

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

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Partially Confidential

I am writing to express my support for the public TAFE system in NSW and to beg politicians of all persuasions to move away from the privatisation of vocational education for the sake of our communities, our economy and our social cohesion.

I dropped out of high school at 16. I also left home at 16. I drifted from poorly paid job to poorly paid job and at the age of 20 became a single parent.

When I was twenty-six I decided that the best thing I could do for my child was to get an education so I undertook the HSC at Ultimo and was successful in going on to be the first person in the history of my family to go to university.

Both my children have also benefitted from the TAFE system, my eldest in the marine industry and my youngest, who had a physical disability, was supported at TAFE to gain his year 10 equivalent. He did this at TAFE because he missed so much school and was spending a considerable time at the Emergency Department of the local hospital that continuity of study was difficult. With the support of TAFE he was able to get a tutor for one hour a week, and the compassion, support and mentoring he received was sufficient for him to succeed. He has subsequently had successful heart surgery and completed an apprenticeship.

As a result of TAFE both I and my children are taxpayers and we contribute to the economy and to our communities.

After working in the private sector for a number of years I became a TAFE teacher where I worked in a rural community to provide second chance learning to people like me who for many complex reasons were unable to complete their education through the school system.

The range of students who I have taught include young people who look after parents with mental illness, young people couch surfing because of family breakdown, single parents attempting to create a better future for themselves and their children, women escaping domestic violence, women returning to the workforce needing new skills and improved confidence, people injured by car accidents or work place accidents needing to retrain, young people who have been home schooled, young people who have suffered serious trauma (for example the murder or death of a parent) young people who reject the school environment, refugees and new migrants, 457 visa workers, indigenous young people at risk and many, many more. Many of my students suffered poverty, poor health, precarious housing, dysfunctional relationships, few support networks, lack of transport and geographical isolation.

You can listen to an interview with one of my former students Dezi Wilson at this link: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bushtelegraph/tafe-changes/5601786>

My students' pathways into their futures have been many and various. Many have taken several years and successive courses to build up the skills necessary for them to participate equally in employment and the community. An example of this is a single parent who Inverell TAFE supported. Firstly she undertook a Career Education for Women course which gave her the confidence to return to education. She completed a year 10 equivalent, Tertiary Preparation Certificate and then the learning centre at the TAFE continued to support her university studies at Deakin University. As a result of her studies both she and her sister are exhibiting artists. But because of her success the ripple effect

resulted in her children, her nieces and her nephews also pursuing study through the TAFE.

This ability to gain skills over time has been removed because of the Smart and Skilled policy which only provides entitlements for one course before the cost becomes prohibitive for many people in my town

The link below identified towns in New England being among the most disadvantaged in NSW according to the most recent *Dropping Off the Edge Report*.

<http://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/3252300/hard-times-roll-call-northern-towns-among-most-disadvantaged-in-the-state/>

The Allen Consulting Group's 2006 *'The Complete Package – The Value of TAFE'* reiterated that *"that there is a general acceptance that in an increasingly global and dynamic marketplace. 'lifelong learning' is the key to remaining competitive and maintaining and enhancing community prosperity"*

The Smart and Skilled model in NSW does not work for 'lifelong learning' and is focussed simply on moving the cost of vocational education on to the individual without any real analysis upon the impact on the economy of removing accessible skill development for the community.

It is important to highlight the clear linkages between the number of years of completed education and social capital outcomes. There is a direct linkage between educational achievement, particularly literacy and numeracy and health, housing, crime reduction and employment outcomes.

The cost of imprisonment far outstrips the cost of educating people.

A Canadian study in 2006 identified the social costs of early school disengagement as impacting on an increased cost for social welfare, a less efficient operation of markets, decreased participation in the electoral and political process and decreased social cohesion.

As a teacher I have witnessed young people with narrow racist views, sharing a classroom in a multicultural context and I have seen those young people learn about each other and form bonds, rather than continue with negative stereotypical attitudes. Public institutions provide a setting for social inclusion to develop. At Inverell the TAFE regularly celebrated Harmony Day and was involved in many community events.

