

INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Sydney Home Education Network (SHEN)
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The Sydney Home Education Network (SHEN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales. The Sydney Home Education Network (SHEN) is a non-profit support group run by volunteers for home educators in the Sydney and greater Sydney region.

Home education is a legal education option in NSW. It is regulated by the Education Act, 1990 and the Home Schooling Information Package.

Access to TAFE courses for home educated students

The Sydney Home Education Network believes that home educated children should be able to access TAFE courses prior to the age of 17 for a number of reasons.

1. Many home educated students undertake TAFE courses as a component of their home education program.
2. Home educated students are unable to receive an ATAR and many use TAFE courses as a pathway to further study. TAFE courses can be used to determine an ATAR.
3. People with a disability are overrepresented amongst home educated students. A primary reason for home education is that schools are not always able to meet the educational, health or psychological needs of the children. TAFE provides a supportive environment for entry or re-entry into formal education.
4. Students who are registered for home education in NSW are meeting the compulsory education requirement of the NSW Education Act 1990 but they are not enrolled in a school and are not considered to be "school students" by the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) or TAFE. Hence, home educated students are excluded from school-based apprenticeships and traineeships and TVET courses. It is TAFE and DEC policy that home educated students cannot undertake these programs because they do not attend a "school".

Access of home educated children to TVET courses

Children in public and private schools can access TVET courses with ease. This is not the case for home educated children. In most situations they are barred from these courses. This is unjust and discriminatory.

The 2014 Inquiry into Home Education concluded that home educated children could access TVET courses. SHEN believes that this statement does not accurately reflect the reality of the situation for most home educated students. The reason why SHEN believes that the conclusion reached was incorrect is provided at the end of this submission under the heading “Additional Information on access to TVET courses”.

Recommendation 1 : That home educated children be allowed access to TAFE courses prior to the age of 17 and that TAFE develop clear guidelines as to the requirements for early entry into TAFE.

Recommendation 2 : That home educated children be able to access TVET and school based apprenticeship programmes and that the guidelines be amended to reflect that.

Recommendation 3 : That the above policies be included in the home schooling registration package so families are aware of these options.

This submission has been approved by the Volunteer SHEN Management Committee.

Carla Ferguson

SHEN President

Additional Information on access to TVET courses

The purpose of the information provided below is to correct the erroneous conclusion reached at the 2014 Inquiry into home education that home educated students have a right to access TVET courses.

In September, 2014, in response to a question on notice at the Inquiry into home education, Ms Pasas, Vice President of SHEN, contacted the St George campus of Sydney TAFE and asked how her son could access TVET as a home educated student. After many phone calls to a variety of people over a period of time, Ms Pasas spoke with a manager from the St George campus who gave her the information required to access TVET. Thus, the Committee concluded that home educated children could access TAFE.

In November 2014, Ms Pasas' son expressed interest in a TVET course. The course he was interested in was held at the Ultimo campus of Sydney TAFE and Ms Pasas sought entry to the programme for her son. Ms (TVET Coordinator,) stated in an email dated 27 November, "... Unfortunately home schooled students are not eligible to enrol in TVET courses unless they are enrolled in a school. "

In response to that email, Ms Pasas provided details of the manager from the St George campus who not only stated that her son could access TVET but also provided enrolment documents. In an email dated 8 December, 2014, affirmed her position that home educated children cannot access TVET.

The denial of TVET to her son was disappointing to Ms Pasas on two levels. Firstly, her son was unable to enrol in a course that had he been in either a public or a private school could have been accessed. Secondly, she felt that she had been misrepresented at the Inquiry and that the false perception that home educated children could access TVET would remain.