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Submission to the Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation

As TAFE Outreach Coordinators working in metropolitan Sydney we are deeply concerned about the proposals to dismantle the 120 year old publicly funded TAFE system in our state. We work with disadvantaged learners and communities however our roles are customised to respond to the demographics of our specific geographic locations. While the role of mainstream TAFE is to provide nationally accredited Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) vocational education and training to a broad range of individuals in response to industry and community need the role of Outreach is to provide courses that offer alternative pathways for adults who experience barriers to education, employment and community participation and to raise community awareness of educational opportunities to improve life chances. Outreach courses are accredited but are not Training Package qualifications although they often contain vocational modules/units from Training Packages supporting greater articulation opportunities for students to mainstream TAFE vocational education and training provision.

For several decades we have witnessed the difference TAFE makes in shaping the lives of people and communities across NSW and we believe that this provision should remain as a valued opportunity structure so that individuals and communities have better quality lives and contribute more to productivity and the economy.

1. The development of skills in the Australian economy;

As Manufacturing Skills Australia (MSA) outlined in their response to National VET Equity Advisory Council's draft VET Equity Blueprint: *Creating Futures: Achieving Potential Through VET* in 2010 they see "the engagement of learners experiencing disadvantage as an important step in achieving the workforce participation goal of 69% by 2025 identified by Skills Australia²".

With over 30% of migrants from CALD backgrounds never having worked (ABS 2010) and a further high percentage being underemployed there is a large untapped potential workforce. In that year it was determined that 44% of unemployed migrants did not have a post-school qualification. Sound vocational education is the key to addressing the needs of these groups beginning with access courses and sufficient pathways to industry experience and higher qualifications.

2011 national census data and the NSW report *Dropping off the Edge*³ (Vinson, 2007) finds a complex web of disadvantage ensnaring generations of Australians and highlights the growth of individuals and communities

experiencing disadvantage throughout New South Wales.

The 2012 National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development also stated the important role of TAFE in “servicing the training needs of industry, regional and local communities” leading to “training and workforce development for industries and improved skill and job outcomes of disadvantaged learners and communities” (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012).

Unfortunately TAFE funding at both the state and federal levels has been declining over the past 12 years with competitive tendering being the norm making the attainment of this goal all the more difficult.

- 2. The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects; and**
- 3. 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**

If we are to achieve the development of these opportunities we need a well funded TAFE system but it is not that simple. That system has to be affordable for those on Centrelink benefits and low income earners and effectively address the needs of people with barriers to accessing second chance and further education. TAFE Equity provision (Disability, Multicultural, Outreach and Aboriginal education) and the support services of counselling (career guidance and learning strategies), library services, flexible delivery resources, student associations are crucial to the effectiveness of this TAFE provision and the success of many mainstream students studying higher level qualifications and developing wider networks that often lead to employment. Effective referral into the right program is also integral to course completion. NSW TAFE Outreach is committed to effective referrals before the commencement of a course.

We also work closely with a range of government and non-government agencies to define the educational and employment potential of individuals and groups in community settings. We negotiate programs with a broad range of community partners to promote social inclusion. The partnerships often provide additional benefit with other services that the learners will benefit from outside of the program. Such partnerships promote wrap around solutions and opportunities. Mutual benefits for all stake holders are key to successful partnerships. Modelling dynamic partnerships or networking is also of great benefit to learners demonstrating the benefits of such collaborations. The recent DEEWR funded PLACE (Partners in Learning and Community Enterprise) project in inner Sydney for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness was very successful at engaging this group into learning, community engagement, networking and eventual employment. The Social Inclusion Pathways for Refugee Youth, a very successful program with young refugees in Fairfield was a partnership between TAFE Outreach and Multicultural, Fairfield High School, Centrelink, the Department of Health, CentaCare and NSW Service for the Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTs). Ten young refugee students from Iraq, Sudan and Burma took part in an

innovative program targeting disconnected refugee youth to help reengage them with school vocational study.

Short courses at varying levels are critical transitions for some migrants to contextualise the qualifications and experience they bring with them. They often have the skills and just require updating workplace and social practices and familiarisation with local terminology.

