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## **Australia: Competency Rich, Skill Poor – A Gathering of Voices**

**A submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation. April 2013**

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*However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.*

— *Winston Churchill*

This submission, whilst dutifully aligned with the terms of reference, holds the one clear message throughout: the Australian VET sector is in crisis. TAFE is the heart of this sector and, due to numerous issues (of which funding is the lesser one) its capacity to enable the development of economically relevant skills and knowledge has been seriously compromised: Compromised to the point at which qualifications derived from the sector are being viewed by industry and bearers alike with scepticism, at times outright derision.

Depicting the perceptions of trades people, employers, teachers and students, the submission describes the extent to which the VET sector is failing the economy, the people, the environment. Despite all the stratagems (managerial structures, audit trails, and the like), and the ever increasing percentage of workers holding ‘competencies’ relevant to their field, the VET sector is spiralling downwards in the one area that counts from a futures perspective - Quality. The result is a system that has everything in it (school linked VET, mentoring, workplace learning, online delivery, industry engagement, its all there) but fails to deliver. Worse, through an internal feedback loop of self-deception it fails even to acknowledge or report on that failure.

The wrong questions are being asked because the ‘system’ works on numbers and output. Quality and people, however, are subjective and thrive on input. Further, questions that question the system frequently offer up insights we find uncomfortable.

The submission is framed as a series of dot points under each of the inquiry’s terms of reference. The dot points are then backed by one or more ‘voices’ gathered from VET stakeholders. These voices have been gathered from various parts of the country and though ‘nameless’ due to issues of ethics, their trustworthiness is easily evaluated by talking to ‘the people’. They depict a truth that, when viewed from any perspective of sustainability – be that social, economic, industrial, or environmental – is disturbing and demonstrative of a system in dire need of refocusing.

**Dr. Glenn P. Costin**

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