

Submission
No 42

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 10/07/2015

Partially Confidential

TO: General Purpose Standing Committee No 6.

ATTN: Hon Paul Green MLC, Hon Lou Amato MLC, Hon Catherine Cusack MLC, Hon Scott Farlow MLC, Hon Daniel Mookhey MLC, Dr John Kaye MLC, Hon Ernest Wong MLC

FROM:

DATE: 10th July 2015.

RE: **Submission to Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this very important issue. I hope it will aid you in your deliberations on the matters at hand. I disclose that I am currently employed by TAFE as a full time teacher. The attached commentary constitutes my professional experience and personal views relating to the expressed terms of reference and therefore should not be construed as representative of the views held by NSW TAFE.

I have provided a brief personal background as an aid in better understanding my submission. I have 35 years of professional experience in the building and construction industry, including 15 years TAFE teaching experience as both a part and full time teacher within post-trade building qualification courses. I believe I am able to provide a reliably informed opinion on the following specific aspects referred to by some of the nominated terms of reference:

- **The role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry.**

I am a strong supporter of public education and consider NSW TAFE to be the pre-eminent provider of world class vocational education and training. Whilst the imposition of a poorly assembled national training package, combined with the adoption of competency based training and assessment techniques has definitely eroded the content and vocational value of the particular courses I am involved with, I still believe NSW TAFE provides far superior training outcomes when compared with the majority of private training providers.

The emergence of private providers within the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector should not represent a problem at a conceptual level. A simplistic hypothesis would conclude that having more training providers is analogous with providing more training opportunities and hence, result in more persons with a vocational qualification. However, at the operational level, this hypothesis fails to inform of the many unintended consequences that can result from such a strategy. The nature of all private business entities, including those that sell education and training services as their source of income, will inevitably and quite correctly be motivated by the adoption of a profit centred business model.

The challenge is to establish an imperative within all RTO business operations, public and private, that does not compromise the provision of standards of excellence in the delivery of educational training. This must be combined by applying stringent validity of assessment tasks relevant to the course qualifications.

At present, the VET sector and the industries that require and rely upon top quality graduates emerging from the vocational education and training system, depend upon the capacity and capability of the Federal Government's agency ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority) to ensure that this occurs.

To suggest that ASQA provides an effective control mechanism to prevent or detect the myriad of operational 'short cuts' that are available to a registered training provider belies any understanding of how private RTO's and federal bureaucracy actually function at their basic operational levels.

ASQA's auditing capability is largely confined to the review of administrative documentation. There is no possible way for ASQA (or any other agency for that matter) to have the capability in respect of a depth of technical knowledge and experience amongst its limited personnel to cover such a huge range of specific vocational areas. What is actually being provided is a simple validity check of the administrative documentation. It is important to understand that there is no detailed, comprehensive analysis as to the substance of the underlying course learning materials and the course content being offered. Most importantly, ASQA fails to

adequately scrutinise assessment content and assessment delivery strategies that are used. This consequently has a substantial deleterious impact on the value of the qualifications being issued.

ASQA auditors are not able to determine if an RTO's training content, delivery, assessment content and method of assessment are of substantive value. A satisfactory audit result will generally occur if the course name and version number, the units of competence, stated performance outcomes, trainer and participant details, dates and signatures are correctly formatted, presented and filed neatly and cohesively within an RTO's documentation system. This is an audit process of sorts, but it does not provide any degree of certainty as to the quality of the educational outcomes that are being provided by the RTO.

ASQA audits are essential geared to generate 'false positives' whilst appearing to have no underlying awareness of this risk. Unless the Federal Government chooses to massively expand the specific technical capabilities of all ASQA audit personnel to cover each and every specialist vocational training category within the VET sector, it must remain essentially meaningless in terms of credibility. It is fundamentally auditing administrative tools and little reliance should be placed upon the compliance outcomes that it generates.

An essential indicator of how poorly ASQA performs can be summed up by the fact that it feels it necessary to defend its capabilities on the homepage of its website as indicated by the extract below:

Statement regarding regulation of the training sector

5 JUNE 2015

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) rejects any conclusion that it has not acted to investigate and take appropriate action in relation to concerns regarding the quality of vocational training and assessment.

