

Blue Mountains TAFE Teacher's Association submission to: The Parliamentary inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation

Terms of Reference

TAFEs have played a critical role in the training and development of Australians for more than one hundred years. For many Australians, TAFEs provide a critical pathway to training and skills which are increasingly needed to access employment. They also play a critical role in regions and in providing access for disadvantaged groups.

The Committee will inquire into and report on the role played by TAFEs in:

- the development of skills in the Australian economy;*
 - the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects;*
 - 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;*
 - the operation of a competitive training market; and*
 - those jurisdictions in which State Governments have announced funding decisions which may impact on their operation and viability.*
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TAFE NSW's brand and the training provided are recognised worldwide, and employers and the community respect this training. Australia already has a mix of public and private organisations providing flexible education and training which has served us well. The current VET reform process is based on the belief that private for profit companies do a better job of training than publicly owned organisations and that competition rather than co-operation is a superior way of achieving quality. We would argue that the reform process is dismantling a world class system, undermining both the quality of training and co-operation with local industry and taking away the current pathways out of disadvantage. By funding the courses offered on a centralised system based on data rather than local knowledge, it is undermining flexibility and innovation.

Terms of reference

The development of skills in the Australian economy

TAFE NSW is open and accessible to the community and offers courses the community wants within each local area, through consultation with employers, community and external agencies. TAFE staff spends time with these stakeholders determining training needs and providing information and advice to potential students and employers. Developing locally based relationships with communities, employers and external agencies takes time and depends on trust and the continuity of a training organization in a particular place. As a public Institution TAFE has built trust and a consultative relationship with local communities which has led to the delivery of courses which the community and businesses want. The outsourcing of courses to private providers who may move in and out of communities will remove the local knowledge base which has informed our current successful system.

Moves to centralize all decision-making around which courses are offered based on cumulative statewide data, will not provide the skills that local sub economies require to thrive. It will limit innovation and flexibility at a time of rapid change.

Proposals to limit the number of subsidized courses a student may undertake and the availability of loans for students needing to re-train will mean less flexibility for people wanting to change careers and a less flexible work force.

TAFE's role in the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects

TAFE NSW has a long and proud history of opening pathways for people to engage in education and training, and complete qualifications that may have seemed unattainable. This has been achieved, to a very large extent, by the provision of equity and support programs and measures. TAFE NSW has an infrastructure of support; services not necessarily provided by private RTOs. These include:

- Student support services such as counselling and careers advice, disability support, individual tutorial support, help in developing research, assignment writing and study skills.

Examples: (names have been changed)

- *Lisa, a student at Blue Mountains College In Western Sydney, had such severe agoraphobia that she was not able to leave her house for 20 years. She had to leave school before completing her school certificate. Lisa is now studying at BM College and with additional support through TAFE's disabilities support program, is making great*

progress. She has also been able to extend her social network and has made friends at TAFE and is now feeling confident enough to work in our student clinic. It is most likely that she will graduate and make a significant contribution to the industry.

- *Blue Mountains College has several students who access disability services for tutorial support and with this additional support are able to achieve academically and will be able to graduate. One student, Tanya, has an autistic child and is intending to use her training to work with parents and children with autism and improve their quality of life.*

Access and Outreach programs

- Equity programs such as Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Education programs, Access and General Education courses, and Outreach.
- TAFE NSW's Outreach program is an internationally acclaimed and innovative adult learning and community engagement program, which aims to ensure that TAFE NSW is accessible to people who face barriers to learning, such as:
 - geographical and social isolation
 - language and cultural factors
 - financial hardship
 - lack of educational confidence
 - cultural factors
 - disability
 - family commitments
 - incarceration in a correctional centre.

Many Outreach and Access students experience multiple disadvantages. The education programs offered by TAFE are quite often the first step in a journey of rediscovery and lead to further education.



