

**Supplementary  
Submission  
No 159a**

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

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# **Presentation to Legislative Council Enquiry into VET in NSW –**

## **Nowra hearing 12/10/2015**

### **OPENING STATEMENT**

My name is Liz Henigan, and for 23 years I have been a teacher/ Head Teacher of Community Services at Nowra and Ulladulla. I am very involved in my community, and I am currently the Community Services Discipline Team leader for our Institute.

I want you to know the challenges of continuing to deliver in the Smart and Skilled context, and in the context of using EBS4/SALM for 12 months, and the negative impact both have had on students, employers, community and staff.

I am proud to work at TAFE, and proud to be a member of the Nowra/Ulladulla team.

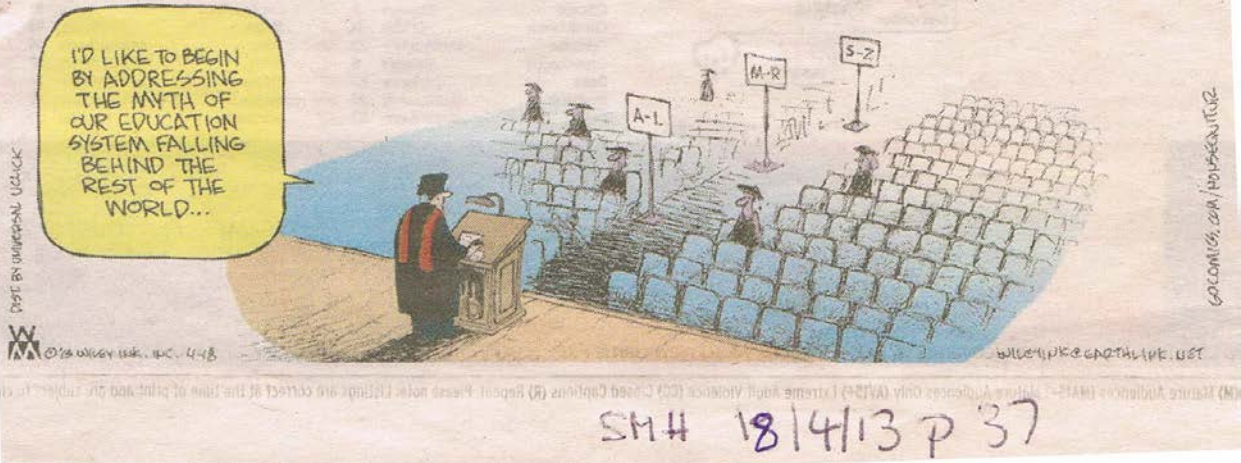
The kind of training we deliver at Nowra and the South Coast is IMPORTANT.

- Every car you drive past today
- Every loaf of bread you buy at a bakery
- Every helpful retail worker or admin worker
- Every hour of care that is given in thirteen local aged care facilities
- Every house you could visit
- Every child care centre
- Every health service
- Every decent haircut
- Many examples of Aboriginal art
- Every traffic light and street lamp
- The activities of many government depts.
- And many small businesses

...there's a good chance that Nowra TAFE (or one of our other campuses) contributed to its existence, its success and its safety.

As you drive away today, please think of that and understand why we are concerned about what is at risk.

**Non Sequitur** by Wiley



I have previously made a written submission to the Enquiry. This document aims to supplement my earlier comments and to provide a **'snapshot in time'** of the combined impact of Smart and Skilled in a regional area (the Shoalhaven). The snapshot is incomplete, due to data problems I will discuss later. I believe that the negative impact on regional areas is significant.

Below is a selection of details which highlight the changes we are experiencing:

Range of qualifications provided	2014		2015
	<b>20 different qualifications offered</b>		<b>Only 7 qualifications offered</b>
Graduations	Of 2014 students	Of 2014 students completing in 2015 (prediction)	Of 2015 students ie who began under Smart and Skilled (prediction)
CIII Disability	18		14 (from 2 intakes)
CIV Community Services FT			13
CIV Community Services PT (cont from 2014)	26 (began in 2013)	10	10
Diploma Community Services	7		7-8 est
CIII Aged Care	53	8	30 (3 intakes plus some completing from a 2014 program in partnership with local employer)
CIII Health Services Assistance (for Aged Care grads)	Not offered – negotiating with local hospital		6
CIV Mental Health	20		10
CIV Leisure and Health flex	12		7
CIV Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander - Primary Health Care Practice	5	2	
CIV Aged Care	5		
Workbased learning program, a flexible program for which included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dip Community Services</li> <li>• Dip Mental Health</li> <li>• Dip Community Services (Case Management)</li> <li>• Diploma of Community Services Coordination</li> <li>• Diploma Disability</li> <li>• CIV Mediation</li> <li>• CIV Pastoral Care</li> <li>• CIV Youth Work</li> <li>• Diploma Youth Work</li> </ul>	14	3	No new intake.
Diploma of Counselling	11		
CIV Disability	8		
CIII Home and Community Care	9		
<b>TOTAL GRADUATES</b>	188	23	97
Employment provided for Community Services teachers	2014	2015	
	4 FT, 30 PT	4 FT, 10 PT (with PT staff all having fewer hours)	