The ASQA organisation would naturally reject any assertion that they are ineffectual within the VET regulatory compliance chain. The reality is that ASQA was never really required when VET was delivered exclusively by TAFE. As a highly creditable, publicly funded and educationally focused entity, TAFE had the sole objective to deliver first class technical training and further education to vocational students. It was clearly acknowledged as a founder and leader in the delivery of VET. The need for an organisation to oversee the VET sector arose due to deregulation and introduction of private RTO's. Analysis as to if this action would be functionally achievable within such a comprehensively complex and diverse sector appears to have been overlooked. This is particularly the case concerning the ability to apply meaningful compliance measures amongst VET private sector operators.

A good example of how ineffectual ASQA is in determining appropriate VET delivery occurred at a TAFE meeting to discuss the use of a 'MOOC' (Massive Open Online Course) platform called 'WebTrain' that Sydney Institute were reviewing. Whilst I fully support new and innovative information technologies in terms of learning delivery, I raised a question concerning the validity of on-line assessment methods used by RTO's who use this platform. Obviously, a critical aspect of evidence for any type of valid assessment is to focus upon confirmation that the student completing the assessment task does so without benefit of external assistance. In simple terms, we must choose and use assessment strategies that minimise the potential for students to 'cheat' on assessment tasks. It remains a fundamental problem that's as old as education itself!

I asked how the system would accommodate this. The response provided was as straightforward as it was unsatisfactory. Apparently, when an on-line assessment is undertaken, a screen prompt appears for the student to 'tick a box' to confirm that the completed assessment task is their own work. When I suggested that fraudulent self verification of assessment submissions was only a 'mouse click' away for students who may be tempted to cheat, the presenter informed me that he had personal knowledge of private RTO's using this assessment verification method and that the private RTO's continued to pass all ASQA auditing procedures with no problems raised as to their continued registration as VET providers. Despite the obvious lack of constructing a valid assessment protocol, which is ultimately the basis upon which vocational qualifications are awarded, it appears that ASQA compliance audits find such authentication systems as being entirely valid.

- **Educational linkages with secondary and higher education.**

While it is recognised that the previous example of ‘self acknowledgement’ of authenticity of student work may be similarly found as a requirement of higher education academic institutions, for either on-line or hard copy submissions, there are significant points of difference that should be considered within the context of delivery of both public and private Registered Training Providers operating in the VET sector.

Firstly, students undertaking VET courses within traditional TAFE college based system are generally not required to submit lengthy written assignments as singular assessment tasks. TAFE retains the use of more traditionally structured assessment protocols such as formal examinations, which ultimately remain the most reliable form of critical assessment within any educational setting.

VET on-line assessment is favoured by TAFE’s OTEN distance learning facility as well as many private training providers. Apart from assignment based assessment submissions the ‘on-line’ components generally feature short, tick box (true false) type quizzes to verify competency. The use of these particular suspect assessment methodologies is highly prevalent amongst many of the VET sector private RTO’s.

Secondly, academic essays can be subject to check programs (such as ‘Turn It In’) that whilst not fully effective in determining author authenticity, can at least detect plagiarism. Recent media reporting has focused attention on the significant problems that exist with fraudulent essay submissions being sold to students. Such is the extent of the so called ‘assignment factories’ (like the *My Master* example highlighted in media reporting) universities are now reviewing as to how more valid forms of assessment may be conducted into the future. Some faculties choose not to incorporate externally assembled assignment work as formative assessment. Whilst this issue appears to be impacting on our university and higher education sector, the VET sector should not be considered immune to the risk of organised and fraudulent student assessment practices. This is of particular concern where a VET course relies exclusively on remotely submitted assignment work with no examinations and on-line work tasks as major forms of evidence that then integrate into a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the student.

Unfortunately, many private RTO’s have precisely structured their business models to utilise these types of assessment practices to constitute the primary ‘evidence’ of student competence. This effectively enables them to grant excessive RPL in order to rapidly progress their students to course completion. This greatly reduces the RTO’s learning delivery processes and virtually eliminates any robust assessment practices which in turn reduce their business costs and increases profit margins. The tangible link between the situations is self evident.

Even where a direct profit motive is not influential, TAFE as a public VET provider is experiencing institutional pressures to ‘process and progress’ students who may not necessarily have reached an acceptable level of competence. There is also pressure for a continued reduction in delivery of teaching hours even for subjects containing highly complex, analytical information. This ill formed strategy attempts to keep up with and compete with private VET training providers’ reduction in their course completion time. From the perspective of the private training providers, there exists a pressure to ensure their clients are attracted to and satisfied by rapid progress through to course completion within the shortest time period.

