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**Response to House of Representatives
'Inquiry into the role of the TAFE
system and its operation'**



Australian College of
Educators
April 17 2013

Introduction

The Australian College of Educators (ACE) is well placed to assist the House of Representatives in its deliberations. The College been in existence for over fifty years as a professional association and is the oldest association in the country that represents educators across the nation. ACE members are drawn from both the government and non-government sectors of schooling and across all levels of education from early childhood through tertiary including members from the TAFE sector.

It is therefore in a strong position to comment on the role of VET and the crucial role the TAFE sector plays in the overall landscape of education in Australia. The College therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on what has too often been given less emphasis than it should in this landscape.

In this submission we will focus on the Terms of Reference but as the Inquiry proceeds we would welcome further opportunities to participate in the development of policy.

This paper has been prepared through consultation with a small team of College members who play leading roles in TAFE across Australia as well as members in managerial and senior academic positions. Input has come from members in five states.

ACE Recommendations

Recommendation 1

TAFE is the public provider of vocationally oriented education and training, and is also a key player in representing these areas at an international level. A national training system should be governed through a shared, complementary approach between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments and public and private providers. To do this, a shared vision of the value of TAFE to Australia, both its society and its economy, is required.

It is now a good time to reaffirm the role of TAFE which has been diminished over time by the rapid increase of marketisation and competition from the private providers in VET – mostly Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The system is now more complicated, being regulated across portfolio areas, as well as relying on agreements worked out through COAG, and a great deal of tender processes.

The College believes that unless the particular role of TAFE is addressed at the beginning of the Inquiry there will be unnecessary and counter-productive conflict between state and federal jurisdictions.

There are a variety of avenues through which the federal government can be involved. Some of these include:

- setting goals for national needs in industry and technology and supporting states in achieving these
- setting national standards for teacher
- setting the criteria for visas for overseas students
- supporting greater equity for indigenous and disadvantaged students.



Recommendation 2

There is no mention of 'quality' anywhere in the Terms of Reference. Just "good enough" is NOT good enough in this modern, competitive world. There should be quality in the courses, the resources and the delivery of the courses. See also Recommendation 3 which expands on the issue of teacher quality.

This lack of reference to quality seems symptomatic of an attitude that treats TAFE as the 'poor cousin' of education. Whether VET is provided by public or private institutions the same high standards should apply in order to avoid a repeat of the situation where institutions set up to cater for overseas students had minimal accountability. This damaged the reputation of both public and private providers.

In this context the College would support the work of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (AQSA) with its vision that 'students, employers and governments have full confidence in the quality of vocational education and training outcomes delivered by Australian registered training organisations.'¹

The College would also like to see a more rigorous process in the initial setting up of Registered Training Organisations.

Recommendation 3

Quality delivery cannot be achieved without quality teachers and this needs to be specifically addressed in an Inquiry.

As our name implies this is the major concern of the Australian College of Educators. In an ACE publication, *Recognising Teaching Excellence*² the following statement, while originally applying to schools also applies to TAFE:

'The quality of teaching is the main driver of successful student learning outcomes.

Australia's teaching profession ... constitute(s) an infrastructure that is critical to its survival in an increasingly global economy.

Every student deserves teachers who are suited to teaching, well trained and qualified, highly skilled, caring and committed to moving forward the learning of their students.' (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008).

Certificate IV TAE (along with relevant industry experience and industry qualifications) is the minimum standard in the TAFE sector, and many TAFE teachers have degrees. We should be moving towards a situation where most teachers have a Bachelor Degree or higher. Similar standards should be required of all RTOs.

With the rapid changes in industries ongoing professional development is also essential and should be a requirement in order to keep accreditation as in other professions.

The College also recommends that a National VET Professional Teaching Institute be explored, which would, among other tasks, develop a set of standards similar to those developed by The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) with standards for the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers. In VET thinking on this the term Master Teacher has been used to refer to a promotion position with the role of focusing on quality teaching and research as well as student needs, rather than a more managerial role.



This is not to diminish the role of good managers – with some 5000 Registered Training Organisations nationally quality management is essential and many of these may not have the structures for developing teachers into managers that are present in TAFE.

The College also would like to draw attention to The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) submission to the Productivity Commission on ‘Vocational Education and Training Workforce’³.

Recommendation 4

The College strongly supports the third term of reference – the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access training and skills and through these a pathway to employment.

The College notes that this is a role where the Federal Government has a specific interest because successful intervention can reduce the demand on a variety of Centrelink services.

The work and role of The National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) should be noted here. This body should enjoy greater status, be better funded (giving it the capacity to be more consultative and inclusive) and should also have direct input into national VET policy re Equity.

What is required is national policy in which funding is linked to accountability for the provision of equity. At the moment equity requirements and their provision falls off state/territory agendas all too easily, especially in relation to training tendered out to many (but certainly not all) private providers who are paid on quick results and often see equity as a cost. Under the weight of competition and also the overarching urgent demands of skills shortages and global economic competitiveness equity has taken a second place.

Recommendation 5

The College is particularly concerned about the unreflective nature of the fourth Term of Reference - ‘The operation of a competitive training market’. The College believes that this has led to some significant failures as well as a weakening of the TAFE system. The inquiry should provide a clear evidence-based rationale for where competition might add value and be of benefit to the community as a whole.

A simplistic reliance on private providers of VET, for whom profit is the main motive, can seriously distort the quality of education provided. The College does not want to see a repeat of the serious damage to the reputation of VET in Australia and around the world when entrepreneurs became involved in the international student business.

Another example of failure was the introduction of a ‘voucher’ system in Victoria where students used their entitlement without really considering their future and then finding their training did not lead to a job. The most commonly cited example was the oversupply of Fitness Instructors which saw huge growth in training against low growth in employment.



Recommendation 6

The College is particularly concerned about state governments accepting federal funding but cutting their own funding or even, in one case, threatening going their own way. We can only reinforce the stress placed in Recommendation 1 on developing a genuine Federal/State partnership working in the interests of all Australians.

Conclusion

The Australian College of Educators wishes the Inquiry the best in its deliberations and remains willing to assist in any way that is felt necessary. The College is also ready to expand on any of these recommendations as required.

Contacts

References

¹ <http://www.asqa.gov.au/about-asqa/functions,-vision-and-values.html>

² <http://austcolled.com.au/article/recognising-teaching-excellence>

³ <http://avetra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/AVETRAs-Response-to-the-Productivity-Commission-for-website.pdf>

