



TAFE Queensland submission to The Senate: Education and Employment Legislation Committee

INQUIRY INTO FREE TAFE BILL 2024 [PROVISIONS]





TAFE Queensland acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and respect the continuing connection to land, waters, cultures and family that First Nations peoples uphold. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We recognise that teaching and learning has taken place on Country for over 60,000 years and two-way learning is an important part of our reconciliation journey.

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This submission

The Senate referred the Free TAFE Bill 2024 (the Bill) to The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee on 21 November 2024, for inquiry and report by 27 February 2025. On 22 November 2024, the Committee invited TAFE Queensland to make a submission into its inquiry to the Bill.

As Queensland largest deliverer of Fee-Free TAFE, TAFE Queensland provides The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee this submission as an overview of student outcomes and experiences through Fee-Free TAFE.



Free TAFE Bill 2024

Outline

As stated in the explanatory memorandum, the Bill establishes an ongoing commitment by the Commonwealth to a grant of financial assistance to states and territories (the States) to deliver Free TAFE places in areas of local and national priority. This is subject to a state or territory entering into an agreement that sets out the terms and conditions on which a grant of financial assistance by the Commonwealth is to be provided.

With TAFE at the heart of the vocational education and training (VET) sector, Free TAFE supports Australians to acquire the skills and capabilities they need to obtain well paid, secure jobs, and ensures Australia has the skilled workforce it needs now and into the future. It reduces the cost-of-living and the debt that people can carry over their adult lives.

The Bill also acknowledges, in the Preamble and the object provision, the importance of TAFE and other public training institutions, and the commitment by the Commonwealth and the States to shared stewardship of the national VET system.

Structure of the Bill

The Bill comprises one schedule with a Preamble and 4 parts:

The Preamble outlines the importance of TAFE, VET and embedding Free TAFE as an enduring feature of the VET system.

Part 1 contains the preliminary provisions for the Fee Free TAFE Act 2024, including its object and definitions.

Part 2 sets out the type of financial assistance the Commonwealth will make towards Free TAFE places, payable to the States in accordance with and dependent upon Free TAFE agreements.

Part 3 defines ‘Free TAFE agreement’ and sets out what matters are to be dealt with in them, such as timeframes for Free TAFE places and funding, priority areas of study and student groups, and reporting obligations from the States to the Commonwealth.

Part 4 provides ‘Other matters’, including the requirement that the Minister must consult with the Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council before introducing any legislation to amend the Act.

Administration of Fee-Free TAFE

Fee-Free TAFE was initially part of the Commonwealth and States' 12-month Skills Agreement, and now falls under the Fee-Free TAFE Skills Agreement (FFTSA).

According to the FFTSA, the Commonwealth and States must agree on Bilateral Implementation Plans. Implementation plans are to include:

- agreed implementation arrangements so that there aren't service gaps across years
- allowance for variation to the Implementation Plan to 'assist States to manage demand for places, including by counting over-enrolments in areas of national priority towards places for the following year'.

For both the first tranche of enrolments (from 2023, Appendix A) and the second (from 2024, Appendix F) the States determine the courses to be funded under the agreement to deliver national and/or State-based priorities.

National areas of priority are listed as:

- care (aged care, childcare, health care, disability care)
- technology and digital
- hospitality and tourism
- construction
- agriculture
- sovereign capability (for example manufacturing, and Defence)
- VET workforce (from 1 January 2024).

The States administer learner eligibility for Fee-Free TAFE and prioritise the following groups:

