

To:



The Committee Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

To the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation

I am writing to make a submission on the role of TAFE and its operation. I write as an individual and a current full time teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at TAFE, Granville, one of nine colleges in the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. I write from my experiences as a teacher serving one of the most disadvantaged regions in terms of language, skills, literacy and numeracy, educational background and income. I am also informed by my own reasoned perspective upon current issues surrounding TAFE and vocational education and training (VET education) in general.

TAFE has long formed the backbone of the VET sector and is still the main provider of VET education in Australia. However, changes over the last twenty years have undermined and continue to seriously undermine its role and ability to provide on a number of fronts. These changes include:

- The privatisation of the education market, particularly the VET sector, that has seen the tendering out of VET and other courses to private providers; this has led to an overall decline in training standards.
- Recent changes to funding, in particular the changes that have been implemented in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland whereby funds are allocated on the basis of student course completions and TAFEs are forced to compete against private providers with far lower operating costs (basically because of underpaying teachers offering inferior standards of training)\
- The increasingly onerous demands of proving and re-proving 'quality' in order to compete means teachers' and head teachers' time is increasingly overburdened by the need to learn and administer quality accountability systems.

Whilst these are relevant specifically to points D and E below, this is a theme that returns repeatedly.

In this submission, I will write briefly about TAFE as a provider of VET training skills (part A), and then focus more specifically on the role of TAFE as a provider of language, literacy and numeracy skills, and on TAFE as a provider of pathways to higher education, other vocational training and employment. I will use my experience of these contexts to then reflect critically on the role of TAFE

in a competitive education market, and also on the impacts of changes to government funding of TAFE.

A. The Development of Skills in the Australian Economy.

TAFE is and should be supported to remain as the pre-eminent provider of skills in the Australian economy. TAFE has grown over the last hundred years and has been set up specifically to provide these sorts of training needs. It is true to say that we have had, until this point in time, one of the best VET education provision systems in the world, through our TAFE system. For example, a recent speech (6 September, 2012 to the TAFE Directors National Conference) by Senator The Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, highlighted the reputation that TAFE has across the world, and certainly within Asia, for VET education.

When I am in Asia on official visits or meeting incoming delegations the two things I am most asked about are Australia's VET system and our TAFE network. Delegations from Malaysia to Mongolia quickly turn the conversation to vocational education and training. It's a topic the Chinese Government, the Malaysian Government, the Indian Government and the Mongolian Government are keen to pursue. That interest is evident at larger international gatherings too.

(Source: TAFE Director's national Conference.

<http://minister.innovation.gov.au/chrisevans/Speeches/Pages/TAFEDirectorsNationalConference.aspx>).

It is why we can market TAFE internationally and attract international students to VET courses such as in hospitalities and community services. These are two areas where the TAFE institute within which I work, South Western Sydney, gets the bulk of its international students from. I know anecdotally that it is also the case elsewhere.

TAFE has the infrastructure, the teaching expertise, the curricula, the bureaucracy and administration, the buildings and facilities and the resources to continue to provide VET education ad infinitum. I cannot understand why our governments appear to be hell bent on destroying something that has been working and working well. It can be streamlined, but it is working; yet privatisation of education and changes to funding particularly the extremely flawed entitlement-funding model are seriously challenging this.

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

One of the most important roles of TAFE is to provide opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and to increase their opportunities within life and employment. Unfortunately, again due to funding cuts and to an over-emphasis on economic prerogatives, this important role of TAFE is under even further threat.

Within our ESOL classes, one of the major populations we have served is middle-aged and older migrant females, often who have been in Australia for more than 10 years, and whose children have grown up here. They usually have low or fossilised language skills. Their focus is not necessarily on gaining employment skills because often they are able to work in industries such as doing piecework or factory work where English language skills are not important, and where the contacts come through their own communities. Rather, these women would like simply to have more functionality in society. They may not have attended English classes upon arrival, instead going straight to work out of necessity. Getting more English skills from TAFE classes serves these women to become more literate and better functioning citizens. For example, during elections such people do not understand who they are voting for, what the issues are or what the various parties say and do. They simply vote based on what their husbands tell them to, or what their friends say, or whether they simply like or dislike someone. They often need help with the voting process. Similarly, they need their family or friends to help them deal with institutions such as banks and government departments. TAFE language classes provide such people opportunities to improve their engagement with society. In my classes over the years I have taught many such women.

