

**Submission
No 211**

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

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Submission to the **Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales**

Introduction

I can only speak to what I and my family have experienced in recent years in the TAFE system. In 2011-2013 I was able to do a few TAFE Outreach courses, some of which my son also attended, at both Gosford and Wyong. For 2014-2015 my son has been studying Graphic Design at Hornsby TAFE.

- (a) the factors influencing student choice about entering the vocational education and training system including:
- (i) motivation to study
 - (ii) choice of course, course location and method of study
 - (iii) barriers to participation, including students in the non-government education and home schooling sectors

The motivation for study comes from recognising a need and doing something about it. Looking towards a career in the creative arts it was obvious that book keeping, website, Photoshop and arts business skills were needed, and TAFE Outreach met those needs.

Course location is a barrier. To study graphic design at TAFE my son had two location choices, Belmont and Hornsby. There are no options between those two locations. To do further study requires getting to St Leonards and some evening classes. Walking through Gore Hill cemetery at night and then having to get two non-peak hour train connections to the Central Coast makes St Leonards a very unattractive option from a safety perspective. To get to Belmont driving is the only real option from the Central Coast.

Choice of course is also an issue. Firstly, because many courses don't show up on the TAFE websites. I knew for certain that Hornsby was offering Graphic Design Diploma courses to start at the beginning of the year and mid-year, but they weren't showing up on the websites. Likewise having been to an Open Day at the Design Centre at Enmore a few years back I know they offer specialised Illustration courses, but looking on the website they don't exist. Secondly, when it comes to Illustration there are several good options in and around Melbourne, but very little choice in NSW.

Barriers to participation. As at 2014 to be able to enrol in TAFE Online or TAFE you had to have a Year 10 certificate, or Record of Student Achievement, which the BOTES wasn't giving home educated children. The websites now appear to have pathways for under 17s without such certificates, but the process is still more difficult than for a school leaver.

- (b) the role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry in:
- (i) educational linkages with secondary and higher education
 - (ii) the development of skills in the New South Wales economy
 - (iii) the development of opportunities for unemployed people, particularly migrants and persons in the mature workers' category, to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects,
 - (iv) the delivery of services and programs particularly to regional, rural and remote communities

TVEIT courses provide good linkage for TAFE with secondary education. The willingness of tertiary institutions to consider a Cert IV an entry qualification and a Diploma as equivalent to First Year studies also provides good linkage.

TAFE is an excellent and essential developer of hands-on skills in the NSW economy, whether that be bicycle maintenance, welding, laboratory techniques, book keeping or graphic design. Sometimes university education is too theoretical for its own good. For example this comes from a bio of a university professor 'Her research is concerned with constructions of performativity in spaces of social, cultural and political engagement'.

A few years back my sister-in-law needed to get out of retail and into a job where she wouldn't be on her feet all the time. The TAFE course in office administration helped her do that, and she was able to get a job in that field.

- (c) factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible vocational education and training, including the influence of the co-contribution funding model on student behaviour and completion rates

Cost has become a big issue. The fees for TAFE courses have quadrupled in the last 2 years. A family might be able to find \$1000 to send a child for TAFE training, but finding \$4000 is often beyond them. The other side of the coin is students taking on debt for courses which have no guarantee of landing them employment. At the same time as the fees have gone up, the level of service has either stayed the same or decreased.

For example, my son is doing a Diploma. Usually there would be two full classes or more, but the fee increases and other change of computer system difficulties reduced the intake. Previously class size was a maximum of 15. Now that class can have up to 22-23 in it, depending on attendance, and if that happens some students won't fit in the class room with 20 computer terminals. It is a cost cutting measure to be sure, but these students are paying between \$4000-\$10,000 for that class and getting less personalised attention than when the courses were much cheaper!

Through levels of TAFE miscommunication I happened to be at the start of the orientation session for those starting the Diploma Graphic Design course mid-year. The casualness with which the teachers began that session should have been deeply offensive to those who were paying \$4000-\$10,000 for the course while committing themselves to a very intensive 12 months of studies.

(d) the effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training, skills and pathways to employment, including opportunities and pathways to further education and employment for the most vulnerable in our community including those suffering a disability or severe disadvantage

The private sector courses that compete with TAFE are very expensive. They have slick marketing budgets and strategies. Often students at those colleges are paying \$8000 for a semester/trimester, and at university that would be the cost for a year's Bachelor of Arts studies. Most of these private sector courses are too new for reputations to have been built.

