

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

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Inquiry into funding for TAFE

"A group of unscrupulous training providers selling substandard courses will have their contracts terminated under a state government crackdown, after revelations of serious misconduct and non-compliance across the sector." The Age, Victoria. June 29, 2015.

I believe the same could be said for many private NSW training providers. And, as the link between proper training and productivity is already established, such vocational training is something that should remain very available to all - something funded by the government as it is in the best interests of the country as a whole.

My father would turn in his grave if he knew of this shift to private fee charging providers with dubious quality of training. This is the draft of an obituary published in the Sydney Morning Herald after his death, 13/08/2006. It was written by Edward Parry, who was one who followed him as a part of TAFE.

I believe any inquiry should take into serious consideration the principles of TAFE that are expressed here.

The Quiet Man Behind an Educational Revolution Hugh Charles Marshall King 1914-2006

In the nineteen-fifties – the heady days of economic expansion after World War 2 - the demand for education at all levels escalated rapidly. The States, which were constitutionally responsible for education, could not cope and the Commonwealth Government began to provide capital grants for the development of schools and universities. However, despite their critical role in training the workforce for the massive post-war reconstruction effort, the nation's technical colleges tended to be thought of – no doubt unconsciously – as still reflecting their nineteenth-century name: "Working Men's Colleges." They were seen as the places where apprentices and industrial cadets who had worked all day came to study for their tickets at night. Facilities were minimal, and the overall image poor.

Hugh King, who died on 13 August 2006 aged 92, entered this challenging environment in 1942 after four years as a high school teacher of science and mathematics. As a part-time Physics teacher with Technical Education in the years 1942 to 1944, while studying for his Arts degree, he observed and experienced much at the 'grass roots' level. With his ideal mix of qualifications (BSc, Dip Ed, BA and medallist in Psychology) and his teaching experience, he was uniquely fitted for the role of Principal Research Officer in the then New South Wales Department of Technical Education.

Over 34 years, from 1945 as an Education Officer, until his retirement in 1978 with the rank of Assistant Director, he worked unceasingly to raise the level of national appreciation of technical education as a sector having its own well-developed philosophy that was grounded on sound educational principles. **These principles included the need to base curricula on the researched**

needs of students (rather than pre-conceived ideas of what was appropriate), a broad base of understanding of the reasons underlying workplace skills and practices, and study facilities of a quality appropriate to the task being asked of the sector.

His view was that without a serious attempt to understand and define the objectives of the various sectors of education, no effective structure can be designed and operated to meet the needs of students in all the sectors.

In the pursuit of these principles, Hugh King fought many a battle against reactionary forces. Often he was pitched against aggressive legal advocates for employers in the NSW Apprenticeship Commission in cases designed to ensure that employers released their apprentices to avail themselves of their legislated entitlement to attend daytime classes.

As secretary of the 1962 Conference of the six State Superintendents of Technical Education, which met annually from this time, he prepared background papers and was free to speak on all matters. The importance of rationalisation was at last realized, and by 1972, statements of the needs from all six states were obtained to facilitate aggregation and dissection of findings. In 1972, by which time Superintendents had become Directors, Hugh King prepared a classification of TAFE courses to make Australia-wide statistics possible.

Most importantly of all, he was a seminal contributor to the national effort to obtain **Commonwealth funding support for technical education comparable to that going to the other sectors (schools and universities)**. His abilities made him a natural choice as executive officer to the national Conference of Directors of Technical Education, where he used his formidable skills as a writer of well-researched, polished prose to prepare the major submissions that laid the ground for the major changes in Commonwealth funding policy that ushered in the era of TAFE in the nineteen-seventies.

Seeking after status and prestige is a well-entrenched human characteristic and nowhere has it shown out more powerfully than in the determination of educational policy. Vocational education has always been in a vulnerable position. **Pressed from below by academically ambitious school systems thrusting upwards and tempted by the status accorded to universities, technical education has needed men and women of strong will to remain true to its calling.**

Hugh King was such a one. Dogged in his efforts to keep his sector focused on its mission, he stood against any, no matter how powerful, who sought the holy grail of status in preference to responsiveness to actual educational need. Not surprisingly, he was sometimes described as cross-grained and stubborn, but the intellectual honesty that he would never abandon left its legacy in some of those who were to follow him. The philosophy of partnership between tertiary education and industry and commerce was to become the foundation stone of the introduction of the colleges of advanced education that transformed the higher education system over the twenty-five years from the late sixties.

A quiet man, who perhaps lacked the skills to communicate well with those he loved, but passionate about TAFE and its status. Let us remember him with gratitude for his determination and vision.