Sadly, this clientele are being pushed aside due to the focus on 'jobs' and 'employability'. In order to guarantee continued funding for our courses, even under current funding arrangements, we need to be able to demonstrate 'outcomes' in the form of students getting jobs, or going into vocational courses. In selecting students for higher courses, particularly for courses such as Cert 2 in Skills for Work and Training, or Cert 3 in English for Further Studies, or Cert 3 in English for Employment and Training, which are high demand courses, we need to discriminate against these types of clients as they are not work or study focused. The courses are primarily for people who are looking for work or looking to improve their English language skills such that they can study VET courses.

Similarly too, recent changes in funding have meant that lifestyle-oriented courses are no longer offered as they are not seen to be contributing outcomes or value for money. Under the recent massive funding cuts outlined by the NSW government, funding was withdrawn from fine arts courses causing whole sections to close. I will use this example again below in section E, but the upshot of such course closures is that opportunities for people to improve their lives disappear.

C. 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.

Currently, one of the most important roles of TAFE is to provide access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education and VET education that they otherwise would not get. I see this first hand. South Western Sydney Institute, in particular Granville College, serves one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country. This in particular is because of the high number of

people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Our TAFE campus is dominated by NESB students in various courses, and this can be attested by simply walking through the college grounds at lunchtime on any given day. Another significant group we serve with our courses is women, in particular NESB female students. Day courses within the ESOL section contain more than 90% women. TAFE offers these students a pathway to courses and to economic independence.

One of the most important underlying sets of skills relates to the increasing role of TAFE in providing language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) support and instruction for students. Major underfunding of public education has led to somewhat of a crisis in LLN standards within the community, something that is well known and something that the recent Gonski review attempts to address. As a teacher within this sector, I can see that students enter TAFE needing LLN support from one of several directions.

1. They have been let down by the current education system, or become disengaged from it for some reason;
2. They have genuine learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia;
3. They have other disabilities that have affected their learning, such as hearing or vision impairment;
4. They are disadvantaged due to family or socio-economic circumstances;
5. They are school aged students or immediately post-school aged students from families that are of non-English speaking background (NESB), and they have not been able to learn a high enough standard of English through the school intensive language centres;
6. They are migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is more difficult for students from backgrounds that emphasise oral cultures; language backgrounds that write from right to left; students who due to wars, unrest and persecution had their education disrupted; or mature aged students who had to work once they arrived in Australia to support their families, and missed out on learning English. These may often be middle-aged females facing age and language barriers.

All of these students need LLN support.

A major current emphasis within the system is the big push towards employability. In order to gain employability skills, or VET skills, a certain level of LLN is required. Our culture is highly literacy dependent, and within VET areas also a degree of numeracy and oral skills is mandatory. Students are expected to read complex texts in order to gain their VET qualifications, to write assignments and reports, to interact at work with competence, to perform complex calculations and so on.

There are also various measures we use to rank students' LLN skills. In relation to language learning, we use the International Second Language Proficiency Rating, or ISLPR. For literacy, numeracy, learning skills and oracy we use the Australian Core Skills Framework ratings and indicators (ACSF levels from 1 to 5). Regarding the ACSF, the following quote, from the Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Australian Core Skills Framework webpage, is pertinent:

The 2006 international Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) found that approximately 40 per cent of employed and 60 per cent of unemployed Australians had poor or very poor (Level 1 or 2) English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills. Level 3 is regarded as the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy" (p.5, Australian Bureau of Statistics 4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2006). Improving LLN skills contributes to more effective participation in training or in the labour force with associated benefits for both individuals and society.

Most VET courses are geared for students with ACSF skill levels at 3 (year 10 equivalent) or higher, particularly for Certificate 3 and above level courses. Increasingly, students are entering these courses with ACSF levels of 2 or even lower. For example, we have had students within our ESOL courses who had been sent there by vocational teachers in order to improve their English, because they were attempting ACSF level 3 or 4 courses, with literacy levels of 2 or below (even if their oracy levels were 3). This is a common scenario.

