

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

**Organisation:** Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association, NSW Teachers Federation  
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# Ryde-Macquarie Teachers Association

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*Thursday, 13 August 15*

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No.6

Parliament House

Macquarie St, Sydney

NSW 2000

## **Submission regarding the Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training**

In opening our submission we would like to remind the committee of the TAFE Community Alliance web site. ([www.tafecommunityalliance.org](http://www.tafecommunityalliance.org)). The most important link on this site records the experience of various individuals with regards to TAFE, and the many benefits they have received from government funded vocational education and training.

- A 21-year-old Aboriginal student records how he received great support for his learning difficulties. These support units are now being cut from TAFE colleges and are not provided by private providers.

- Peter records how his TAFE teachers and support staff assisted him in completing his studies while suffering from severe depression. The implementation of Smart and Skilled has resulted in the loss of these support staff and the sacking of hundreds of dedicated and trained TAFE teachers.
- A young woman named Ariyani describes the importance of TAFE Outreach Community Engagement/English classes. Since the implementation of Smart and Skilled, these ESL services have been cut.
- One woman begins her story with the heading, 'Escaping the poverty trap'. This statement forms the heart of our submission.

She concludes, 'Through TAFE, and the services it offers, as a quality public provider I was able to build a series of qualifications'.

- A woman in the Blue Mountains describes how at 53, she was able to obtain her HSC amidst much adversity. Her story is summarized by the statement, "TAFE has the power to change lives and give people a second chance"

Since the implementation of Smart and Skill, it has been the experience of careers teachers that students are often left in the dark regarding courses and the fees pertaining to courses. Year 12 students leave High School in September, not knowing which courses are to be offered in the following year. If they are aware of the courses to be offered, often the fee is

not publicized. This results in students enrolling in a course, commencing the course, and then having to drop out due to the exorbitant fees!

The complexity of course structures and their associated fees particularly effects disadvantaged students.

The traditional path of many students in our schools has been to find employment or to enrol in a TAFE course or a university course. It is our experience that TAFE has become too expensive for many students. This results in a future based solely upon seeking unemployment benefits, with no further avenue to develop new skills.

The committee does not have to be reminded of the consequences of high levels of youth unemployment:

- Increased rates of mental illness
- Increased demands on social security
- The development of ghetto communities, particularly in lower socio- economic areas.
- Increased levels of crime.

TAFE has traditionally offered a pathway to a career for many students, who for numerous reasons, have not succeeded in traditional education settings. In addition, the provision of affordable TAFE college courses has provided high school students to commence their training in areas such as boat building, nursing or childcare, while still completing a HSC.

These courses in TAFE are varied and taught by teachers that have worked in the relevant industry, adding true meaning to vocational education and ensuring that the courses reflect industry practise and standards.

In contrast Smart and Skilled has allowed private providers to:

- Radically cut back face-to-face teaching time in order to save costs. For example courses are now offered in relation to Certificate IV Plumbing, with a reduction of 300 hours of face-to-face time!
- Minimize costs by failing to employ support staff in areas such as student welfare ESL and student disabilities.
- To cancel courses at the last minute.
- To allow the graduation of students in courses who lack basic knowledge and awareness of safe working practices. This has resulted in employer groups questioning the quality of candidates graduating from private vocational education colleges. We are reminded of a story emanating from the Wollongong Chamber of Commerce expressing concerns about the skills of apprentice electricians.
- Offer inducements to students to enroll in courses with exorbitant fees. This has become such a problem that Government now recognizes it.

- The termination of courses in TAFE colleges resulting in greatly increased travel time for students in order to complete their studies at another venue. As an example, students in the Western Suburbs of Sydney now have to travel to the Eastern Suburbs to complete courses in motor mechanics relating to heavy vehicles.

So farcical has the implementation of Smart and Skilled become that not only are courses abolished overnight, but also private providers themselves have ceased operation with little notice.

We would like to remind the committee of the fate of TAFE in other states.

- In Victoria, TAFE funding has been cut by 300 million dollars per year.
- In South Australia cuts of over 9 million dollars to the TAFE budget have been made for 2014. Forecast cuts in the future range up to 21 million dollars per year.
- The Queensland government is in the midst of closing 38 TAFE campuses and cutting 78 million dollars from training, tertiary education and employment.

These governments do not appreciate the importance of TAFE!

New South Wales remains the last bastion of government funded vocational education. But the Barbarians are at the door!

A well resourced public TAFE sector is vital to achieving a skilled workforce and contributes to reducing inequalities in society. In recent state elections in Victoria and Queensland, cuts to TAFE were one of the top issues. In the NSW elections, where a seat changed

hands, cuts to TAFE were again a major concern of the electorate. Our Association alone has collected hundreds of signatures protesting against policies associated with Smart and Skilled.

If the consequences of the implementation of Smart and Skilled were not so serious, one could refer to the legislation as 'Dumb and Dumber'!

Alas the implementation of Smart and Skills tears at the heart of a just and equitable society, greatly diminishes the learning environment of students seeking vocational educational and training, destroys the working conditions of existing TAFE employees and represents the total approbation of the NSW Government to fund Public Education. The removal of TAFE from the education portfolio is a sad reflection of this.

Yours truly

Adrian Sarroff

President, Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association

NSW Teachers Federation.