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Submission to the Committee of Enquiry into the role of TAFE

My personal story illustrates the importance of TAFE in the life of one individual, but I know that many individuals have experienced positive life changing experience via TAFE.

My parents were working class folk with no formal education beyond the early years of primary school. Yet they understood that education was the key to improving one's life chances so they encouraged me to focus on learning. Despite this I did poorly at school, but I on leaving school I did manage to secure an apprenticeship as a carpenter.

As part of my apprenticeship it was necessary for me to take a TAFE course which in those days took four years of part time study. I grew to like carpentry, but to my surprise I developed a great love for the aesthetics of timber and of building. While I was working through my apprenticeship I also studied music. My aesthetic awakening as a carpenter and my experience in music changed the trajectory of my life. I eventually became a high school music teacher and, with more study, became a music academic, a field in which I worked for more than 30 years. During my life as a music academic, I continued to work with wood on projects around our home.

Important to the development of my aesthetic sensibility was a section of our TAFE course in which we studied the shapes and forms of classical architecture and how these shapes influenced the design of buildings in the modern world - especially the shape of skirtings, architraves and so on in Australian houses. Oddly, we apprentices thought that this was irrelevant to the work we were to do, but for me it was very important - it inspired in me a sense of wonder.

TAFE was really my only choice for study at the time: and it played a very important role in my life. I would hope that TAFE will continue to serve young people who do not have strong academic records.

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