Whilst I was the Head Teacher at the Inverell TAFE we worked with the Interagency group and the Alcohol Education Research Centre to trial a range of interventions including a Liquor Accord to minimise alcohol related harm within the community. The TAFE worked with Department of Housing in South Inverell to establish the Linking Together Centre and then to deliver programs from the centre which included: Mural programs to reduce graffiti,

programs for young parents and their children to re-engage them with learning and equip them with parenting, nutrition and literacy and numeracy skills. This group also accessed local health interventional professionals including dentists, midwives and diabetes testing. We were active participants in the Community Drug Action Team and worked with young people to secure youth services. We developed an alternative to HSC English 'Workplace Communication' which was available to schools online with teacher support at sites like Warialda to enable those young people focussed on employment, rather than university a mechanism to make that transition. There is no capacity to run that program under Smart and Skilled and in fact the 'Youthlinks' Program which was a partnership between TAFE and local high schools for young people at risk of disengaging from school can no longer run. Between 1999 and 2005 we were able to run via Helping Young People at Risk funding programs for young people no longer attending school, many of them Indigenous. Many of these young people gained employment as a result of our intervention and some are now leaders in our communities.

The Inverell TAFE also worked with community leaders from both the government and non-government sector to develop their management communication skills. The work was with both government sector and non-government sector and resulted in outcomes like implementation of procedures manuals for Business Enterprise Centres across NSW, plain English documentation for local government correspondence increasing effectiveness and efficiency and local people gaining recognition for their skills – for example Telstra Businesswoman of the Year nominations.

<http://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/1087071/inverell-woman-thrilled-with-telstra-award/>

TAFE in Inverell is represented at Rotary, at the local business chamber and TAFE staff have been regularly involved in the town's business awards

Many Inverell people also accessed a range of language courses on offer in the evening, including French, German, Japanese, Spanish and Italian. There are distinguishable cognitive benefits for learning a second language and adults with poor literacy seem to accelerate literacy acquisition if they are given this opportunity. The cost of Language courses at TAFE has become prohibitive and the courses no longer run.

The crucial role TAFE plays in building social capital right across the community is poorly understood by government and is deserving of notice.

The role TAFE plays in supporting students with a disability is simply irreplaceable.

I would like to tell the story of _____ – a disability student who worked for a local disability non-government organisation on the recycling truck. Regulations were introduced which required _____ to have the literacy necessary to be able to identify the name of the businesses the truck picked up from. _____ was in his early fifties and because he had an intellectual disability his father had discontinued sending him to school when _____ was nine years old. He had kept him working out on the farm. For _____, employment is his identity and loss of employment was akin to loss of his identity. Consequently, the literacy numeracy teacher at Inverell TAFE photographed all the businesses in Inverell that were involved in the recycling program and constructed a set of flash cards. _____ and the teacher, via disability support funding, worked for about 9 weeks until _____ had sufficient recognition and literacy to retain his employment.

When I was recruited as teacher to Inverell TAFE in 1995 it was a thriving hub of learning. There were about thirty full time teachers and many part time casual teachers. The programs included Agriculture, Horticulture, Conservation and Land Management, Shearing, Wool Classing, Meat Inspecting, Construction, Civil Engineering, Engineering including the range of welding courses, Automotive, CAD, Fashion, Business Administration, Information Technology, Community Welfare, Children's Services, Gem Faceting, General Education, Literacy and Numeracy, Local Government Certificates, Tertiary Preparation Certificates and these are just the ones I can remember.

Reforms are supposed to improve things. The Smart and Skilled reforms are not doing that. There aren't even 10 full time teachers left at the TAFE campus in Inverell. There has been about a 75% drop in enrolments in 2015 at the Inverell TAFE campus. People cannot afford the fees; teachers are fearful for their jobs and under intense pressure because of the flawed EBS system foisted upon TAFE.

<http://www.inverelltimes.com.au/story/3247423/state-government-in-firing-line-at-inverell-tafe-campus-protest/?cs=1523>

Smart and Skilled is based upon a premise that education is a market and that markets will find their price. However, markets just don't work like that in the bush. Inverell no longer has an air service because air services providers on the Sydney Inverell run could not compete or afford the overheads. It will be desperately sad if Inverell TAFE cannot be maintained and it will be that much harder to attract people to settle in the town and to contribute to the local economy.