Similar patterns are reported elsewhere. For example, at Bega Cert IV Community Services enrolments have dropped from 19 to 10; Diploma Community Services from 12 to 7; CIII Aged Care from 20 to 12; CIII Health Services Assistance (Acute) from 20 to 13; and Early Childhood has had a similar drop.

While many of the semester 1 enrolment problems have been ironed out, we still have problems, such as instances of semester 1 students without State Training Services commitment ID's.

**The only concrete way of estimating the impact on overall campus enrolments is the empty spaces in the carpark. This "car park gauge" registers similar readings all along the south coast. It is based on how many spaces are free in the car park, compared to previous years when people have been complaining about parking several blocks away or across the highway. This assures me that engagement with training is significantly reduced in my community – so much so that we can fence off a large area of the car park to use for a student project building cabins, without anyone complaining.**

## Impact of Smart and Skilled.

- i. **Why have our completion rates fallen with Smart and Skilled?**
  - 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. This is a change from previously
  - because the higher 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.
  
- ii. **Does IPART's costing accurately reflected the extra costs needed for rural/regional locations and support of individuals with additional needs and challenges? Having worked at the coal-face of this costing structure now for 10 months – the answer is NO.** 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. If someone has not obtained literacy and numeracy, for example, in their 10-13 years at school, then sustained assistance is needed to assist them to obtain these skills as an adult. The reduced capacity we have had to support high needs students has had an impact on successful completions. We believe, however, that these students have a right to a meaningful education and opportunities for employment and growth.
  
- iii. **The need for ongoing, responsive training in regional areas not being supported well.** 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.

*Example: I have a CIII Disability student I will call S who wishes you to know her experience. She is on a New Start payment and has one child. Her marriage has ended. She holds an old CIV in Financial Services. Recently she completed a CIII Aged Care, as she wanted to work in the high-growth industry which supports the more vulnerable members of our community, and is working. She wanted to build her skills and employment prospects by gaining a CIII Disability. She came to enroll in June, and was not able to do so because she was ineligible for a S&S place. After numerous requests for a commercial offering, I set up the offering myself – but my own inexperience meant that I didn't realize that a commercial offering's fee was around \$6000 and would not be reduced because of credit transfers and Recognition. The \$6000 + fee was unfair because S only had a few competency Units to complete. So I set up another offering and it was costed at \$2648. This is an enormous amount of money for someone whose base rate of pay is just over \$19 ph.*

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

*Example: We have had to stop providing individualised work-based learning for experienced community services workers, because Smart and Skilled funding levels do not allow it. This has removed our ability to deliver a wide range of top-up qualifications at local regional levels.*

- iv. **It is too complicated.** People are telling us they are choosing not to enter training because they S&S information is confusing and incomprehensible.
  
- v. **It is not really supporting good quality learning and training, as was hoped.** There is an expectation within the Smart and Skilled culture that short, sharp, snappy training is preferred. We are encouraged to provide training more quickly, and actively encouraged to switch to online delivery. I want to comment about both those issues, as examples of the paucity of understanding of what makes a truly smart and skilled society.
  - o **Online delivery.** There are some wonderful examples of online delivery, and we do use it here in the Shoalhaven in oh-so-many ways. However there are limitations
    - i. Student computer competence is assumed but not necessarily present. It is a myth that everyone is computer-literate.
    - ii. Computer availability. There are a significant number of households in the Shoalhaven which do not have a computer. We provide computer access at the library – but that requires travel costs.
    - iii. Internet access eg there are significant areas in the Shoalhaven without broadband, much less the promised NBN.
    - iv. Online learning assumes general literacy and numeracy as a prerequisite, whereas classroom learning can better support these skills to be gathered ‘as you go along’.
    - v. Limited ability to work collaboratively, observe and learn from others – which is a valued practice in the workplace
    - vi. Lower retention rates than methods which engage face-to-face.
    - vii. **Most importantly** – online learning is only suitable for some parts of learning. Yes, we can provide say WHS information and ‘how to’ clips from you-tube, but .....
      - Mechanics can’t learn the diagnostic smells they need to know
      - Bakers can’t feel the texture of the dough, nor smell when the bread is ready
      - Children’s services workers can’t learn the knack of changing a wriggly, fretful infant

- Community services workers can't truly learn the practice of empathy and kindness.
- Nurses can't learn to take a blood pressure or BGL

Therefore, it is important to only use online learning as suitable, not as a catch-all strategy for money-saving delivery.

