

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.*

FE.

I make this submission as a former teacher, senior, Deputy Principal/Curriculum and Principal who worked in single sex boys and girls technical schools as well as comprehensive government schools in South Australia, as a former member of the Flinders University Council and Academic Senate and as the author of *A Broader Vision: Voices of Vocational Education in South Australia in the Twentieth Century* published by Lythrum Press, Adelaide 2001 – 886 pages. In addition I have had a State-based advocacy role for Graduate Women-SA since 1993 and have been a member of the Australian College of Education since 1972.

Question 1. The development of skills in the Australian economy

One of the problems we face in considering the development of skills in the Australian economy is our failure to consider the impact of history on the point that we have now reached. The past impinges on the present in so many ways but politicians, current employers and even administrators in education would rather not look back.

In Australia, we fail all the time to learn from the past. It is about time we did take note of the impact of innovation and changes in educational philosophy on the structures of and *the interaction between the vital pre-tertiary and post-secondary educational institutions*. The 1970s saw the beginning of a movement away from a society where one stayed in the one job for life, and where women had few options besides being wives and mothers. The development of 'the pill' gave women effective birth control and many were interested in taking up different career opportunities that such freedom offered.

In the 1980s the Technical and Further Education Colleges were set up, in the views of teachers at the time of the change to comprehensive schools, 'to pick up the pieces'. [*A Broader Vision: Voices of Vocational Education in Twentieth- Century South Australia*], collected and edited by Erica Jolly, published in 2001, p 485]. Theoretically, we had decided in the 1970s to connect theoretical and practically based education in comprehensive schools. In practice, through timetabling and attitudes of administrators in schools and Departments of Education that connected approach did not happen.

From the 1970s on, most secondary schools concentrated, and still concentrate, first on the academic aspects of subjects too often treated as 'silos'. At the same time, since unskilled labourers were earning much more than apprentices, able young men chose that road. At Brighton Boys Technical High School in the 1970s we found great difficulty in convincing the most able students to take up apprenticeships.

We were not then thinking of women moving into non-traditional trades-based areas. Private companies found apprenticeships an interruption to profit making. The public-based industries, such as the railways, were not encouraged to carry on their apprenticeship programs in so many of the trades, for example furniture making, related to that form of transport.

Al Grasby, as Minister for Immigration, began the process of solving Australia's problems of insufficient skilled craftsmen and tradesmen, and potentially women, by a broader multi-cultural immigration policy, a skilled immigration policy we have found useful ever since. While lamenting the absence of the changing skilled labour force we need, we have taken the skilled workers - usually men - in all professions, trades and crafts from other countries without any consideration of what their loss has meant to those developing countries. That has been the cheaper, less demanding way to operate, requiring less commitment to local Australian skill development from so many private industries, many of which are owned by foreign companies with no commitment to the quality of Australia's skills base.

Even then, we were not thinking of post-secondary education as a public good. Al Grasby's solution was utilitarian. It may have had advantages in terms of effecting the removal of the White Australia Policy, but it undermined the process of the skills-development in the education of Australia's own trades and crafts population, the inventive section of the population used to being innovative as needs arose, not necessarily bound by theoretical considerations. [It is a pity that the ABC removed 'The Inventors' from television, since that program made so many Australians aware of the ingenuity of men and women faced with practical problems to solve.]

My point is that we have failed in educational forward thinking regarding the skills required for the future of Australia's changing industries ever since. Unfortunately, given the short-term thinking of Australia's politicians, employers, power-brokers and the commercial media concentrating on the here and now, I expect we will fail again. And I consider, the limitation of the questions from the AEU demonstrate this weakness.

Look at

Question 2 The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects.

Where is there evidence that we have looked at and sought to learn from the examples of nations with broader visions? We have had examples of advanced thinking about future developments in a nation's economy from Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries, whose educational systems support learning for all. Where have we worked in a forward thinking way to develop opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects? Where, in that question, is there the sense that the deprivation of the un- and under-employed has an impact on the quality of community interactions?

And we have developed a managerial approach in the TAFEs as well as the

universities, which impedes imaginative and thoughtful examination of issues and focuses more on corporate success than extending our knowledge and skills base. We could have been developing solar-based industries decades ago.

