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**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Education and Employment Inquiry into the role of technical and  
Further Education system and its operation**

Made on behalf of the staff of the Foundation Studies Section at Sydney Institute of TAFE,  
Ultimo campus.

**The development of skills in the Australian economy**

Foundation Studies is the section of NSW TAFE that delivers a core program of basic literacy, numeracy and computer classes. Foundation Studies provides an entry point for many students who need to develop their literacy and numeracy skills before they are able to enter vocational programs. This may include people who are changing jobs, upgrading current skills or people who are seeking work and did not, for a variety of reasons, develop these skills during their schooling.

The work done by teachers in this section of TAFE also directly supports the development of skills for many students engaged in vocational programs in the TAFE system. Many students have the practical skills needed to satisfy the requirements of their vocational course but do not have the literacy, numeracy and computer skills to read course materials or complete written assessment tasks. In the Learner Support programs that we run we assist students with these demands of their vocational programs.

This Learner Support role is a particular and valued component of TAFE NSW provision. The private sector does not offer this support and thus many people are denied training or fail courses simply because of the literacy/numeracy demands of the course materials.

Many of our students are from the most disadvantaged sections of the Australian community. They are mostly not well connected, articulate nor politically powerful people. Many would not feel comfortable writing to a newspaper or speaking in public about their needs and aspirations.

**The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects**

Many of our students are from the most disadvantaged sections of the Australian community. Participation in literacy/numeracy classes provides them with skills for social engagement, personal and family life as well as forming the basis for vocational skills.

88 % of students in our Course in Language, Literacy and Numeracy program are from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds. 96% are from NESB in our Preparation for Work and Study Certificate 1 and II programs, 98% of our learner support students are NESB.

I spoke to a student today who is a skilled sewing machine operator. She is unable to get work because she can't read or write even though this is not needed for the day-to-day performance of her job.

Many of our students are people who have worked and contributed to Australian society for many years but find that the skill requirements of their work have changed and their lack of literacy/numeracy skills means that they are no longer regarded as suitable for the job.

Foundation Studies programs have been systematically reduced and had funding cuts over many years. Each year this means we are able to offer fewer literacy and numeracy classes and less support for vocational students. Pressure from management also means more students in classes. Students are expected to learn foundation literacy/numeracy skills in educationally impossible time frames.

The following table shows the impact of the cuts on our section and thus on our students and teachers.

<b>Before 2005</b>	<b>Students per class</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Students per class</b>	<b>Hours lost per week</b>
Night Literacy 2x6 hours /week	8	Night Literacy 1x2.5 hours/week	10	9.5
Night PWS 2/6 hours /week	10	Night PWS 1X2.5 hours/week	19	9.5
Night computers 1x6 hours /week	8	Night computers 2x2.5 hour/week	10	1
Lunchtime computers 1hour x4days a week	8	cancelled	0	4
Day Literacy 6x6 hours/week	8	Day Literacy 4x5 hours/week	10	16
Small group literacy 3 hours/week	4	cancelled	0	3
Day Numeracy 2x6 hours/week	8	Day Numeracy 1x2.5 hours/week	11	9.5
Day Computers 4x3 hours/week	8	Day computers 4x2.5 hours/week	10	2
PWS daytime 3x18 hours/week	12	PWS daytime 3x18 hours/week	20	0
Learner support in LearnSpace 8 hours/week		Learner support in LearnSpace 4 hours/week		4
<b>Total hours lost</b>				<b>62.5</b>

Literacy and Numeracy programs have become more focussed on work requirements and the social, personal and family aspects of students' learning have been totally removed from the educational discussion.

**The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access training and skills and through them a pathway to employment**

TAFE NSW has stated that it has an overarching social inclusion commitment to maximise participation and development opportunities for TAFE NSW students and communities. TAFE NSW is supposed to provide socially inclusive programs and services to enable students to reach their potential regardless of individual circumstance or background.

TAFE NSW states it is committed to supporting lifelong learning, enhancing access to education and training, increasing employment pathways and building social capacity.

This must translate into greater provision of literacy and numeracy classes as well as the provision of learner support for students in vocational programs. This needs to be taught by qualified literacy and numeracy teachers.

Small classes are essential in this area of education. Beginning learners cannot learn in classes where a teacher lectures or delivers with a PowerPoint presentation. Most of our students need individual or small group programs with a learning program tailored to their specific needs. They cannot learn in classes of thirty or online. Small classes are particularly at risk in NSW as a result of the “thin market” approach being adopted by the NSW government.

### **The operation of a competitive training market**

The private sector is not interested in small classes for low income students. They do not provide the support many of our students need, notably personal and career counselling, disability support and individual or small group programs.

The operation of a competitive market in NSW has already seen the support services for TAFE students slashed. Support staff have their jobs threatened or have already been made redundant. Counselling services, outreach programs, multicultural programs and basic skill programs are all under threat. These are the very programs that make TAFE, the public provider, such a strong and valued service to the community.

### **Those jurisdictions in which State Governments have announced funding decisions which may impact on their operation and viability**

NSW TAFE has increased the fees for many courses, which will put them outside the reach of most of our group of students. The general increase in many course fees this year was around 10%. However, the concession fee available to these students has doubled from \$50 to \$100.

Most literacy/numeracy students cannot afford the high cost of vocational programs and to enrol them in these programs under the proposed voucher system when they do not possess the skills to enable them to successfully participate in class or complete assessments would be criminal.

In this new way of viewing vocational education, literacy/numeracy skills are not seen as ‘vocational’ skills. They are not marketable and slip off the agenda. However, they underpin all learning and must not be seen as expendable or a side issue to be foisted off to other institutions. They are, and should continue to be, a fundamental and valued part of our core business as an education and training provider.