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Shaun Thorpe

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To the Standing Committee on Education and Employment,

I am writing in response to the Government's call for submissions to assist the Federal Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education in Australia. In addressing the Inquiry's terms of reference I would like to share my personal experience working in a Victorian TAFE. In particular I wish address the following terms of refference:

- the development of oppotunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects;
- 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;
- those jurisdictions in which State Governments have announced funding decisions which may impact on their operation and viability.

Prior to this year I was working at a regional Victorian TAFE teaching in a very successful program for adolescents. Gippsland Technical College (g-tec), which had its origins as a Federal Government Technical College, is now part of Advanced TAFE (Formaly East Gippsland TAFE).

The g-tec program enabled adolescents and young adults to pursue a career in the trade sector while completing their Secondary education. For many of the students I worked with at g-tec, mainstream schooling was no longer catering to their needs and without the alternative education option of g-tec their post compulsory education outcomes would be limited, with the most likely outcome for them to be unemployed and on welfare. The Technical College provided students with the opportunity to re-engage with education, complete year 12, gain the skills they need for employment and gain the life skills to become productive members of society.

Unfortunately due to the short-sighted Victorian TAFE cuts by the Liberal/National Coalition the g-tec program has been severely affected. Program budgets have been slashed and student fees have quadrupled.

In implementing cost savings measures the TAFE has combined students in the g-tec program with other inappropriate youth and adult programs, watering down the effectiveness of the program and the ability of teachers to engage students. Teachers have also begun teaching across campuses via videolink which was obviously a very inappropriate method of engaging tactile learners who are yet to become independent learners. Cost savings measures such as these have ripped the guts of the Technical School model and have severely impacted the long term viability.

This has all happened even though Victorians were promised the TAFE cuts would not affect youth programs. The unreasonable program fees coupled with the also excessive increases in trade training fees has pushed the cost this program out of the reach of the majority of the students who would benefit most from this program. The inflated prices means the program is now only available to the wealthy.

Unfortunately because of the uncertainty in the TAFE sector and the failing Technical College program due to underfunding, I had no choice but to leave the TAFE sector at the end of last year and seek more stable employment in the Victorian Secondary Education sector. As a young teacher who has invested a lot of time into the TAFE program and in developing specialised applied learning teaching skills, I found it very distressing having to leave the Technical College. I had no choice however but to switch career directions for more stable employment.

I am strongly troubled by the Victorian Government's decision to slash TAFE funding and the long term effects it will have on our society. Aside from displaying recklessness about the economy's future by not supporting the skills shortage, I am also greatly concerned about the social consequences these decisions will have in our society. I would like to see the Victorian Government's funding cuts reversed and to see the Federal Government implement a national standardised approach to educational funding.

Yours Sincerely

Shaun Thorpe