For example the CSIRO, established in 1926 as one of the most forward thinking developments by an Australian government, was doing serious research in the area of solar energy but we did not follow through, except for telecommunications in desert areas. Recently, however, the CSIRO developed 'Windfall' – a Wi-Fi Patent – but had to fight American wealthy technology companies that tried to steal its invention, the result of their hard work and ingenuity. But the CSIRO fought and won.

The CSIRO, for example, employs men and women with all kinds of skills and knowledge, some are trades-based, others with higher education qualifications, some with both! They have to look to the future in the way they operate, not to some short-term gain. And if the Coalition wins government we can expect to see the undermining of the CSIRO as a public good, set up to consider the wide range of scientific and industrial developments needed for a sustainable future, as they will privatize more and more of it. **Then profit, not public good, will come first.**

We could have been making advances to lessen the degradation of our environment but it has taken major droughts to force those in agriculture to face the terrible impact of the salination of great swathes of agricultural land. Recently I saw just how much of Western Australia's agricultural land is now covered with the red blotches of saltbush. That lack of forethought has brought with it a decline in the opportunities for those skilled in a range of trades, including technologically advanced extensions of traditional trades, to make a life for themselves and their families in rural areas.

Partly, this has happened because managers in this country tend to be cautious and more concerned with data than personal development. Look at reviews of managerial practice in Australia. See how often the fearful hand of managers and accountants, with no feeling for anything other than 'the bottom line', discourages innovation. We have had major businesses in mining and manufacturing geared to the demands of the owners whose primary concern is with their own survival. What happens to their subsidiaries in other countries does not matter in the long run.

We chose to stay tied to America's oil-based car industry, when it was clear in the 1980s, that there was a need to move away from the petrol-driven engine. We chose to stay tied to a dinosaur. [I was in America in 1967 when there was talk of the need for an electric car or a more fuel-efficient car. What happened? An American company bought the Sarrich orbital engine and that was the end of that. Nothing was going to impede America's car manufacturing giants and the oil industries they were connected with. They opposed anything that might increase their costs or decrease their profits.]

There was a time in the 1980s, when industries were making connections with

secondary schools and students were discovering the range of opportunities on offer either through TAFE-based qualifications or through apprenticeships. [For example, that was the relationship Marion High School developed with Mitsubishi, waking up administrators in that company and in the school to the fact that innovation with potential profit resulted from the creative engagement of both. According to Heather Rideout on Radio National's 'Saturday Extra' with Geraldine Doogue April 13th 2013, that valuable industrial/school cooperative, collaborative, creative, imaginative connection with its wide range of possibilities for both was discontinued. I do not know by which governments.]

Too often we have preferred horizontal barriers between the different sectors in education with those at one level knowing nothing, and happy to know nothing, about those below them in the hierarchy of educational institutions.

The Trade in Schools development can complement the more complex, demanding, practically oriented approach to learning that the TAFEs, at their best as post-secondary educational institutions, promote as a public good. The cooperation between teachers in Trade in Schools and their local TAFEs can enable older students who resent the confinement of secondary schooling to stay in education.

We need to remember that age alone should not be the basis of decisions for where a student fits. She and he might have life experiences that make them emotionally old before their time. For them, the narrow, linear aspects of so much test-driven schooling may be irrelevant. They may be ready for a more practically oriented vocational approach where they are treated as adults. They may, in fact, then move on at the point of readiness to further qualifications.

We can expect that kind of collaboration to decrease when TAFEs are merely 'commercially-oriented' as separate entities. Profit will come first. Costs for students will increase. The recent short-sighted draconian financial cuts to TAFEs by Liberal and Coalition State governments demonstrate how little those political parties recognize what must be done in educational skills-based terms to 'value add' to our nation's capacity to compete across the globe.

Let us not forget that the Coalition's Treasurer, Peter Costello, when asked about developing computer designing capacities here to 'value-add' in this essential twenty-first century technological industry, dismissed the need for us to do anything that might cost 'tax payers' 'when we can import them'. The idea of an Australian investment in the future through the extension of our skills base did not enter his head.

The point I am making here is for the need for attitudinal changes in both major political parties.

TAFEs are an essential part of the collaborative, inter-connected stages in education. They are not just a separate part with little connection to

secondary or higher education.

