

This submission addresses the following terms of reference:

(1) (a)(iii) & (iv), (1)(b) & 1(f)

The underpinning assumptions of this submission are that:

- many individuals in our society face patterns of 'cumulative disadvantage'
- access and equity issues in Vocational Education and Training are important
- public money is to be used for the public good
- recent changes in funding models have had a negative impact on the ability of TAFE to provide services and programs for equity groups.

"For more than twenty years adult literacy and numeracy classes have been an important vehicle for social justice within the TAFE system. However, in recent years state-funded programs have almost disappeared from Queensland TAFE to the extent that this year only limited and much more expensive programs, if any, are likely to be offered. (Macaulay 2014:14) Chris Macaulay's prediction has come true as this submission will illustrate with examples from a metropolitan Qld TAFE.

Two 'success stories' taken from my experience as a Literacy/Numeracy teacher in TAFE are provided as examples of the significance that effective, affordable literacy and numeracy training can have in students' lives. These particular examples have been chosen to illustrate some important aspects of adult literacy skilling that people not familiar with the field may not fully realise.

**Student A** - Highly intelligent but with severe problems learning to read and write, sometimes referred to by educators as a "spikey profile" and a classic indication of learning difficulties NOT intellectual impairment. Left high school functionally illiterate. Low self esteem due to schooling experience. Working as a cleaner where her problems with literacy could be hidden. Attended her local TAFE Literacy class in the evenings for 15 years. There are no quick fixes when overcoming learning difficulties. Has, with this ongoing support, successfully completed a qualification in massage therapy and runs her own business.

In her own words "If it wasn't for the great support I have received from your Adult Literacy Classes, I would never have had the confidence and courage to go forward with my life and achieve the great things I have. This is a statement i make not just from a working perspective, but on a personal level, as having a severe spelling problem not only affects your work but your state of mind as well. Thank

you."

Without the public subsidy of literacy courses making them affordable for the working poor, this pathway would have been blocked for this student. A student in a similar position under the new funding arrangements would simply not be able to afford course fees if they were an independent adult working in a low wage job. Evening literacy/numeracy classes are no longer offered at the leading metropolitan TAFE this student attended.

Increasingly any affordable literacy programs are funded under stringent assessment demands requiring fast tracking through skill sets and levels which make them unsuitable for many adult literacy students who require individualised diagnosis of need and delivery of specific underpinning knowledges they may not have successfully acquired in the school system. The rigid attendance requirements make them unsuitable for employed people.

**Student B** - A single parent, little formal education worked as a cleaner with Blue Care and wished to progress to working in Aged Care as a carer rather than a cleaner. Enrolled in TAFE to improve literacy prior to undertaking further study. Sought advice from TAFE teacher about enrolling in an Aged Care course with a private provider. Advised to "go for it" because the private provider's brochure guaranteed extra learning support. When actually enrolled no extra support was forthcoming and the student continued literacy classes with TAFE to access the help she required. Without this assistance the student would have withdrawn from the Aged Care course. This student would no longer have this fall back option to be supported by TAFE because of the increased cost of community literacy classes and the severely reduced choice of hours offered.

In her own words "They (the private provider) made me feel stupid like i did in school and just told me to copy from the students who could keep up."

A very real danger in the for profit education market increasingly being proffered as the preferred model is poor quality training as indicated above. Support was advertised but not offered and most of the "learning" was completing workbooks often by copying from other students.

Literacy classes - example of cost increases at a Brisbane metropolitan TAFE

2013 between \$50 to \$100 for up to 12 hours of instruction per week for 18 weeks offered 4 mornings and one evening

2014 \$984 for 3 hours of instruction per week for 18 weeks on a Thursday morning

It is a classic Catch 22 now for students with low literacy and/or numeracy skills. Subsidised courses are those directly related to employment outcomes. To be successful in these courses students need

reasonable literacy and/or numeracy skills. To compound the problem many of these courses are being compressed into ever increasingly shorter time frames and much of the delivery is being shifted online as a cost cutting measure. As a result even higher literacy and numeracy skill levels are needed for successful completion.

Sue Feeney