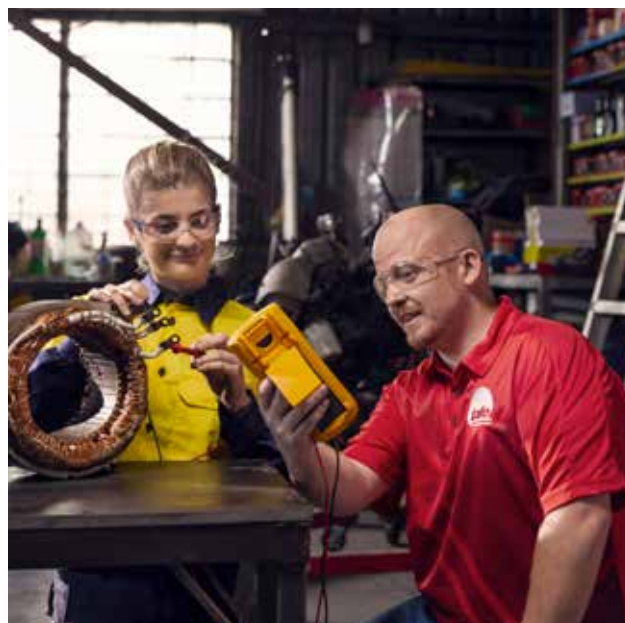
- First Nations Australians
- young people
- people out of work or receiving income support
- unpaid carers
- women facing economic insecurity
- women undertaking study in non-traditional fields
- people with disability
- certain categories of visa holders.

For tranche 1 (Appendix A) the States are to specify an initial list of courses and address how the list meets the national and/or State priority areas and how the list may be updated.

For tranche 2 (Appendix F) the States are to provide estimates of the number of places for each national priority, based on previous delivery patterns and indicative of expected demand.

Under the FFTSA, Fee-Free TAFE is effectively restricted to TAFE providers with a few exceptions.

TAFE Queensland



Introduction

TAFE Queensland is a Queensland Government statutory body, with a Board who report to the Queensland Minister for Finance, Trade, Employment and Training.

It is the largest, most experienced training provider in the state, with a history of serving Queensland's communities for more than 140 years. It offers more than 400 practical, industry-relevant courses from entry-level certificates to bachelor degrees. Training is delivered to over 144,000 students each year across more than 60 campus locations in Queensland. This includes 29,000 apprentices and trainees 'in training'.

Students from over 90 countries also chose to study with TAFE Queensland in Australia and abroad, reflecting TAFE Queensland's reputation for delivering world-class training.

TAFE Queensland consistently delivers high quality outcomes for students and employers. In 2023-24, these outcomes included:

- Competency completion rates at 87%
- Students employed or engaged in further study rate of 86.2%
- Student satisfaction rate of 89.5%
- Employer satisfaction rate of 93.1%.

TAFE Queensland is the largest provider of trade and technician training in the state. Its apprentices and trainees learn skills, expertise and technologies currently used in the workplace as teachers are both personally and professionally connected to many specialists and organisations in their industry.

As a key provider and innovator in the VET sector, TAFE Queensland supports the Queensland and Australian Governments to deliver on their commitments for economic growth and job creation in a rapidly changing global environment.

Industry experts

TAFE Queensland teachers are fully qualified with years of hands-on experience and practical knowledge. They are also passionate about passing on their wealth of knowledge to apprentices/trainees. With training developed in consultation with industry partners, employers can be confident that TAFE Queensland apprentices and trainees have the skills they are looking for.

Training facilities

TAFE Queensland's purpose-built training centres ensure students receive hands-on training using the latest equipment, tools and practices.

Student support

TAFE Queensland students have access to an extensive range of resources to assist with their studies. Support services include learning support, counselling services, Indigenous student support, and disability services.

Results

As a multi award-winning training provider with a 93.1% employer satisfaction rate, TAFE Queensland continues to deliver outstanding results for both our students and employers.

Fee-Free TAFE in Queensland



In Queensland, Fee-Free TAFE commenced in January 2023 allowing eligible Queenslanders to study priority skill sets and qualifications, providing opportunities to upskill, reskill or start a career in high-demand industries.

With over 70 industry-recognised courses to choose from, eligible Queensland Fee-Free TAFE students are gaining in-demand skills in high-priority areas, including health and science, business, cyber security and IT, education and community, agriculture, and service industries. On offer is a range of skill sets, certificates and diplomas with Fee-Free TAFE.

Fee-Free TAFE is part of Queensland's Free TAFE initiative, which also includes:

- Free Nursing
- Free Apprenticeships for Under 25s
- Free Construction Apprenticeships for Over 25s.

