

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee: Inquiry into Current and Future Skills Needs

Submission of the Australian Education Union

April 2003

The AEU supports the submission of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to the Inquiry and in addition submits the following matters as specifically influencing the capacity of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to effectively contribute to quality sustainable post secondary education and training programs as a vital ingredient for the development of a labour force skills shortage strategy.

In particular the AEU is concerned to ensure that Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes as the major public training provider are able to maintain and improve the capacity of their staff to provide quality education and training programs for the whole non university post compulsory education sector including meeting the needs of industries or occupations facing short to medium skills shortages.

The AEU represents over 15,000 TAFE teachers and other education staff nationally. The national reforms underpinned by a competency based training system and industry training packages, delivered at a time and place of the employers choosing, has impacted on the working conditions of TAFE teachers and in their professional capacity to meet the needs of the new training environment.

The decline in federal funding for TAFE, creation of a competitive training market, reduction of industry expenditure on structured training (and its substitution of public funds for its own effort) have put enormous resource pressures on the capacity of TAFE teachers to meet the increasing demand for skills acquisition particularly in an environment of extensive industry restructure and under circumstances compounded by their exclusion from the reform process.

A system in transition from education and training based on a master servant relationship to one based on broad based nationally developed multi-skilled occupations must include consideration of the views of teachers and their institutions and better workforce planning mechanisms.

If the TAFE system is needed to assist in reducing short to medium skill shortages in the labour force then this will require a reassessment of the current skills of teachers and their future skills needs. If there is a skills shortage for particular occupations in the labour market then there is likely to be a skill shortage for these occupations amongst TAFE teachers.

Put simply the demand for competent and qualified TAFE teachers mirrors the demand in the labour market generally.

From a TAFE staffing perspective the most significant issues to be faced in enhancing the capacity of TAFE staff to meet these demands in the near future are:

1. over reliance on market forces and increased use of casuals to resolve teacher shortages
2. lack of planning to deal with retirement/loss of qualified teaching staff over the next 10 years
3. inadequate investment in staff development to meet changing labour market training needs
4. inadequacy of current national policy in addressing staff renewal and replacement strategies

Because of the emphasis on student outcome at the expense of inputs, such as the investment in teacher education and ongoing staff/professional development, the vocational education sector has suffered and been inadequately prepared to meet the needs of labour market skills shortages.

This is reflected in the views of TAFE teachers nationally. In a major study by the AEU TAFE teachers expressed concern about the quality of education they provide. For example half of all teachers in an AEU survey listed funding cuts as one of the five changes that had the most impact on their work, and nearly half listed constant change and restructure in TAFE. (*TAFE Teachers: Facing the Challenge*, Kronemann, www.aeufederal.org.au)

Other factors impacting on their work included reporting and accountability requirements, the cuts to teaching staff, the changes in delivery and curriculum, reduced job security and greater casual employment.

Almost one in three listed curriculum changes and about the same proportion mentioned training packages as amongst the five changes which have had the most impact on their work. Cuts to support staff were also cited by one quarter of teachers.

Asked about the impact of these changes on their work and life, 86% of teachers say that their workload has increased or significantly increased.

More than two thirds (68%) say that their ability to maintain professional standards and provide quality education has been eroded.

In addition, 61% said that professional interaction between staff has reduced and half say that their relations and interactions with students have been eroded. While nearly 44% say that their ability to maintain and update their technical skills has been increased, about 30% say it has been decreased. Teachers themselves are expressing concerns about the quality of teaching and learning that can be provided in the current environment

When asked about career aspirations or desire for promotion, almost one quarter of teachers identified the need for a change in management style or culture as an issue. Many teachers saw management as having turned away from a prime focus on education as a result of the current financial and cultural pressures while others said that management needed to value and recognise teachers' work, and yet others saw the need to build an effective, open and competent management structure.

Other issues highlighted in the survey included the need for greater stability and additional resources for TAFE. About one in five teachers said that workloads would have to be reduced or conditions improved for them to be interested in a management position. Many teachers said that they wanted a career path which enabled them to achieve promotion without leaving teaching.

It is the intensity of the ever-increasing responsibilities, and the interaction between them resulting from national reforms that comes through clearly in teachers' comments

As a result of these reforms TAFE teachers have become managers of change in others as well as change managers within themselves.

In order to address these issues the AEU makes the following suggestions:

1. that an audit of current TAFE teacher education and technical qualifications be undertaken
2. that a national TAFE staffing qualifications profile be developed through relevant employers and unions
3. that a national staff development plan be initiated by ANTA to target areas of skills shortage in the TAFE sector.

The AEU is available to make further verbal submissions to the Inquiry as required.

Yours sincerely

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Federal TAFE Secretary

Australian Education Union