

Introduction

Inquiry in the 43rd Parliament

- 1.1 On 21 March 2013 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment of the 43rd Parliament adopted an inquiry referred by the then Minister for Tertiary Education, Hon Chris Bowen MP, into *the role of the Technical and Further Education system and its operation*.
- 1.2 The Committee received 172 submissions from interested individuals and organisations and in excess of 1 000 responses to a survey organised by Unions Australia.¹ These responses were not received as formal submissions to the inquiry.
- 1.3 The Committee held an initial public hearing in Canberra with the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. A further hearing was conducted in Brisbane on 7 June 2013, at which key stakeholders, including TAFE Directors Australia, appeared and roundtable discussions were held with employer and industry associations, community organisations and unions.
- 1.4 The Standing Committee on Education and Employment ceased to exist upon dissolution of the 43rd Parliament and accordingly its inquiry lapsed.

1 Unions Australia Survey Responses accessible from http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives/Committees?url=ee/tafe44/subs.htm viewed 24 October 2014.

Inquiry in the 44th Parliament

Referral of the inquiry

- 1.5 The Standing Committee on Education and Employment for the 44th Parliament was established on 14 November 2013 under Standing Order 215.²
- 1.6 On 24 February 2014 the Minister for Industry, the Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, referred terms of reference for the inquiry. The terms of reference differ from those of the inquiry in the 43rd Parliament and are set out in the front pages of this report.

Inquiry process

- 1.7 The inquiry was adopted and announced on 26 February 2014 and submissions from interested individuals and organisations were called for. A wide range of stakeholders including state and territory governments, peak advocacy bodies, employer organisations, business chambers and unions were also directly invited to make submissions.
- 1.8 Under House of Representatives Standing Order 237 the Committee was able to consider and make use of the evidence submitted to the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) inquiry of the 43rd Parliament. This included 172 submissions and transcripts from the following public hearings:
 - 30 May 2013, Canberra – public hearing; and
 - 7 June 2013, Brisbane – public hearing.
- 1.9 The Committee held public hearings and inspections as follows:
 - 19 March 2014, Canberra – public hearing;
 - 8 April 2014, Sydney – public hearing;
 - 9 April 2014, Newcastle – inspection;
 - 15 April 2014, Melbourne – public hearing;
 - 16 April 2014, Bendigo – public hearing;
 - 30 April 2014, Launceston – public hearing;
 - 7 May 2014, Townsville – inspection and public hearing;
 - 6 June 2014, Canberra – public hearing;
 - 12 June 2014, Adelaide – inspection and public hearing;

2 House of Representatives Standing Orders as at 14 November 2013, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/05%20About%20Parliament/53%20HoR/53%20PPP/StandingOrders/fullreport.ashx>> viewed 24 October 2014.

- 13 June 2014, Perth – inspection and public hearing; and
 - 16 July 2014, Canberra – public hearing.
- 1.10 In addition, the responses to the Unions Australia survey, while not formal submissions to the inquiry, formed part of the broader context drawn on by the Committee.
- 1.11 All TAFE institutes with which the Committee engaged greatly assisted the Committee in its work.
- 1.12 Full details of the public hearings can be found in Appendix B.

Survey

- 1.13 A key objective for the Committee was to hear from past, present and future TAFE students. The Committee received little evidence from these groups and, therefore, chose to conduct an online survey in order to hear their views. The survey was launched on 5 May 2014 and closed on 31 July 2014. The survey received a total of 6 635 responses.
- 1.14 The intention of the survey was to gather attitudinal responses to TAFE experiences. The survey focussed on individual student TAFE experiences; asked questions relating to demographics; sought advice on how TAFE has benefited respondent's personal experiences; and requested feedback on how TAFE could improve.
- 1.15 The survey was not intended to yield statistics in relation to Vocational Education and Training (VET) or TAFE, or to provide a representation of the TAFE sector student cohort. For an accurate statistical portrayal of the VET sector, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) should be consulted.³
- 1.16 The survey collected both qualitative and quantitative responses. A selection of free text survey responses has been included in Chapter 4 to provide an indication of views expressed.
- 1.17 Quantitative responses to the survey can be found in Appendix D. Of the respondents to the survey:
- 28.95 per cent were aged over 50 years;
 - 63.50 per cent were female;
 - Over 11 per cent identified with having a disability that affected their work and/or study options; and
 - More than 37 per cent had completed a tertiary qualification.