There are various reasons why students do this. These include pressure on students from Centrelink and Job Network providers and the student's own desire to move ahead or their own miscalculation of their ability. Also and increasingly, the imposition of funding restrictions through new funding arrangements via state and federal governments puts pressure on TAFE sections and teachers to enrol as many students and pass them as possible, or else they will not have a job. This will be dealt with in more detail below in section E.

Similarly, most students enrolling in basic ESOL courses enter with ACSF levels of 1 or 2 across their various skills (oracy, reading, writing, learning skills, numeracy), which translates as ISLPR levels of 0, 1, 1+ and 2 for language abilities (oracy and literacy) (a native speaker would be level 5). There is a considerable gap for most students in order to be competent enough to succeed in VET courses.

Some examples of my experience in providing this support for students include providing tutorial support for students studying Certificate IV and Diploma of Business Studies. These students had literacy levels of ACSF 2 yet really needed ACSF 3 or 4 to do their assignments and be functional in a work context. Also, I have at times taught students in ESOL classes with ISLPR levels lower than 1+

who had attempted Certificate 3 courses in other sections and even passed. For example, I had a Certificate 2 student who had passed most subjects in the Diploma of Accounting, relying predominantly on her work experience in the area and her numeracy skills, yet whose oracy and literacy skills were ACSF 2 and ISLPR 2, which meant she could not pass all subjects in her Diploma.

TAFE also formerly offered specific English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, where English tutorial support was offered in conjunction with vocational skills training. These courses have sadly fallen under the axe of funding cuts. For example, our Institute Multicultural Unit formerly offered an ESP course for students to do Certificate IV in Community Services. This led to the Diploma of Community Services. This sector is one where there is a lot of work in the community, particularly for NESB people with the required skills because their bilingual and bicultural skills are highly valued for the job. I have had several graduates of ESOL and English for Academic Purposes courses in recent years go straight into that ESP program in Community Services and succeed, both in the course and in finding fulfilling work. However, this program has lost funding under recent changes and no longer exists.

The literacy skills gap is a chasm for many NESB students. This in particular is so for students from the following backgrounds:

- students from backgrounds that emphasise oral cultures, such as from some African cultures;
- language backgrounds that write from right to left, e.g. from Arabic or Persian language backgrounds;
- students who due to wars, poverty, unrest and persecution had their education disrupted; or
- mature aged students who had to work once they arrived in Australia to support their families, and missed out on learning English.

For many of these students, the literacy requirements of many VET (let alone university) courses are beyond their capacity, even if they have practical skills that would be assessable in a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment. I have taught many such students. These include:

- a Cambodian Chinese man who was fluent in six languages, had basic literacy in Mandarin and Cantonese, who could hold a critical discussion in broken English on current national and international affairs, yet whose schooling had been disrupted by war from the age of 8; he also had trade skills yet his family responsibilities affected his ability to learn enough English literacy to do a VET course and be assessed for RPL;
- an Iraqi electrician who could wire a house yet whose literacy, even in Arabic was low due to having to leave school at the age of 11;
- an Iraqi mechanic who had to leave school at 9, similar to the student above;

- a former Iraqi military lawyer and police commissioner, now aged in his 50s, looking after a daughter with serious mental illness, whose literacy in English was ACSF 2, oracy 3;
- an Iranian electrician who had extensive trades experience within the petroleum industry, who also had other trades skills, yet whose ISLPR was 1+. Due to his sense of failure and frustration, he was depressed and having family and marital problems; his daughter was also diagnosed diabetic. His wife had been studying English for Academic Purposes as her language level was much higher than his, but ultimately she had to leave her studies due to their family issues.

Without TAFE, such students have little chance of ever getting off welfare. However, in some of the cases above it is the TAFE system that has provided viable pathways to employment and better opportunities for these people.

- The Cambodian man was driving taxis when I last saw him (I've encountered him at two colleges) and had enrolled in an automotive mechanic course, had obtained some RPL, had been told to improve his English, was doing evening language study and was slowly working towards his trade certificate;
- The Iraqi electrician had been one of our perpetual students, due to lack of learning skills, but had improved enough to be working as a trades assistant, whilst still attending literacy classes through the ABE section;
- The Iranian electrician's son completed his apprenticeship and Electrical Trades certificate, also at Granville TAFE, obtained his electrician's license and then started a business with his father offering home maintenance and electrical services. The wife quit her English studies but completed Certificate 3 in Business Administration instead, then administered the family business. Their family situation improved greatly.

