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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

I, Jim Duffield, of BEECHBORO make the following statement on the basis of my personal knowledge and beliefs, except where otherwise stated.

Background I am 67 years old and am a retired army officer from the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers, in the postcode of 6063. Before my army life of some decades I was a building tradesman. Since retiring I have been a member of three (3) school boards in Perth, and Chair of two. I have tutored at a number of Perth universities. My partner is a senior lecturer in TAFE (or whatever label it has today in WA) with multiple higher degrees in adult education.

Notwithstanding the parlous pittance offered as “salaries” to apprentices, I make some further observations. Given that when university education was free, the best we achieved of presentation at those institutions was 30% of school students. I suggest that we will not push that figure higher in the near to medium term given that university students must now pay HECS/HELP for that education. This means, in spite of Gonski, that 70% of the population will NOT go to university.

TAFE is the only institution which can, and in the past has, serviced that bulk of the population. Gonski is moot given the reality of that 70%. Let us service the vast number before we hook and hang anything educational on the schooling and university systems.

How does our national parliament manage our nation’s manpower (personpower?) and deliver the qualified technically trained body of citizens needed for our advancement, particularly in essential infrastructure technicians and tradespersons, into the bulk of this century? Short answer, they cannot, and do not. I have seen many students, including my family, struggle with TAFE and the circus it has become, might I suggest a circus sans ringmaster. I emphasise that the problem is not the staff, it is to be found in both the management and governments.

Development of skills in the Australian economy

This is a problematic rubric given that once upon a time one could pose a question to a State Minister; “How many (for example) Carpenters are in training(?) and get an almost immediate answer. Since the advent RTOs (Registered Training Organisations), this question is almost impossible to answer. And how many self employed top tradespersons with a self-employed turnover of, say, \$300,000pa, will lecture at TAFE for \$60,000pa with a PAYE tax burden? Further, given that in 2011 some 60,000 apprentices walked away from their trade qualification potential (Annex A) one might reasonably argue that an answer to this heading is that we unsuccessfully “attempt the development of skills in the Australian economy.”

Development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects

In any training environment one must reward as an organic part of the training experience. Our certification of effort in levels of time and experience does not achieve this aim.

Parity of Qualification That one can achieve a Certificate (Cert) IV in six months, and some diplomas in a year or 18 months, yet a state licensed tradesman such as a plumber takes over five

years to be licensed, and ends up with a Cert III must indicate the circus analogy is not without some merit. I emphasise, some skills sets see a diploma or associate degree in much lesser time than it takes to achieve contractor status for electricians or plumbers. Periodically, one must pat the dog on the head, not just shove it in a "time-out" box or abandon it.

Delivery of services

In Western Australia the government went through an event I call the new nomenclatura. What once were TAFEs (Institutes of Technical and Further Education) are now a number of different names. This makes even the discovery of ones institute for a possibility to a suitable course an exercise needing bureaucratic GPS expertise. Once all were TAFEs, now in WA all are something else? This does not lead to efficiency of recruitment.

Recognition of Prior Learning This can be a time consuming element of a lecturers activity on-campus, and it is both necessary and valuable. However, it detracts from the prime function of the lecturer in lesson preparation. Thus delivery and marking and can lead to burn-out and separation from TAFE as their employer. It is inefficient and could be better achieved if the staff numbers reflected recognition of this fairly recent impost. They do not.

The Cert IV Lecturer Most TAFE lecturers must complete an appropriate Cert IV in Training and Development to lecture in any TAFE. This can be most problematic. I know of one lecturer whom had been a Nurse Educator as a Registered Nurse, and after gaining further appropriate qualifications lectured for a decade at a Perth university, then moved to a TAFE. And in spite of one of her degrees being a Masters by Thesis in Adult Education, was compelled to undertake a TAFE Cert IV. Plainly a waste, not only of her time, but also the taxpayers investment in her attendance at a course that was conducted by persons less qualified than they.