At Noarlunga TAFE, for example, those wishing to enter administrative roles in the different aspects of the medical and health professions study to get the knowledge and the qualifications/ certificates needed to be effective in what is a major industry as well as a necessity to maintain the health of the Australian community. Where would the 'medicos' and other health professionals be without a quality support structure? This is a *complementary* program essential for the health services. This TAFE-based course will be needed for the public good as well as for the provision of opportunities for their students to earn a living.

Education is not central as a 'public good' in the minds of those committed to the idea of a market-driven economy. However, in the past, the Trade Unions did not help. The preservation of male power and the exclusion of women for so long as significant in the approaches to the collective bargaining process was meant to perpetuate the dominance of men in trades-based occupations. Women in the workforce were not considered significant. Even today in the hospitality industry, for example, the key figures in the development of chefs are men.

However, after the 1970s, the TAFEs did provide an avenue for women, formerly encouraged to feel that higher education was not for them, to move into post-secondary education.

Before 1970s, and after and still, if we look at the impact of advertising, girls were encouraged not to see themselves as having a right to the access to further education. Vocational education, with its initial practical orientation, was of value in the schools and even more value in the TAFEs. For many women this post-secondary avenue was a pathway to higher education. For others it gave them entry to vocations and careers that expanded their horizons beyond teaching and nursing, valuable as those professions are.

But, recently TAFE administrators have made it difficult for women seeking to re-enter the workforce to succeed. In SA, for instance, the TAFEs at Mt Barker and Victor Harbor removed the women's studies because women, getting jobs mid course, were not completing their courses. TAFE administrators or the government were more concerned with the data of the completion rates than seeing the women's movement into employment as success.

Question 3 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 move to 'commercially-oriented' TAFEs is guaranteed *not* to provide services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals. Every thing will be 'user-pays'.

Consider, for example, the needs of disadvantaged communities – not just

individuals – in remote regions. In South Australia, for the TAFEs on the remote First Nation APY Lands, the separation of the State-based, regional TAFE-based provision of lecturers, from the Federal-based provision of the proper infrastructure and working conditions that have the health and safety requirements for the lecturers who fly in and out, can be an impediment to learning. What lecturer can work successfully with students in a hazardous situation? There are political opportunities for shifting blame with these split funding responsibilities when the TAFE lecturers are unable to do their work properly.

There is need for interstate cooperation. For example, the TAFEs on the APY Lands need to collaborate with Western Australia for an on-line course to enable students to qualify for a driver's licence. That licence is not just needed to enable a man and woman to drive a vehicle, given the immense distances they must travel, if they are employed or if they need to travel for health or family reasons, It might provide a legal identity if that person, because of where he or she was born, does not have a birth certificate. How often do businesses consider these additional roles of TAFEs in remote areas? How often do tax payers encouraged by commercial media to berate governments for waste in educational inefficiencies know or care about how the TAFEs, like all educational institutions, cater for the needs of students who may not be coping for a personal reason. Educators are not just there to increase the skills-base.

But, in South Australia the legislation to set up independent TAFEs is expected to pass both Houses: a Labor government is moving South Australia's TAFEs further down the competitive rather than cooperative and complementary path.

Another factor ignored where the delivery of services and programs is concerned is health. The health of a community will demand the presence of appropriate health workers in TAFEs where they are situated in areas remote from centres of assistance.

Online learning is going to have real value but it must always be seen as complementary. In practically based courses, hands-on, face-to-face practical engagement matters. [Sir Norman Foster, one of the world's greatest architects, still keeps a model room. He has found that computer-generated images do not reveal the three-dimensional problems that the models provide. Architecture will need to change considerably in the 21st century. The documentary on his life and work is very useful for a world where we need to be moving toward zero-carbon producing cities with a skilled workforce able to maintain them.]

A major problem in terms of delivery of services and programs to support regions has just arisen. A bi-lingual approach is of value for Indigenous students who need to have the competence in English to be part of the mainstream. They need avenues of learning through websites and radio and television that are culturally appropriate and that help them to learn English as a second or third language.

In South Australia the NBN has proved very valuable on the APY Lands. But if the Coalition's NBN plan of rollout to street-based nodes, using copper to the residential areas is put into practice, what will that mean for Indigenous remote areas? The Labour vision of covering 90% of the nation has the added value of enabling health and medical information to be shared across all areas. We need to remember the connections of health and education if we are to deliver services and programs to remote communities, which will have their share of individuals with disabilities requiring support to gain the educational qualifications they need for employment.