A Berry hairdresser made the unsolicited comment to me last week that "I would never employ someone who has done their training through one of the private colleges online, every time I have seen someone like that, they have had no communication skills, no ability to work with hair. It is all just theoretical. The way you do it at TAFE makes sure we can work properly"

- **Fast-tracking training is not always good.** Some students come to us already skilled and experienced, and we can then fast-track them individually through individually modified pathways and Recognition. However, other learners come to us needing time to develop.

Somehow the role of experienced educators in determining how long it takes to learn good practice has been over-ridden by administrative and political forces. Reduced hours result in reduced learning for many among our learner population.

Smart and Skilled structures have led to us being encouraged to shorten courses, and to prioritise full-time courses as retention and completion rates are seen as lower when study-time is shorter. Similarly, Industry Skills Councils have in some cases changes time frames from three to two years eg Chef.

However

- i. Local employers are unhappy and have told us in no uncertain terms that they valued the extra time to help their employees develop
- ii. It doesn't take into account the time needed to maturely learn one's skills and knowledge.  
Eg 1 – school leavers often need time to grow into the role of responsible trades-people and professionals  
Eg2 – in community services we often take in people with the experience of being 'clients' – receivers of services – and it takes a long time to grow their hearts and minds to befit the role of professional community services workers
- iii. This is reducing the availability of part time and evening courses, which if it continues will reduce the opportunity for people with work or child-rearing commitments to be able to access part time training.



This year we have delivered a CIV Community Services in 12 months full time instead of 2 years part time. These students were discussing with one of my staff the 6 month online course offered locally by a different provider. They said that they thought this was far too short a time frame. They also stated that if, at the end of last year, they had seen the 6 month version advertised, they would have wanted to do that, and get the qualification quickly. However, now they know the value of time to absorb and integrate their learning, they envied the students who had taken 2 years.

# Impact of the introduction of EBS4.

## **Please know that EBS4 is not working for us.**

Yes, there are improvements, and we have worked incredibly hard to develop and learn 'work-arounds'. But they are just that – work-arounds. Teaching and administrative staff do not have confidence in the integrity of the data. We are repeatedly told that it is working and that it has improved, but our experience is different.

SALM/EBS4 was developed over time with an eye to the known plan for introductions of Smart and Skilled, and to replace and integrate old systems.

I have listed below a small selection of problems experienced regularly.

### **Poor reporting mechanisms**

In preparing for today, I wanted to be able to give you accurate summaries of data such as enrolment numbers for my section and for the campus. It is not possible to run an accurate report. One said I had 47 paid-up students in CIII Aged Care this year; another said 23; another said 42; yet another said 0. The best I can do is manually count the numbers for my section, and use the “**car park gauge**” described on page 4.

### **Missing information**

When teachers and administrative staff use EBS4, we repeatedly find that data is missing.

*Example: We have a set process for recording Recognition assessments in SALM. It involves the teacher's access through Agent, and then the Head Teacher's access through Client. When it works, it is time-consuming and cumbersome. However, it frequently doesn't work. Over and over I have had the experience of Units which had been correctly set up not appearing in Agent. After 3 or 4 more months of students waiting, I had to get approval for processing them directly in Client, however this goes against the business rules we are required to follow. It has wasted probably 30-40 hours of staff time, and local students have had to wait months to have their fees reimbursed for these Units.*

*Example: I have had the experience of teachers being unable to access the parts of the program which allow them to enter attendances and /or results. Often they can access “Agent” itself, but the space where they need to enter information does not appear on the screen. Even more strangely, I have had a teacher who is responsible for a Unit, and who has result spaces for two assessments ..... but not the other two assessments.*

### **Inaccurate and unreliable data**

Sometimes the data changes online without us touching it. Of course this is often viewed as staff error or imagination.

However, let me give you a colleague's example: *she was contacted by a student who finished in June to say their certificate had not arrived. She knew she had checked 'completions' before she finished up at the end of semester 1, and happened to still have a print-out of the 'course completion' report printed in June. But when she looked online, some of the results were different to the print-out. How can this happen???* And yet it does .... over and over again.

### **Lack of efficiency**

Even when SALM/EBS4 is functional, 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 that used to take me 20 minutes now take me on average 4-5 hours, thus taking me away from students. On this estimate of time, I would have spent 85 hours this year simply setting up SALM, whereas last year it would have taken me about 4-6 hours. This 85 hours is then added to each time a class swaps days, a student withdraws or changes programs, or seeks Recognition, a teacher needs to be moved to another program etc. (Hence my answer of adding 15 hpw to my workload at Monday's hearing). This does not include the hours I have spent assisting others with problems as my staff come up against problems.