Imposed partnerships such as those with Job Services Australia (JSAs) are problematic when there is a lack of appreciation of the program complexity and learners are pressured to undertake tasks that undermine their progress. For example, TAFE Outreach students at Liverpool have been directed to sit in a room at a JSA for three hours as their training requirement, reading newspapers and then writing letters of application, with no one in the room to assist them. We are advised by DEEWR that the funds we need to run programs for the most marginalised are now with JSAs. They are offered incentives to achieve specified outcomes for the most disadvantaged; in our experience this is not congruent to individuals achieving their potential for full participation in society. Even the basic task of providing résumés to clients seems to be beyond the capability of some JSAs:

“Every résumé brought in by JSA client has had to be rewritten. One man brought in a résumé with simply his name and address, what does this do for a person’s confidence? A résumé can reflect a person’s identity. There is also the opportunity to apply very productive processes including validation of life experience, skills and knowledge, building self-esteem and exposing opportunities that can be applied in building a résumé that seem to be completely lost by JSAs” (Outreach Teacher, 2010, Mt Druitt TAFE Job Pond)

A range of Post Special Access courses that NSW TAFE Outreach and Aboriginal and Multicultural Education have previously offered are vital for marginalised learners to build strong foundations of knowledge and study skills in vocational areas however these courses are very rare as a result of reduced funding for equity provision. DEEWR Productivity Placement (PPP) funded places are generally not suitable for these students or TAFE Institutes are concentrating their PPP places at Cert III or above in order to meet COAG targets.

Acknowledging the OECD recommendation that Certificate II and III are equivalent to school leaving “free education through Certificate II or III is consistent with provision in basic education generally and would improve equity”. “Students should be entitled to pursue VET qualifications without charge up to the level normally attained at the end of schooling, that is, up to Certificate II or III.” “The current funding framework has a number of inconsistencies. It is unclear why, on public policy grounds, pupils in schools studying for Certificate III qualifications (the level of qualification for those leaving school and seeking entry to higher education) pay no fees at state schools, while those studying for VET Certificate III qualifications in VET institutions doⁱⁱ (Hoeckel, et al, 2010)

Unfortunately it is the Equity Sections that are often first hit when TAFE Institutes are making budgetary decisions.

4. The operation of a competitive training market

The concern with the NSW government's *Smart and Skilled* reform is that vocational courses will be very expensive, definitely outside the range of disadvantaged students. The entitlement system is of equal concern as prospective students are confused with what is available and who may make decisions based on 'gifts' or other enticements not on the most suitable and high quality course. Alternatively people who are with JSAs will be directed into the JSAs training arm (as is currently the case) and will not understand that they have a choice and even if they do know what else is available.

IPART has yet to determine how the courses will be costed but the government has made it clear that only courses in skill shortage areas will receive funding. Some local industries have concern that though their industry is not on the skill shortage list they have an ageing workforce and need young people who can be trained and mentored for succession planning purposes.

It is still unclear how the Community Service Obligations will work under this proposal and how the disadvantage loadings can be costed.

As Equity areas do not fall under skill shortage areas and the access Certificate I and II courses may not rate under the approved courses list – as has been the case with most PPP and other DEEWR contestable funding programs we have great concern about the future for disadvantaged students in NSW.

The deregulation of VET is a great cause for concern and the Victorian example is not one that we wish to see replicated in NSW.

How will TAFE be effectively funded to retain equity services for students from CALD backgrounds and people experiencing multiple barriers to gaining qualifications?

Conclusion

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the inquiry.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010 *Perspectives on Migrants, June 2010*

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010 *Perspectives on Migrants Table 2 Unemployed persons, Prior experience, Country of birth by year of arrival.*

Hoeckel, K. Field S. Justesen, T. R. and Kim, M. 2008, *Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational, Education and Training Australia* <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/11/41631383.pdf>

Manufacturing Skills Australia 2010 *Submission to the National VET Equity Advisory Council's draft VET Equity Blueprint: Creating Futures: Achieving Potential Through VET*

Vinson, T. (2007) *Dropping off the edge*, <http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/files/Edge.pdf>