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To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Rohan Langford and I am a video production teacher at Lismore TAFE. I currently teach on and coordinate the Certificate IV and Diploma of Screen & Media. Thankfully these courses have not been affected by the recent cuts to funding at TAFE. However I have been watching first hand the distruction caused in the North Coast TAFE Creative Industries section primarily to courses in Visual Arts and Fashion.

Before these recent government imposed cuts, Lismore and Wollongbar TAFE were running highly successful and very popular courses in both these course areas. The Visual Arts courses in Lismore had more applications by prospective students each year than any other course in the campus. Over the last 9 years I have seen many Graduates go on to have successful carees in the creative industries with the help of these courses. It is no wonder they were so well respected and popular.

This also probably has something to do with the large amount of money that is generated in the Northern Rivers through the Creative Industries. In her 2006 report into Screen & Creative Industries in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, Cathy Henkel puts the percentage of Creative Industries practitioners at 6.1% of the region's workforce in 2005. According to her estimates the number of Creative Industries practitioners working in the Northern Rivers had more than doubled since 2000. It is clear that work in the Creative Industries represents a significant part of the local economy of the Northern Rivers.

The difficulty is in mapping the employment outcomes of creative courses. There have been many success stories that I know of from visual arts & Fashion students from Lismore and Wollongbar. However the very nature of being an artist or fashion designer is very often hard to qualify with employment statistics. Graduates don't apply for jobs as an artist in the way that someone might apply for a position as an accountant. The nature of Creative Industries work is often part time working towards an exhibition or creating one off commissioned works until you have established a name for yourself. This type of practice does not show up on government employment statistics so Visual Arts courses become easy targets for government cutbacks.

However when you take a closer look at the benefits to the region from graduates of these courses you see a very different story. There is the musician who now produces his own cover artwork for his albums whilst creating a second income stream from selling ceramics at the weekly markets. There's the Fashion graduate who opens their own shop selling revamped second hand clothes as well as their own creations. There's the artist that still works part time in a local cafe but now flies to Melbourne or Sydney several times a year to exhibit in galleries. All of these people I know. This is how artists living in regional areas succeed. Visual Arts may not be their only income stream but in many cases it represents a significant one. As well as the undoubted benefit to their own mental wellbeing through establishing their creative practice.

Government employment statistics don't see the man who came to study ceramics at Lismore TAFE to teach his hands how to work again after a serious motorcycle accident. They don't see the numerous people with disabilities who find meaningful purpose in learning how to paint, sew, sculpt or edit video. They don't see the aboriginal man recovering from alchoholism who now has the skills to open a small design business. These employment and social outcomes don't fit the mould. But I have seen them every year that I have worked for TAFE.

I am happy for you to make these stories public. However I have purposefully left the names of the people mentioned in these stories out as I have not been able to talk to them personally before writing this email.

I think that the cutbacks to these popular and immensely beneficial Visual Arts & Fashion courses at Lismore and Wollongbar TAFE have been some of the most near sighted and foolish changes to the education system that I have ever seen. It is clear that such poor decisions could only have been made without any consultation at an institute or campus level. I really hope there is still something that can be done to remedy this situation before these cuts tarnish the creative industries courses in TAFE for good.

Yours Sincerely,
Rohan Langford