

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Impact of Smart and Skilled on TAFE

Since the introduction of Smart and Skilled (S&S) at the beginning of this year, regional TAFE's have been reeling with the cuts and removal of courses in a fully contestable market.

In less than a year TAFE colleges that were energised places of learning are being silenced. TAFE car parks once full are half empty, class rooms once vied over now remain empty, the presence of teachers is diminishing and student voices are hushed.

Using the TAFE planning and management system, it became obvious that if a course was to survive under Smart and Skilled it needed to: enrol 15- 18 students, have 13 students attend each day, maintain 90% course completion rates, have no more than 2 students repeating the course, employ part time teachers over permanent teachers, reduce course delivery by 100 teaching hours and remove Certificate I & II courses. Most courses in TAFE cannot maintain this 'business model' and regional TAFE's will disappear.

Support services such as disability consultants, outreach programs, library facilities, counselling services and literacy/numeracy support for students enrolled in vocational courses are under continuous review and have resulted in slashing and/or removal of these services.

- Most Vocational and Education Training (VET) courses in TAFE have disappeared or have been cut, in most cases, by at least 100 hours.

Impact on students- Many students are upset and angry particularly towards the end of the course when they realise the full impact in cutting face to face teaching hours especially trying to complete assessment tasks. They are unable to access learner support as learner support hours have been either slashed or require at least 6 students to attend a session for it to remain 'economically viable'. The majority of the students needing support are young people and women with children who are trying to juggle family commitments, work and the course requirements.

One student, married mother of two children, broke down and cried saying she was so run down with a heavy cold as she was spending every night and early morning trying to finish assessment tasks with far less hours of the teacher's input. She said she could not see herself completing the course.

Impact on teachers- Teachers have to constantly revise and trim down their course content as delivery hours dwindle away. Two part time experienced TAFE teachers (PTT) and leaders in their industry saw potential WHS issues in sending students out into a high risk industry knowing that they could not cover the course content required for that industry. These teachers left TAFE.

Cutting 100 delivery hours in one semester (18 weeks to 15/16 weeks) also impacts on permanent teachers (PT) who need to catch up these teaching hours taking on extra teaching hours (2.5- 4.5 hours) per week to complete the annualised teaching hours target of 720 hours. Many teachers and head teachers now find they are under programed, having already absorbed part time teacher's hours. As these part time

teachers leave, permanent teachers and head teachers have no teachers to replace them when sick. They often take the class, quite unwell, rationalising that their students cannot afford further cuts to the delivery hours.

- Teacher Staffing

Impact on students- One course has had a complete turn-over of its staff (over 4 PTT's leaving in 6 months) and there are no permanent teachers in the section to mentor and support them. The impact felt on students has been very distressing to witness. Some students just drop out while the remaining students have become quite vocal in asking questions as to why they are paying more for less hours of teaching and why are the new teachers unfamiliar with the course work structure and resources.

Since the beginning of the year, it is not uncommon to hear students openly dissatisfied about TAFE. The range of complaints starts from the time they enquire to the central customer service departments especially about the delivery of courses and fees, fee hikes, on-line enrolment process, transcripts being incorrect, the drawn out process involved in completing the Unique Student Identifier (USI), the turnaround of teachers and the cutting of delivery hours.

Impact on teachers- New PTT's are unable to access resources and assessments or find there are limited resources and assessments available to them at a faculty/institute level (Sharepoint). With the lack of course content resources many new part time teachers to TAFE purchase ASPIRE learning resources, teaching and assessing straight from these texts.

Part time teachers, once introduced to the EBS/SALM systems and other TAFE corporate systems soon realise the enormous amounts of time in course preparation and administrative duties and the generous hourly teaching rate (approximately \$72) diminishes to under \$18 an hour. Most return to their chosen industry.

Over 2,500 teachers have departed from TAFE directly as a result of S&S and while this causes alarm for the remaining professional and experienced teachers there appears to be little concern from TAFENSW.

- Deletion of fee exempt courses

Impact on students- All literacy/language/numeracy (LLN) courses are no longer fee exempt and this has impacted on students who need the basic LLN skills for survival and employment. Centrelink recipients are now required to pay \$80 concession with little concern because 'we are running a business'. Enquiries from people wanting to learn to read and write (mainly due to the successful Reading, Writing Hotline advertising campaign) are informed by TAFE that without a concession the course (that was fee exempt), is now approximately \$220. There have been no enrolments this year from this group of people who are not eligible for a concession.

People from equity groups- such as the unemployed, low literacy/numeracy skills, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, youth, & youth at risk, single mothers, disability persons and mature aged people beginning in technology- who want to acquire basic literacy/numeracy/computer skills have drastically declined under S&S.

