

Date: Sunday, 14 April 2013 6:05:43 PM

The Secretary,
Senate Committee of Inquiry into the Role of TAFE,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Madam/Sir,

I do not wish to make a long and detailed submission to your Committee but I do wish to record my concern at what the NSW State Government in particular (and, I strongly suspect, the Premier himself) seems to be doing to the NSW TAFE network.

Firstly, were it not for the dedicated efforts of Penny - a GetUp! subscriber and a person sufficiently committed to her cause to have established a petition on CommunityRun (an adjunct network to GetUp! for that purpose), I would not have been aware of your Inquiry. GetUp! may well have well over half a million subscribers (that's about 4% of Australia's voting population!) but even of them, very few would have received Penny's email. As a consequence you will receive even fewer submissions than you might were most Australian voters to be subscribers to networks such as GetUp! - an rapidly increasingly likely prospect.

Secondly, my concern is based on my own experience within both the TAFE system and two Universities (Monash and Melbourne). I cannot easily convey how hugely helpful I have found it personally, and how helpful I believe it is, for Australians to be able, on the one hand, to have any academic talent they may have refined and refocussed into a practical effect by and through the TAFE system and, on the other hand, to then benefit directly by accountable and credible Certificated TAFE qualifications which, in achieving nationally consistency, are able to be nationally and internationally recognised for competency in relevant skills at appropriate levels of depth.

Were I not have been able to have gained a Certificate IV in Training and Education (formerly Training and Assessment) and a Certificate IV in Transport and Logistics (Car Driving Instruction) I would not have been able to grow my microcosmic business from part- to full-time, nor have been able at least to contemplate a possible move from NSW to South Australia as a senior driving instructor. This despite having graduated in 1978 in psycho-sociology from Melbourne University.

Thirdly, I have attached a copy of my email of 13-03-24 to the NSW Premier, itself sent on the basis of an email from Penny concerning the NSW Government's myopic and ideologically driven cuts to what I believe they see as "hippie indulgence".

Fourthly, I wonder if you might care to write to the NSW Premier asking for clarification on his - and his Government's - requirements as to what an appropriate minimum TAFE teaching qualification now is. You will have noted the paragraph in the attached email asking the Premier for clarification on this very point.

It seems to me that one third of Australia's population, encouraged by the Federal Government to complete their secondary schooling as never contemplatable before (thanks to this weekend's emplacement of the Gonski Report), little discouraged as I think they're likely to be by the Government's withdrawal of some middle-class welfare measures in their determination to continue their educational success at a tertiary level, are being belittled and browbeaten by the NSW Government when it comes to refining, practicalising and applying their academically proven skills.

Worse, as my email noted, those who have been poor and dispossessed and who can find TAFE study a graduating and mentored method of functional academic and practical progress are being thrown back into psycho-social dysfunction.

And worst, the State Government is saying to the whole student coterie of that remarkably functional educational system - "Get Stuffed. All you bastards need is enough dictatorial authority to force you to do as your tutors say/demonstrate and to get out there as quick as you can!"

Hoping that this input and its consequent feedback may strengthen your resolve to even further improve what may emerge as a world-class education system,

Yours faithfully,

Charles Lowe

Dear Premier,

Along with 27,000 other NSW voters I lend my voice to ask for the reinstatement of funding to TAFE colleges to enable them to restore the types of Arts courses they'd been able to run before your Government cut their funding, allegedly as a consequence of the previous Government's wastefulness.

I say "allegedly" because there is little more certain in contemporary politics than incoming Governments claiming their immediate predecessors were wasteful: the claim facilitates a partisan reprioritising of Budget monies.

There's a much bigger cause at stake here. It's the need to preserve an avenue to social legitimacy to those who, being socio-economically disadvantaged, don't readily have practiced 'left-brain' (i. e. logical/reasoning) skills and can only "get ahead" by depending on their right brain (imagining, creative, inventive). When a Government does as yours has, a consequence is that it will encourage such disadvantaged people to even take to crime!

I quote from Penny Ryan's CommunityRun information email:

"the cuts were the result of the financial crisis left by the ALP and visual arts, sculpture and ceramics have been cut because they have no job outcomes.

Yet the impact on the art schools is as predicted. The cuts have mainly hit rural areas (many smaller rural campuses are no longer running courses) and the most disadvantaged. In 2011 one third of students enrolled in creative arts came the most disadvantaged backgrounds and 60% of all students studied certificate level courses as a pathway higher level diplomas. A survey of colleges has found that certificate courses are largely a thing of the past (due to high fees and no VET Fee Help) and with them, access to disadvantaged students."

Please ask Thomas George MP about the extent to which the "Graffiti murals" now adorning the inner lanes of Lismore's CBD depended on the TAFE-trained proficiency of its artists - and ask him if it's becoming a tourist attraction and helping commercially revive a formerly dead heart.

My understanding is that you don't think too much of the TAFE system anyway (didn't you announce, about 6 months ago, the abandonment of the hard-won and bitterly fought requirement for TAFE teachers to possess a Certificate IV in Training and Education?). Please correct me if I'm mistaken.

Mr O'Farrell, please restore TAFE Arts funding to the level it was when your Government took office.

I await your reply with interest.

Yours faithfully,

Charles Lowe