

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Prior to the implementation of Smart and Skilled in January 2015, Minister Piccolo stated that no student with a disability would be worse off under Smart and Skilled. As this submission will demonstrate this statement is clearly false.

Under Smart and skilled there have been significant changes in the way courses are delivered in TAFENSW. This has had a profound impact on student enrolments, transition pathways, delivery practices, staffing and the reputation of TAFENSW in the wider community.

Not all terms of reference will be addressed in this submission and the focus will be on the impact of Smart and Skilled on students with disabilities, Aboriginal students and the most marginalised groups in our community.

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*

If enrolments are any indication many students have lost motivation to study in VET. Anecdotally students have reported that it is too expensive; it is too difficult (the introduction of educational business systems in TAFENSW at the beginning of 2015 crippled TAFE colleges because of poor course information, misinformation and flawed enrolment processes) they couldn't get information about courses and costs as no one could tell them anything.

As reported by the SMH on June 23<sup>rd</sup>:

*The state government's controversial TAFE reforms have driven away more than 30,000 students this year and at least 2500 TAFE staff have lost their jobs since 2012, the budget papers reveal.*

*The government's so-called Smart and Skilled reforms, which began on January 1 this year, saw many course fees rise substantially and coincided with the collapse of a new computerised enrolment system.*

*This led to school leavers baulking at vocational training with the latest figures showing that certificate III enrolments dropped by 18,073 students. For certificate IV, there were 10,568 fewer enrolments this year than last year.*

*The state government has conceded that Smart and Skilled has driven away students.*

*"Enrolments in 2015 reflect a lower than expected market response to Smart and Skilled reforms in the transitional stage since its start in January 2015," the budget paper says.*

The significant decline in students coupled with the stripping of funding from TAFENSW has led to empty classrooms, deserted campuses and loss of specialised teaching staff across all faculty areas.

Students with disabilities have had access to specialist Disability Teacher/Consultants to support course information/decisions and develop pathways, facilitate enrolment, assess and implement reasonable adjustment and work with teaching sections to achieve positive learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. In many TAFE Institutes, business reform processes have led to a cut in the number of specialist positions and the re-classifying of these positions as 'generic' college based positions. For many students with a disability, the loss of this service will create a barrier to access VET.

This situation is worsened by the imposition, under Smart and Skilled, of forced disclosure of disability on enrolment so that the training provider can claim a 10% loading. This forced disclosure, and the implementation of new business systems in TAFENSW directly challenges the privacy and confidentiality of disability information. This in itself has the potential to prevent students with disability from at best disclosing their disability and at worst, not enrolling at all.

The loading of 10% is totally inappropriate for the support of students with disabilities.

*(ii) choice of course, course location and method of study*

In preparation for the implementation of Smart and Skilled TAFENSW began to 'rationalise' course offerings. With the implementation of Smart and Skilled this year and the consequent decrease in numbers (in fact TAFE numbers have declined by more than 80,000 since 2012, including declining numbers of Aboriginal students and students with disabilities) this 'rationalisation' has continued. Consequently, within TAFE Institutes courses have been restricted to single campus delivery and there has been considerable loss of choice in method of study.

For example in Sydney TAFE, the HSC and Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) programs were restricted to specific campuses so that currently, TPC and HSC are offered only at 2 campuses (one city campus and one southern campus). Whilst TPC is offered at Ultimo, there is no HSC and the feeder Year 10 equivalent is not offered at this campus. Consequently the viability of these programs is threatened and under the current Smart and Skilled funding models are not likely to survive. These courses were also free and under Smart and skilled there is a co-payment which automatically excludes certain sectors of the community. This directly impacts on 'the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects.'

**NOTE: Many students with Disabilities, students who are educationally disadvantaged and Aboriginal students have used TPC as a vehicle to gain general educational skills that they have missed and that enable them to progress to higher level courses in TAFENSW or move to university. Already hours of delivery have been reduced (science modules were**

previously delivered over 3 \* 2 hour sessions and now 2 \* 2 hour sessions; this equates to 36 hours less over a semester. Will second chance education survive under Smart and Skilled?

As a direct result of Smart and Skilled, pathways to both higher level Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses, and employment for students have been severely impacted.

### **CASE STUDY 1: Pathways from Certificate II to Diploma**

Music courses at Sydney TAFE were offered at Certificate II, Certificate III, Certificate IV and Diploma levels. This created a transition pathway for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and Aboriginal students who may not have had the opportunity to complete their school education but could transition through course levels in their area of vocational choice. . As a result of Smart and Skilled, students who now do a Certificate II in Music Performance and wish to continue in the performance stream must enrol in a Diploma Music (Performance). There is no entry requirement, no transition pathway, no opportunity to build skills required to study and succeed at this level and no fee subsidy so these students acquire a debt of approximately \$12, 000.