(e) 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, and

At the start of 2014 the students in my son's cohort were promised regular Industry Talks. They were supposed to happen on Wednesdays, at lunch time. I never found out how often they were supposed to happen. My son's TAFE days for 2014 never occurred on a Wednesday and there were never any posters up to say that something was on. I was told that the usual way of doing things was for someone to run around to classes on Wednesday mornings and say 'it's on come along'. When I said that was unfair to those not in class on Wednesdays and requested a way of communication (email, Facebook, website) I was told there were regulations preventing that. If notice was given the day before I could have put my son on a train on Wednesday to get there. So he had no industry input in 2014. I hoped it would be better in 2015, but there wasn't even a space on the timetable for Diploma students for Industry Talks in first semester, and it is not mentioned on the second semester timetable either. I again expressed concern and was told that a several hours session with Industry input was expected in May. Come the beginning of May I asked when it was going to happen. I was told that the person who was to organise it had taken ill/was unavailable, so nothing happened. It is now August 14, 5 weeks into second semester and there has been no sign of any 'we might do something Industry input related on Monday mornings' happening. I am looking squarely down the barrel of there being no Industry input from current practitioners into my son's graphic design education at all over the 2 years. What is worse I have yet to have had any evidence that the teachers and head teachers care about that breach of promise given in the Customer Service Charter <http://www.nsi.tafensw.edu.au/About/CustomerServiceCharter.aspx> .

Have any of the teachers assisted my son with career planning advice or employment path suggestions? Eg 'Hey kid, you have what it takes to specialise in poster design.' Nothing like that at all has happened. It feels like there is a sausage machine mentality going on. The students come in, the students get put through the programme (which hasn't been updated for years), the students go, and a new batch comes in. There seems to be no follow up at all as to whether the students gained employment in the field of study or not by the teachers

themselves. An electronic short survey arrives in the inbox, but it is generic and impersonal. While there is a career counsellor on campus, whether they have any intimate knowledge of graphic design employment and future study possibilities is unlikely. Anyway, the students normally have only a half hour between subject sessions, which isn't enough time to meet with a counsellor anyway. The subject sessions have been crammed together with the worthy aim of reducing the days needed to be at TAFE and maximising the ability to do project work at home or hold down a part time job. But it does have the consequence that students don't have the time to avail themselves of campus services unless they go in on an irregular day.

(f) the Smart and Skilled reforms, including:

(i) alternatives to the Smart and Skilled contestable training market and other funding policies

(ii) the effects of the Smart and Skilled roll out on school based apprenticeships

(g) any other related matter.

I am concerned that there seems to be no commitment to excellence. A friend tells me that I should go easy on TAFE teachers because life is so hard for them with fighting funding cuts and administrative paperwork and other requirements. It doesn't help that everyone seems to have had 10-20 years' service and may have lost enthusiasm. But there doesn't seem to be any attempt at all to do better.

In June of 2014 we went to what we thought was an information afternoon for those interested in finding out more about future courses. When we got there, there were no welcomers, no signs, no desk, no tea, coffee or Minties (such as most institutional open days have). If I had taken hours off work to get to that information session I would have been severely nonplussed. What happened was eventually a few teachers milled around and had an informal chat with anyone who knew something was supposed to be going on. Seriously would you sign your child up to an institution that treated you like that? How could you possibly expect quality students with that approach?

Where the teachers could have shined is in the comments on completed projects. The students put hours and hours of effort into these projects to mostly get a 'competent' or 'non competent' outcome. Even for the first semester Diploma projects there were several that had one line written responses, none of which gave any clue about what was good about it nor what areas could be improved.

I am further concerned that the TAFE mechanism hasn't woken up to the fact that 'business as usual' won't cut it anymore. You can't give the same level of service you have always given if people are paying quadruple for that privilege. Parents and students have to ask themselves if the time, cost and effort are worthwhile, especially given that there are no employment pathways at the end of it. I can see these higher costs leading to students forsaking tertiary study altogether and reverting to private mentor/mentee master/apprentice models over which the government will have no input at all.

A skilled workforce benefits us all. Increasing the cost barriers to TAFE benefits no one. But until TAFE teachers start losing their jobs because the students can't justify the costs, lack of service and lack of meaningful outcomes maybe nothing constructive will happen.

Catherine Cavanagh

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