Without TAFE, these types of success stories would be impossible.

TAFE provides much of the training in these basic skills courses that enables students to go and study other courses within TAFE and hence become more enabled to get work. By providing courses that directly teach stand alone English language skills through lower level ESOL courses, Certificate 3 in English for Further Studies and Certificate 4 in English for Academic Purposes, then also through the Adult Basic Education (ABE) section, TAFE provides important pathways for students into vocational training courses, higher education courses and employment. For example, I teach on and coordinate the Certificate IV in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at Granville TAFE. This course focuses on providing students with academic literacy skills to succeed at universities within Australia. From our student cohorts, over 90% go either directly to courses within Australian universities or to Certificate IV or Diploma level courses within TAFE. From last year's semester 2 EAP class of 17 graduating students in Granville, 7 went onto higher education courses at Australian universities and

the remainder (bar one, who is pregnant) are doing vocational courses within TAFE. From last year's class, three students are doing Cert IV in accounting in TAFE and intend to complete the advanced diploma course. These students told me they were happy doing this, even though they could have entered university, because they recognised the practical value of the education taught within TAFE. The value of having more than one accredited qualification was also appealing to these students. During our EAP course, we had a guest lecturer from the University of Sydney accounting department come and tell us the students who come through the TAFE pathway, whether they are NESB or not, are always better prepared to cope with university studies. They also gain academic credit for their TAFE studies. For our graduates in this pathway, there were only benefits from continuing their higher studies through TAFE.

Similarly, more than 75% of students in Business Administration courses within Granville TAFE were graduates of the ESOL section Certificate 2 in Routine English Language Skills, Certificate 2 in Skills for Work and Training or Certificate 3 in English for Further Studies. Many eventually find work, for example, I have been served by previous students of mine in Coles and Woolworths. Without these pathways in to skills and employment, these students would remain clients on welfare.

D. The operation of a competitive training market.

I believe strongly in the importance of public education; it is a fundamental responsibility of governments to plan for the future needs of both industry and society, and to provide education to its population to see to it that no section falls behind due to any disadvantage. I can also understand the need to do this in the most efficient possible way, but this should not compromise the most important need, that being to provide the right education opportunities to the populace, of the highest possible standard.

That said, the privatisation of the education market has been one of the worst things to happen within the VET sector. It has achieved the clichés of 'choice' and 'efficiency' in the market but at the cost of quality, of genuine educational considerations and ultimately of workplace safety and of skills. We, as in Australian society, will be much poorer for all of that.

We did not need 'choice' in our VET market back in the 1990s when the Keating government began the moves towards privatising the VET sector. TAFE was doing a great job, then and now. What would be the value of such choice? Perhaps employers could get their trainees trained more cheaply, but at the end of the day, those savings need to be made somewhere. They are made predominantly in two places: teacher's wages, and quality of provision.

Firstly, teachers became 'trainers' and were no longer paid as teachers but were paid wages that were sometimes half of what they would have received as fully trained TAFE teachers. Secondly, quality of provision was compromised. It became possible to complete basic trade qualifications, i.e. Cert 3 and Cert 4 courses in Carpentry (Building) could be completed in 2 years (including apprenticeships) instead of 4. I have seen advertisements of private providers offering similar qualifications to be completed 'within 12 months', one semester courses within 6 weeks, etc. A survey of any daily newspaper's classified section will reveal a plethora of such advertisements offering Cert 3 qualifications within short periods of time. Of course, sizeable fees are charged for such courses. I cannot be convinced that these courses would offer the same level of instruction, the same opportunities of practical experience and supervision, and the same level of support that would be offered in the equivalent course offered by a TAFE college. This would be so no matter how ethical or how accountable the private provider was (and I must acknowledge that there are some high quality private providers).

Governments are completely to blame for this. They created this system and they have driven it ruthlessly to an ultimate end where quality educational provision comes last and saving costs comes first.