Electronic connections are vital for the remote areas. How many of the remote areas have the requisite electronic connections? We need to see the NBN as a public good, not just an avenue for individuals to have access to the Internet and for businesses to connect across the globe at a faster rate.

Question 4 The operation of a competitive training market

TAFEs were meant to be more than just providers for a 'competitive training market'. Howard began to undermine them when he set up the technical colleges in competition, taking from the TAFEs lecturers needed to provide courses in his user-pays colleges, which for too long lacked quality control of what some of them were offering.

Governments of a market-driven persuasion have not helped the TAFEs to fulfill the vocational functions we need to develop a more skilled and more knowledgeable society.

Those who see welfare as undermining the capacities for Indigenous people to become self-reliant and independent members of the Australian community ignore the fact that the institutions to teach the skills, the TAFEs, might not be set up in their regions to do the work effectively. I have considered this problem in the previous question.

I fear that political infighting and refusal to consider the educational value of the practically-oriented approach of TAFEs as first a public good will mean that we will continue to lag behind developments in other nations and it will continue to be the reason that so many of our 'best and brightest' will leave Australia's shores. We can guarantee that market-driven politicians will prefer private companies and will cry to the fearful voters about the cost to TAFEs, rather than seeing their role as an integral part of our interconnected educational investment in a future that, like the world that changed us at the end of the 19th century, we hardly envisage.

Considerations arising from a Radio National program today.

On 'Saturday Extra', with Geraldine Doogue today, April 13th 2013, I have just listened to two business-based experts *dodge* the question she asks of 'how' we are to provide the workforce needed for the 'Future Focus'. Heather Rideout, now on the Board of the Reserve Bank, and Phillip Bullock who

formerly was CEO of IBM were interviewed about this report.

This is what concerns them. They say that 50% of our people have levels of literacy too low for the future workforce. They say that 40% of our people have numeracy levels too low for the same reason. Too few as yet have an adaptive capacity, the capacity that will be needed when people have to change from one kind of job to another. They see quality *independent* career advice as essential. So far it is only in schools and often is outdated. They say 50% of the working population will change jobs after five years. Heather Rideout made reference to the loss of the connections between industries and local school in an imaginative collaborative way. [Some of us might have some concern about some industries that are making connections with schools.]

We are going to need 14 – 15 million workers in the three major sectors, one of which was health and social care – the interview can be downloaded. There will be more skilled jobs than unskilled. 70% of the working population will need post-secondary qualification and qualifications from the vocational sector. Even plumbers, an example used by Phillip Bullock, might find their knees give out and they'd need an alternative set of qualifications to move in another direction. People are likely to need double qualifications, vocational and/or higher to We need to develop a complementary skills base with Asian countries. Heather Rideout said 'our vocational training was seen as the best in the world.' Was? Is that before the TAFE's were undermined by private training colleges of variable quality, given John Howard's belief that private, profit-based competition is preferable to viewing education as a public good?

Heather Rideout sounded appalled when she described what is now happening in Canada where companies are outsourcing jobs and asking Canadians to train their foreign, cheaper replacements. Where was she when companies here decided that maintenance was too expensive? TAFE's were discouraged, for example, from continuing to train instrumentation measurement engineers who maintained the quality of infrastructure in regional and remote areas. Businesses preferred to let equipment run down and then fly in expert consultants to make repairs rather than have on hand qualified people trained in TAFE's and in universities to carry out a regular program of maintenance. To my knowledge a course has now been established at the University of Melbourne but this process of dismantling an important maintenance capacity for infrastructure appears to have begun before 1988.

Both agree there must be a minimum increase in State and Federal funding of three percent to bring about the growth in the capacities of educational institutions to help our future workers cater for the changes they will face. They did make the point that 30% of the skills employees have now are under utilized in industry.

No one mentioned women in the discussion. No one mentioned those with disadvantage. No one mentioned those in remote communities. Much as I have admired Heather Rideout as a spokesperson for business, she showed

how limited is a business-based approach to providing those skills. Neither answered Geraldine Doogue's question of *how* we would meet the future they anticipate. Perhaps if they had had an educator or two on the program, they might have offered a range of answers because one size will not fit all.

