

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 14/08/2015

---

Partially Confidential

## **Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in NSW**

August 2015

The Smart and Skilled policy has contributed to drastically fewer enrolments in TAFE NSW during 2015. In a period when industry is crying out for skilled workers we have a policy which is resulting in radically less in engagement in vocational education; it is in effect de-skilling Australians.

It's first negative impact has been on the cost of courses, which effectively excludes people from education, especially the poor. Even though the cost is highly subsidised for those on a benefit, \$240 is too much. The government itself has recognised this and tried to ameliorate the situation with a 'bandaid solution' of offering scholarships for those between 15 and 30 who are on a benefit. Scholarships are only needed because the price is too high. And pity the poor person who is 31, 32, 33 etc.

Costs of \$3000 to \$15000 for courses assumes young people have parents who can afford such fees.

Secondly the 'prior qualification' restriction puts retraining (and hence employment) out of the reach of so many people. For example, a woman trying to return to work has a qualification from 15 years ago. Her old qualifications are not regarded as relevant for employment. Her partner has a low to medium paying job. She cannot afford to pay full fees of \$8000 or even \$3000 (for targeted priority courses) to undertake training to re-enter the workforce.

Another example would be those students who are less able, and who need a series of courses to allow them to catch up or reach a level where they are capable of seeking employment. Many who have mental health issues or other disabilities need time for skills development or a second chance at education.

And then there are the people over 55 who are expected work until they are 67 who are being put out of work by government policies such as Smart and Skilled and who are effectively disenfranchised from gaining re-training due to the qualifications they already hold. It is estimated by the PSA that 1,200 TAFE support staff (librarians, student administration and technical officers) have already lost their jobs due to TAFE restructuring.

Thirdly the system is over complicated with at least 7 categories of student fees. This, combined with the stuff up of TAFE's computer system (EBS) makes the enrolment process difficult. If after 12 months of implementation this system cannot be made to work then it is time to get rid of it.

The level of Smart and Skilled funding means a significant reduction in funding for support services. TAFE Libraries, counsellors and disability support services have all suffered. Private RTOs provide none of these services and hence have lower delivery costs. We would argue that the education private RTOs offer is of lesser quality for all students; and they do not provide the support needed for less able students. But TAFE is being driven to compete with RTOs. We have seen:

- Disability support reduced to half an hour a fortnight for students with a learning disability. What can you really do with someone who has learning disabilities in half an hour a fortnight?
- Tutorial support is now only offered to students who can afford to pay for it.
- Teachers are being forced by their managers to deliver courses in less and less time, with increasing proportions of courses being delivered online. Anyone without computer skills or access to the Internet is severely disadvantaged. Again less able students are less able to succeed with this pressure cooker type of education.
- TAFE Libraries are being forced to reduce their collections (for example by two thirds), reduce their opening hours and are struggling to maintain the level of support needed for a quality vocational education which will give students life long learning skills and the agility to respond to changing work environments. Libraries assist teachers with skills and resources to develop and deliver quality education.
- The demand for competitiveness among and between TAFE Institutes as well as private RTOs is killing any quality in the training now being offered by any RTO; we are all racing to

the bottom to reduce the cost of delivery. Private RTOs are there for a reason – to make a profit. To make a profit they reduce costs. They reduce costs by reducing quality. And TAFE is now trying to become the equivalent.

The end result of Smart and Skilled is a reduction in quality training for everyone, and a lack of training opportunities for the most disadvantaged people in our society. This isn't just bad for individuals; it is costly and unproductive for our society, leading to increased marginalisation, welfare costs and social unrest. It also impacts on the quality of outcome for our students. Does our society really want mechanics, technicians and para professionals who don't know what they are doing? Do we really want our children to have fewer opportunities for training?