The tendering of contracts for skills provision that really should be the responsibility of the TAFE system to deliver is a case in point. The best example I can refer to is the tendering processes for the government Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) contracts, and to the dissolution of the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) in favour of private tendering. Discounting the fact that I believe these services should simply be provided by TAFE (or AMES) in the first place, our TAFE institute, South Western Sydney, tendered a very competitive bid for the last LLNP contracts offered. Their bid was completely ignored on the basis of cost: it was simply more expensive than the private competitor, who got the contract. It did not matter that our bid offered quality guarantees and provided clear account for all aspects of provision. Then we began to hear stories from students returning to TAFE from those programs: classrooms with 60 students and one teacher; classes being run in hot, noisy corridors rather than classrooms; teachers not allowing students to leave to maintain family responsibilities; poor quality instruction with students "learning nothing"; teachers being paid poorly and facing job insecurity; classes closing. In relation to the provision of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), we heard similar stories, save the large class sizes; classes would collapse if student numbers fell below 15 (the bottom line); teachers' jobs under threat; short-term contracts; teachers having to phone students outside of teaching time to pressure them into coming to class to maintain numbers. Forget that these are adult students with their own priorities outside the classroom.

Ominously, the AMEP program is administered under the 'entitlement funding' model that has spelled disaster in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, leading to closures of colleges, losses of jobs and losses of opportunities, all in the name of efficiency. We are very concerned.

Regarding quality of provision, TAFE at present has a competitive advantage. It has a reputation in the community as the place to go for quality instruction, for VET and LLN courses. It is the place people turn to. It is an institution. If someone flunked at school, they could always go to TAFE and get their life back together. TAFE pathways offer students ways into university, other careers and more skills for their current jobs. I wonder how long it will take to erode that in the public mind, once funding cuts really start to bite.

As a teacher within the system, we are very conscious of providing the highest standard of quality training and keeping ourselves on the bandwagon of continuous improvement. From my own experience as a language teacher interviewing new students, there is an ongoing theme amongst migrants seeking to improve their English language skills: "go to TAFE". When I ask them why, they say the teaching is better and they will learn properly. For example, within one afternoon of placement interviews this semester, where I interviewed and placed six students within an hour, four of those recently granted their permanent residence status told me this as a reason for wanting to study in TAFE. They were not being attended to in class by teachers, the classes were at an inappropriate level for them, they were disengaged. These were students who were still studying, with a private provider, their free 510 hours allocated as part of the Adult Migrant English Program. These students were prepared to pay and come to TAFE and learn, rather than to finish their free hours which they felt were not serving them. My colleagues and I have similar experiences every week during interviews. The issue here is one of quality of provision of training.

We have been able to maintain our quality of provision because:

- we have been up until now, funded well enough to be well resourced and to provide adequate provision, something that may change in 2014;
- we are audited extensively and are extremely conscientious regarding audits;
- our teaching staff are extremely dedicated, often going over and beyond what they are paid to do in order to ensure students get what they need;
- many of the teaching staff in TAFE (all in our section) are university-trained. This is something that ceased as of 2009 when it became adequate to have only a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to teach in TAFE;
- that teachers are currently paid as teachers (and are thus properly remunerated).

Another serious issue affecting quality of provision is the lowering of the teaching standard, which was a pretext for reducing wages paid to teachers. As a result of the minimum standard required to teach in TAFE being only Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, the numbers of people within South Western Sydney Institute who did not pass their TAA2 assessment and required further

mentoring has increased in the years since this was implemented. The TAA2 is the in-service inspection of permanent teachers in their 8th to 12th month to check on their skills and competence and also to monitor for areas where they may require further support and training as teachers.