Neither considered the rest of the population. What of the others? What of older people who might have to wait until 70 for a pension? What of those who still want to work and can do so in different ways, given the possibilities provided by electronic connections? We do not want Aldous Huxley's 'soma-controlled' *Brave New World* for Australia's people.

Older people seeking employment today are often discounted if they mention their age. We will not want to lose their experience and their capacity to contribute to the society and to earn income. A commercial training market, in my view, is likely *not* to have that kind of long-term vision, or the capacity to provide the stimulus needed to enable the older generations to gain the skills they need for the new work they might want to do.

Only TAFEs, there for the public good, providing new courses often vocational courses, having the assistance of older people experienced in the changing aspects of their trade or industry as practically-oriented tutors, working with these more mature aged students, charging reasonable fees, will have the capacity to provide these avenues to enable the older generations to live more satisfying lives. [Sir Norman Foster is 76 and no one is thinking of trying to stop him thinking and working.] But, if the Howard government's push to private 'technical colleges' is followed by a Coalition government, we may not have these **technical and further educational institutions** there to provide the expertise needed.

In conclusion

Reducing these national tertiary institutions to acronyms, we have forgotten why they were established to 'pick up the pieces' and now to contribute to the future good of Australia and Australians in all their diversity.

They are as important as higher education but they have suffered from a level of intellectual snobbery that has discounted the importance of their role in the education of Australians.

Rather than support the TAFEs, rather than take a longer view, Registered Training Organisations [RTOs] and private colleges, with little quality control, were expected to be less expensive options. In fact, in many instances they created problems; such as 'colleges' set up to attract Indian students with promises of easier access to permanent visa status here. They lowered the quality of training in Australia.

The TAFEs are like the glue that connects the theoretical and the practical in education. Closer to the practical aspects of the lives of people in their local communities, they have provided community support when centres of higher education have been more remote. Until now, the TAFEs have been also been more affordable, while being responsive to both local and national skills

and knowledge needs.

TAFEs must be made affordable again. And governments, as Heather Rideout and Phillip Bullock insist, must provide the extra funds, the additional three percent. It is ironic that business, which so often prefers private profit-based approaches in education, is calling for government support. For these business experts presenting the 'Future Focus Report', as for all Australians the technical and further education sector is a vital *investment* if we want a 'value-added' approach that brings with it a sound skills and knowledge base for our nation and moves Australia beyond the unsustainable, environmentally-damaging, short-term, profit-focused attitudes of those encouraging Australia to rely on extractive industries.

Erica Jolly

April 14th 2013

30 North Street

Henley Beach SA 5022

(08) 8356 7716

ericajolly@internode.on.net

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Regarding Question 1. The development of skills in the Australian economy

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At Noarlunga TAFE, for example, those wishing to enter administrative roles in the different aspects of the medical and health professions study to get the knowledge and the qualifications/ certificates needed to be effective in what is a major industry as well as a necessity to maintain the health of the Australian community. Where would the 'medicos' and other health professionals be without a quality support structure? This is a *complementary* program essential for the health services. This TAFE-based course will be needed for the public good as well as for the provision of opportunities for their students to earn a living.

Education is not central as a 'public good' in the minds of those committed to the idea of a market-driven economy. However, in the past, the Trade Unions did not help. The preservation of male power and the exclusion of women for so long as significant in the approaches to the collective bargaining process, was meant to perpetuate the dominance of men in trades-based occupations. Women in the workforce were not considered significant. Even today in the hospitality industry, for example, the key figures in the development of chefs are men.

However, after the 1970s, the TAFEs did provide an avenue for women, formerly encouraged to feel that higher education was not for them, to move into post-secondary education.

Before 1970s, and after and still, if we look at the impact of advertising, girls were encouraged not to see themselves as having a right to the access to further education. Vocational education, with its initial practical orientation, was of value in the schools and even more value in the TAFEs. For many women this post-secondary avenue was a pathway to higher education. For others it gave them entry to vocations and careers that expanded their horizons beyond teaching and nursing, valuable as those professions are.