**NOTE: A student with a disability doing this course in 2014 would have been fee exempt; now they must pay a full commercial fee. A student on Centrelink benefits would have paid a concessional fee.**

### **CASE STUDY 2: Pathways to employment for students with Disabilities**

A student with Autism has already completed a C2 Computer Hardware as a TVET student. Then a C3 in Info Tech and then a C4 in Interactive Games clear transition pathway). Despite multiple job applications (and possibly because of his disability) he needs more qualifications. This is a common issue for students with disabilities who often need to be more qualified than their non-disabled peers when competing in the job market. To improve his chances in his chosen career path, he needs to enrol in C3 Programming. He is ineligible for a Smart and Skilled Concession/Exemption at C3 level (he has a higher qualification) and he is unable to pay the \$6960.00 for a six month course, and he is ineligible any sort of FEE HELP. He cannot enrol in Programming Certificate IV as he does not have the underpinning skills which he needs to develop in a Certificate 111..

**NOTE: Had this student done this course in 2014 would have been fee exempt.**

Where courses have remained, the hours of delivery have been modified/reduced so that sections can deliver courses within the Smart and Skilled pricing models. This raises

serious questions about the 'quality' of the 'student learning journey'. Furthermore, for students with disabilities and those students who have any kind of educational disadvantage the impact of reduced hours of delivery are profound.

#### EXAMPLES:

1. Many trade sections have cut delivery to 4 days instead of 5 and in some instances students only attend 3 days. Other sections have reduced the number of blocks they deliver, and still others have cut the weeks of attendance from 18 to 15 (or less).
2. Business courses have had nominal hours significantly reduced.
3. One very popular Design course that was previously delivered for 18 hours a week for a full year is now delivered for 24 hours a week for one semester.

NOTE: It would be hard to find one section in TAFE that is offering students the same delivery hours as were offered to students in 2013 (prior to Smart and Skilled preparation and the 2015 implementation).

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

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

Skill development takes time and practice. One of the major impacts of Smart and Skilled has been the reduction in delivery hours. This has a profound impact on the quality of skill development and underpinning knowledge, in all areas but especially in apprenticeships where practical skill development equates to half of delivery. The result of this reduction in delivery is under skilled and under trained graduates which raises further issues regarding workplace safety. TAFENSW has been forced into this position by the cost price of training determined by Smart and Skilled and by competition from private providers who offer 'fast' qualifications. The implications of reduced delivery have been discussed in section a) ii). The practices of some private training providers has been detailed in numerous newspaper reports and warnings from the Trade Practices commission as well as anecdotal evidence from students.

CASE STUDY: Student with multiple disabilities including Attention Deficit Disorder, psychosis, physical disabilities and Dyslexia completed a Certificate III in Community Services with a private provider in a six week period and with no work placement. The

equivalent program in TAFENSW would take six months and have a compulsory work placement component.

CASE STUDY: Student with multiple disadvantage (educational disadvantages/special schooling, drug and alcohol/addiction) and Dyslexia/learning disabilities had completed a Community Services course with support from the Disability Unit. The student was enrolled in 2 Diploma courses at a private training provider without any assessment. She never attended a day of training but found she had a VET FEEHELP debt exceeding \$30,000.

(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,

Mature workers, the unemployed and migrants who have completed a Certificate IV or above, regardless of when where or what must pay full fees for any program at Certificate III level and below. This includes English language courses and foundation skills courses, such as literacy and numeracy and computing programs that support re-entry to the workforce. Second chance education has already been addressed in a) ii)

CASE STUDY: Prior to implementation of Smart and Skilled any student with literacy and/or numeracy issues could co enrol in a foundations studies course for no cost. This co-enrolment facilitated student learning, improved functional literacy and numeracy and supported course completion. Students must now pay an enrolment fee for this co-enrolment. For many students the course fee itself is difficult to fund thus making the co-enrolment unattainable for many students.

(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

The fee structure under Smart and Skilled is a barrier to participation. Students who have higher level qualifications (Certificate IV and above) are not eligible for subsidy under Smart and Skilled for Certificates below Certificate III.

CASE STUDY: A very bright male student who has ADHD and very poor literacy needs to do a foundation skills course for students with learning disabilities. Because he completed

higher level certificates (partly through RPL for skills/positions held in his employment he will have to pay the full fee of \$2200 to attend a program for 1 day a week for a semester.

Furthermore, it appears that all training providers, under Smart and Skilled, have an unashamed policy of 'bums on seats'. This policy results in inappropriate student placements, poor outcomes and accumulation of debt for individuals and the taxpayers of Australia. VET FEEHELP debt has increased exponentially over the last 3 years and taxpayers carry the bulk of that debt as the training has not consistently led to course completion and employment. Training packages do not require any assessment of students' capacity to complete a course at a particular level; no literacy and/or numeracy requirements and no educational achievement level as does tertiary entry. This has left students vulnerable to exploitation and financial abuse.

(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

As a direct result of Smart and Skilled, pathways to both higher level Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses, and employment for students have been severely impacted.

SEE CASE STUDY 1 AND 2 IN PREVIOUS SECTION a) ii):

CASE STUDY 3: Student wanted to enrol in Laboratory Course and due to disability needed to start at C3 as a pathway to more difficult content in C4. Stated this had been a successful strategy in the past. Couldn't afford a C3 commercial, couldn't attempt going straight into C4.

(g) any other related matter.

The implementation of Smart and Skilled has resulted in the loss of flexibility in terms of enrolment and completion.