

Submission  
No 161

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date received:** 13/08/2015

---

Partially Confidential

13 August 2015

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I am in a role to assist vulnerable community members daily trying to access VET and particularly TAFE, seeing them fail. I could regale you with hundreds of stories of people affected by recent changes unable to access education or incurring a huge debt to do so, but I know you will not have time to read them all. They number in the thousands at my location alone and I hear many worse stories from people coming from the private VET sector to TAFE with students being aggressively marketed and misled by unaccredited 'career consultants'.

**I simply ask you one question – if you are unfamiliar with VET and TAFE, could you or a vulnerable family member enrol?**

I challenge you to try and actually get to the point of starting your course. Many people think they are enrolled but are not (and we are not funded for them subsequently).

1. Half the people I speak with cannot find the course relevant to their job goals as a first step (could you imagine finding the search words for the year 10 equivalent course called "Foundations for Vocational and Further Study", that to work as a support worker in an aged care neighbourhood centre you should look for "Leisure and Health", or an out of school hours child care worker "School age education and care"). Customer, Careers, Multicultural, Disability, Aboriginal and related services that assist people with this information have been reduced significantly across the state and the new TAFE web search functions do not assist most people tell us.
2. Assuming this success then they need to register for a USI with ID on a separate Australian Government website, immediately disadvantaging anyone without current documentation such as homeless youth at risk, incarcerated, etc.
3. Review the course information which uses language so foreign to plain English most cannot understand what they want to

know. For example, what does this mean to the average person trying to understand their fees increase with low level literacy: "On 1 January 2015 the NSW Government introduced changes to how students access government subsidised training in NSW. These changes are part of the Smart and Skilled reform of the NSW vocational education and training system and affect all new and continuing students. It covers all qualification levels Certificate II to Advanced Diploma, selected Foundation Skills courses at Certificate I and II levels, all apprenticeships and selected traineeships. For more information and how this may affect the fees you pay please visit [smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au](http://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au)."

4. Find their personalised course price estimate (which is only available by clicking on "enrol" which most people think commits them to the fee they don't know yet),
5. Determine if they have any RPL/Credit Transfer, (that process to get the adjusted fee is a whole other submission and discouraged by RTO's as it requires STS to approve it and be processed within 2 weeks when often the student balks at the adjusted fee anyway),
6. Complete the online 'enrolment' forms, which is actually only a registration and prompts them to enter any old TAFE student number, which we cannot look up for them usually on the new computer system if it wasn't at the same College,
7. Verify their email accuracy separately, by noticing 1 email of 3 on this very topic of 'verifying your email',
8. Provide or confirm their Centrelink/Disability/Aboriginal status details, if they can get through to the right people to do so and have the correct evidence, assuming those people still exist in that region,
9. Submit any other local course selection documents or entry requirements to the teachers who may well be on vacation,
10. Verify their email again on the local college student system,
11. Attend any compulsory information sessions probably not listed on the TAFENSW site they may have enrolled through but the local College/Institute website course page only,
12. Glance at their payment receipt to identify their location and time to attend first class, along with course completion time and if delays occur beyond that course duration somehow understand they need to start over and pay again,
13. Finally, assuming the class is not cancelled due to lack of numbers, within several weeks of enrolment negotiate and sign an agreement outlining how they will complete the course and what support they require for literacy, disability etc., often unaware of what may arise after signing including from their personal life or learning difficulties yet to be explored in the harder units of study.

I worked out under smart and skilled we now need to ask people 9 questions to tell them the price of the course applicable to them! The terms 'Smart and Skilled' on a course page means nothing to the public who don't know how to navigate their best price given any financial hardship or equity circumstances. Expensive full fee paying VFH providers with questionable ASQA monitoring, can simply quote a price.

There is very little data being collected with good research methodology. Often anecdotal outcomes 'research' on Smart and Skilled only ask people enrolled rather than those trying to enrol, which doesn't capture those affected more significantly. **Smart and Skilled reforms particularly have disadvantaged** skilled migrants, anyone who has completed post school studies before at CIV or higher and permanent residents yet to be eligible for citizenship. I regularly confirm people have to pay more than university fees – for example \$6000 for a 6 month part time course at CIII level.

NSW Government employees are required to report wastes of public funds over certain amounts. **TAFENSW and DEC have spent nearly half a billion dollars on computer systems under LMBR which don't work!** We have to often do our leave forms manually, students often require manual interventions to enrol and half the features don't work. The SAP/EBS4 software was barely adapted 'off the shelf' before funding was yanked by the Minister and DG. Many of these complaints are responded to as temporary by Institute Management who know it's been 8 months and likely several more to have even simple changes made.

**Dignity towards staff and respectful consultation are non-existent in the reform process.** I have watched my region of TAFE decimate well over 100 jobs (I guess no-one really knows but NSW Treasury who fund the VR's), without a single farewell being permitted. Token email submissions are invited with an auto-reply and without a single comment on the issues submitted being provided in response. Consultants are brought in to 'recommend' models amazingly consistent with thoughts expressed by management beforehand or from other regions already implemented. None of the upper TAFE management appears to be actually trying to upwardly manage issues in a departmental culture of avoidance and fear to comply with ministerial office demands. None of them are contributing to student recruitment or completions we are all being asked to justify our existence on.

I have heard similar people in other regions tell me they are buying their own pens for work, having distressing conversations with students in public spaces and daily ministerial complaints are being handed down to local level to respond to issues requiring ministerial intervention on state-wide policy and systems issues. **It is only a matter of time before critical**

**incidents occur** from students in dangerous situations and teachers without support.

In finishing, my work area is presently under review and I cannot believe we will be around much longer. I assure you we work hard for the public and convert many enquirers to enrolments and assist student to progress. My personal records indicate I have provided over 600 people with assistance this year to date – despite have annual leave for 6 weeks and having additional duties away from the frontline regularly. I am taking long service leave next month and will be unlikely to return depending on the outcome of the internal review. **If my role exists, it will likely be amended and the workload/locations significantly increased under “and other duties” making me ineffective to help the public.**

I wish the group well in the review and note **the VFH reforms coming in will help** reduce some confusion at the Diploma level, despite permanent residents not being able to access these protections. I cannot see that the Australian Government COAG incentives to implement Smart and Skilled, have actually not cost NSW taxpayers more in implementation costs and state government lowered productivity effects, due to a lack of faith in the TAFE system being able to assist people achieve successful employment.

Kind regards,