It also does not include the hours and hours we will spend entering attendances and results. I am hoping that this may be a little easier than it was last year – while this was a time-consuming process under CLAMS, last year the workload trebled or quadrupled, and a rough guesstimate of the staff hours involved would be 700 hours, mostly unpaid.

Data entry of attendance and results by teachers in Agent is also more time-consuming – thus taking them away from students too.

### **Weaponisation of data**

I believe that this is an example of the **weaponisation of data** (a concept developed by Dr. Jondou Chen – see [nonprofitwithballs.com](http://nonprofitwithballs.com) 2015). This concept applies to us in that very very detailed data is gathered and manipulated, but not for the greater good of our community. The data required in SALM/EBS4 serves to further disadvantage already disadvantaged people and communities. For us:

- The high rate of casualisation in TAFE mean more people are trying to learn the new and complex system, and this fragmented learning is often incomplete.
- The Shoalhaven lacks good internet services, so we can't use it as quickly as higher-speed areas
- TAFE students are not getting correct results in a timely manner
- There are thousands of unpaid hour being spent to correct the inaccuracies – taking staff time away from students and industry

This 'weaponisation' is worse in regional areas due to more thinly-stretched staffing, slower internet and fewer resources

## Impact on TAFE workforce.

No-one will deny the initial impact and the stress people were put under, by their desire to get things sorted out for students and employers. But the sustained and unreasonable pressure for staff at all levels has continued. Staff are demoralized and embarrassed at the coalface. They are faced with a system that is hard to navigate, complaints by learners about the disparity in fees within any one classroom. There is a sense of decreased job security, and with current Enterprise Bargaining, a plan to reclassify (and downgrade) many Customer Service positions (hence significantly reduced pay rates – some up to \$25,000 difference; others were a \$10 – 15,000 reduction); similarly there is a proposal that teachers teach and extra 14% of hours per year. Staff feel that the organization is not showing loyalty to them, despite the staff being the people who have carried them through a crisis period, and are still doing so.

I will repeat from my original submission:

*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.*

## Response and Risks in the Shoalhaven area

1. Over time, for the reasons I have outlined, and which were discussed at the Hearing in Nowra, we will have a **reduction in skilled workers**, and in their capacity to upskill.
2. There will be a **cycle of reduced enrolments** due to costs and enrolment difficulties, and reduced community confidence in any RTO training. This will lead to reduced capacity to offer a solid range of qualifications and training opportunities. In turn, local business and the community will be unable to stall and skill their organizations.
3. There is already a decreased **flexibility** due to both EBS4 and Smart and Skilled/IPART costings. In the past, organizations could come to us and say “Hi TAFE, can you provide us with such and such” and we would try to work with them to source funding and provide what they wanted. From a CIV Disability for the local sector’s experienced workers in the late 1990’s and a Diploma of Youth Work requested by the local Youth Work peak body in about 2000, to a CIII Disability and a CIII Aged Care for Weja Aboriginal Home Care Workers last year, a Vocational Graduate Certificate in Family Dispute Resolution requested by the local Family Relationship Centre, and all things in between, we have responded as well as we can to local industry needs.

People who say that TAFE has been inflexible up to Jan 2015 were simply repeating an old myth, not basing their claims on contemporary practices. We train and assess in diverse and creative ways, in classrooms, on site in factories, building sites, farm paddocks, in church and community halls – pretty much anywhere we can. We are absolute contortionists, and committed to our community. However the ability to provide customised training for individuals and small groups has gone because of the level of funding determined by IPART, and the lengthy periods required for setting up offerings in EBS4/SALM adds another layer of difficulty.

4. **Safety risks.** It is lacking in social responsibility to continue to reduced the supervised learning of people working with small children, fixing brakes, working on scaffolding or electrical installations, or supporting vulnerable people.
5. **Complexities left unaddressed.** IPART, in its costings, has not reflected the complex interweaving of relationships, knowledge, individual needs and social disengagement in the learning field in a disadvantaged, regional area such as ours. The lack of extra support has further disadvantaged the already disadvantaged.
6. Our local campus has **strong relationships with local community sectors.** Eg local Aboriginal community groups, the local community services sector. These are built on many decades of building trust and working together to build social capital.

I am sure that there are many other RTO's willing to step into this space, but I would challenge whether this will be done with the same motivation of building our community.

Our local community is angry, feeling bereft of needed and trusted services. They perceive a lack of care for their training and related needs.

The word is out that TAFE is now expensive – in Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum, the writer of 'The Dressmaker' (current movie) refers to her experiences as a TAFE student three times, stating TAFE "was affordable back then". This echoes the feelings of our community.

The Nowra community values its TAFE. They feel let down.