

## **TAFE Teachers Association of the NSW Teachers Federation**

**April 2003**

### **Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the capacity of current government policies and programs to meet current and future skills needs**

This submission is written on behalf of over 6000 members of the TAFE Teachers Association in NSW. The comments reflect those made by members both in reply to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, and to general concerns around training and education in the TAFE sector.

#### **Introduction**

TAFE teachers in NSW come into the profession with extensive industry qualifications, knowledge and experience. To get your foot in the front door for a permanent job, you need three to five years' industrial experience, and most have a lot more. Most maintain their industry contacts throughout their teaching careers. At the same time we employ thousands of part time casual teachers for their industry expertise, and ability to ensure that TAFE courses are up-to-date and reflect current industry needs and requirements.

TAFE NSW has six educational divisions whose job it is to liaise with industry and to ensure that TAFE NSW courses and curriculum involve industry in their planning and development. Part of their role includes advice to TAFE Institutes around current industry trends so that educational profiles can reflect the workforce needs.

With all of this expertise, why is TAFE NSW unable to meet the needs of industry and to keep up with areas of skills shortages?

We would suggest that there are several answers to this problem, and that the difficulties for TAFE are imposed by current government policies, concerns and funding issues outside TAFE itself. It is often suggested that TAFE, whether it be TAFE NSW or some other state or territory, is too bureaucratic and TAFE teachers too inflexible to respond to emerging needs and trends in vocational education and experience. The opposite more honestly reflects the TAFE teaching and educational workforce.

TAFE teachers, by and large still identify closely with the industry areas that they came from, and reflect the concerns of workers in those areas. They feel the same frustration when they find that they have large areas of unmet demand in their courses, that they are not given the funding they need, and they cannot meet the education and training requirements of industry.

#### **Funding**

2003 can be used as an example. There has been an enormous demand for building and construction courses in metropolitan and regional areas this year. Courses are full, classes are full and facilities are full. Skilled tradespeople are required in building and construction, yet there is no additional funding to meet these needs, nor funding for buildings and equipment. On the Central Coast of NSW, a growth area outside Sydney, facilities and courses at Wyong and Ourimbah are full. The Institute is concerned as to how it can cater for the number of apprentices in this area. The inability of governments, both state and federal, to provide the funding to meet the identified vocational education and training needs, is a problem that must be both recognised and rectified. At the same time, the state government in NSW cut funding to TAFE for capital works and equipment in this financial

year. Such short-sighted planning will contribute to the skills shortages being experienced in NSW.

The policies of the Federal government, since 1996, have been paramount in creating this funding crisis in TAFE. The implementation of the 'growth through efficiencies' platform, set about to do just that, to force growth in VET sectors without providing additional funding to ensure that quality education and training could take place in the areas identified as needing it. The move to short term traineeships rather than apprenticeships, has also placed pressure on industry and the training market to expand greatly in the cheaper, often lower AQF training areas, at the expense of trade areas which are resource intensive. In other words, we have seen vocational education and training decisions made around funding and cost cutting, rather than skills development needs of Australia.

## **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

If Australia is to make skills development a priority, and to really implement programs that ensure integration of training and economic development then funding must follow. In the lead up to the 2001-2003 ANTA Agreement additional funding of over \$1 billion was identified by various parties. Funding to address previous cutbacks and to provide for needed growth must be forthcoming from all governments. Continuing Federal funding tied to punitive conditions must end. Funding must be specifically allocated to the public provider, TAFE, on an ongoing recurrent basis.

### Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Since the late 1990's, the vocational education and training system has been typified by the increase of short term traineeships at the expense of full term apprenticeships. Training has been sacrificed to provide employer incentives. This was made explicit in the policies of the Howard Government in the lead up to the Federal elections. The only additional money provided for vocational education and training related to funding for employer incentives for various plans to supposedly address the need of new and existing workers. Any positive outcomes from such programs have yet to be announced.

Opposition policies around funding for courses in para-professional areas have not been pursued by the government (nor the Labor Party it appears) and Australia continues to lack trained para-professionals in many areas of health, education, engineering etc. Such programs are vital and start to bridge the gap between university and VET qualifications.