Qualifications and skill sets funded under Fee-Free TAFE are aligned to national and state skills priorities, in-demand areas, and emerging industries to enable Queenslanders to be job-ready and meet current and future skills needs. As industry priorities change and new qualifications and skill sets are developed, the qualification list may change.

In Queensland, Fee-Free TAFE is administered by the Department of Trade, Employment and Training (the department) and delivered through two public providers, TAFE Queensland and CQUniversity, as well in the initial tranche by Mater Education for the Diploma of Nursing.

In Queensland, funding for Fee-Free TAFE is comprised of State subsidy paid in arrears at completion of competencies and funding in lieu of student contribution fees managed by TAFE Queensland, also based on units of competency enrolled. Total funding is based on the individual units a student attempts. Where students withdraw from units of competency, these funds are made available to additional students to access via Fee-Free TAFE.

Fee-Free TAFE has seen increased participation in government funded qualifications at TAFE Queensland during 2023 and 2024 as reported by NCVER in the Government Funded students and courses [link](#).

TAFE Queensland qualification completions

In 2023-24, the overall successful unit of competency completion rate for TAFE Queensland students was 87%. For apprentices and trainees that rises to a 96% completion rate. In total, almost one million units of competency were completed by TAFE Queensland students during the year.

With the very strong labour market, low unemployment environment, and cost of living challenges, quite understandably people are frequently choosing to work over study and this can impact qualification completion.

In fact, the term ‘changed or started a new job’ was the number one reason cited by students during recent NCVET research¹ as to why they did not complete their training.

The data shows that around 14% of qualification part-completers did not complete their qualification as they had already achieved what they needed; that is, they had either completed all intended training, learnt the skills needed for a job or achieved their training goals. These should be seen as training success stories, despite non-completion of a qualification in the data.

The research also demonstrated that there are many other reasons for a student not to finish their study, such as:

- They may be seeking to complete only certain units of competency, as an example, for licensing reasons.
- They may be determining their best suited training options. For example, our Trade Taster programs is where we have almost 3,000 students each year undertake partial courses.
- Students, like all of us, face challenges that may cause them to cease their study, often temporarily to recommence at a later time.

Recognising the industry need to provide targeted training that supports Australia’s future workforce, Queensland’s Fee-Free TAFE funding is being applied to nine skill sets in addition to full qualifications.

One of these is the Battery Electric Vehicle Inspection and Servicing Skill Set (AURSS00064) which provides existing workers in the automotive industry, primarily small businesses, the skills and knowledge to safely inspect and service battery electric vehicle systems by safely depowering and reinitialising battery electric vehicles. By successfully completing the four accredited units of

competency that make up this skill set (AURETH101, AURETH102, AURETH103, AURETH107), automotive technicians ensure that the vehicles’ high voltage (HV) rechargeable energy storage system (RESS) is isolated in accordance with manufacturer’s specifications before commencing any work to these vehicles.

The units provide credit towards AUR32721 Certificate III in Automotive Electric Vehicle Technology and other qualifications that allow for selection of these units.

This Fee-Free TAFE skill set has achieved a 97% successful completion rate.

As at 31 December 2024	2023	2024
Commencements (calendar year)	42,069	27,764
Qualification / Skill Set completion	13,312	5,221
Students still in training	5,498	11,625
Students inactive / completed partial qualification as intended	23,259	10,918

¹Wibrow, B, Hall, M & Griffin, T 2024, The student journey: the many faces of completion and non-completion in VET, NCVET, Adelaide

Fee-Free TAFE Transforming Lives





Kerryn Griffis

Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management

A pancreatic cancer survivor, Kerryn Griffis is also a single mother-of-five who seized the opportunity Fee-Free TAFE provided to study a Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management to pursue her lifelong passion for conservation.

Kerryn has always had a deep love for the bush stemming from her grandparents, who were tour operators in the Northern Territory. Her admiration of nature continued into her adult life, with the former stay-at-home mum spending much of her time in the bush practicing macro-photography with insects, pollen and fungi.

