

Submission
No 112

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 11/08/2015

Partially Confidential

I have contributed to a TAFE Teachers' Association submission, but wish to make some brief comments independently as well. I have worked in TAFE NSW for just over 20 years, firstly as a Part time teacher and course coordinator, then as a full time Outreach Coordinator. Outreach provides equity programs that are accessible, flexible and provide opportunities for people from a wide range of backgrounds, to obtain skills, confidence and direction for their future.

Sadly, with the introduction of fees for what were previously free Special Access Courses, and eligibility criteria that exclude many wishing to retrain, restart study or aim for a new career, enrolments in Outreach courses across NSW have dropped dramatically since the start of 'Smart & Skilled' this year. The result has been that Outreach programs in many TAFE institutes have been deleted, or transmogrified to become something quite different from what they were intended to be - an important arm of TAFE's commitment to access and equity.

It has been distressing and bewildering to those who have been committed to the provision of Outreach programs, to hear the former Premier and former Education Minister speak of our programs as akin to 'basket weaving' courses. I have heard minister Piccoli, on radio interviews, refer to access courses as hobby or interest courses, and suggest that people should pay if they wish to do these.

This flies in the face of evidence that our courses are about providing people with the experience of success, confidence and direction that they need, to progress onto seeking paid work, or enrolling in higher level qualifications, thus improving not only their own lives, but the NSW economy as well. Outreach courses typically provide a pathway to further study in a vocational area, they can offer some computer literacy skills, and yes, they can also contribute greatly to social cohesion and social capital within a community.

Outreach has had a proud history of delivering first class, customised and flexible training, in partnership with communities, employers and service organisations, for nearly 40 years. The dismantling of the state wide Outreach program has been one of the most distressing aspects of Smart & Skilled to date. We know that once such a program disappears, it is never revived. The NSW Government would argue that such decisions are a matter for TAFE Institutes and of course that is true. The fact remains that this move towards deleting Outreach and other equity programs in TAFE, began mainly due to the funding cuts to TAFE made by the O'Farrell Government in its first term, and continued apace under Smart & Skilled.

I have focused on this aspect of the effects of Smart & Skilled in this submission as I believe it is emblematic of much that is wrong with the policy. Whilst the policy, and the government, talk of a continued commitment to equity and access in VET, it is hard to see how this can be borne out, when TAFE Institutes are faced with enormous cost cutting pressures, and the imperative to operate as 'efficient' lean businesses, rather than as organisations tasked with providing that most important of government services to its citizens, opportunities to learn, become educated and skilled people who can then gain employment and contribute.

As I am a TAFE employee, I would prefer my submission be published without my name, however I am more than happy to offer more information if any members of the Committee wish to contact me.

thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts to your inquiry.