

**Submission
No 146**

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

Name: Mr Geoff Turnbull

Date received: 13/08/2015

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in NSW

I have been a TAFE teacher in NSW for forty years and I am proud of the hundreds of thousands of students who have graduated with high quality, widely recognised and highly regarded TAFE qualifications during that period.

TAFE NSW is a world class vocational education and training system. Only recently educators from Indonesia and India visited NSW to observe how the TAFE system operates so that they can return to their countries and replicate what is regarded as best practice.

However, all this is at risk with years of chronic underfunding and recently the introduction of *Smart and Skilled*. *Smart and Skilled* has resulted in huge fee increases which many potential students are unable to afford. The State Budget reveals that over 30,000 fewer students enrolled in Semester 1 this year.

2,500 teaching and support positions have been cut since 2012.

Teachers have been made redundant, courses have been cut and in many cases the hours of delivery have been reduced in order to make TAFE “more competitive”.

The disastrous effects of *Smart and Skilled* go beyond the traditional education and training environment. NSW prisoners are not classed as a “disadvantaged group” under TAFE’s *Smart and Skilled* and are therefore required to pay full fees for all courses including external courses. Most inmates cannot afford these fees and only Aboriginal inmates or inmates with a disability are eligible for an exemption.

It is a myth that market forces and contestable funding will result in quality education and training. Rather it encourages a “race to the bottom”.

Competitive tendering has led to a plethora of private, for-profit providers emerging to make a quick dollar and exploiting vulnerable students in the process. This has resulted in inducements being offered to potential students, poor quality teaching and often sham qualifications,

TAFE NSW is trusted to deliver high quality training delivered by qualified and experienced teachers that ensures students achieve the best possible outcome.

TAFE is the bedrock of skills training in NSW and is recognised for its quality vocational education and training.

NSW is short of skilled trades persons. Only investment in TAFE will address the skills shortage.

TAFE colleges in rural and regional areas play an important role in the economies of the local communities and are a part of the social fabric in these communities.

TAFE caters for students of varying ages, Aboriginal students and students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

TAFE has always been particularly concerned to provide educational and employment opportunities to students who are most disadvantaged. These students include those who

are physically and intellectually impaired, those with emotional, drug and alcohol problems, those who have failed at school or been expelled and those who are homeless.

TAFE also has a proud history of providing second chance education to the disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society. For many students it is their last chance. If TAFE is not there to provide them with the means to turn their lives around there is the very real prospect that they will end up in the criminal justice system.

TAFE provides support services including Aboriginal Consultants, Multicultural Coordinators, Consultants for the Disabled and Counsellors to ensure that the special needs of students are met.

Only TAFE can provide the quality education and training required to meet the needs of industry and society and to give individuals the opportunity to upgrade their skills and access further education.

In the interest of a fair and equitable society TAFE NSW must be guaranteed a level of funding to be able to continue to provide affordable, quality vocational education and training and to remain the pre-eminent provider of vocational education and training in NSW.

Geoff Turnbull

13 August, 2015