

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

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NSW Inquiry into TAFE

This is a recount of my experiences with TAFE in the past 1 and a half years.

I chose TAFE because of its practical approach in terms of content. Compared to universities, most are theory based rather than practical course work. By enrolling in a course at TAFE, I can learn both theory and practical skills so that I am ready for a job or career in the future.

Teachers are also incredibly helpful towards their students, making TAFE comparable with a school environment. Comparing it to university where you are expected to keep up with coursework yourself.

Another great thing that TAFE provides is “disability” support. I have a severe food allergy, and when contacting the appropriate staff member, I was able to get support for my condition which included some online training for the teachers and coordination with security in the event of an emergency.

A major downfall was with the new ‘Smart and Skilled’ reforms which came into effect this year. During the start of this year (and the end of last year), it was hard to find out information about courses and the new fees, until close to when the classes started. Teachers and staff were a bit clueless having a new system introduced to them, and it just caused a bit of chaos when I tried to enrol into my course.

A big surprise was when I found out I had to pay \$6,900 for my course this year – a 6 month course that used to cost under \$1,000. Comparing it to university, the cost would be equivalent or even more, just for six months. The reasoning of this new fee was because I had taken on a Certificate IV course in the previous year, then I had decided to change my course when I decided that I wanted a different career in IT. The new course was a Certificate III, and the new Smart and Skilled charges the full commercial rate fee if you drop down a level. As I was told by staff, you can only pick a course on the same level or higher. I can understand that part of the reason is because of people taking up different Certificate III courses year after year to keep the benefits of being a student, but for people just changing their career, or trying out a new course? – It’s unfair. The system should penalise those that game it, not for those who are doing the right thing.

As for my course, after a discussion with staff and teachers, both sympathetic to the new fees students had been subjected to, I had decided to take on the Certificate III – even if it meant paying more money. My family doesn’t earn too much, but TAFE is valuable to me. TAFE is one of the only training providers that has affordable courses in a supportive learning environment.

If the government continues to make more cuts to TAFE, where will we go to gain the skills for a new job, while being able to pay the costs? As a result of the fee increases, I have heard stories about some TAFE classes having to be cancelled, because of the lack of students. If these fee increases and cuts to TAFE continue, it will be harder for those looking for a job in the future to gain the skills they need.

Sincerely,

Ainslie Pasqual