3 Statistical data for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector can be accessed via the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) website:
<<https://www.ncver.edu.au/>>

- 1.18 Business Administration, Information Communications and Technology were the most common fields of study for survey respondents. Also, respondents gave an average positive rating of 82 per cent on how they perceived their TAFE qualification was valued by potential or current employers. A similar picture emerged in relation to student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the resources available at TAFE.

Structure of the report

- 1.19 Following this introductory chapter, the report contains four chapters.
- 1.20 Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Commonwealth's involvement in the VET sector. The governance and regulatory areas outlined have roles in the VET sector and do not specifically govern or regulate the TAFE sector.
- 1.21 Chapter 3 deals with the development of skills in the Australian workforce. It considers the position of TAFE, Industry Skills Councils, and the regulatory approach of the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Chapter 3 also considers the issue of identifying skill needs and shortages.
- 1.22 Chapter 4 provides an overview of the importance of TAFE in providing pathways to employment and university as well as its significant community support role.
- 1.23 Chapter 5 considers the competitive training market and the issues for TAFE in this market.
- 1.24 Each chapter notes relevant elements of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) framework.

Senate inquiry

- 1.25 On 11 December 2013 the Senate referred an inquiry into TAFE in Australia to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee. The Committee tabled its report on 14 May 2014.⁴ While there was some overlap between the terms of reference for the Senate Committee inquiry and those for the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment inquiry, there was also considerable divergence.⁵ Term of reference 2(a) for the Senate Committee

4 Parliament of Australia, Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 'Technical and Further Education in Australia', 14 May 2014
<http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/TAFE/Report/index> viewed 24 October 2014.

5 Parliament of Australia, Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 'Technical and Further Education in Australia: Terms of Reference',
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/TAFE/Terms_of_Reference> viewed 24 October 2014.

inquiry required the Committee to consider any public information provided to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment TAFE inquiry.⁶

Changes to the Commonwealth framework during the inquiry

1.26 During the course of the inquiry a number of changes were made to the Commonwealth framework relating to VET. These changes were as follows:

- Until December 2013 the COAG Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE), which commenced in 2011, functioned as the COAG body focusing on workforce needs, educational attainment and skills.⁷ In December 2013 COAG considered its arrangements and announced a new Industry and Skills Council to replace SCOTESE.⁸
- In April 2014 the National Skills Standards Council was dissolved and its ongoing functions were delegated to industry representatives and selected senior officials through the Industry and Skills Council Advisory Committee.⁹
- In April 2014 it was agreed that the ongoing committees and sub-committees established under the previous SCOTESE, including the National VET Equity Advisory Council, be dissolved.¹⁰ As of 1 July 2014 the functions of the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency were transferred to the Australian Government's Department of Industry.¹¹

6 Parliament of Australia, Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 'Technical and Further Education in Australia: Terms of Reference', http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/TAFE/Terms_of_Reference viewed 24 October 2014.

7 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE), *Terms of Reference*, <http://www.scotese.natese.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/61239/SCOTESE_Terms_of_Reference_endorsed_by_COAG.pdf> viewed 24 October 2014.

8 National Advisory for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment, 'COAG Industry & Skills Council', < <http://www.natese.gov.au/cisc>> viewed 24 October 2014.

9 It should be noted that on Friday 13 December 2013 COAG considered its arrangements and announced a new Council for Industry and Skills. SCOTESE remains in place as the authorising body for work it was previously tasked with until the new Council is formally established and assumes responsibility.

10 Australian Government, Department of Industry 'Vocational Education and Training Reform', 'Establishment of the Industry and Skills Council Advisory Committee', <<http://vetreform.industry.gov.au/news/establishment-industry-and-skills-council-advisory-committee>> viewed 24 October 2014.

