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Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment *Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation.*

- Terms of Reference:**
- 1.The development of skills in the Australian economy.**
 - 2.The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects.**
 - 3.The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access training and skills and through them pathway to employment.**
 - 4. The operation of a competitive training market.**

As a TAFE teacher I have seen that **the numeracy and literacy level of the learners in my NSW TAFE classes is critical to their success in developing skills for work.** Deficits in literacy and numeracy levels needed for workplace success have arisen from four main reasons:

1. English as the learner's second language (ESL)
2. A disrupted school education
3. A learning disorder
4. Disability.

The Illawarra region has over the past decade lost employment in unskilled work which traditionally catered for the least skilled employees. The least skilled have the lowest literacy and numeracy levels. When training is attempted in TAFE by these unemployed students it is essential that their literacy and numeracy levels are addressed by support specialist teachers for them to course complete. Moreover, qualified teachers are an important element in their classroom because they can recognize learner deficits. A **case study** example of this is a student I taught who left school at 14 years of age, drifted into the care of Correctional Services and eventually came to TAFE aged 31. With the expertise of qualified teachers in the course, TAFE Counselors and Literacy and Numeracy teachers, completed a course, started a new business and currently employs two staff one year after Graduation. This case study example vocational success is replicated semester after semester.

The NSW Government held what is termed *Smart and Skilled Consultations*. I attended a session in Nowra in 2011 with private RTO representatives. At this consultation I was directly told by the private providers that they do not have specialist teacher support for learners who have ESL, learning gaps, learning disorders or disabilities. When I told them that I currently had 25% of my class with diagnosed psychological disorders and disabilities they informed me that they could not have provided a service to train them for work. **TAFE offers opportunity for my students to benefit from skill development which private providers do not offer.** Further, the specialist Counseling Service TAFE provides was not replicated by any of the private providers.

In 2013 semester one I have in my class: two diagnosed students with Anxiety Disorder, one student with Cerebral Palsy, one student with Visual Impairment; one student with minimum English language skills and one student with low level written English skills. All of these students have access to Counseling Services, Disability Consultants and Literacy and Numeracy support.

At the commencement of the semester the enrolment for the class was 15 students. **The 2013 class has had its contact class course time hours cut by 40% due to lack of government funding.** The effect on the students is that more of the course has to be self-directed learning.

None of the students enrolled in the 2013 class as a self- directed or flexible learning delivery mode. Students enroll in face to face delivery learning mode because they are self-aware enough to know that with gaps in their current level of skills and education they need direct contact. On line learning options are identified by them as not an option because their direct feedback to me is:

- They would not be able to interpret the instructions
- They do not have access to the IT technology required or have the IT skills to complete online learning.

The views expressed by my students is supported by the fact that 30% of the 2013 class needed assistance to enroll online into their course.

When funding budget constraints reduce the hours taught to students the teachers are consequently under programmed. This is in a context of the NSW Government intention to dispose of 800 NSW qualified TAFE teachers. **This aspect of the operation of the competitive training market has reduced funding for the operation of courses, resources and staff is not a positive outcome for individuals wanting training to increase their skills.** It is also punitive for the well qualified teaching staff.

The class teaching resources for teachers and students have been impacted by previous budget cuts. There is limited access to computers for internet data base access. Computer based class rooms have been reduced in number. Teachers have been operating effectively

by managing the resources they have but **the lack of new resources, the aging quality and lack of their currency is a direct result of lack of funding and the threat of further reduction in funding will pose serious issues in the future.**

A most important teacher and student resource for vocational training is the TAFE Library service. **It was announced in March 2013 that the services the Institute Library Service offers is being reviewed. One Campus Library has already closed.** I take my class to the Campus Library two hours per week to gain access for every student to current data bases relevant to their Business course assessments. My students utilize the computers outside class time in the Library because they lack access to a computer which is fully functional for their course needs at home. The Library and Information Service is a critical part of student learning and TAFE has provided a strong and essential service to student learning with it. No other provider of vocational education in NSW has such a service for learners. Learner resources open the door to information pathways. This vital service for students is operating effectively but is **under threat of funding cuts.**

TAFE NSW is a very effective training provider for the community as it provides for all levels of students. The teaching qualifications and industry experience of the teaching staff are the highest in Australia. They are an essential resource for training and skilling. The proposal by the NSW Government to introduce less qualified staff as Assessors and Tutors will seriously impact on the quality and validity of skilling the workforce. TAFE has the teacher training, experience and resources to **develop skills and benefits the whole economy. It is essential that there is a guaranteed funding commitment to TAFE as this will benefit the economy and the community especially in regional areas.**

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