



To the Senate Committee of Inquiry on the Role of TAFE

Dear Committee Members,

As a former TAFE art teacher and someone who has worked with rural and remote communities, I am concerned about TAFE Art funding cuts.

My first point concerns what I see as a major truth and importance about TAFE fine arts education. Governments justify cuts by arguing that art courses do not lead directly into jobs. I accept that the thousands of ordinary people who do these courses may never become artists by profession, (although some will, and some of those may go on to higher education in the universities to study Fine Arts). But many TAFE art students will not make art after completing their courses, or will only occasionally. But the point to me, having taught in TAFE art courses both in the city and in rural TAFE, is that the people who are doing these courses benefit, and their communities subsequently benefit, in ways that do not have anything to do with the industry jobs that the government is concerned about. The benefits occur in other ways that politicians should be equally passionate about.

This is my personal experience of teaching in TAFE arts courses. They support community development. It's true that many of the students who do these courses are never going to get jobs within the arts. Many of them may not get any job at all. In many cases there is simply nowhere else for them to go, not within TAFE, nor anywhere else. Some of them are mature age students who are finally able to access self education after years of caring for family. Some have mental or physical health issues, some are recovering from substance abuse. Some are young and developing, on their way somewhere else in the working world. The important thing is that the pleasure and the self expression, the feedback and the concomitant rise in self confidence, the fruitful conversations about individual expression and community that arise within contemporary art practice make the TAFE arts courses absolutely vital, because they are supporting self education and community development. This is different from employment success, though just as vital, as any government should realise, and of course the one may lead to the other. The Aboriginal Art sector recognises this critical link between arts and community development, and notably, this funding seems secure, for now.

TAFE Arts courses can teach people about creativity, resilience, self reliance, and survival, often in the face of indifference, often on a shoestring budget. These are the qualities that have enabled artists to survive in Australia for generations. Students doing these courses can become better carers and parents and grandparents, nurturing creative play in their children. They can become better workers and volunteers. They can become more engaged citizens.

I think politicians and especially rural ones, or those representing areas with high unemployment should think hard about this.

Yours sincerely

Alison Clouston