“I’d wanted to study conservation for ages, but it was full fee, which put me off. My friends kept telling me I should become a park ranger, but anything I was interested in doing was only available down south and too expensive. When Fee-Free TAFE was announced I had another look online and it was free, so I jumped on it,” Kerryn said.

“There’s no way I would have been able to study without the funding, so it was amazing that the course I wanted to do was fee free. It felt like a sign from the universe that this is what I was meant to be doing,” she said.

Kerryn is now employed by a local ecological restoration specialist and is working in the industry she is passionate about.

“TAFE really has been lifechanging for me. It’s opened so many doors for me and for that I’m so grateful,” she concluded.



Ana Jensen

Diploma of Nursing (HLT54121)

After working in the construction industry for over a decade, 37-year-old Ana Jensen bravely decided to change careers and follow her unyielding passion for nursing and fascination with the complexities of the human body - a passion she believed was her true calling.

Despite her clear vision, Ana had to overcome several challenges, including undiagnosed learning difficulties, which made her anxious about studying.

“I always knew deep down that nursing was my true calling, but the fear of repeating my school experience and potentially wasting my time held me back,” Ana said.

“Fee-Free TAFE presented a viable path forward, removing financial hurdles and providing a flexible, accommodating learning environment.

“The flexible study options at TAFE Queensland are a game-changer. Whether it’s online learning, face-to-face sessions, or catching up with class recordings, they’ve made education accessible for everyone.”

“I’m so grateful for the progressive learning pathway TAFE provided. It’s allowed me to thrive,” she said.

For Ana, the Diploma on Nursing (HLT54121) serves as a crucial first step toward her goal of completing the Bachelor of Nursing.



Aaron Cormack

Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work (CHC43515)

With the aid of Fee-Free TAFE, 43-year-old Aaron Cormack found a new career calling in mental health, driven by his passion for reading, learning, and travelling.

Working in banking and finance for eight years, with stints in retail and the printing industry, Aaron found his calling in the mental health sector while volunteering as a Peer Worker with Queensland Health's MatchWorks.

His decision to study with TAFE Queensland came after encouragement from his line manager who has supported him throughout his career-changing journey.

"I decided to study and become a positive role model, make a difference in the community and share my lived experience with people to help inspire hope and recovery," Aaron said.

"The training at TAFE Queensland was fantastic. I attended classes twice a week, and the workload was manageable. The training facilities are first-class, and my educator was incredibly knowledgeable."

"My course has prepared me to work in the industry with confidence, implementing the practical skills, theory and knowledge in an empathetic and constructive way," he said.

Aaron's career aspirations include becoming a team leader with Queensland Health and returning to volunteer with MatchWorks in the hope of helping more participants navigate the mental health system and inspiring hope and recovery.



Jaxon Watt

Certificate IV in Cyber Security (22603VIC)

Jaxon Watt's journey to a technology career began when he enrolled in a Certificate II in Autonomous Technologies (10935NAT) through the TAFE at Schools program in 2023.

Through the course, Jaxon gained a understanding of software, hardware, and the frameworks that support autonomous environments. But ultimately, he realised his passion lay in understanding these systems and how they could be applied in real-world innovations.

Consequently, after completing the course Jaxon enrolled in a Certificate IV in Cyber Security (22603VIC) and is accessing Fee-Free TAFE to continue his career pathway.

"Pivoting to cyber security felt like a natural extension of my interests. While autonomous technologies gave me a broad foundation of skills, cyber security lets me dive deeper into the theoretical side of things, which I enjoy," Jaxon said.

"I enjoy coming to TAFE because the hands-on, practical units are different from regular schooling. The learning is oriented toward my interests and passions, which made studying more engaging, as did the adult learning environment. And being around like-minded classmates made it easier for me to connect and make friends."

"I'm hoping to use the money I saved to pay for my Bachelor of Cyber Security studies at university after I've completed my TAFE studies," he said.

TAFE Queensland is helping Jaxon turn his curiosity into a career by giving him the technical skills, knowledge and confidence to gain employment in one of the world's most in-demand sectors.