I mentioned quality audits. In order to stay 'competitive', TAFE must maintain and be seen to be maintaining its 'quality' of provision. This leads to onerous demands upon the time of teachers and head teachers in order to learn and maintain quality audit systems. For example, and this is but one example, we must rigorously document our assessment procedures. We must have a bank of documents with cover pages, syllabus performance criteria, conditions of assessment, previous pre-teaching, evidence collection methods and checklists, evidence, learner feedback sheets, and examples of student performance. For each unit we teach we need validated assessments, and for our entry tests we need validated assessments; validation is another nightmare of paperwork consisting of before and after forms, procedures that must be followed. Each section needs validation timetables, and all units must be covered. Every five years, courses are revised, reaccredited and often changed, so all the paperwork created from the previous five years needs to be updated. This is one small example of an area required to meet the VET Quality Framework, which replaced the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and which is now administered by a new body called the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), an organisation that is gaining a reputation for taking a draconian approach to these matters during its quality audits. We thus live in fear of the looming ASQA audit, which prevents very real threats to us, because if for some reason we do not meet their onerous requirements, they may withdraw our right to deliver courses.

This is a ridiculous situation in which we find ourselves, and one in which we should not be, as the government provider. It is the outcome of a privatised training market; it causes us to waste so much time and effort in proving our quality that we are forced to relegate important matters like teaching and learning to the background. It is as if the whole system has forgotten what it is meant to be doing (i.e. providing VET education).

I am not against accountability: it is clearly necessary. However, the need for over-accountability has grown up because of the competitive environment, and because there are unscrupulous private providers, as the collapse of several colleges for overseas students in recent years demonstrated. Those colleges were rotting the system. TAFE does not rot the system, but it is forced to be seen to be upholding it.

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

As mentioned above, TAFE systems in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland have been negatively impacted by a shift to the entitlement funding model which is slated to be introduced in NSW in 2014. This model is fundamentally flawed for a number of crucial reasons.

The current funding model allocates funds to sections based upon student numbers in enrolled courses, regardless of outcomes. The new model will give sections funding based upon course completions. The money also does not travel with the section. Each student has a limited amount of funding they are entitled to receive (or rather, that will go to the TAFE provider) before they must take student loans to pay for courses. There are some serious consequences arising from this.

Firstly, in order to be paid, course numbers need to be kept up above a workable threshold. There will be pressure to over-subscribe courses to cater for the inevitable drop-outs. This means class sizes will start bigger. There will also be pressure on teachers and sections to keep bums on seats through courses, meaning there will be a situation of continual topping up. This means pressure for teachers having to keep pressure on students to come (and therefore undertake the time consuming task of continuously calling, monitoring and following up on students). This also means that teaching and learning is seriously compromised. Students coming late into classes will be behind. Classes are always uneven in their profiles anyway, so this makes the teaching of the class and class planning more difficult. There will be pressure to pass students, as students will need to pay for courses they fail through student loans. This will lead to a fall in standards. It is inevitable because teachers will feel their jobs are under threat. Inevitably, quality is compromised.

This has happened already in Victoria where the TAFE system has been decimated by this funding model. Some colleges have closed, others have gone into massive debts due to government underfunding. The consequences of this are very human. Students lose their first choice of quality provision, the community loses an institution, lower quality private providers take over the provision increasing pressure on a system already under stress, teachers lose jobs and therefore income, houses mortgages etc. It is a very scary proposition and it has already happened.

Above I mentioned the example of the O'Farrell government withdrawing funding for fine arts courses. I would like to mention an anecdote of the human cost of that decision. One of my mentors in my TAFE career, a retired head teacher, had thought seriously to study fine arts in her retirement by doing a TAFE course. Her nearest TAFE was Meadowbank. At that TAFE they had a strong fine arts department, with (I think) a head teacher, five permanent staff and a number of casuals. The head teacher was called in after the NSW government decision to cut funding and told that unless he could guarantee the operation of a commercial course, which he could not, there would be no section next year. So, with that, there was not only the loss of opportunities for people to study a life skill in retirement, but also there goes one part of the Tertiary Preparation Certificate provision; there also goes the jobs and mortgages (and stress) of the teaching staff whose lives depended upon their work. I know also of the "spill and fill" that has happened within Sydney Institute ESOL sections,

whereby staff were sacked and then told to reapply for their jobs (fewer positions). This is terribly stressful. There were no redundancies offered. This is the reality of funding cuts.

