



To the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Inquiry into the role of TAFE system and its operation

I am a Head Teacher of ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages)/Languages at Granville TAFE, Sydney and welcome this opportunity to state how important TAFE is to the local, state and national community and economy.

1 The development of skills in the Australian economy

Granville TAFE is located in south west Sydney, with a very high population of migrants and high unemployment. These people are at risk of never contributing to the Australian economy because of the barriers of language and culture, unless they learn English and vocational skills. TAFE provides this.

Most of our students have attended On Arrival English courses at other providers before they come to TAFE. The Granville ESOL section offers Cert s. 1, 2, 3, and 4 English courses, providing literacy and numeracy in a cultural context, to enable students to progress to employment or further education.

The strength of TAFE is that it offers a natural pathway to vocational courses and also offers services to support to students who need assistance to achieve their educational and employment goals. These students would otherwise be underachieving and /or remaining lifelong welfare recipients.

The Cert 1- Cert 4 courses are vital for overseas qualified migrants to reach a level of English whereby they can participate in the workforce as soon as possible.

Granville TAFE offers Arabic Interpreting courses and successful students can be NAATI accredited and go directly into the workforce.

TAFE also offers pathways to younger students who attend Migrant Youth courses, develop their literacy and numeracy and then progress to other preparatory or mainstream courses.

TAFE offers pathways and support to employment.

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

Stop TAFE Cuts

Recently a French friend , who is a highly successful financial consultant, confided “Those ESOL classes made all the difference for me when I first migrated to Australia”.

TAFE also offers people who have missed out on an education a second chance to achieve their potential and contribute to our society. The strength of TAFE is that it offers a natural pathway to vocational courses.

A young Afghani woman came to see me, demanding entry into a Cert 4 English course. She was determined to make up for her limited education and options in her own country. After being tested we persuaded her that she needed to start at a lower level. She studied ESOL Cert 2 for 6 months, then I taught her in Cert 3 English for Further Study and watched her English improve and her general knowledge widen. She then went on to successfully complete Cert 4 English for Academic Purposes. It took 18 months to prepare her for further study but she is now doing well at NSW University.

At the moment I am teaching an African aged care worker who cannot progress at work because of her limited English. She thought/ hoped she could work without improving her English, but now realises that she needs TAFE , its support services and its vocational training. She intends to finish Cert 2 in ESOL, enrol in an Aged Care course or another English course and perhaps later study Nursing.

Outreach courses, disability officers, counsellors, multicultural officers are all vital for many of our students to achieve successful outcomes, but during the last couple of years support services have been more difficult to access because of funding cuts.

Since last year we have lost a number of female students (I have the names of 8)who are part of the JET scheme. The government will not pay for childcare because these women were enrolled in courses at the same certificate level as before. They are seen as “not progressing” even though they are enrolled in appropriate courses for their language level. It is important to recognise that due to lack of education, settlement issues including psychological and cultural pressures, the progress of these students is NOT linear. Sometimes they move sideways to consolidate their language skills before they move onto the next certificate level.

Through partnerships with vocational sections ESOL and ABE teachers supply critical support to mainstream students who have language, literacy or numeracy deficits so they can successfully course complete.

Continued funding cuts reduces our capacity to provide appropriate courses to disadvantaged students.

3 The operation of a competitive training market.

One of my duties is to assess, interview and place prospective students. We always recommend that students take advantage of the 510 hours of free on- arrival English

Stop TAFE Cuts

which is offered by private providers. However, again and again students say “ I want to come to TAFE. My friends say TAFE classes are good. Now I am not learning. The classes have many different levels together and sometimes there are not enough desks”. We are seeing a definite trend that these students have poorer literacy skills than before.

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

I fear that with entitlement funding starting next year in NSW , TAFE teachers will be under pressure to produce “results” which will reduce the integrity of our courses . Students may be “passed” because our funding and their government support depends on it.

It is important to recognise that due to lack of education, settlement issues including psychological and cultural pressures, the progress of these students is NOT linear. Sometimes they need to move sideways to consolidate their language skills before they can move onto the next certificate level.

I am also concerned that our highly qualified part –time teachers will be replaced by assessors and teachers.

There is no cheap way to provide quality education and training.

TAFE plays a critical role in providing a skilled workforce and the ESOL/ABE and Foundation studies supply the underpinning knowledge.