What is of particular concern are CALD students who have completed the AMEP funded English program and are mostly not eligible for a concession. They are now to pay up to a thousand dollars if they require further English language skills. Not one of a dozen former students has been able to pay this fee.

Students with low literacy skills and computer skills are required to navigate through the TAFE on-line enrolment website, answering a plethora of questions to determine how much they are to pay. At best if they are unable to do this they receive help from customer service staff in full view of others answering highly personal questions regarding their employment status, disability status and confirming if they are Centrelink recipients.

Impact on teachers- The responsibility for working out fees and payments now falls heavily on HT's and teachers who have to navigate through a number of variables (such as previous qualifications and whether or not they are Centrelink recipients). The teachers are required to follow up with students who have not paid their instalment fees.

Teachers are being blamed by the state government in not knowing how to advise students accurately on course fees when it is the shemuzzle of the EBS/SALM system and the variables in the payment system that is the real culprit. This further undermines a teacher's role.

- Removal of courses

Impact on students- Students have limited course choice under S&S. Courses especially Certificate I & II have all but disappeared. This has impacted heavily on students who enrol straight into Certificate III courses. Up to 30% of these students do not have the literacy/numeracy skills at a Certificate III level.

Year 10 equivalent courses that skilled students in English, Humanities, Maths and Science have been replaced with a course that offers literacy/numeracy work skills. Schools, employers and the Armed Forces no longer view this course as a Year 10 equivalent course and enquiries from these sectors have all but ceased.

The Tertiary Preparation Certificate IV course (Year 12 alternative) has been a real alternative to students wanting to enter university. This course is in danger of ceasing at the end of this year. It is no longer considered 'economically viable' unless 15 students have enrolled and teaching hours are heavily reduced. Delivery hours have already been reduced by more than a 100 hours per course.

Impact on teachers- Teachers are under increased pressure knowing that at least three students per class will need significant help with literacy and also knowing that learner support has either been slashed by half or cut completely. Students with a disability may not identify initially, when completing the online enrolment process, and therefore teachers only become aware of their disability after a few weeks into the course.

The lack of course choice to students has resulted in a decrease of enrolments, especially in regional TAFE colleges. Course selection has declined by 50% in less than one year in many sections.

Teachers are blamed for the lack of enrolments and are told it is their responsibility to 'drum up business' for TAFE. There are several instances where PTT's have been told to go out and find the students if they want any teaching hours.

What needs to be noted is the current community service obligation funding is having a positive impact for classes of students requiring foundation skills support. This funding while generous, is short term, and camouflages the full impact S&S will eventually have on TAFE when this funding ceases.

- SALM/EBS TAFE system

S&S coincided with the implementation of the SALM/EBS system. As this system was meant to align with State Training payments under S&S and to give accurate data on student details it has failed miserably on both accounts. This system is cumbersome, multi-layered, time consuming and unforgiving.

The cost of this system (over \$520 million) and the continual need for HT's to spend up to 35 hours a week in correcting errors and inputting data could have been better spent in keeping many regional TAFE's viable in delivering programs that the local community needed.

This system continues to cause endless and ongoing problems for students, support staff, teachers and managers across the state.

An avalanche of former students have not received their correct results or have received incorrect or incomplete transcripts. This has impacted particularly on trainees and apprentices. It also impacts on head teachers and teachers who have to solve these problems.

EBS advertising data has seen courses not being advertised and this has significantly impacted on enrolments.

One mistake at an institute level, a box not being ticked, caused enormous work force hours costing at least \$60,000 to correct this mistake. It required every HT to re input over 20 hours of data while being supervised by managers and customer service staff.

Related teaching duties that should be used for lesson preparation, marking assignments, organising assessment tasks, liaising with students and maintaining compliance requirements is swallowed up with EBS/SALM. Teachers are completing these related duties in their own time until late at night and on weekends.

This system is causing WHS issues (such as distress, strained eyes and RSI) as it requires at least 3 hours at a time to complete tasks that took 10 minutes in the former CLAMS system. It is not uncommon for HT's to engage in at least 30 hours of data entry a week. It is not uncommon to find HT's crying and distraught after hours on EBS where little is achieved and more discrepancies are uncovered.

Being assured from the state government and TAFE management that this system has only a few glitches and it is the teachers who are not able to learn this system, causes further distress to those at the coal face having to deal with this all-consuming inefficient system.

The solution is simple, put the millions of dollars of tax payer money, now going into the hands of private providers, back into TAFE because there is nothing smart or skilled about the Smart and Skilled initiative.

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