A pathway to employment

TAFE can be, and often is, partnered with employers to ensure an experiential base to their qualifications, and this could be amplified, ensuring a variety of experience for the student rather than a solitary employer experience?

The operation of a competitive training market

The private sector appears to be grasping at the monies from government(s) without ministerial audit and oversight. This is covered above, but it is noteworthy that any TAFE audit activity that is organisationally provided does so from a larger resource base than that of a strictly limited and profit based private body. This perhaps needs recognising and managing at the both the state and Federal government level.

State Governments

The random scratchings of an Imperial Civil Servant that arrived at what we today call States are an impediment to progress by internationally mobile technicians and tradespeople, whom will or should implement the wants and desires of the university graduates who may design any infrastructure, but need TAFE qualified technicians and tradespeople to manage and realise their vision.

The multiple jurisdictional variability of qualifications and the time spent gaining them is a clear indication of incompetent management and in particular State governments laissez faire approach to technical training for infrastructure over many decades. I urge the Committee to examine the example of the [WA State Training Board](#) and their qualifications. Apparently not one person whom has completed a long term state licensed trade, not one person with a higher degree in adult education. I do not believe that WA is unique with this QANGO and its staffing. This is both absurd and very sad.

These State/Federal floorboard gaps, for trainees to fall between I assert, are an impediment to the commencement let alone the engagement and completion of any qualification. Whilst the poor wages paid to apprentices is a huge issue, the requirement to negotiate an oligarchic divide just adds wood to the fire. An illustration is the tool allowance paid Federally to trainees. I understand the same monies are paid to ALL tradespeople, regardless of the nature and complexity of

equipping an apprentice for their trade. Just a lazy oligarchy with an unusually simplistic and lazy solution.

Conclusion

I urge the committee to ensure that our TAFE sector is well-funded because we will ultimately see more people leaving TAFE than entering it if the 60,000 apprentice loss is projected to 2015. Further, the state licensed trades of an Electrician or Plumber and Gas Fitter sees a lead time of at least six years. Yes, it takes as long to produce these two trades as licensed contractors as it does a General Practitioner of medicine, with not nearly the same emphasis by government in focus or appropriate funding.

I finally offer:

- a. TAFE must employ, even part time, qualified people to examine claims for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and let lecturers get on with lecturing.
- b. Canberra is responsible to "harmonise" trades and non-university qualifications, especially in the building and engineering trades.
- c. To achieve this the federal government must first "harmonise" our standards by inflicting, at least;
 1. a unified national standard building code, and
 2. a similar standard engineering code.

- across Australia. If only to unify the curricula of trades courses but also to make tradespeople portable in their qualifications and skills exercised in and across our nation for our needs; infrastructure, maintenance and new works.

But also to balance time and certification in the skills based national institution that is TAFE. This also goes to international competitiveness by manual trades and contractors in research and development and international competition in the building and engineering trades.

Additionally, the Federal government, as against its responsibility of national human resource policy, must establish an Inspectorate of Technical and Trade Training, reporting annually to parliament to ensure that both they and the States are uniformly producing a national quality of graduates from TAFEs and RTOs and that part completion in one state may see easy recognition, completion and where necessary, registration in another.

We have a crisis on our hands. The only real and long term answer to our 457 Visa issue appears addressable only by a viable well funded, academically and practically qualified and well salaried staff of a Nationally managed TAFE system. The circus, gentlemen, must have a ringmaster. The whip is in your hands, 60,000 walk-outs and 70% of Australians are calling.

Submitted by
Jim Duffield of BEECHBORO
Sunday 14th of April 2013

"War - Hard apprenticeship for freedom" - Edward Everett Hale

Annexes:

A. Trade Apprenticeships and Cancellations - 1963-2011

Figure 1 Number of Trade Apprentice Cancellations/withdrawals 1963-2011



Source: NCVER, Historical Time series 1963-2011, table 9 Cancellations/withdrawals in 12 months ending 30 June by trade occupation, 1963-2011.