

Submission
No 123

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in NSW

Introduction

My name is _____, and I'm a 27-year-old female student. I am currently studying a Certificate III in Community Services Work at Sydney TAFE, Ultimo Campus. I am writing this submission from a personal perspective and point of view, because TAFE has played a major role in my education experience. I thank you for considering my submission.

I would like to comment and address the terms of reference for the inquiry into Vocational Education and Training, in such a way that is broken down into four simple points...

1. Positive experiences of TAFE-

As noted in my introduction, I'm currently studying a Certificate III at TAFE. I feel proud to be at this level, because I initially started my studies doing foundation skills through TAFE Outreach. My life has consisted of numerous complex struggles, including mental health issues, homelessness, hospitalizations, and family breakdown just to name a few. As a result of these issues, I was unable to complete my schooling, with year 9 being the highest level reached.

I completed my first TAFE Outreach course through Ultimo in 2012, a Certificate I in Access to Work and Training, a Fine Arts course that was off campus. This course changed my life. Having been through a tumultuous period the previous years before, this course was exactly what I needed. Not only did I love the content, but being an Outreach course, the extra support and encouragement from staff was exactly what I needed in particular to rebuild my confidence, and get me back into the swing of routine and life without immense stress or pressure. I received a scholarship as a sum of money at the end of the course through the Sir David Martin Foundation, to which I could put toward anything to further my educational development, including materials. I chose to get a quality professional camera for my interest in photography. I now use it for photography work, as I am a photographer for the local community paper in my area, and have been for almost 2 years now.

The second course I completed, was in semester one this year. It was another Outreach course at Ultimo TAFE - Certificate II in Introduction to Work in the Community Sector. I loved it so much, I have now finally found an area that I would consider a highly likely career path. I was supported and encouraged in such a way that fostered confidence, and a sense that "Maybe I can do this!" I now plan to complete my Certificate III in Community Services Work, and want to go on to do the Certificate IV next year. I aim to do the Diploma in Social Work the year following. There is one obstacle that may get in the way of this, and that is consistently causing me concern, acting as a real barrier – the rising fees. If I can accomplish this, I will have the options of working in the Community Services sector, or furthering my

studies at university. A goal I never thought possible, but now am immensely excited for.

The staff that are employed by Ultimo TAFE are passionate, and committed to giving all students, but in particular disadvantaged students, the tools they need to enable them to go further in their educational journey. They provide a leg up to students who need that little bit of extra assistance and backing to reach their goals. I believe that every human being needs a sense of achievement. This is important to build confidence within you, which motivates and inspires you to want to go further.

2. The unique values and benefits of TAFE-

I deeply believe that TAFE/public education is of utmost importance to Australia. It offers everybody a “fair go”, a slogan our culture speaks proudly. Rather than a competitive market and successful business, TAFE values access, equity, and equality – something that I’m sad to say I feel is going backward in our country, evidently in regards to tertiary education.

Another benefit of TAFE, are the support services offered. There are three stand out supports offered at TAFE, that are perfect examples of TAFE’s values of access and equity:

1. Disability Support Services
2. Learner Space
3. Outreach

All 3 have had grievous cuts, greatly impacting on each of them, and in turn, negatively impacting on those using their services. These impacts include under staffing, putting immense stress on staff remaining. Workloads that are far too large for one person, subtract from the quality of work outcomes, as there are only so many hours in a day. I’ve observed that the students are then impacted, due to the lesser quality of service, and sadly others fall through the gaps. All of these support services are crucial to TAFE as an institution, to staff, and to students.

I’d like to elaborate a little more on Outreach, as a consumer who has benefited so immensely from what it has to offer:

Outreach bridges the gap for students who aren’t quite ready, or don’t yet have the capacity due to complex life situations and struggles for the pressure of full time education. Having done 2 Outreach courses as previously mentioned, I know that fellow students in my classes were experiencing issues such as homelessness, AOD, living with a disability, mental illness, and people out of prison trying to better themselves and get back into life. My opinion is that Outreach is one of the most valuable assets to TAFE NSW, but is tragically being gradually wiped out across the state.

Outreach courses were previously free, operating on a course-funded model. However, with the introduction of Smart and Skilled, it now operates from a revenue model. This has created another barrier for those who are already struggling and disadvantaged. This is **not** what TAFE Outreach is about.

Support to this extent is not available in other private Universities and Colleges, making higher education out of reach for those experiencing complex issues and disadvantage.

3. Negative experiences with private providers:

I have not been a student with a private provider. I don't have the money, am reluctant to sign myself up to an enormous debt, am uncertain of their reputability and as previously mentioned, at times need extra support that private providers don't offer. I have had small experiences with private providers however, concretizing my concerns regarding reputability and decent values. A couple of them have approached me via door knocking. I was disgusted to find they were being highly misleading. One in particular came to do my door, with an incentive that you get a free laptop from the government. They gave me a 10minute spiel, offering me a number of courses that I could pay for via VET-fee help, and would not need to pay off until I earned over \$50,000. The man who represented the College was insistent that I commit to an online course. He expected this without explaining to me what the courses entailed, the actual cost of the course, and reiterated the laptop several times. I found myself frustrated and asked how much the courses were – he hesitantly confessed they started at \$30,000. Angrily, I told the man from the college to please leave, asking him how many vulnerable people he had approached without giving them adequate information about what they were committing to. I'm disgusted this college was asking me to sign up to a \$30,000 debt, diverting me from this fact by going on about a free laptop.

I live in a Department of Housing apartment complex, filled with vulnerable residents. I find it unethical that private providers are targeting vulnerable people, including those people who do not have the aptitude, attitude or ability to complete a course.

4. Impacts of Smart & Skilled on TAFE-

There are many negative implications due to the rolling out of Smart and Skilled across TAFEs around the country. I've spoken with teachers, who know of students that have had to stop their studies half way through their diplomas, unable to afford to complete them. This particularly applies to international students, and students who are not on a government benefits but are on low incomes.

I have fellow classmates who did the certificate II with me last semester, and were eager to do the Certificate III. But the fees have created a barrier for them, and they have not come back because they cannot afford it. One classmate I will refer to is a on Newstart allowance. He

has a young family to look after on this small pension. His partner was retrenched from her job and is also on Newstart allowance. They have an 11month old, and even though he wants to go to TAFE so he can get a better paying job, he cannot afford the fees. the complicated system further deters him and has impacted his motivation to return to study. This is so very sad because he has so much potential, now hindered.

I find the endless criteria of Smart and Skilled unjust, overwhelming, and ridiculously complicated. And I know I'm not the only one experiencing this. I find the entitlement related questions offensive, and bring up a sense of shame within me, pushing me back into a negative sense of being "labeled" or having a "problem". I wish break free of these and move into my potential, not be reminded of my personal struggles, and yet again have to *prove* them to get a fair chance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I ever so respectfully ask that the government rethink the way funding be distributed to Vocational Education and Training providers. I whole-heartedly believe that TAFE really is too good to lose. If the opportunity for equal and accessible education becomes any less for those disadvantaged, I gravely fear the outcomes of that would be many miss out on quality skills and training, preventing them from contributing in a positive way to our society.

Thank you again for considering my submission.