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SUBMISSION TO THE SECRETARIAT ON TAFE INQUIRY

I am presenting this submission to your committee on my own behalf. I have worked for TAFE for the past 17 years in the library service and our family have been involved in TAFE in Western Australia since 1977. My husband started lecturing in Horticulture and now is General Manager of Operational Services in the Pilbara region. Our family have worked in the remote area of Broome and Carnarvon and also spent many years in the metropolitan area of Perth. We have both seen many changes to the way TAFE has evolved and restructured over 20 years.

I feel I have some points which will be useful in relating to TAFE, both in the country and remote areas like Burringurrah and Beagle Bay communities. I have travelled through the Kimberley region and stopped at TAFE Centres at Derby, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham. We have four young adults who have been schooled in the Gascoyne Public Sector and all have a tertiary education.

- **The development of skills in the Australian economy**

At the present time skills in the Australian economy are driven by Industry and TAFE liaises with industry members, educational institutions and Government departments to create the necessary courses to equip Australians to be trained in a particular skills area to meet the market needs for the future.

At the present time in the metropolitan area of Perth, there is a strong emphasis on International Studies, ESL, English, Auto Trades, Construction, Business & IT, Panel Beating, Auto Electrics, Heavy Duty Mechanics, Refrigeration & Air Conditioning, Engineering, Occupational Health & Safety, Hospitality, Child Care Studies, Fashion and Design, Community Services, Metal Fabrication and Aeronautics. I believe these courses are necessary in the current market and should continue to provide students with a good prospect for future employment.

The Regional areas of Western Australia still require TAFE facilities for ESL, English, Auto Trades, Construction, IT, Business Studies, Metals, Community Studies and Child Care. These courses are essential to country regions because they are the basic educational requirement students need to future their educational prospects. There are regional High Schools to year 12 and there are other District High Schools which go to year 10. At times TAFE is the "bridge" to complete an education for students slipping through the system from year 10 to year 12. Such courses may be the Certificate of General Adult Education or an equivalent.

Regional TAFE Colleges and Centres are absolutely essential in giving the young people in the town the opportunity to skill them ready for work. Depending on the industry in their area students are skilled for mining, agriculture, droving and cattle farming, mining salt, retail, hospitality, marine studies child care and business. It also provides an opportunity for students at university level to study, sit for exams or to engage in Tele -centre programs via satellite.

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

At the present time there is a huge need for migrants to learn ESL English in order for them to be equipped to have adequate English in the workplace. At the present time TAFE and AMES is providing a large number of students to improve their study to reach Certificate IV. Now that TAFE is offering Higher Level study students have the opportunity to have entry into University Courses. TAFE provides the sound training “blocks” to ensure that the students are ready for university study.

Often migrants are professionals when they arrive in Australia, but they do not have good English to work in their profession of study. TAFE enables them to study English so that they can sit for Overseas testing to continue their career in their chosen profession.

I have often spoken to parents who come to the library to purchase books at the Bookshop for their children. Many have stated how grateful they are that TAFE is here. The reason is that parents feel “helpless” if their child is having problems at high school. Young students come to TAFE and their life changes. When the student completes the “Pre-apprenticeship” he/she has matured and is ready for serious learning. Pre-apprentice Training gives the student a taste of the Apprentice role and units of study. The student has the opportunity to mix with older students and learns the ways of studying in a “tertiary environment”. Parents have told me “that they do not know what they would have done with their child, if he/she did not go to TAFE”. For many families TAFE does more than prepares the student for a career path. It helps families more forward and struggling students to become the “person they want to be”.

TAFE has been around for more than 70 years and there are 4 or 5 generations who have been to TAFE either as a Technical College Students or an Apprentice. TAFE is well respected in our community and everyone knows that TAFE will prepare the student for work and provide the best opportunity available. TAFE is a common name that most Australian families know and respect. With RPL and the new module format, learning has never been easier but still has a lot of credibility in the community.

Also, there is the migrant test IELTS which students study full time and part time at night and Saturday morning in preparation for the test.

TAFE is the place where students can receive excellent training to prepare them for the sorts of problems they will encounter when working in Australia and there are courses available. Regional migrants need to learn about chemicals, agriculture, business in Australia, water and irrigation conditions, Occupational Health & Safety, export and import and other issues.

The workplace is continually evolving and changing. All workforces need to update their technology skills with the latest software and electronic equipment. Business, IT and the Library Service are the main areas for enabling students to have access to the latest technology. TAFE Training should be available so that Australians can improve themselves.

- **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 is the ideal trainer to provide programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access training. Most TAFE centres in remote areas have access to businesses and industry people who are generally ready to assist in the training of young people. Sending TAFE staff to set up programs in remote areas to prepare students to obtain skills to use in their community has been ongoing for some years. TAFE lecturers have been lecturing at Burringarra Community, Murchison on “How to maintain vehicles and repair vehicles”, Horticulture Skills and Certificate of General Adult Education and other adult classes. These are the skills the community needed and enabled the young people to seek further training in the closest town being Carnarvon.

