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I welcome the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and its operation. I make this submission as a private citizen who has been employed at three TAFE Colleges since 1993. I also have a family member completing a TAFE art course at Diploma level. In this submission, I urge that the Commission consider the recommendations that lead to a Western Australian funding model that delivers the intention of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) National Partnership on Skills Reform April 2012¹ without disadvantaging students, and current valuable TAFE courses.

The Skills Reform Package was introduced to address an underfunded training sector and fund skills required for the 21st Century labour market. As outlined in the package, flexible funding provided to states was to be used effectively to increase efficiency, productivity and innovation. Over 6.7 billion has been supplied by the Commonwealth to states to achieve these outcomes. Now known as the Entitlement Model the benefits are student choice through a voucher system with a measurable outcome of course completion rates².

Within the flexibility of the funding arrangements it is important that the Western Australian State government produce the best results having learnt from the mistakes of the Victorian and NSW Governments under the Entitlement Model. Keating, referring to the Victorian TAFE system, warned that the imposition of full fees for workers who want to retrain or change career are particularly unfair and risky for the economy (Age, 2010)³.

Terms of Reference

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

TAFE is crucial to the growth of skills to meet industry demand and drive innovation. Apprenticeships play a significant part in the skill base of the Australian economy with 390,000 apprentices and trainees undertaking off-the-job training while enrolled at TAFE institutes.

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

Australians may enrol in a number of TAFE courses over a life time to upgrade their qualifications in a changing work environment. This is just one reason why people attend TAFE throughout their working lives:

- 550,000 aged 15-24
- 440,000 aged 25-44
- 260,000 over 45.

¹ National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform accessed 15 April 2013 from <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/319>

² Australian Council for private Education and training (ACEPT) 2011

³ The Age (2010) Keating Doubts over TAFE Changes accessed 15 April 2013 from <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/keating-doubts-over-tafe-changes-20100913-159ae.html>

The entitlement model, requiring everyone has one qualification at Certificate III and then a loan system for further courses, needs to be reassessed. This is a threat to many courses at a higher level. For example, “a Diploma in visual arts will set Hunter TAFE students back \$12,500 a year from next year, more than double the annual cost of studying art at university”⁴. If this practice was introduced by the state government in Western Australia, then one of the nation’s finest and most popular art schools at the Central Institute of Technology (CIT) could be under threat. CIT has world class artists delivering in ceramics, sculpture painting and printing. These courses that skill the artists of the future must not be lost under future funding arrangements, particularly with the closure of the Polytechnic West’s art school at the Midland campus in 2013.

- **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 Colleges are funded to provide support for students from various equity groups who as a result might be disadvantaged in a training environment. Compliance with the equity legislation in training: the Disability and Racial Discrimination Acts ensure student access to Aboriginal Programs and Disability Services. These students’ participation and completion of training add to the vitality and diversity of the Australian workforce. TAFE provides accessible education for:

- 65 000 Indigenous students
- 80 000 students with a disability
- 190 000 students from a non-English speaking background

Many small private training organisations do not have the capacity or resources to provide the same level of support and services for these equity groups. Some may be exempt on the grounds of “unjustifiable hardship” under the legislation. This, for example, may apply to the employment of Auslan Interpreters for deaf students at \$55 an hour. As a result, students from these equity groups may be excluded.

Under new funding arrangements lectures may see a drop in their work conditions and students may receive qualifications issued by substandard training organisations. According to a report on ABC’s 7.30, “apprentices are being ripped off by privately run, training schemes that have moved in on a market once dominated by traditional TAFE colleges”⁵. A number of lecturers, known to me, have left private providers in WA. These organisations offered an hourly rate of \$40 an hour which TAFE lectures are paid \$67 an hour.

I urge the committee to ensure that our TAFE sector is well-funded. I, therefore, recommend:

1. A working group be established with representatives from relevant unions : the State School Teachers Union and CPSU/CSA and the

⁴ Newcastle Herald Nov. 23, 2012 “TAFE Changes hitting staff and students.

⁵ 7.30 8 August 2012 Vocational education regulators face more testing times accessed 15 April 2013 from <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2012/s3563622.htm>

Department of Training and Workforce Development to overcome the problems outlined in this submission such as:

- I. a user pay model for most disadvantaged students to attain further qualifications after the attainment of Certificate III
- II. the rise of substandard private providers as evidenced in other states
- III. loss of high quality art programs and courses that do not qualify for funding under the Skills Reform Package
- IV. reduction in standard of student qualifications and staff working conditions