

**Submission
No 205**

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

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
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Attention:

The Hon. Paul Green MLC,
Chair,
Inquiry Into NSW Vocational and Training Education

Dear Sir,

I am a former TAFE Teacher Consultant for Students with Physical Disabilities and was based in the former Southern Sydney Institute for over 10 years. I also happen to have sustained quadriplegia and am the current President of Spinal Cord Injuries Australia.

As such I am writing to you to express my alarm, disappointment and disgust at the recent developments in TAFE NSW, especially the deliberate destruction of what was once one of the finest support services for students with disabilities in the post-secondary sector in the world. The current administrators who have overseen this wholesale demolition ought to hang their heads in shame because they are ruining the futures of potential students with disabilities before they have even begun. Many have now been forced onto social welfare benefits rather than being in training for tax paying, productive and fulfilling careers.

The VET sector in Australia has had a user pays for profit system implemented over recent years in the states. NSW is the current state to move into this area with the introduction of Smart and Skilled on the 1 January 2015. The result of this "for profit"

system is that government spending in the National VET sector has dropped by 26 percent in per contact hours between 2004 and 2013 (Quiggin: 2015). Now much government money is going to "for private" providers who have abused tax payer funding and failed to properly train students including students with disabilities.

In Victoria, for example, warnings that poor training outcomes would occur were ignored when large numbers of private providers were given government funding at the expense of TAFE jobs and student outcomes. Consequently 9,500 students have been forced to return their certificates because of a lack of quality, and another 3,000 are still being investigated. Furthermore, \$4.2 million in funding has been identified by the current Victorian government because of 'findings of non-compliance' (Anons: 2015).

The introduction of Smart and Skilled funding in NSW as has occurred in Victoria, means that funding has shifted from TAFE to private VET providers. Class hours have therefore been cut, and class sizes increased as large numbers of TAFE teachers and other TAFE staff have lost their jobs. A NSW Department of Education Report found that TAFE has lost 2,000 teachers and support staff since 2011 (McNally: 2015).

Job cuts have also occurred in NSW TAFE despite these being in areas where private providers do not offer educational support to students with disabilities and other students with higher needs. These include full and part time positions such as Counsellors, Disability Teacher Consultants, Disability Teachers, interpreters and Outreach co-ordinators. For example, Northern Sydney Institute have cut Teacher Consultant positions from 9 to 5 and South Western Sydney Institute (SWSI) have cut their Teacher Consultants from 12 to 10. Additionally SWSI have cut their only 3 full time Teacher Disabilities positions, cut the number of Counsellor positions from 18 to 10 and cut outright many Outreach co-ordinator positions. Other institutes are also moving to cut equity and disability support staff.

These cuts to TAFE services demonstrate that Smart and Skilled funding is not very smart or skilled nor is it sufficient to support students with disabilities and other students

in need. The additional funding also provided to TAFE via Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding is not filling these gaps. This submission argues that TAFE needs to be adequately funded to support high need students as the recent history of private providers' engagement with this student cohort is one of exploitation and total failure. As has been documented, private VET providers have deceived and misled these students into taking out significant VET-FEE help debts (Inclusion Australia: 2015; Shulman: 2015).

Estimates have placed the number of students driven away from TAFE at over 30,000 since the introduction of Smart and Skilled "reforms" in January 2015 (Smith & Needham: 2015). Unless TAFE funding is restored students will continue to be educationally disadvantaged and robbed of training opportunities.

In the course of your investigation I urge you to consider the now significantly reduced opportunities for potential students with disabilities as well as the outrageous roting of a once proud community-minded sector by rapacious carpetbaggers in the private VET system. The haemorrhaging of the disability positions and training for students with disabilities must stop now. Please re-instate funding so that TAFENSW can once again offer the best training services for students with disabilities in Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Joan C.Hume OAM,
President,
Spinal Cord Injuries, Australia,

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