

**Submission
No 159**

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

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Submission to Legislative Council Enquiry into VET in NSW

There are two things I want to raise, and they have both impacted on TAFE within months of each other: Smart and Skilled and EBS4. Between them, they have undermined a strong and efficient public training system.

1. Impact of Smart and Skilled.

- i. IPART's decisions about how much it costs to deliver training state they have taken into account extra costs related to rural/regional locations and disability, however they do not seem to have understood the requirements of disadvantaged people. The extra funding disappears almost immediately, and in no way allows us to effectively meet their needs. For example, the 15% loading might purchase a few hours of tutorial support, not the sustained support needed for someone who is struggling with literacy, fears of formal education etc. The time and travel costs of staff moving between locations quickly eat into the loading for rural/regional areas. It is unreasonable to expect that this loading is sufficient to effectively assist students with extra needs.
- ii. Since the reduced funding per person/ class group was implemented, our completion rates have plummeted. For example, CIII Aged Care is a high-demand qualification, with good employment outcomes. Notably, local employers have preferred our graduates, because they are well-trained and familiar with workplace practices. We usually graduate 12-15 people out of an intake of 18 – in June only 4 people successfully finished. Why? Because S&S offers subsidized programs only to those without a sustained history of education, and so there is no role modeling provided of good study and learning habits; because the high fees actively discourage retraining; because the problems with EBS prevented people from enrolling and people pulled out of the qualification early on, prior to them making a payment, and consequently not being committed to the course.
- iii. S&S actively discourages people from moving sideways to increase their skills, by only subsidising early qualifications, and not supporting people to move from, say, a CIV in one area to a CIII in another. The process of expecting people to move from CII to CIII to CIV to Diploma is simplistic and does not reflect the diversity of skills and the need to continue up-skilling throughout our lives. We are told that the current workforce requires 'lifelong learning', and this does not necessarily mean an upward trajectory. Often sideways steps, or even steps which seem retrograde, are needed for workers and potential workers to gain the skills they require in an ever-changing employment field.
Example: If a person holds a CIII in Floristry and a Cert in, say, Business Admin from many years ago, they may well not be able to obtain employment in the current environment, but they cannot gain a subsidized place in a CIII Aged Care.
Example: a married person has a BA from 1974, has been raising children for the last 2 decades and has not been in paid employment. Their partner is employed but not a high wage earner. Until 2015, they could afford to undertake a CIII in Disability as a way of

getting back into the workforce in a high-employment area, however now they need to pay full course cost, which their family cannot afford. For many years offered a

- iv. We have been significantly hampered in our delivery of innovative, varied and responsive training, due to the reduced funding per student.

Example: In Illawarra Institute the Community Services sections have been able to offer a program of flexible learning we call Work Based Learning. This allowed experience existing workers to work through (usually Diploma level) qualifications as a combination of workshops, classes, tasks in their workplaces and individual consultations and mentoring. It had been embraced and valued by industry partners for the last 15-20 years, allowed regional and rural workers access to a wide range of qualifications that they could otherwise not access, using a range of learning modalities in a supportive manner. It had been carefully costed to cost no more to deliver this very individualized service than it did to provide a Diploma to an individual in a traditional setting. The current funding level and model prevents the continuation of this program.

- v. It is too complicated. People are telling us they are choosing not to enter training because they S&S information is confusing and incomprehensible.

Example: This is the first time in the 23 years I have worked at TAFE that has seen significant declines in student numbers. The car parks are frequently, if not empty, then providing plenty of empty spaces every day instead of overflowing to the surrounding streets.

Example: My own teaching section has dropped student numbers from around 300 in recent times to around 150 this year.

This is a substantial drop, and I doubt that other RTO's are picking up the students who are not enrolling in TAFE. In the longer term, it will be creating increased skills deficits.