But, recently TAFE administrators have made it difficult for women seeking to re-enter the workforce to succeed. In SA, for instance, the TAFEs at Mt Barker and Victor Harbor removed the women's studies because women, getting jobs mid course, were not completing their courses. TAFE administrators or the government were more concerned with the data of the

completion rates than seeing the women's movement into employment as success.

Question 3 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 move to 'commercially-oriented' TAFEs is guaranteed *not* to provide services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals. Every thing will be 'user-pays'.

Consider, for example, the needs of disadvantaged communities – not just individuals – in remote regions. In South Australia, for the TAFEs on the remote First Nation APY Lands, the separation of the State-based, regional TAFE-based provision of lecturers, from the Federal-based provision of the proper infrastructure and working conditions that have the health and safety requirements for the lecturers who fly in and out, can be an impediment to learning. What lecturer can work successfully with students in a hazardous situation? There are political opportunities for shifting blame with these split funding responsibilities when the TAFE lecturers are unable to do their work properly.

There is need for interstate cooperation. For example, the TAFEs on the APY Lands need to collaborate with Western Australia for an on-line course to enable students to qualify for a driver's licence. That licence is not just needed to enable a man and woman to drive a vehicle, given the immense distances they must travel, if they are employed or if they need to travel for health or family reasons, It might provide a legal identity if that person, because of where he or she was born, does not have a birth certificate. How often do businesses consider these additional roles of TAFEs in remote areas? How often do tax payers encouraged by commercial media to berate governments for waste in educational inefficiencies know or care about how the TAFEs, like all educational institutions, cater for the needs of students who may not be coping for a personal reason. Educators are not just there to increase the skills-base.

But, in South Australia the legislation to set up independent TAFEs is expected to pass both Houses: a Labor government is moving South Australia's TAFEs further down the competitive rather than cooperative and complementary path.

Another factor ignored where the delivery of services and programs is concerned is health. The health of a community will demand the presence of appropriate health workers in TAFEs where they are situated in areas remote from centres of assistance.

Online learning is going to have real value but it must always be seen as complementary. In practically-based courses, hands-on, face-to-face practical engagement matters. [Sir Norman Foster, one of the world's greatest architects, still keeps a model room. He has found that computer-generated

images do not reveal the three-dimensional problems that the models provide. Architecture will need to change considerably in the 21st century. The documentary on his life and work is very useful for a world where we need to be moving toward zero-carbon producing cities with a skilled workforce able to maintain them.]

A major problem in terms of delivery of services and programs to support regions has just arisen. A bi-lingual approach is of value for Indigenous students who need to have the competence in English to be part of the mainstream. They need avenues of learning through websites and radio and television that are culturally appropriate and that help them to learn English as a second or third language.

In South Australia the NBN has proved very valuable on the APY Lands. But if the Coalition's NBN plan of rollout to street-based nodes, using copper to the residential areas is put into practice, what will that mean for Indigenous remote areas? The Labour vision of covering 90% of the nation has the added value of enabling health and medical information to be shared across all areas. We need to remember the connections of health and education if we are to deliver services and programs to remote communities which will have their share of individuals with disabilities requiring support to gain the educational qualifications they need for employment.

Electronic connections are vital for the remote areas. How many of the remote areas have the requisite electronic connections? We need to see the NBN as a public good, not just an avenue for individuals to have access to the Internet and for businesses to connect across the global at a faster rate.

Question 4 The operation of a competitive training market

TAFEs were meant to be more than just providers for a 'competitive training market'. Howard began to undermine them when he set up the technical colleges in competition, taking from the TAFEs lecturers needed to provide courses in his user-pays colleges, which for too long lacked quality control of what some of them were offering.

Governments of a market-driven persuasion have not helped the TAFEs to fulfill the vocational functions we need to develop a more skilled and more knowledgeable society.

Those who see welfare as undermining the capacities for Indigenous people to become self-reliant and independent members of the Australian community ignore the fact that the institutions to teach the skills, the TAFEs, might not be set up in their regions to do the work effectively. I have considered this problem in the previous question.

I fear that political infighting and refusal to consider the educational value of the practically-oriented approach of TAFEs as first a public good will mean that we will continue to lag behind developments in other nations and it will continue to be the reason that so many of our 'best and brightest' will leave

Australia's shores. We can guarantee that market-driven politicians will prefer private companies and will cry to the fearful voters about the cost to TAFEs, rather than seeing their role as an integral part of our interconnected educational investment in a future that, like the world that changed us at the end of the 19th century, we hardly envisage.

