

Senate TAFE Inquiry Submission

I wish to make a submission to the Senate TAFE Enquiry. I have been a TAFE teacher in Access and Equity for more than two decades. In this submission, I would like to briefly address the role played by TAFE in our community and the factors that affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business.

Linkage with higher education

High School Alternative

TAFE plays a vital second chance education role for many people who have not been able to complete the normal HSC provided in high schools. These people have had family commitments or personal issues that have precluded them from attending or completing the HSC. At TAFE they are able to take a Tertiary Preparation Course, that will get them into further or higher education and become productive members of the community.

English language training for migrants – learner pathways

My main area of teaching is to migrants. It is especially with this group that I can see how the skills that migrants bring to Australia, remain locked and unused until they acquire the English language skills that TAFE provides them with. With the language skills they gain at TAFE they can live and work productively in Australian society. It might be argued that private providers can also teach these skills, but private providers cannot usually also provide the support services in the form of personal and career counselling, learner support, library and other facilities that have grown up around TAFE colleges over many decades.

In the Certificate IV English for Academic Purposes course that I coordinate, students come from diverse backgrounds. Most already have tertiary qualifications in their country of origin and want to pursue a bridging course or further and higher education in Australia, so that they can work in the professions and employ their overseas skills in their adopted country. Many of my students go on to careers in nursing, engineering, business and management and end up making enormous contributions to the fabric of Australian society and as well as the economy. TAFE facilitates their move into their new lives in Australia, whilst increasing their earning capacity and their ability to contribute to society. Without TAFE, many of my students would not be able to improve their language skills to levels that would be acceptable for university study, or working contexts that require highly proficient levels of English.

Affordability and Accessibility

For my students, TAFE NSW in its present form is affordable, but this will not necessarily be the case under the proposed NSW voucher system called 'Smart and Skilled'. Under the proposed system, students who take higher level certificate courses could face enormous fee increases, because the NSW Government will not provide an entitlement for courses above certificate III, or where students have already completed a qualification at the same level as the one they are applying for, irrespective of the course previously studied. This means that a non-English speaking background student who has completed a certificate II in hairdressing, for example, will have no entitlement to improve their English language skills by completing a certificate II in English language skills.

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We all know why TAFE is valued by the community; we all have a TAFE success story that involves us or someone we know.

I am reminded of a recent graduate who was disowned by his wife and children because of a mental illness. Pedro (not his real name) was institutionalised at St Vincent's for many months and could not return home when he was released. He suffered incredible anguish at not being allowed by his wife to see his children, especially his youngest children. He found crisis accommodation, where he lived for more than a semester, while he enrolled and successfully completed a Certificate IV in English for Academic Purposes, was awarded a TAFE student scholarship and went on to complete an arts qualification. He is now in his own accommodation and has regular contact with his family and is planning to pursue his studies and career in art.

Pedro's story is not an uncommon story in TAFE. By some standards, Pedro's story will not be judged to be a success story, but I disagree: let us imagine a society where hundreds of people in Pedro's dire situation fall through the gaps; what kind of society will we be living in? It is clear that in Pedro's case and in the lives of many others like him, TAFE makes a difference

Effects of the contestable funding model on Affordability and Accessibility

The contestable funding model has decimated TAFE in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland. What is planned for TAFE NSW for 2015 will have the same effect – private providers will take more than 70% of the allocated contestable funding to run for profit certificate 1,2 and 3 courses with no responsibility to cater for students with disabilities and special needs, like English language, while students with disabilities or other needs, or those who want to study at higher certificate levels, like my students, are left to a stretched under-resourced TAFE sector, who, without proper resourcing, will be unable to provide for their needs.