

Submission
No 267

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date received: 24/08/2015

Partially Confidential

RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

INTRODUCTION

In this response, the Terms of Reference has been addressed in the same order as the original document.

I will be addressing only selected parts of the ToR , and other topics has been kept without comments.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. That General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 inquire into and report on vocational education and training in New South Wales, and in particular:

(a) The factors influencing student choice about entering the vocational education and training system including:

(i) Motivation to study

I found there is a serious lack of motivation to study especially in the lower than average performers among school leavers. There are number of reasons to this situation, among them the most prominent reasons are:

- Poor numeracy and literacy skills; there are many students entering in to TAFE to study, who are unable to write, use a pencil to draw, measure using a ruler or a another measuring instrument, and to read. Due to this reason the group of students in this category are reluctant to participate in active learning.
- Cost of training; recently published TAFE fee structure is a significant barrier for the learners to further develop their skills. Unless a person is fully unemployed the payable fees are too high for learners to follow training courses. Although there are options to receive VET FEE Help is available for selected courses, the students will end up with a large debt

(ii) Choice of course, course location and method of study

- While there is a wide selection of courses available for a learner to chose from, the number of training courses available itself is a confusing thing to a new learner. Therefore it will be beneficial to review these courses and simplify those lists, If

there are courses which have not delivered in the recent years it is advisable to delete them from those lists

- The current course or “Qualification” structure consists of a certain number of “Units of competencies” to form a particular course.

As an example:

UEG20114 - Certificate II in Gas Supply Industry Operations (Release 1)

<https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/UEG20114#>

To successfully complete the course a learner must complete a 4 core units worth 120 points and number of electives from two groups of elective units, Group A and group B. In group A they must complete a selection of units worth up to 60 points or from Group B a collection of units up to 240 units. In group A and B there are over 50 units to chose from. When it comes to selecting the right combination, students do not have a choice, as the institutions offering the course will be defining the units to deliver. Generally the institutions will select a group of units which can be delivered at the lowest cost to the institute as they are under commercial pressure to deliver the course at the lowest cost.

The situation is very similar across the board and this has become a very confusing thing to students. It is much better if there is a less number of units to chose from and they cover the essential subject material to an adequate level.

- **Course locations:** it is not practical to spread the availability of courses in too many locations in the state as it becomes economically unviable to provide sufficient facilities, especially with industries like Gas, Electricity, Mechanical, ICT and other highly specialised subject areas. At the same time it will be beneficial to provide access to a broader spectrum of students from all areas in NSW to access such training facilities. To address this situation, the possibility of providing accommodation such as hostels to students (with or without third party assistance) should be considered. The number of available training positions can be limited and shall be offered to the most suitable candidates. In that way the training will be delivered at a higher standard and it will be received by the most deserved students. Expanding the course availability in a un sustainable manner will lead to over spending and as a result to the collapse of entire department.
- **Method of Study:** Online delivery is very common and popular in all areas of training and education now. But there is a serious limitation in this method when it comes to deal with students with a lower learning capabilities. While the online techniques can be used to enhance the learning outcomes, the guidance and coaching of a qualified teacher is very important to maintain. This is very important when there are difficulties in understanding and special assistance requirements. Online methods are great as “Learning” tool. But they are not very effective in “Teaching” .
It is very important to facilitate practical session to learn the subject material as

most of the learning involve industry or customers. Developing people skills is very important in this aspect.

(iii) barriers to participation, including students in the non-government education and home schooling sectors

- No comment

(b) the role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry in:

(i) Educational linkages with secondary and higher education

- It is important to identify the students with capabilities to develop themselves as tradespersons at an early stage and divert them to vocational education, thus they can develop relevant skill at an early stage in their life. In this way the students will be able to join the workforce much earlier and thus will be in a better financial position as a result of that. Diverting them to Vocational education should not stop them from continuing their further studies, up to degree level and beyond. There should be a link between the secondary school and Vocational education, so that the funds allocated to both streams can be effectively spent. This will give the answer to poor numeracy and literacy skills we are experiencing among our students. The students who would follow vocational stream will learn such skill much better in vocational stream.

(ii) The development of skills in the New South Wales economy

- A constant review must be carried out about skills shortages in NSW and a pay special attention to imported skills from overseas countries in recent years. That information shall be fed in to vocational sector and incentives must be provided to RTOs to develop new training packages if required to address such shortages
- Currently there are industry restrictions for learners to enter in to some trades. Some of them are obtaining electricians and cabling licence. This has become a serious limitation to develop local skills as the industry is unable to provide apprentice positions to those who are willing to obtain such licences. The requirements are somewhat prohibitive in some areas, which require a period of six years to work as an apprentice

(iii) The development of opportunities for unemployed people, particularly migrants and persons in the mature workers' category, to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects,

- No comment.