This highly corrosive dynamic has been correctly described as a ‘race to the bottom’ in our basic VET educational standards. Statistically, there may be more VET graduates produced, however the skill levels and capabilities of those increased numbers of graduates is highly suspect, as is the actual value of the compromised qualifications being awarded to a large number of students. Severe risks have accrued as most private RTO’s have a propensity to accept very basic documents as ‘evidence’ of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) on behalf of their students. Formal academic transcripts of previously completed studies can usually be relied upon but are then highly dependent on the accuracy of an RTO’s ‘mapping’ equivalent subject content across different qualifications. Validation of more informal documentation such as workplace reports, work samples and personal support statements can also be highly subjective and is prone to falsification. These types of supportive documents can be very difficult to properly authenticate as to their appropriateness in granting subject exemptions and advanced course standings and yet they are extensively promoted and used by RTO’s as being a desirable and appropriate form of evidence supportive of RPL.

To illustrate the potential problems of validity of the VET sector, recent ABC and Fairfax articles highlighted examples of systemic failure to ensure educational integrity. These involved some of our most well regarded public and private academic institutions. The reports focused on graduates who were practicing within the health care sector when they were clearly not equipped to do so. The seriousness of this matter was demonstrated by a graduate nurse administering dish washing liquid to a patient instead of the proper medication due to an inability to read the label and distinguish the difference between the contents of two similar containers. This was blamed on the student's lack of basic literacy skills despite them having been awarded a formally recognised tertiary qualification. There is something critically wrong within any education and training system when this can happen in Australia in the 21st century.

- **The development of skills in the New South Wales economy.**

A critical aspect for review within the framework of the development of skills within the New South Wales economy and the provision of VET occurs when the qualification that is being issued is linked to occupational licensing. The risks and consequences of any systemic compromise being made by VET providers to ensure that all qualification holders actually receive appropriate levels of training and have been properly assessed inevitably transfers to the various agencies that rely upon the nationally recognised qualification as being evidence of attainment of those requisite skills and knowledge.

Development of the highest quality skills within the New South Wales economy is vitally important now and into the future. It is also strategically linked with the provision of a high quality, best performing VET system. The building and construction industry is indisputably one of the major growth sectors for both NSW and the Australian economy. For unspecified reasons, Australia failed to implement a COAG agreement to establish a common, nationalised system of building licence accreditation. We have subsequently retained inconsistent licensing regimes, each being administered by State and Territory government authorities.

Whilst the primary purpose of this submission does not go toward an analysis of this topic, it should be stated that Queensland currently has the most logical builder licensing system. It aligns classes of building licence with an incremental increase in the level of professional qualification. Licensing in Queensland also covers all types of building construction works, not just residential works. For licensing purposes, Western Australia also has a higher level of building qualification required than that of NSW. In this sense, and in respect of protecting consumers by ensuring that only highly qualified and well trained professional builders are being produced by the VET sector and then granted a licence to practice, NSW has fallen significantly behind all other states.

The NSW builders licensing regime exists under the Home Building Act. It relates only to residential home building construction work with a value in excess of \$1000 in labour and materials. NSW Fair Trading is the agency responsible for builder licensing. Apart from some minor work categories, specialist service licences (electrical, plumbing, gas fitting and refrigeration) and swimming pool building specific licences, there are two major categories pertaining to general building construction and trades work licences.

The first category involves that of building trade licences. This basically means this licence holder is restricted to only perform the trade work nominated by their licence category. This relates to carpentry, bricklaying, concreting, roofing, plastering, painting, tiling and other typical construction trade work.

The licence holder may hold several different trade work categories under their licence if qualified to do so. The typical VET qualification for issuance of a building trade contractor licence is generally at 'Certificate II' or 'Certificate III' level. The majority of building trades training is done as part of a working apprenticeship together with the specific trade based course being delivered by RTO's.

The second and far more important category is the building contractor licence. Only persons who hold this licence can enter into a home building works contract. The base level VET qualification required for the issuance of this licence is the CPC40110 'Certificate IV in Building and Construction' (Building). This is a post-trade level qualification and it is the compulsory, though not the only qualification that is required by anyone wishing to obtain a NSW building contractor licence.

