

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

Organisation: OTEN branch of TAFE Teachers Assoc. (AEU NSW)
Date received: 14/08/2015

OTEN branch TAFE Teachers Association (AEU NSW) submission:

This submission is made by the branch executive of the OTEN branch of the TAFE Teachers Association (AEU NSW) on behalf of our members.

Background:

OTEN (Open Training and Education Network) is the largest online/distance education provider of Second chance and Vocational training in Australia. It is part of Western Sydney Institute and TAFE NSW. In 2010 OTEN celebrated its centenary of quality public TAFE distance learning.

We offer over 200 courses to more than 93,000 students. This makes OTEN the largest tertiary educational institution in Australia. We enrol students continuously throughout the year and provide students with a flexible form of self-paced study which fits in with their work and family commitments. OTEN offers a chance for social and economic inclusion that would otherwise be denied. It works well for many students, who come from a range of backgrounds, they are mature age; from rural, regional and remote locations; are isolated by disability, illness or lack of childcare or are young people who don't fit into mainstream education. (See **appendix 1** for examples of students' success stories and [student testimonials](#) on the OTEN website).

Distance/ online education is a specialist field, requiring highly skilled professional teachers and support staff. In addition, OTEN teachers have high level academic and industry qualifications and experience. Their excellence in teaching has been recognised by national, industry and state awards.

OTEN's Equity Unit exemplifies the highly specialised and skilled nature of OTEN teaching. It has almost 7 thousand students with disability and some 4 thousand Aboriginal students with a handful of specialist teacher consultants, disability and in addition one SEO, Aboriginal education and a couple of Outreach teachers. Each teacher consultant is a highly qualified and experienced specialist in a particular area of disability including intellectual, physical, psychiatric, neurological, visual, deaf and hearing impaired and a teacher consultant for adaptive IT equipment. Without these specialists teacher consultants who deal with many clients who present with complex problems/issues their students would find it difficult to succeed in their studies and would risk further economic and social exclusion.

For more information about OTEN go to the [OTEN website](#)

Impact of Smart and Skilled changes for OTEN:

Impacts on staff:

Years of Federal and State budget cuts to TAFE NSW has taken its toll on OTEN's students and staff. (See for example, **appendix 2**). Teachers have experienced constant rounds of funding cuts, years of job freeze, restructures, reviews – we have been restructured and reviewed to within an inch of our lives! These restructures are inevitably followed by voluntary and forced redundancies and increasing casualization of the teaching workforce. Along with decreased funding has come increasing workloads for teachers, as student numbers have increased from nearly 32 thousand in 2007 to 109 thousand in 2013 without an increase in the permanent teaching staff and some increases in casual teachers.

The Smart and Skilled policy has added to the stress and trauma of constant funding cuts, restructures and job insecurity for OTEN staff. Every teaching section at OTEN as well as WSI are

being reviewed. Many teachers and support staff are losing their jobs and student numbers decline and funding falls.

The OTEN branch of TAFETA (AEU NSW) was so concerned with the Work Health and Safety (WHS) consequences for our members of the flawed implementation of the new Electronic Business Management System (EBS) which was introduced at the same time as Smart and Skilled fee changes that it undertook a staff WHS survey. The results of the survey were alarming and indicated a serious risk of immediate and long-term adverse health outcomes for OTEN teachers. **(See appendix 3)**. The Management of TAFE NSW and the Minister responsible for TAFE have a duty of care under the WHS Act to respond to these WHS issues. It is our understanding that the General Manager of TAFE NSW Pam Christie, has been informed of these findings. The officials of the NSW Teachers Federation have been seeking an interview with Minister John Barilaro to discuss WHS issues and other issues related to the implementation of Smart and Skilled to no avail.

Impact on students

Smart and skilled has resulted in a prohibitive and confusing fees structure for students. It has resulted in lower enrolments by 14% at OTEN which is less than the state average of about 30%. That represents thousands of fewer students at OTEN. People who wish to retrain and have previous qualifications seem to be the most impacted by increased fees. Those on low incomes and averse to FEE-help loans are also being excluded from studying with us. **(See appendix 4)**

Grossly inadequate Community Service Obligation funding for second chance education, Equity students including Outreach, Disability and Aboriginal students are being adversely impacted by Smart and Skilled. A fee loading of just 10% for Equity students is so unrealistically low that the outstanding and essential equity unit is under review. The two equity managers OTEN and WSI will lose their job at the end of this year and be replaced by one manager with double the workload. The remaining Equity teacher consultants are yet to find out their fate. This will impact very adversely on this vulnerable group of students.

Community Service Obligation funding for the HSC course is so low that it goes nowhere near covering the cost of provision at less than \$5 for each nominal course hour over two years. This will severely impact on disadvantaged students who are clients of community organisations such as Oasis, Eagle RAPS, Youth of the Streets and Mission Australia. **(See appendix 5)**

Impact of EBS on students

Students had difficulty enrolling and re-enrolling resulted in fewer enrolments and inability to log into our online learning site and continue with or commence studies whereas in colleges students were allowed to attend class and have enrolment sorted out later. Many of these issues are still not resolved as enrolled and financial students are randomly made unfinancial and denied access to their online learning much to everyone's frustration.

General observations

Smart and Skilled is an example of market failure. Technical and Second chance education is an investment in the future productivity of the workforce and NSW economy and is a government funding responsibility. The use of taxpayers funds to subsidise private for profit VET providers does not save money in the short or long term: Results in lack of provision for expensive to provide courses and students. When second chance education is reduced or not offered at all, then the cost to society in loss of skills, Reduced productive capacity and the cost of locking the disadvantaged into welfare rather than work. For every \$1 invested in TAFE a further \$6 is contributed to the NSW economy. When funds are withdrawn from TAFE then NSW will suffer a huge loss in

productive capacity and threatens future economic growth. It will result in chronic skills shortages and hinder proposed infrastructural developments in NSW.

Recommendations

1. That the NSW Government abandon Smart and Skilled
2. allocate all VET funding to TAFE and
3. substantially increase TAFE funding.
4. Reduce TAFE fees to students.
5. The Minister responsible for TAFE NSW take his duty of care to his employees under the WHS Act seriously and institute changes to address issues raised by the Teachers Federation (AEU NSW)