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Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education System and its operation

On the 9th of April 2013 a meeting was held at GAA House in Melbourne to discuss the future of the Jewellery Industry and training of Apprentices in Australia.

Present at this meeting were representatives of:

Gold & Silversmiths Guild of Australia, Jewellery Association of Australia, Gemmological Association of Australia and other high profile jewellery business owners.

A. The development of Skills in the Australian economy

Cutbacks in TAFE and University funding, combined with lower numbers of jewellery workshops taking on apprentices, means that the two usual pathways to training as a jeweller or metal artisan are on the verge of disappearing.

With the pressure of imported jewellery being cheaper than local products, due to the strong Australian dollar, reduced discretionary income and the increase in internet sales our Jewellery industry is imploding.

The GSGA is a group of world class artisans, who have a depth of skill and knowledge to create unique personal items that are hand wrought with ancient skills as well as cutting edge technology. We, along with other key industry bodies are very concerned that by reducing funding to TAFE colleges even further you will be denying the training of future jewellers and artisans and will force the closure of the related Jewellery departments around Australia.

Australia is slowly losing the skills that we have been protecting.

Why have Jewellers been on the National Skills Shortage list when we have such a low TAFE training rate.

Why is the 'Tools are for your Trade' grant not available to the Jewellery Apprentices?

B. Development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase life and employment opportunities

With the closure or dumbing down of courses available in the TAFE Colleges, we are finding that what the colleges are producing is not what the industry requires.

Around Australia the TAFE colleges run Advanced Diploma Jewellery courses which are very popular and oversubscribed. If more cutbacks occur these courses will be

“priced out of the market” and unaffordable by students due to the considerably higher fees. These students are not considered employable in the jewellery industry as they do not have the depth of knowledge and skills of a Certificate III Jewellery Apprentice.

The numbers of indentured Jewellery Apprentices have been reducing yearly. This year the training numbers for Certificate III in Australia are:

- Victoria – 32
- Queensland -25
- South Australia - 8
- Western Australia – 28
- New South Wales - 31

NB: NMIT in Victoria currently trains Northern Territory and Tasmanian Jewellery Apprentices.

This in turn has affected the full time employment of lecturers in these areas, most are having their hours cut and classes doubled in size teaching more than one year level, sometimes all three year levels in one class.

Peter Keep – CIT Western Australia Jewellery trade lecturer currently has 28 apprentices combined into one class, where they will not have the same course content as previous years.

NMIT – Victoria will soon be merging 1st and 3rd year Apprentices into one class.

Technical Schools were closed in Victoria over 10 years ago and the VET course introduced. What happens to the VET students when these courses are cut?

There is a current 3rd Year Jewellery Apprentice who was a VET student at Southbank Tafe in QLD, when he finished year 12 he could not get a Jewellery Apprenticeship in QLD and travelled to Victoria where he was signed up by a regional Jeweller in San Remo, Victoria.

Changes to training our future jewellers should not and cannot happen overnight. We need to protect the model that is currently in place while we design a course that is more relevant to the times we live in.

If these proposed cuts do occur then it is time for a new training model of which there is a variety of options:

1. a pre-apprenticeship Certificate II in Jewellery Manufacture which would be a solution for the busy employer who wants to take on an apprentice that already has some basic hand skills and not risk a three month training period where the apprentice realises that he/she is not suited and leaves.
2. a full time 2 year trade course but at the same time offering the 3 year apprentice training system. The full time Certificate III would be a ‘User Pay’ system.

3. a Certificate IV could also be offered to those people in the industry who wish to learn more once they have achieved a Certificate III.

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

As mentioned before, Jewellery Apprentices have a choice of only 5 training TAFES around Australia; Tasmanian apprentices fly to Victoria monthly for training, Northern Territory apprentices fly to either SA or Victoria or NSW.

By taking away these services and training programs to regional areas will have a very negative outcome to an already depressed industry.

There exists 'Thin Market Funding' which is available for trades that have small class sizes. The Printing and Watchmaking industries have access to this special funding to keep them going. Why not the Jewellery Industry Trade?

The GSGA have members nationally who happily mentor young jewellers and promote the education of jewellers and artisans. We also support the TAFE colleges by offering monetary awards for their graduates each year.

D. The operation of a competitive training market

A National Training Scheme should be encouraged. Currently the training courses at the five State TAFE colleges that have a Certificate course in the Jewellery Industry but they do not have a National agreement to when they teach it.

Our current course units are taken from an engineering training package. Most of the units have little or no relevance to jewellery making.

The Jewellery course should be written in a jewellery language that all can understand.

Eg. Young 2nd year Jewellery apprentice travels to Melbourne and gets an apprenticeship but the subjects he has already completed in 1st and 2nd year in QLD do not align with that of NMIT in Victoria.

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

By cutting the funding to the TAFE Jewellery training colleges, will only speed up the declining numbers of qualified jewellers in Australia.

TAFE colleges are responsible for assessing the progress during training and play a vital role in filling those skills gaps that are not covered in the work place.

The practicality of having a privatised Jewellery course is not a viable one.

Australia is too large a country to do this! It has been proven in the past that privatisation does not work well when you are trying to monitor quality skills.

The government, both Federal and State are nominated by the people to ensure that their health, education and safety are maintained.

Please do not sell off yet another system that you are employed to look after!