

**Submission
No 210**

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

Name: Ms Philippa Clark

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into vocational education and training in NSW

Please find below my submission to the committee in relation to the parliamentary inquiry into vocational education and training. I have addressed my comments to the terms of reference.

(a) (iii) barriers to participation, including students in the non-government education and home schooling sectors

There is a discrepancy in the way home-educated children are dealt with by the NSW VET sector. Smart & Skilled is only available to those who have stopped being a school student, and won't accept a home schooled child because they are seen as a school student. On the other hand, the same child can't access TAFE because for the purposes of the TAFE system, they are not a school student. Home-educated children should be eligible for one or the other (preferably TAFE).

(b) the role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry in (ii) the development of skills in the NSW economy and (iii) the development of opportunities for unemployed people... to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects

I am a product of a private VET provider, and I make no apologies for that. However, I am disturbed at TAFE's accelerating decline over recent years. TAFE is and should be the backbone of the VET sector but successive funding cuts and opening up more of the sector's funding to be contestable has crippled TAFE.

TAFE brings true equality of opportunity for those wishing to study, whether they be disadvantaged, unemployed, looking to upskill or change careers, or pursuing a trade rather than academic achievement. It should be accessible to all regardless of background.

One of my friends has an intellectual disability and did not do well in his HSC. His ATAR was low and he couldn't get into the university course he wanted. Instead he went to study at TAFE and excelled – and absolutely loved it. All students should be able to have the TAFE experience that he did, but in the current climate those who aren't feeling the squeeze of cuts to staff, facilities and face-to-face training hours are being priced out of attending in the first place. I believe TAFE should be free.

(d) the effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training, skills and pathways to employment...

Under Smart & Skilled, student access to TAFE and the quality of the courses offered have suffered.

I was recently contacted by a horticulture student from Padstow TAFE. She was partway through her Certificate 3 and had been informed that her fees were about to increase ten-fold. The facilities she relied on in her course – the plant nursery, greenhouses, potting sheds and propagation houses – were to be closed and staff laid off. The future of the TAFE library was also in doubt. This student suddenly had to deal with a massive price hike for a much diminished learning experience. This situation should not even be allowed to occur, but it is the sad reality playing out across TAFEs state-wide.

In closing, money transferred from public education to private is money transferred from needs-based services to profit-based services. The Smart & Skilled model and the "Victorianisation" of TAFE is not in the best interest of the students it was meant to serve. Other submissions have outlined its many failings in more detail. I simply urge the committee to recommend against going any further down this path.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Clark