In addition to having a 'Certificate IV in Building' qualification, persons who wish to obtain a building contractor licence must have at least one other formal qualification related to building.

This requirement varies significantly from having a 'Certificate III' trade qualification in either 'Carpentry' or 'Bricklaying' up to a 'Diploma in Building' and further, to a 'Degree' issued by an Australian university in Building Construction, Structural Engineering, Quantity Surveying or Architecture.

The Australian Quality Framework (AQF) demonstrates the clear hierarchy of the various qualification levels issued by training providers. It is implausible to consider that a person who has completed a 'Certificate III' level trade course specific to performing bricklaying or carpentry work only, will have obtained the same level of training or acquired the depth of knowledge within the broader nature that building construction encompasses compared with a person who has undertaken study at either a 'Diploma' or 'Degree' levels. And yet the NSW OFT licensing regime has specifically created this false level of 'equity' in knowledge between them. This is a significant and serious error of judgement that should be addressed.

The anomaly fails to recognise that a Certificate III trade qualification, even within the confines of the alleged 'foundation skills' areas of carpentry or bricklaying, simply does not take into account the indisputable fact that modern building construction work has evolved to require the adoption of a much higher level of skill in multi-disciplinary construction management work by the builder. There is also substantial evidence that most builder/client related disputes arising within NSW Fair Trading Home Building Service which progress on to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) have a combination of poor contract administration, inferior project coordination, lack of works supervision and inappropriate project management skill on the part of licensed builder as the main causes or central issue of the dispute.

The days when the residential building industry comprised construction of small and basic free standing cottages, predominantly involving a simple timber framework and/or masonry construction are over. The current and future focus on residential building works is on larger, multi-unit construction. This trend demonstrates that past traditional carpentry and bricklaying trades' skills have, to a significant extent, become irrelevant in terms of equipping a person with the requisite skill to manage building construction projects within a highly complex regulatory environment. Therefore, the maintenance of a single building licence class with a trade qualification being linked to the granting of a license for all manner of residential building works performed is an anachronism when compared with the other more progressive position of both Queensland and Western Australia relative to builders licensing.

The linkage of this issue to the VET sector becomes self evident with an analysis of just how many private training providers are now heavily advertising within this specific section of the training market. They are specifically offering their clients 'fast tracked' courses in 'Certificate III' carpentry trade and 'Certificate IV Building' courses. Whilst there may be more sophisticated data available, I suggest the committee members conduct a very simple sampling exercise. Organise a study of how often just one radio station, the Sydney radio station 2MMM, broadcasts private RTO paid advertisements for these specific qualifications within a 24 hour period. All of the advertisements are characterised by the basic message that their prospective clients will:

- a) Not have to undertake any formal study or assessment tasks.
- b) Have work experience recognised as prior learning.
- c) Get their qualifications within a very short period of time.
- d) Be able to get their builders licence.

There is a corresponding shift in popular culture, no doubt driven by the succession of 'DIY' television shows, celebrating the cult of the *'tradie'* together with an inherent fascination with stellar rises in property prices.

From a very ill-informed but growing perspective, it appears that by the simple act of strapping on a nail bag and popping on a hard hat and safety boots, anyone can transform into an experienced 'builder' and be well on the way to their million dollar property portfolio dream. The artificial presentation of teams of amateur 'builders' involved in an endless cycle of renovation and construction on our television screens could have serious unintended consequences for the building construction industry when linked to the points made above about how many of the private RTO's expedite building course qualifications for those with 'industry experience'.

NSW OFT is in the invidious position in that applicants for a building contractor licence will not have course transcripts as evidence as to the veracity and substance of the qualifications they have obtained other than the RTO's accredited number and a Nationally Recognised Training (NRT) logo. OFT is placed in the position where it must rely entirely on ASQA having systems in place to prevent maladministration in the issuance of qualifications linked to builder licensing. I believe I have previously presented many areas of serious concern in this respect and that ASQA is not, nor will it ever likely be in a position to achieve this.

It should be recognised that NSW WorkCover Authority has chosen to act to protect against the possible serious diminution of safety standards arising from potentially disreputable RTO's. Several 'High Risk' work category licences issued by WorkCover will only acknowledge a TAFE issued qualification. This has likely evolved from previous experiences with rogue private training providers 'fast tracking' and even selling qualifications without implementing valid forms of training and assessment.