TAFE is a significant employer of teachers, both full and part time. My father was a head teacher (now retired for 20 years) before me and from the days when he was still working there has been an ongoing push from within government departments to pay teachers less. They have sought to re-classify us as trainers and assessors and pay us less for what we do, or pay future employees less for doing what is already a multi-faceted and complex job. Whenever government education departments look at making savings, they always ask “what can you do without?” The savings always come from trimming away at the teaching end, or reducing necessary support staff. TAFE teachers in my experience are professionals who care about students and genuine educational outcomes. In my section, everyone is university educated. We teach, assess and administer courses. We should be paid as teachers.

Additionally, when it comes to cost savings, there is very little attention given to the huge and wasteful educational bureaucracy that has built up in TAFE. I have been watching human resources advertisements for several years and most jobs that are advertised are for various “officers” and “managers” at various levels. For example, a colleague who had been teaching –learning manager within our faculty was seconded to an acting position elsewhere. Her new job consists of opening ministerial complaints and forwarding them to relevant parties. For this, she is on a salary in excess of \$120,000 per year. There are many, many jobs like this in TAFE that are highly excessive and unproductive. Moreover, there is the regionalisation of TAFE into institutes. So this bureaucracy is replicated over the 8 regional institutes within NSW. This is an incredibly wasteful model of educational provision. There are currently hundreds of millions of dollars going towards the salaries of Institute Directors and their various support staff. I hypothesise that this is the long-term product of a system that has allowed former teachers to create a bureaucratic need for themselves in order to justify their management salaries. The recent negotiations between TAFE and the Australian Education Union in order to negotiate a new workplace agreement underscores this, whereby the management offered us a number of poorly explained new employment categories including “educational leader”, which was I (and others) believe, a thinly veiled attempt to give redundant managers a place to land.

On top of this, we need to take into account the effect on students. TAFE will no longer be the place they can come for a second chance. It will cost them a lot of money if they keep failing. There are many reasons why students fail and not all of these have to do with lack of ability or irresponsibility towards studies.

In every course too there are inevitable drop-outs. Students drop out of courses for a variety of reasons and in my experience these reasons often have to do with changing life circumstances as much as anything else. With our clients, in teaching English to migrant students, there will be a host

of good reasons why students need to drop out of courses ranging from needing to work, to lack of time, to apathy, to tending to many, varied and sometimes terrible family circumstances. I mentioned some student examples above, one of whom was an Iraqi student in his 50s who eventually had to drop out of his course to look after his teenage daughter who had begun to exhibit symptoms of serious mental illness. Another student of mine in English for Academic Purposes in 2011 could not continue his studies because his family back home in Congo were being threatened by rebel forces and had to flee for their lives into the jungle. He was not able to contact them for weeks and in the mean time, his studies took a back seat through no fault of his own due to the incredible stress and fear that he was under, the ongoing enquiries and phone calls and appointments with consular staff. One of our students last year ended up in prison due to unpaid fines. Sometimes our students go overseas: sometimes out of compulsion, sometimes because they have booked tickets months in advance before they found out they had a place in English language courses (our courses have long waiting lists). As teachers under an entitlement funding system, we will be forced to fill those places in classes in order to get paid. We cannot predict those types of things and students either do not or will not tell us. They may have been waiting a year for a class and so they do not want to compromise their place.

Following on from these points, this funding model will seriously add to the financial burden that NESB students face. Learning language is not something that happens in a 'lockstep' fashion. Students do not automatically progress from one level to the next in a smooth linear fashion. Even for the best students under the most conducive circumstances, language learning can be a ragged, uneven process. For adult students facing family responsibilities where there is limited time and financial pressures, this then can be a slow process. Add to this the pressures of being in a new country, as well as any additional issues such as trauma from past experiences, then it means that acquisition of English can be a slow process that may reach a certain level of functionality and then not really improve. This process is called fossilisation. It means that learners facing disadvantage and difficulty learning the complex literacy required to succeed in VET courses may never get there. Under an entitlement funding system, these learners will face considerable impediments learning English beyond a certain level without incurring large debts in FEE-Help loans. This adds further burden to pre-existing disadvantage.

This draws my rather lengthy submission to an end. I thank you for the opportunity to have a say in this process. I am absolutely sure that submissions made by other interested parties will further support, or be supported by, the points I have raised here. Please do not let TAFE go to the dogs, washed away by faulty policies informed by faulty ideologies that leave people behind.

Yours sincerely

Darren Curl