Photo- Students in a sustainable gardening Outreach Course

Some examples of students' experiences (names have been changed):

- *Julie entered the Outreach 'Work Opportunities for Women' course as a single mum with very few employment prospects. Nearly 10 years on, Julie has gained skills to be employed by a very large company, she has also returned to complete further qualifications to enable her to expand her role and act in higher positions.*
- *Geoff, aged 53, found that due to his age, re-entering the workforce after retrenchment was very difficult. He had no idea how to approach an interview, very limited computer skills and no knowledge of how to send resumes by email. Geoff completed an Outreach course which helped him to recognise his life skills and he also gained the skills he needed for employment, and as a result is now employed by Bunnings hardware store.*
- *Kerrie had been a bricklayer all his working life when a back injury stopped him in his tracks. Kerrie joined an Outreach 'Introduction to Computers' class and when the term was over, progressed to the next step and enrolled in a small business course.*
- *TAFE Outreach regularly offers 'Pathways' programs such as courses leading to higher level qualifications in Community Services Work, Aged Care or Children's Services. Graduates from these programs obtain volunteer or part time work and/or progress to Certificate courses in the vocational areas.*
- *A number of students have come into BM College massage courses from Outreach or Access courses such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. They have completed the Diploma level in massage therapy and now work in the industry, making valuable contributions. Some have gone onto university courses.*
- *Anne had had a high level role in IT before a set of difficult life circumstances and setbacks knocked her confidence and resulted in mental health challenges. She completed a C.II re-entry course at BM College and has found a new direction in life. She now works as a part time TAFE teacher and is a valued member of the teaching team.*

Training for offenders in correctional centres

TAFE NSW plays a major role in delivery of educational and training programs in correctional centres, to enable offenders to be better prepared for release. These programs include foundation skills such as language and literacy, life skills, and vocationally oriented skills.

Example:

- *Mark had an interest in Reptiles and enrolling in a course gave him the focus he needed. He completed a Certificate III in Captive Animals and became a much respected Keeper, working at a high profile facility, and is now president of the local association. Mark has also been invaluable in shaping the TAFE training program to meet the needs of other inmates and has regularly been engaged as a guest speaker.*

Training for young early school leavers

TAFE NSW provides an essential pathway for people who have not succeeded in school education. General education courses offered in TAFE NSW are offered in an adult learning environment with support for students to succeed.

TAFE resources and infrastructure

TAFE NSW Libraries work closely with teachers to assist disadvantaged students, with specially tailored spaces and services. Libraries provide staff with specialised expertise in information literacy. Library staff work at several levels: they assist individuals, in addition to designing and delivering information literacy training tailored to vocational areas. TAFE NSW Libraries also provide access to and support for using computers; as well as access to relevant, up-to-date information in electronic, print and audio visual formats, and resource teachers in their subject areas.

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.

TAFE NSW works in close collaboration with community, industry and other stakeholders to customise training to meet local needs. TAFE NSW consults with employers, industry and community groups to meet local and state/national needs.

Blue Mountains College is positioned outside the Sydney metropolitan area and offers accessible local training (in a geographically large area with few public transport options), with some courses

unique in Western Sydney / NSW. In this way it is a good example of the role that TAFE colleges can play in the provision of training and education, where there are few other options available.

Example: we are concerned that any significant increases in course fees may result in students not being able to undertake complementary health courses. Blue Mountains College is the only RTO in Western Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Western NSW to Bathurst, providing training in complementary health.

TAFE NSW has been at the forefront of utilising opportunities for blended learning that use both the online environment and face to face teaching.

TAFE, through its OTEN network, has a long history of delivering distance education to thousands of students in regional, remote and overseas locations.

Beyond the provision of training, TAFE colleges also contribute enormously in other ways to the development and the life of the local community, particularly in rural and regional areas. This role should be recognised in future funding arrangements. TAFE colleges provide opportunities for local industry, business and community organisations to participate in training, by hosting students on work experience placements, or participating in student learning projects involving real work settings, or employing work ready TAFE graduates.

For example:

A learning project undertaken by students in the Blue Mountains College Community Services teaching section, who have partnered with a local cancer support service, Blue Mountains Cancer Help, and initiated fund raising and awareness raising activities in the community, including assisting at the organisation's Open Day this year. Other similar projects have involved students taking on responsibility for assisting the development of activities and organising an Open Day, with the Katoomba Men's Shed



Photo-open day at the men's shed

The operation of a competitive training market

TAFE is the largest RTO in NSW and the only one owned by the people of NSW.

To put TAFE in a position where it has to increasingly compete for funding will only degrade the level of training and service that can be provided because to compete, TAFE would have to cut costs, which inevitably affects best practice. It is right of every person in New South Wales to have access to education and quite often TAFE is where adult learners start.

TAFE NSW's access and equity measures, described above, also contribute to national social inclusion goals and should continue to receive appropriate funding under any new arrangements.