NSW OFT should be immediately instructed to utilise a similar risk mitigation strategy as WorkCover for the issuance of any new building contractor licences. That is, only a 'Certificate IV in Building' course qualification issued by a NSW TAFE is recognised for the purposes of granting a building contractor licence within NSW.

- **The level of industry participation in the vocational education and training sector, including the provision of sustainable employment opportunities for graduates, including Competency Based Training and the application of training packages to workforce requirements.**

The implementation of a poorly structured and highly ambiguous National Training Package BCG03 General Construction with subsequent amendments to the CPC08 Construction, Plumbing and Services Training Package marked the start of an incremental decline to what was previously an extremely high quality standard of educational outcomes made available through the NSW TAFE system. The flawed Competency Based Training (CBT) scheme which accompanied it has proven to be wholly inadequate and does not sufficiently cater to a meaningful education and training experience beyond the Certificate III level for which it was originally intended. After having applied themselves diligently to their studies, VET students can find that their assessment is ungraded. They will either be found as 'competent' or 'not yet competent'. From an educational philosophy, this narrowest of dictums is the ultimate disincentive to engender a desire amongst any student cohort or individual to attempt to perform at their very best level. It is a flawed concept that really is only applicable for very basic training and yet it now permeates the entire VET sector. It is certainly not recognised by the higher education sector which creates problems for VET students transitioning to university study with a transcript that lists the students' status as 'competent' and doesn't reflect true performance levels they may have attained.

The decline in VET has been further accelerated by the diminution of the once high teacher qualifications and associated active industry experience once required for all TAFE teachers. The introduction of a tokenistic Workplace Training and Assessment at Certificate IV level as the prerequisite teaching qualification has further eroded the quality standards within VET, particularly for higher qualification levels and all courses with analytical orientation and content. The current 'Certificate IV in Training & Assessment' (TAE40110) offers no improvement to this situation and should never be considered as a replacement to having teaching and training personnel with high level academic qualifications specific to the area of the training being delivered combined with at least 10 years of relevant industry experience. In this sense, the extreme diminution of teacher training standards sees the VET sector acting in the exact opposite direction to all other educational providers.

- **The Smart and Skilled reforms.**

The incredibly valuable reputation that TAFE has built upon for over a century has been severely tarnished by the wholly predictable impacts arising from the ironically titled 'Smart and Skilled' VET scheme. As many others have commented, the 'Smart and Skilled' strategy has failed spectacularly in its ability to create a VET system that has the capacity to produce either of its titled components.

This situation has arisen despite the fact that other states such as South Australia and Victoria, which entered into identical restructurings of their own VET systems several years before NSW, are now scrambling in response to try to repair the damage done to their own TAFE networks. And yet NSW chose to eventually follow the same defective pathway, forewarned with the knowledge of the disastrous outcomes evident in the other states TAFE systems. Einstein is attributed to the quote that the definition of 'stupidity' is to repeatedly perform the same experiment and expect a different result.

- **Any other related matters.**

The NSW TAFE system is the oldest and most valuable technical education training asset amongst Australia's publicly owned and operated vocational education and training providers. Despite having proven success in producing generations of highly skilled workers and offering vital pathways to further and higher education for many, it has been systematically damaged by those who are convinced that its funding could be significantly reduced without deleterious impacts and that the private sector could instead be trusted to provide vocational education and training services as reputably as the TAFE brand has done over that time.

There will be those who cite evidence of private RTO's economically outperforming TAFE in some selected areas of course delivery. This may be correct, however no one should do this without first acknowledging the very real risk of embedding seriously compromised standards used to achieve such false economies and that ASQA has demonstrated that it has failed and will continue to fail to provide a solution to that problem.

No doubt, there are opportunities for TAFE organisational and cost structures to be improved, as there will be at every public sector agency. Institutional organisations within TAFE are demonstrably top heavy. There exist too many non-teaching, middle management and executive roles that do not contribute productive nor provide effective inputs. Many of these roles are taken up by those who have actively sought a career in educational administration when they failed as effective VET practitioners. Like most bureaucracies, it has been allowed to grow larger and more complex without any plausible reasons for doing so.

