

Date: Thursday, 11 April 2013 9:55:40 AM

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Dear Senate Committee,

Thank you for investigating this issue. It is just so important to so many people.

I am a student at Hunter Street TAFE studying the ADVANCED Diploma in Visual Art.

I have qualifications and a career in Graphic Design where I have worked long hours and contributed greatly to the economy of marketing and advertising.

However, I first suffered post-natal depression 10 years ago and have not been able to rejoin the work force.

Through art and the nurturing, small class interactive environment of TAFE that I have experienced over the last four years, I feel I will soon be in a position to apply for work in either graphic design or start my own business as an artist.

I meet a lot of people who are suffering or have suffered mental illness and I am certain the arts are one of the best channels for self help. There must be studies proving this!! Surely it is better to have people in art schools than waiting in doctors' surgeries for medication?

Also, I am fairly certain I would not have been able to commit to the VET fee debt 4 years ago when I started my Diploma. Which means I would have probably not be thinking of returning to work now. It was certainly less daunting paying \$644 per semester than \$4000 which is about what it is now. We are denying certain community members access to art by enforcing the commercial fees and reducing classes/services. Not everyone can jump into the Diploma or Degree course. There are now more barriers to enter the a career in the arts because of recent changes/cuts to lower entry level courses. So what are these people doing instead? Giving up? Standing in a Cetrelink line?

The lack of Art in TAFE education will affect this city, and similar towns. I feel that the art culture in Newcastle is very special and vital to holding the balance. People here are angry about coal dust and gas seam exploitation.

...Or are lost in the bottom of a beer at a footy match. Sport is also a big part of this town, but I feel it is adequately funded through commercial sources and does not need additional funding that could be given to the art gallery and art education.

Please return the staff numbers, bring the cut courses back, return the funding to the resources we need so we can be certain of our TAFE Art Education and to stay out of the Psyche Wards!

Regards,  
Melissa Baldwin