

Submission
No 114

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Smart and Skilled course fee complexity:

Smart and Skilled has created a vast array of problems not only with those potential students who were wishing to enrol, but also with teachers and admin staff who have to deal with the process of helping students to enrol. The time needed to enrol a student has significantly increased and is putting immense pressure on all staff concerned.

As a TAFE teacher and an active person in the community, I am in constant contact with students, teachers and the general public. The Smart and Skilled reforms are causing:

- a) Potential students who may have a previous qualification, whether it may be from a university or a TAFE college are being charged thousands of dollars in order to retrain. Many do not want to take the risk of taking out a large VET Fee loan to find that there is no job prospect after completing the course. At our TAFE college we have had countless students who have walked away from wanting to enrol in a course. These are adults who may have gained qualifications well over ten years ago, have worked and have been made redundant and are mature age students who are finding it difficult to find full time work, especially in regional and country areas. This is also happening state wide. TAFE colleges are no longer buzzing with student activity. Students in TAFE colleges are down by a significant amount comparing figures from three years ago.

- b) For those who would like to enrol into a course, need to gain a Universal Student Identity number. This in itself has been a farce. Enrolling into a course is a two stage process. The process takes too long to complete. Potential students fill in an enrolment form for the course. They would then need to have an appropriate ID to gain their USI and attach to their enrolment form. Many young students do not have a Medicare card as a form of ID which adds days for teachers and admin staff to chase students for an ID card to gain their USI. TAFE Admin staff has had to work full weekends – Saturdays and Sundays to place a huge backlog of students into the new clunky, often arduous EBS system software. Low literacy or those with low computer skills are taking up a great deal of administration staff and class teacher time to gain a USI.

Below is a quote from a teacher email who notified me that it took her one hour of her time to gain a USI just for one student.

“.....his enrolment form is in the sign on book. Could you drop it in to main office on Monday when you are over there for computers? The office was closed by the time we finished on Tuesday. Interview finished at 4pm and it took until 5pm in the library to complete the USI number generation and permissions!”

This is definitely not a one off issue. This is a constant issue state wide. Teachers do not have hours of valuable time to spend on gaining student USI numbers, let alone time wasted on using the new arduous EBS computer software which is not user friendly.

- a) Those students who have gained a USI may check the course fee on line to find that they need to pay thousands of dollars to do a course. If they decide to continue with the course and find that it is too difficult for them to continue well after the census date, then they are up for the full fee of the course, a debt which they carry for life and needing to pay when they reach a certain salary level.
- b) EBS is the new inefficient software TAFE teachers and administration staff are forced to use. It was implemented without trialling in some colleges. Below is what one Head Teacher has to put up with. This is also a common issue amongst a majority of Head Teachers in the state. Below is notification sent by a teacher regarding the use of EBS by Tribal software.

“Thursday is my administration day. In the last four weeks I have spent at least 5 hours of that day trying to sort out SALM issues like:

- Getting students into registers – I have 30 students not in registers
- Withdrawing students
- Getting new cal.occ codes for late enrolments.

The SALM help desk is very good but the constant phone calls and explanation of problem take a lot of time.

- It takes a lot of time chasing enrolments
- A continuing student whose course started in March is still to receive her quote.
- It took 2 months to provide a quote for a transferring TPC student

Impacts of Smart and Skilled on TAFE:

Hunter Institute of Technology have deleted a number of courses as well as cutting back large chunks of hours from existing courses. The HSC was totally deleted. Two Maths teachers, a

Science teacher and an English teacher were given VRs. The remaining teachers have been teaching in the Tertiary Preparation Course "TPC". The TPC is a certificate 3 and 4 qualification, the tertiary Preparation Certificate which provides its students with uni entry and entry into TAFE diplomas and provides the same pathways as the HSC. This course has suffered a severe cutback in hours of teaching delivery as well as the elimination of choice of electives for students in one institute. English, maths, science and humanities classes which formerly were run at 4 hours per week were cut back to 3½ hours per week. Students studying at the one campus could no longer choose electives but are now forced to accept the one shoe fits the course which the TPC has become. Students wanting a higher level of mathematics than the basic standard course were unable to access it. Only Biology is offered in science, those wanting to access other sciences are not catered for. Not a good move when it is essential for students needing more hours, not less, in these discipline areas to help them through further tertiary studies. Our modern society needs more maths, science and computers (STEM skills) for the benefit of our country in a global market.

Under Smart and Skilled, students are paying more for less. In the certificate 2 Skills for Work and Training in a particular institute, a formerly 18 week course x 20 hours per week is being delivered in as little as 14 hours per week for 9 weeks. The course is being delivered in a very lean way and student competencies are not as good as they used to be. As in the TPC these students cannot choose electives but need to do the program offered. The course is conducted in shorter hours with larger classes and for a higher fee (if the student is not entitled to a concession).

The Hunter has three large water ways. The three are Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens and Newcastle Harbour. These large water ways have a number of recreational boats, yachts and commercial shipping. The boatbuilding course at Newcastle TAFE was deleted two years ago as well as the fibre glassing units. Students wishing to do boatbuilding are now travelling to Meadowbank TAFE in Sydney. The very few students who started the course some have opted out of the course due to course costs and travel expenses to Sydney.

The Hunter region is a tourist hotspot catering for tourists and Sydneysiders to spend a weekend or week away. The hospitality and tourism industry employs thousands of workers. Due to state funding cutbacks, Hunter TAFE has cut hospitality and tourism courses from Glendale, Cessnock, Wyong and Maitland TAFE colleges. Hospitality and tourism are now only offered at Hamilton and Ourimbah TAFE. Once again, young students need to travel large distances, many are apprentices on low wages who find the cost of travel and course attendance financially difficult.

The implementation of Smart and Skilled has caused TAFE Institutes to look at increasing class numbers to pay for the coverage of course costs. This has meant that class sizes need to be increased. This is to the detriment of adults with extremely low literacy and numeracy skills operating at the Pre Australian Core Skills Framework.

Prior to Smart and Skilled these adults were catered to by placing them in smaller classes of not more than eight. These students were given individualised programs catered to their needs. These types of students are no longer accepted in classes as it is uneconomical to have smaller

classes of six to eight students. Placing these students in large classes of eighteen with continuous enrolments throughout the year would mean that these low literacy and numeracy students would not gain individualised help and become lost in a large class.

The cutting back of course hours, total elimination of courses mentioned has caused the loss of over 1800 qualified university trained teaching positions in the last eighteen months. Smart and Skilled and contestable funding is causing TAFE to cut back on quality delivery to compete with the for profit private training colleges. Under the new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement TAFE management are pushing to have trainers to train students in order to cut down costs and come down to the level of private providers. Trainers only require a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Fewer university trained teachers will be required to deliver lessons. Teachers will be mainly required to prepare lessons and advise trainers to deliver class lessons etc. Assessors will be used to assess students. The lowering of teaching standards down to trainers and assessors will affect the quality in course delivery.