A flawed feature of this organisational hierarchy is that, unlike the higher education sector, some TAFE personnel hold appointments such as Faculty Director, Assistant Faculty Director, Chief Education Officer and even Head Teacher **without** relevant professional qualifications or appropriate industry experience within the specific faculty areas which they supposedly lead. This is an incomprehensible situation for any educational institution that wishes to be dealt with in a serious and respected manner by other educational institutions and by the industry and work sectors that they purportedly deal with. It represents an unprofessional organisational structure in need of significant change management with qualification specific merit based appointments made that are similarly used within the faculty management of the higher education sector.

A specific failure of TAFE management has been the adoption of the 'EBS' 'Agent' & 'Client' software system. Rumours circulate wildly about the multimillion dollar cost of the 'EBS' system and how and why it was ever accepted as a functional replacement for 'CLAMS'. From an end user perspective I can honestly state that it is the most retrograde example of a significant ITC program implementation that I have ever witnessed in any of the private and public sector businesses that I have worked in.

To consider that a supposedly sophisticated government business organisation such as DEC/TAFE would not have utilised a strict performance based contract that placed sole responsibility for the software developer to prove their system **prior** to any rollout in 2014, is simply unfathomable. It's unnecessary complexity and a seemingly endless series of system failures and inherent glitches has directly resulted in students and staff being unable to establish basic things such as accurate estimates of course cost, student results and in many cases, students are simply unable to enrol in TAFE courses due to a failure of the 'EBS' platform.

And yet as of July 2015, it remains as a highly flawed central business system. It would be entirely appropriate to identify the persons who were responsible for this disaster, the brunt of which is being unfairly carried by most TAFE teaching staff and some frontline administrative personnel.

The culmination of the need to actually have an inquiry into TAFE and the VET sector should of itself sound an alarm for the public of NSW. If we want free market, competitive and cost driven educational ideologies and so actively continue to commoditise vocational education and training then we should expect the inevitable consequences of those actions which is a serious diminution of educational standards.

If, on the other hand, we want a reliable, valuable, creditable and highly respected provider of first class technical training and further education that will fuel future industry needs with first class, quality graduates as it has done for the past 125 years, we need to take positive actions to ensure that TAFE can and will remain as the principal provider of our VET services within NSW.

Summary Points:

- There should be acknowledgement of VET course qualifications that are linked to occupational licensing as being 'high risk' courses.
- Occupational licenses issued by NSW government agencies linked to 'high risk' VET courses should be restricted to recognise courses delivered by NSW TAFE. Particular focus should be given to the 'high risk' qualification area linked to building contractor licensing as a matter of urgency.
- VET Fee Help should be available for all TAFE students who undertake 'high risk' VET qualifications linked to building contractor licensing courses.
- TAFE should ensure teachers whose primary role is in the delivery of trade training courses (up to Certificate III level) only teach up to that level. TAFE trade course teachers should not be involved in the delivery of a 'post trade' courses (Certificate IV level and above) unless they are qualified to do so.
- TAFE and private RTO VET teachers should be required to hold an industry related formal academic qualification **one level higher** than the course content of the qualification being delivered.
- All VET teachers should be required to have specific industry related experience of no less than 10 years prior to employment as a teacher/trainer.
- TAFE NSW should establish equity across the entire TAFE network. At present, TAFE Institutes are actively competing against each other on course pricing. This is even occurring between colleges within the same institute. This should cease immediately as TAFE is effectively cannibalising itself as a single entity which has long been a feature of its great strength.
- Internal cost subsidisation of course fee structures to selectively maintain particular TAFE colleges should not be allowed to continue. It distorts market demand by students and further distorts the most effective use and allocation of TAFE teachers and resources.
- The provision of teaching contact hours required to adequately deliver a course should not be arbitrarily reduced by more than 15% of the total nominal hours for that course.

Personal Background Information

I completed year 12 in the late 1970's. Like many 17 and 18 year olds, I was undecided on a career. This was due in part to a progressive disengagement with the senior secondary school educational system. Subsequently, I achieved a poor result in my HSC with no university admission ranking available to me.

I worked for a period of two years in a semi-skilled job. Informal 'on the job' training provided me with basic skills in performing sheet metal work, metal wall and roof cladding and other general building work tasks, albeit within a heavy industrial work environment. The nature of this hard, dirty and at times dangerous work made me realise that I should seek a better, long term career option. To achieve this, I recognised that a course of formal training for a recognised skill with a respected qualification would be an essential thing to aim for.