2. Impact of the introduction of EBS4.

- i. It doesn't do what it is meant to. It was meant to, as a minimum, maintain student attendances and results, and link through to a number of other systems. It does not work. I have put hundreds of hours into learning the system, working with Helpdesk and trainers, and over and over again the 'experts' confirm that many of its functions are simply not working. I do not know who made the final decision to "go live", and I understand that it was made under pressure of time etc, but really it is fundamentally flawed. It should not have been implemented.
- ii. The consequences have been 10 months (to date) of sustained and unreasonable pressure for staff at all levels. It is often quoted that EBS4 cost \$6million. However, that in no way reflects the personal costs, and the thousands of hours of unpaid work that has been contributed by teachers and others. While admin staff have sometimes been paid overtime, teachers and others have given untold time and effort in trying to correct the problems, without payment, simply because they are committed to the organization, their students and their communities. In my own teaching section, the four permanent staff all worked 40-plus hours in the first week of their last summer holidays, having already worked lengthy unpaid hours in the preceding weeks. Our time was entirely spent checking and correcting student results. We were told that this was

due to issues related to the migration of data from old systems to new ones, and things would proceed much more smoothly and accurately in future. However, the same or similar issues emerged at the end of semester 1 2015, so clearly the problems are ongoing rather than simply data migration problems.

- iii. There is nothing more demoralizing for staff who are committed to quality work than operating within a system that doesn't work – to be constantly doing and redoing tasks simply because a computer system is not working has placed enormous strain on the wellbeing of staff. As a Head Teacher, I have tried to support staff, often working well into the evenings to train and trouble-shoot with part time staff (unpaid hours for all of us), but have none the less lost 5 of my PT staff in recent months due to the pressures of the dysfunctionality of EBS4; others have been reduced to tears, anger and a sense of bewilderment. All are feeling discouraged and alienated due to EBS4. We have all repeatedly been on the receiving end of complaints (at times abuse) from customers and pressure from distressed colleagues. I am watching skilled and experienced Head Teachers, in particular, crushed by the weight of workload and discouragement. There has been great concern expressed about the welfare of staff, but nothing can be done to alleviate the core of the problem, as EBS4 is now at the heart of all our student record-keeping. The duty of care to the entire workforce has not been observed in any way, over this sustained period, and it has taken a considerable toll on thousands of staff state-wide.

Example: a short survey undertaken by Federation in Illawarra Institute demonstrated a range of impacts on the wellbeing of staff, including sleep problems and suicidal ideations.

- iv. It is way, way, way too complicated to be efficient. It is fiddly and very detailed and there are far too many opportunities for people to make very minor mistakes that create very major problems. Tasks such as setting up course offerings, registers (rollbooks) and assessments now fall increasingly to Head Teachers, whereas the previous system allowed the significantly lighter load to be shared with other teachers. Tasks that used to take me 20 minutes now take me on average 4-5 hours, and the interruptions inherent in my job mean ample opportunities to make mistakes. We were repeatedly told that "cloning" offerings etc would make the task far quicker the next time – but in fact this has not proven to be true. From the teacher's point of view, entering attendances and results in Agent should be a simple task but please refer back to point 2.i – the system doesn't work, and consequently teachers frequently cannot fulfill their basic record-keeping responsibilities.

Example – when a register is set up in Client, frequently grey boxes randomly appear in the register, against varied students and weeks in an intermittent pattern – these then prevent the students appearing in Agent. The HT has to remove these grey boxes, and the teacher has to re-do their attendance-keeping tasks, but of course the grey squares can then reappear at any time, in different random patterns, requiring the HT to correct it again, and again, and again. It is an expensive source of time-wasting frustration all round.

Example: I have been waiting for nearly 3 months to get effective assistance to enable Units to show in a section of Agent called "progressions", so that we can start processing Recognition assessments, which in turn has impacts for the fees of students. Despite consultations with trainers and Helpdesk, no-one has been able to rectify the problem for me.

- v. Exactly who was it that thought it was a good idea to tie down Head Teachers to computer screens to essentially data enter, rather than teaching, industry consultation, staff development and support etc? It is a very poor use of money to pay HT rates for this task, rather than clerical rates (less money and far more data entry skill!)

I hope that you understand that the above comments are made with a great desire for the return of TAFENSW to the central place it has in the community, serving the local community's vocational training and development needs. This is particularly important in regional and rural areas. Over the last 23 years I have seen lives transformed by TAFE innumerable times, with a student recently telling me that TAFE has several times "saved his life" and believe that the combined impact of EBS4 and Smart and Skilled are having significant detrimental impact on individuals, communities and the social capital of our state. What is happening now is a false economy.

Liz Henigan