(iv) the delivery of services and programs particularly to regional, rural and remote communities

- No comment.

(c) factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible vocational education and training, including the influence of the co-contribution funding model on student behaviour and completion rates

- No comment.

(d) the effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training, skills and pathways to employment, including opportunities and pathways to further education and employment for the most vulnerable in our community including those suffering a disability or severe disadvantage

- In the current vocational education sector, the competition among training providers has not resulted a favourable situation for the students. There are many training providers offering courses to students through Vet-Fee Help loan scheme for diploma, advanced diploma, graduate certificate and graduate diploma courses.
- There is no apparent limit of number of students an RTO can register.
- There is no set of eligibility requirements for a particular course where they can apply for VET Fee help in a particular course of study. Therefore almost anyone can register in a any course (practically) and claim VET Fee Help loan. The money will be paid to the RTO by the government and student will pay back the loan, when they start earning a salary more than \$54,126.00.
- It is advisable to investigate the amount of funds which had been collected by RTOs over the time and the corresponding repayment rate of Vet Fee Help loans. In this analysis it is required to pay attention to the “re payability “ of certain loans considering the age of the student, and the level of education they receive.
- This scheme has created an opportunity to training providers to register large number of students in their training courses and scoop money out of the government funds.
- When offering a VET-Fee help, there should be more checks and balances before releasing funds, similar to the process a bank would follow, when giving a loan to the customers.
- It is more appropriate to offer assistance to eligible students for no fee or for a small fee with proper selection criteria to follow some selected courses rather than offering them the VET Fee Help loan.
- Schemes like these will show an increase in the number of students undertaking courses in a short period of time, but in the long run they can result in funding shortages, large amounts of unpaid debt, and a group of qualified but not skilled enough people to meet industry requirements.

- Government has already realised the malpractices of some of the RTOs <http://www.myskills.gov.au/latest-news/government-strengthens-vet-standards/> but the measures taken are to control the activities of RTOs in a quality assurance perspective, but it will not stop students enrolling in unsuitable courses and accumulating loans. Need to fix the problem at entry points, which will result in more effective use of funds.

(e) the level of industry participation in the vocational education and training sector, including the provision of sustainable employment opportunities for graduates, including Competency Based Training and the application of training packages to workforce requirements, and

- No comment

(f) the Smart and Skilled reforms, including:

(i) Alternatives to the Smart and Skilled contestable training market and other funding policies

- No comment

(ii) the effects of the Smart and Skilled roll out on school based apprenticeships

- No comment

(g) Any other related matter.

- The <http://training.gov.au/> is the central place where all course details are maintained. In this website there are thousands of training components such as Training Packages, Qualifications, Accredited courses, Units of competency and skill sets. The structure of a qualification is as follows
- **Training package** is the top level
Ex: UET12 - Transmission, Distribution and Rail Sector Training Package
A training package consists of number of qualifications

Ex: the above training package has the 16 **Qualifications** listed. They are at Certificate II, III, IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels

There are 18 skills sets under this **qualification** and

There are 224 **units of competencies** relevant to this training package.

The **Unit of competency** is the document describes the details of subject material that should be delivered to the student in order to complete the course successfully.

Each qualification has prescribed the number of **Units of competencies** that needs to be covered in order to become qualified under that stream of study.

- There are thousands of Units listed in this website, and these are the most important documents which describe the content to be delivered under training courses, the range or the environment where it should be delivered and assessment criteria.
- Most of these units need to be reviewed as there are so many loosely defined content and sometimes outdated information.
- As a result of the “unreal” nature of most of these units, RTOs can compile courses, which are valid and satisfy all quality requirements, but will not enhance the knowledge of learners. Some of these units will cost nothing to deliver and low in academic value but gain valuable points towards course completion.
- A large amount of Units of Competencies, it will be a very costly exercise to review and update them on a regular basis. Most of the units are at release 1 level, indicating that no one has looked in to the relevance of this material after the first release. There is no revision history table these units. No information about unit developers and no way to give feedback.
- It highly recommended to consider reducing the number of Units of Competencies to a manageable level and to set up a system to review them periodically by industry experts, teachers and any other suitable persons including students.
- There can be an open system to review, similar to the systems used by international standards development bodies such as Standards Australia. They use “workgroups” or teams of experts to be the custodians of a set of standards, thus following the latest industry trends.
- A well-structured and quality assured system with provision for continuous improvement will improve the consistency and relevance of Vocational Education in Australia.