My vocational inclination arose from the work I had been exposed to. This led me to seek an apprenticeship in the building construction industry. During the early 1980's however, apprenticeships were normally restricted for 16 year olds after completing their year 10 School Certificate. As a 20 year old with a poor HSC result, I was effectively excluded from any mature apprenticeship pathways that now sensibly exist for 'older' workers. I reconsidered options available to me in pursuit of a career in the building industry. Fortunately, I found a construction affiliated course at TAFE and completed an Architectural Drafting Certificate. I commenced work with a local architectural practice and whilst working there, I was able to enrol in part time study and complete a Building Certificate also with TAFE.

Equipped with my TAFE qualifications I proceeded to work and gain experience in various capacities within the building and construction sector before obtaining my own NSW Builders Licence. Following a number of years

working on residential and commercial building projects, I was employed as a Building Technical Officer. During that stage of my career I was given the opportunity to study for a degree in Construction Management with my employer paying my university fees on successful completion of my course. My previous study and work experience provided me with an exceptionally valuable knowledge base to draw upon. I graduated with a degree in Construction Management - Building with first class honours in the mid 1990's. I was promoted within my employers' organisation to a Project Management role. I was involved in the delivery of several major building construction projects and infrastructure development works in the lead up to the Sydney Olympics. Following completion of project commissioning, I went on to become a Facilities Manager for an organisation with operational building assets and infrastructure worth over \$5b.

Around this time, I made contact with one of my previous TAFE teachers and was offered some Part Time Casual (PTC) teaching one night per week at the TAFE where I had studied nearly two decades previously. At the time, I certainly didn't need the extra money as an incentive and having to go to work to teach at night after working all day was not altogether appealing. The main reason for my accepting this engagement as a PTC teacher with TAFE was that I had experienced firsthand the enormous benefit in being given a 'second chance' in my learning opportunities and subsequent successful career path by the TAFE system. Based upon the experience and knowledge that I had been able to acquire, I wanted to see if I could contribute something back to an educational system that had provided me with my own opportunities by engaging and encouraging students that may be experiencing a similar situation to me.

My next role as Manager of Works for a local council provided me with exposure to civil construction works projects, local government politics and public sector management within a regional environment. I was very fortunate to also re-establish contact with the NSW TAFE system and was able to resume a PTC teaching career delivering post trade building studies subjects one night per week in a regional TAFE college.

On returning to Sydney, I was fortunate enough gain a position as a full time teacher of building studies with TAFE. I undertook a Graduate Diploma of Vocational Education and Training qualification which was, at that time, a requirement of my full time teaching appointment.

I have enjoyed my teaching role and remain in this position however, over the past few years I have witnessed the gradual decline of a once superb course structure and TAFE training system that I and many others have greatly benefitted from. My experience of the TAFE system is not unique. Many other TAFE teachers with whom I have worked and many others that I have spoken with have had similar 'second chance' career opportunities provided to them via TAFE. Their motivation is largely based on giving something back to future generations of students of the highly reputable 'Technical College' system that had served them so well throughout various stages of their careers. The ability to draw on their vast professional experience together with their affinity with the TAFE system made them amongst the very best teachers when 'going to Tech' as part of a post school education was something that was both a meaningful and highly beneficial experience.

Because of the significant changes responsible for dismantling a highly successful technical college educational system and as a result of the 'Smart & Skilled' strategy, TAFE has unfortunately lost and risks continuing to lose its reputational status within the VET sector. New teachers of the same calibre will not be attracted to the faulty TAFE and dysfunctional VET models that are evolving under this poorly considered strategy. As has happened in other states, many NSW TAFE colleges will risk closure together with an irreplaceable loss of experienced teaching staff.

Einstein's quote should remind us all that we can choose to adopt a 'stupid' and 'ignorant' view that this time the results will be different, when in reality we should be expecting exactly the same outcome here in NSW as has already occurred in the other states. Repeating the VET 'experiment' will not produce a different result.

And whilst ignorant politicians and bureaucrats can afford to fade away, unscathed into history, NSW and Australia will be left to suffer the significant calamity and consequences of such blinkered actions.

Yours sincerely,

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