Any future course fee system must encourage, not inhibit, a progression through various levels of courses.

The government should consider the affordability of courses for isolated and vulnerable members of the community. If the aim is to skill the work force and increase the skills and qualifications of the working population, then the high support needs of many in these groups need to be addressed. Funding should reflect the services provided by TAFE's counseling, equity and support programs, and library services.

Are all RTO's able to provide a full range of student support services including libraries, counsellors and career advice to ensure quality and equity in educational delivery? What is the cost, to students and the community, of forcing TAFE colleges to withdraw or minimise these services, due to emphasising the 'bottom line' at the expense of a quality training environment?

Increasing contestability of training funds will impact negatively in the Blue Mountains region. One major impact will be on retracting resources (i.e. time, expertise, people and access/partnerships) from quality vocational education, due to a growing need to constantly source funds to maintain educational programs from year to year. External sources of funds continue to reduce and merge, resulting in complex and rigid guidelines and criterion, and short term funding timeframes.

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

In 2012 the NSW Government announced funding cuts to education which will result in 800 job losses across TAFE NSW, including teaching positions. TAFE Institutes are conducting "Products and Services reviews" to meet these targets. In some Institutes this has resulted in the complete or partial elimination of Access and Equity measures described above. Adult Literacy Officer

positions, Multicultural education and Outreach Coordinators and their programs, have been deleted in some areas, and others are currently under review. Funding for Art courses in TAFE which have contributed to our vibrant cultural economy have been cut and fees increased to a level which was not accessible to any but the very wealthy.

This represents a squandering of the good name and of the effective and highly valued programs TAFE has offered the community, business, culture and industry.

In addition courses have been deleted from some institute business lines and colleges, resulting in reduced choice for students and local employers, greater travel time and associated costs for students who can no longer study in their local area, job losses and a reduction of community and industry confidence in TAFE as the provider of public vocational education and training in NSW.

Should the committee wish to discuss these issues further we would be happy to be available.

Joy Connor
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Wentworthfalls

Ropes access training for Indigenous bush regeneration students

Last semester the Environmental Studies section of Blue Mountains College facilitated the training of three indigenous trainees from the Deerubbin Land Council. The training focused on a 'ropes access course' taught by Bill Proctor, a leader in the ropes safety field. Kayne Moreton, Peter Brown and Steven Knight completed the three day course taught in purpose built facilities at Lawson as well as in the field at Mt York near Mt Victoria.

The training will help the students work safely as bush-regenerators on difficult access sites, specifically on a culturally significant site at Sackville on the Hawkesbury River. The students are also currently completing the Certificate III Indigenous Land Management course focusing on bush-track construction facilitated by Kieran Hitchell, team-leader track construction at Blue Mountains City Council. Upon completion these students will supervise six new trainees from the Deerubbin Land Council.



Joint Program Produces Results for Tourism Icon

In a joint commercial project with Scenic World, the IT section of Blue Mountains College delivered customised training to Scenic World staff. Negotiations occurred between Geoff Stodart, Human Resources/Occupational and Safety Manager at Scenic World and Colin Tyrrell, Head Teacher of IT at Blue Mountains College.

Units of competency were identified through a detailed training needs analysis and subsequent individual training and assessment pathways developed for the 30 employees who participated. Individuals attended the training program based on their current skill level and specific job requirements. All employees completed their course with 10 staff achieving the advanced program in spread sheet applications.

"This project is a good example of how we customise training products for an organisation," said Colin Tyrrell. "Individuals only attended as necessary based on their existing skill level and job requirements. Our experience with flexible pathways makes it a smooth process for the client organisation."

Organisations with training needs in IT, or other industry areas, can contact Blue Mountains College to discuss delivery options.

Community services students marking the fight against prejudice

The first official event for the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) was staged on May 17, 2012, at Springwood's town square. A joint project between Blue Mountains College and Springwood Neighbourhood Centre, the inaugural IDAHO day in Springwood saw more than 150 people attend to share support, stories, delicious cakes and a barbecue.

The Springwood event was a project of Blue Mountains College Community Services Certificate IV students Belinda Tangye, Lisa Gilderdale and Ashleigh Ang, who organised the day with a zero budget. Rotoract Australia volunteers donated sausages, cakes and resources. Liz Murphy from Springwood Neighbourhood Centre said "It's been a great initiative by the TAFE students and we have been happy to work in partnership with TAFE."