The local TAFE Centre in small regional towns is the focus of training in the region. He/she works closely with Aboriginal communities, schools, and industry groups to set up programs to meet the needs of the community. TAFE has played a profound role in providing these skills and making education available for everyone in the community. High School students leaving year 12 have two options in remote areas like Carnarvon. The student can stay in the town with the support of TAFE which generally offers a unique program to prepare them for work locally, or the student travels away from family and travels 1,000km to Perth to attend school in Perth. The same thing happens for students in Wyndham, Kununurra, Broome, Derby, Halls Creek 2000km from Perth. If there is a TAFE in the town the students have access to “On Line studies at TAFE”, or attend internal courses. Specific programs for disadvantaged youth that cannot attend high school are directed to TAFE. Apprentices from remote areas can come to large regional towns or Perth on “block release” to continue their studies. The need for TAFE centres and large country TAFE colleges are essential as they give families the choice. The choice is to send their child away to school for further study or to keep them at home and nurture them as they grow to young adults. Giving the child access to local training at a TAFE Centre is a pathway for employment. Not every country child wants to go to University and having the choice of TAFE is a “god sent”. Not every child learns the same way and TAFE is the most experienced in providing the challenge of different learning styles to assist each and every student.

- **The operation of a competitive training market; and**

The operation of a competitive training market sounds good in theory and I suppose the necessary way to go in this time. However, I have reservations on the training market. Many private providers are offering courses which are completed in a much shorter time than TAFE. Many students are taking advantage of this offer with the private providers, but in the long run I feel the student is not receiving the same education.

TAFE has developed programs that work and part of the design is to allow students to study and recall information in a particular time frame. TAFE programs are set out

so that student's get to benefit from what they learn. Anyone can complete a course in a shorter time, but are they retaining the knowledge. Studies have proven that recalling information just before an exam is not worthwhile as the information is not being retained in the long term.

Private providers are offering shorter courses and at a cheaper rate. TAFE cannot complete with the cheaper rate, but there is no doubt TAFE does produce a better standard of training and the student is more employable at the completion of study.

A large majority of students who are already skilled and looking for further education are pleased to study "on line". TAFE has been forward in organising courses so that they can be accessed on line. However, there needs to be more resources available for the "on line" student to access. Good resources and data bases material are essential. Therefore more money should be set aside for data base technology.

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

The West Australian State Government has announced funding cuts to TAFE in the past few years and as you are aware TAFE colleges like Polytechnic West have been restructuring for 20 -25 years.

It is now necessary to inject large amounts of money to upgrade IT technology and facilities, especially if Databases are going to be used in place of printed material in libraries. The large volume of students using the computers are causing the main IT frames to collapse. If the focus is on "technology and the use of electronic information" in the classroom, then more emphasis is needed to plan for upgrades or purchasing new servers and computer equipment. Such financial restriction to budgets is totally unacceptable for the continuation of providing excellent support for students and lecturing staff. TAFE needs to update libraries, workshops and classrooms to provide the latest technological equipment available to give students the best possible training for 2013 – 2030. TAFE needs to be competitive.

I strongly believe there cannot be two bodies running the same programs. A few years ago the Federal Government opened two federally funded training centres in Perth. An Automotive Training Centre commenced in Maddington and another started in Armadale. Just 15 km away there is a very large TAFE Automotive Training College at Carlisle and a Heavy Duty Mechanical course being run at Thornlie TAFE some 3 km away. The Federal Training Colleges were in opposition to TAFE. I understand now that the Federal Training College is not running and may be transferred to TAFE. It was a waste of money, doubling up with equipment, materials and staff. TAFE colleges are doing a good job in the automotive industry and have excellent lecturing staff and training facilities.

My concern for any fund cuts to TAFE Colleges is utter disbelief. Ultimately the huge loss of excellent lecturing staff is paramount. Industry based lecturers have such a wealth of knowledge and skills from Mechanical Engineering to the Arts.

With our increasing population which is going to continue, the exploding birth rate and immigration our nation “needs to think on its feet”. We cannot afford a “brain drain” and there needs to be ways for our lecturing staff to continue to encourage and foster skills to prepare our students for the future. An example is “environmental and solar and energy power”. We need to create courses so that Australians can be leaders in 2020 in the energy resources and environmental sustainability programs.

Instead of pulling money out of TAFE colleges it should be re-directing funds to specific programs similar to universities so that TAFE can be a leader in solar power, wind power and assorted projects. TAFE has the brains (lecturer’s and students) but they are not able to run proper programs because of the lack of funding and technical support. There should be a number of Mechanical and Technical colleges where specific course can lead onto research programs in energy and new technologies.

The funding for TAFE colleges should be funded by the State Government as the State Government is committed and liaises with Industry in Western Australia. The State Government can work together with TAFE as it currently does to create more courses which will supply the need of training West Australians for future projects in West Australia. Equally the State Government should take control of TAFE colleges in other states as State Government Departments know what programs and skills area are required in each state and what commitment TAFE needs to make to prepare students for new projects and pathways to the future.

Anne Crocker

8 April 2013