Considerations arising from a Radio National program today.

On 'Saturday Extra', with Geraldine Doogue today, April 13th 2013, I have just listened to two business-based experts *dodge* the question she asks of 'how' we are to provide the workforce needed for the 'Future Focus'. Heather Rideout, now on the Board of the Reserve Bank, and Phillip Bullock who formerly was CEO of IBM were interviewed about this report.

This is what concerns them. They say that 50% of our people have levels of literacy too low for the future workforce. They say that 40% of our people have numeracy levels too low for the same reason. Too few as yet have an adaptive capacity, the capacity that will be needed when people have to change from one kind of job to another. Both see quality *independent* career advice as essential. So far it is only in schools and often is outdated. They say 50% of the working population will change jobs after five years. Heather Rideout made reference to the loss of the connections between industries and local school in an imaginative collaborative way. [Some of us might have some concern about some industries that are making connections with schools.]

We are going to need 14 – 15 million workers in the three major sectors, one of which was health and social care – the interview can be downloaded. There will be more skilled jobs than unskilled. 70% of the working population will need post-secondary qualification and qualifications from the vocational sector. Even plumbers, an example used by Phillip Bullock, might find their knees give out and they'd need an alternative set of qualifications to move in another direction. People are likely to need double qualifications, vocational and/or higher to We needed to develop a complementary skills base with Asian countries. Heather Rideout said 'our vocational training was seen as the best in the world.' Was? Is that before the TAFEs were undermined by private training colleges of variable quality, given John Howard's belief that private, profit-based competition is preferable to viewing education as a public good?

Heather Rideout sounded appalled when she described what is now happening in Canada where companies are outsourcing jobs and asking Canadians to train their foreign, cheaper replacements. Where was she when companies here decided that maintenance was too expensive? TAFEs were discouraged, for example, from continuing to train instrumentation measurement engineers who maintained the quality of infrastructure in regional and remote areas. Businesses preferred to let equipment run down and then fly in expert consultants to make repairs rather than have on hand qualified people trained in TAFEs and in universities to carry out a regular program of maintenance. To my knowledge a course has now been established at the University of Melbourne but this process of dismantling an

importance maintenance capacity for infrastructure appears to have begun before 1988.

Both agree there *must* be a minimum increase in State and Federal funding of three percent to bring about the growth in the capacities of educational institutions to help our future workers cater for the changes they will face. They did make the point that 30% of the skills employees have now are under utilized in industry.

Neither mentioned women in the discussion. No one mentioned those with some disadvantage. No one mentioned those in remote communities. Much as I have admired Heather Rideout as a spokesperson for business, she showed how limited is a business-based approach to providing those skills. Neither answered Geraldine Doogue's question of *how* we would meet the future they anticipate. Perhaps if they had had an educator or two on the program, they might have offered a range of answers because one size will not fit all.

Neither considered the rest of the population. What of the others? What of older people who might have to wait until 70 for a pension? What of those who still want to work and can do so in different ways, given the possibilities provided by electronic connections? We do not want Aldous Huxley's 'soma-controlled' *Brave New World* for Australia's people.

Older people seeking employment today are often discounted if they mention their age. We will not want to lose their experience and their capacity to contribute to the society and to earn income. A commercial training market, in my view, is likely *not* to have that kind of long-term vision, or the capacity to provide the stimulus needed to enable the older generations to gain the skills they need for the new work they might want to do.

Only TAFEs, there for the public good, providing new courses often vocational courses, having the assistance of older people experienced in the changing aspects of their trade or industry as practically-oriented tutors, working with these more mature aged students, charging reasonable fees, will have the capacity to provide these avenues to enable the older generations to live more satisfying lives. [Sir Norman Foster is 76 and no one is thinking of trying to stop him thinking and working.] But, if the Howard government's push to privatized 'technical colleges' is followed by a Coalition government, we may not have these **technical and further educational institutions** there to provide the expertise needed. In reducing these tertiary institutions to acronyms, we have forgotten why they were established to 'pick up the pieces' and now to contribute to the future.

Erica Jolly
April 14th 2013

