

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 13/08/2015

Partially Confidential

Vocational Education and Training in NSW Submission

Background:

Southern Riverina rural community members. Past students of TAFE, AE and university. One been a literacy/numeracy/ESOL teacher at TAFE and a secondary English/languages teacher. One is a grazier and engineer. Employer s of young people who need access to training AND education. Parents of same. Quite like to have the choice to be able to study ourselves without relocating. We appreciate the opportunities that come from having a good well-rounded education. We are frustrated by out-of-touch politicians and those who have no direct experience of trying to live and work in regional, non NBN-connected NSW.

Student choice factors:

1. Delivery method – do not like Online as the only/main method, as internet access is a HUGE barrier – it is **extremely unreliable** (fixed wireless) and **costly** – uses up all data if studying. Can only get 15GB/month at cost of \$100+ to use between children, study and our business. Cannot stream video/watch YouTube etc. Slows to 64KB – unusable if go over quota. RIDICULOUS. NBN fibre will not come near us apparently, even though it will go up the highway near us, we cannot tap into it. Satellite service will no doubt be yet another disappointment adding to the city / country divide already existing as regards equitable access to internet and technology. We are third class citizens in this regard. Luckily we are not trying to educate children with school of the air. We are NOT really in the outback – only 45km to a large town where some lucky people, in a few streets (not everywhere there either) have unlimited ADSL.
2. Quality teaching
3. Reliable provider, recognised qualification.
4. Cost

BEFORE Smart and Skilled

TAFE education has given many students a second chance at education when the school system failed them. There are many success stories of students who have had their lives changed dramatically by completing TAFE education pathway and foundation skills courses.

Cert 4 Tertiary Preparation is one such course, for example, which is a Year 11/12 equivalent and can pathway into uni or further education/training. One student is now doing a Masters in Social Work after having started with Cert 4 TPC, then Cert 3 and 4 Community Services, then Diploma/Uni combo. She is making a massive contribution to the local community working with disengaged youth and other vulnerable members of the community. Another student who was bullied at secondary school, came to TAFE did TPC, did really well, then did an Aged Care qual and is now working in a local Aged Care facility. There are plenty more similar stories of how a TAFE education has transformed lives for the better and opened up career prospects previously thought out of reach.

Other students, who have had fractured education in the past but want to improve their abilities, have learned how to read, developed confidence and been able to improve their own lives /contribute to their community / enter the workforce – NOT quickly, in 18 weeks, but over some years. This is an AMAZING achievement by any standard. Imagine the joy of an illiterate parent when they can finally, after a long struggle, read a book with their child.

This slow and steady, valuable self-improvement is NO LONGER POSSIBLE under Smart and Skilled. The commercial pressure on providers such as TAFE to get students in and out quickly means that improving your level of education is a 'luxury' that is sadly not valued by our government. The Smart and Skilled term is in fact tautology. It seems as though if you have a learning problem, are disabled in some way, live in a regional area, live in town but with dodgy internet or are older than 30, you CANNOT get smart and skilled at all.

POST S & S Concerns:

1. Lack of recognition of meaning of and value of EDUCATION by Govt – all emphasis is on TRAINING. Both are needed, both equally important. If a student's education has been patchy, resulting gaps often render any poorly supported training ineffective at best.
2. Education underpins all other skill acquisition; it should not be compromised.
3. Many students who need/want training have very low literacy levels, lack confidence and need more EDUCATIONAL help before they could cope with the demands of either online OR traditional education. They are still potentially capable of contributing meaningfully to society; they need and deserve more support than the S&S policy gives them.
4. The literacy and numeracy support necessary for many students to complete their courses successfully MUST be delivered by well qualified LLN professionals, if it is to be effective support. Not all providers have these specialist LLN teachers.
5. We as a society need to value education and recognise that people learn differently; some need longer than others to master new skills.
6. Literacy and numeracy build over a period of time. There is no 'quick-fix'.
7. TAFE used to be provider of choice for our trainees/employees – now many courses do not run due to low numbers or only run in online mode – we cannot do that for reasons above.

8. Enrolments have plummeted at our local TAFE due to cost – even \$80 is a lot for many people to find. People who would benefit most are going without education; they cannot afford it. Mental health issues are increasing in staff and students.
9. This S&S policy will no doubt lead to a further reduction in TAFE services as teachers will lose their jobs if they are not teaching as much due to fewer students. In our location TAFE is the best option for a good quality non-school educational opportunity. There is a real community fear of losing more TAFE courses/access.
10. Online education/training – cheaper to deliver so the govt/providers love it as a cure-all. In reality the quality of such education/training is likely to be MUCH lower than a traditional delivery method.
11. The employer's definition of competent is often divergent to providers'.
12. It requires LOTS of effort/time to set up online courses so they are as engaging as possible. Teachers need time to do this without the pressure of getting out finding students.
13. Staff morale, teaching and admin, is at an all-time low. Stress and anxiety are commonplace. Serious physical and mental health concerns are growing.
14. Confidence in govt. policy direction is also low. Regional constituents feel forgotten, undervalued and ignored.
15. A high number of people –of ALL ages - do not have the sound technical literacy and independent learning skills needed to learn online (e.g.: reading a screen is a very different skill to reading a book) so find it very challenging and drop out early.
16. Employability skills such as teamwork are difficult to teach effectively online.
17. Industries and employers of all persuasions want employees who have great PEOPLE skills. To develop these you need to interact with people, face-to-face, NOT computers.

Recommendations:

1. Instead of axing teachers and courses, maybe fix the admin system which is a disaster and making the whole system worse.
2. Need to learn from other states' mistakes in sabotaging their TAFES with flawed \$ driven policy. Find a better role model.
3. Abolish limits around how many foundation skills courses a student can undertake. Many people need longer to learn / improve their skills. Society benefits from this – it cannot be seen as a waste of money.
4. Scholarships are a good idea but should be for over 30s too. Lots of people older than that want to improve their educational level. Why cap the age of those entitled to learn?
5. Value education and recognise that it is an investment in Australia's future. It is a service that a government should provide equitably to all, regardless of location and situation.
6. PLEASE DO NOT DECIMATE TAFE in rural areas especially.
7. Everyone leaves school literate and numerate – now that **would** be a true education revolution!