Sam Alexander

Certificate III in Outside of School Hours Care (10983NAT)

After 19 years working as a manager in a roadside assistance call centre, 48-year-old mother of two Sam Alexander was made redundant.

In reassessing her options, Sam wanted to grow her skills and return to work in a career she was interested in, enjoyed doing, and was able to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

“I was volunteering at the school tuckshop when I saw an ad come up for an administrator role at the school’s after school hours care service, which sounded perfect for me. It was not far from home and gave me the opportunity to get back into the workplace after having time off,” Sam said.

“I love it. It’s just clicked with me. The work/life balance is incredible for someone who has school aged children; I pretty much work school hours, am finished most days by 5pm, and it’s flexible around me and my family,” she said.

Eager to enhance her career, Sam progressed into the 2IC (second in charge) service administrator role and was encouraged by her manager to gain a qualification and grow her knowledge and skills within the industry.

“I really wanted to do the role justice and gain more understanding of the childcare side. I had heard that the Certificate III in Outside of School Hours Care (10983NAT) was subsidised under Fee-Free TAFE funding, meaning I could study online, at my own pace and at no cost.”

“Even though I was doing it all online, I never felt like I was doing it alone; I had the same teacher throughout all of my units, and she was super responsive if we emailed through questions and would happily arrange Zoom meetings with me and the other students if we didn’t quite grasp something or felt like we were struggling,” she said.

Sam said she is proud to have her qualification and with it, a greater understanding of the work the educational team within her service does every day.

“I get a lot of satisfaction from my work – you can really see the kids’ character and personalities shine, and you get to help guide and shape their future, which is a pretty great feeling,” she concluded.



Terri Aspery

Diploma of Nursing (HLT54121)

With over a decade of experience as an Assistant Nurse for Queensland Health, Terri Aspery saw firsthand the importance of nursing interventions in improving patient outcomes.

Using Fee-Free TAFE funding, Terri chose to enhance her career and start her journey to becoming a Registered Nurse by first enrolling into a Diploma of Nursing (HLT54121) for free.

“TAFE Queensland’s hands-on approach to training was invaluable. The practical skills and support from our teachers made such a difference—they really pushed us to take our learning further and prepared us for real-world situations,” Terri said.

“The diploma polished my knowledge and helped me understand the importance of evidence-based practice in healthcare. It has been incredibly beneficial in helping me advance my skills and confidence in the field.”

“Fee-Free TAFE came at the perfect time for me. Without it, the financial burden of studying, travelling, and accommodation would have been a major obstacle. It gave me the incentive to pursue my nursing qualification and follow my dream,” she said.

Since graduating, Terri has continued her work with Queensland Health and is now focused on advancing her career in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, as well as exploring opportunities in subacute care.



Jessica Sloper

Certificate IV in Adult Tertiary Preparation

Jessica Sloper, a mother of eight, used Fee-Free TAFE funding to embark on an inspiring study journey to inspire her children and fulfil her dream of helping people.

After 17 years as a stay-at-home mum, Jessica initially considered joining the police force to help people, but her ADHD diagnosis led her to pursue a career as a paramedic instead.

Determined to make a difference, she began studying with TAFE Queensland to develop essential study skills and find an alternate pathway into university to study Paramedicine.

“TAFE’s teachers are incredible. They’re patient, adapt their communication to different learning styles, and are always ready to help you understand,” Jessica said.

“With the money I’ve saved thanks to the Fee-Free TAFE funding, I’ve bought a laptop, stationery, a bag, and I’ve paid for transport to South Bank from Caboolture. I’m very grateful for it, and it’s made studying easier.”

Jessica also accessed TAFE Queensland’s AccessAbility support services, which helped her develop an individual support plan and provide practical assistance and advice to help her manage her ADHD while studying.

Reflecting on her journey, Jessica is proud of how far she’s come and hopeful her children see her as an example of resilience and dedication.

“I want them to see that you can keep growing and learning, no matter where you start,” concluded Jessica.

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