11 Australian Government, Australian Workforce Productivity Agency (AWPA), <<http://www.awpa.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>> viewed 24 October 2014.

- 1.27 These changes are also noted in Chapter 2 of this report. It should be noted that much of the evidence to the inquiry was provided within a framework within which now dissolved bodies were functioning. Submission and transcript evidence that mentions these bodies has not been changed.

The recurrent nature of issues facing the TAFE sector

- 1.28 This report deals with TAFE as it is today. This in turn requires an awareness of the history of TAFE. The 2001 NCVER report, *The Development of TAFE in Australia*, provides an extensive and well set out history of TAFE and the policy discussions surrounding the TAFE sector.¹² This research also shows that many, if not all, of the issues facing TAFE, TAFE students, state, territory and Commonwealth governments and private enterprise/industry are ongoing.
- 1.29 In addition, the 1974 *Kangan Report*¹³ on technical and further education needs is recognised as one of the seminal reports dealing with the TAFE sector. TAFE NSW notes that the *Kangan Report*:
- ... named and defined the TAFE system. Many of the carefully cultivated components of the sector were recognised by the report and consolidated in the 1970s by the Whitlam and Fraser governments. Individual opportunity and social improvement became catch-cries and important philosophies.¹⁴
- 1.30 The following points made in the *Kangan Report* underscore the recurrent nature of themes in the TAFE sector from 1974 to today:
- The main purpose of education is the betterment and development of individual people and their contribution to the good of the community. Technical and further education should be planned accordingly. Emphasis on the needs of the individual should lead to easier access to learning, to better physical conditions for learning, to suitable student and teacher amenities, to welfare facilities, and to the highest standards of health and safety in workshops and laboratories.¹⁵

12 G Goozee, *The Development of TAFE in Australia*, 3rd edn, NCVER Ltd, 2001.

13 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974 [Kangan Report]*, VOCEDplus, <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.

14 New South Wales Government, TAFE NSW, 'Our History', <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/about/our_history.htm> viewed 24 October 2014.

15 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974 [Kangan Report]*, vol. 1, p. xxiii, VOCEDplus <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.

- The demand for education throughout life can be expected to grow not simply because of changes in technologies and social organisation but also because people will become increasingly aware of the practical advantages that it gives the individual in respect of employment and livelihood. The cost of formal vocational education, however, will inhibit its growth unless advantage can be taken of new learning technology that can supplement formal teaching strategies or substitute self-learning techniques for formal classroom attendance. Technology in educational strategy warrants very considerable development, and efforts should be encouraged to spread its use.¹⁶
- The services of social workers should be available to college students for counselling on personal, family or social problems. College organisations should be such as to try to avoid losing students because of such problems.¹⁷
- More action is desirable to link streams of vocational education in technical colleges to career opportunities in secondary industry and the fast growing tertiary industries. Young people at schools should be given more information about the relationship between available courses and existing occupations, and TAFE authorities should re-examine career opportunities to assess the sufficiency and relevance to the labour market of the current range of courses.¹⁸
- Relevance is the key principle in courses. Content must be kept relevant, and little-used knowledge and skills should be removed. Reviews for this purpose might be justified every two or three years of apprenticeship, post apprenticeship, technician area courses and the like, which are continually under the influence of technological change. In all States, committees of persons appointed from industry to assess course contents are used to a greater or lesser extent and are very helpful. Maintaining the relevance of contents of courses, however, is a task for specialists who can identify the critical requirements of vocations, and jettison material that is irrelevant. The

16 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974* [Kangan Report], vol. 1, p. xxiv, VOCEDplus, <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.

17 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974* [Kangan Report], vol. 1, p. xxvi, VOCEDplus, <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.

18 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974* [Kangan Report], vol. 1, p. xxx, VOCEDplus, <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.

Australian Government should help all States to employ and develop more such specialists.¹⁹

19 M Kangan, *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education, April 1974* [Kangan Report], vol. 1, p. xxv, VECEDplus, <<http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv38436>> viewed 24 October 2014.