NSW has continued to support apprenticeship training in a range of trade areas but without appropriate funding of support and resources TAFE TA fears that the quality of the programs will also suffer. Our teachers tell us of poor employer understanding of training requirements and the commitments they make when they sign Training Plans.

At this stage the TAFE Teachers Association and TAFE are involved in a consultative process across the State with trade teachers to discuss the resources and support they need to ensure quality education and training in apprenticeship programs. Resources are needed to:

- develop Training Plans with the input of both the employer and apprentice
- ensure the Training Plan is adhered to both on and off the job
- to develop and maintain student profiles
- to assess on-the-job training
- to provide gap training ensuring the teaching of underpinning and transferable skills and knowledge.
- capstone testing

In the two meetings to date, teachers have spoken strongly of the need to be given time and support to do this work. In southwestern Sydney an example was given of a trade area across two different colleges. In one a teacher was given the resources to visit each employer, negotiate the Training Plan and ensure employers understood their training commitments. In this case the teaching section had received logbooks and records of on-the-job training from all employers and the good relationship between the training provider and the employers was maintained. In the other case this had not occurred and the teaching section was now having to spend time chasing up employers for the requisite paperwork. One has to wonder in this case whether the training was also appropriately carried out.

The appropriateness and success of the Federal Government's new Apprenticeships has been widely questioned by teachers and educationalists. The ability of funding and incentives to be exploited by providers, NACs and employers has been highlighted in a range of media programs.

TAFE teachers have provided the Union with a range of examples over a number of years where traineeships have in particular been used as a form of cheap labour, rather than opportunities for real training. This is particularly relevant in a number of hospitality areas.

If governments, whether Federal or State, implement new schemes for training, such as the New Apprenticeship Scheme, they must at the same time make a commitment to identifying and funding the work involved. It is not good enough for the Federal Government to say that is a State responsibility, and for the State Government to say that it is a Federal initiative.

Too often it is when these schemes start to collapse and enough media attention is brought to bear on the lack of quality education and training that resources are allocated. I would suggest that such short sightedness rarely occurs in schools or universities and one has to question why it should occur in the VET sector.

#### Pre-vocational Courses

One success of pre-vocational courses has long been established and recognised within educational circles, but again apparently ignored by governments. In TAFE NSW, most of these courses have disappeared and then offered only on a sporadic basis. At the same time employers and industry find them immensely attractive and the job success rate is very high.

The TAFE Teachers Association would strongly suggest that there is an investigation into the appropriateness of and funding required for pre-apprenticeship/pre-vocational programs in a range of trade areas. If these do assist young people in identifying future career paths and help to ensure employers that they are taking on apprentices who are work ready, then surely such programs must become an important part of our training system and skills development in this community.

#### **Existing and Continuing Workers**

Australia has a commitment to extend and expand the skills needs not just of young people seeking to enter the workforce, but of older existing workers.

As employees move rapidly from job to job and as work continues to change within industry, governments must commit to funding training programs to meet these skills development needs. Any move to make the cost of such courses too high for ordinary workers must be resisted. TAFE and vocational education and training are about equity and access and about improving the skills and career opportunities of all people. A HECS type fee in TAFE is not about equity, as suggested by some within the Federal government, but about

preventing workers from addressing their training needs. The commitment of this country to learning through life must become more than words and must not be seen as wholly the responsibility of the individual.

Given the expectations that people will now change jobs and careers on a number of occasions through their working lives, skills development must address this expectation. With industry changes and restructuring of the last couple of decades, many workers have found themselves unexpectedly to be out of work. Vocational education and training has long recognised the needs of women returning to work or changing jobs, but it has also been suggested by our members that there is a need to develop and provide such courses for men. It is part of TAFE's access and equity rule and must be supported by governments as part of their commitment to the Australian workforce.

### **Training Packages**

In the recent consultations around the ANTA Training Objectives 2004-2010, there was considerable criticism of Training Packages and their capacity to determine appropriate vocational education and training.

Members of the TAFE Teachers Association have long criticised Training Packages, whilst recognising some recent improvements, on the following basis:

- they are not training packages, but at the best provide a framework for assessment
- they are based around narrowly defined industry areas, making multi-skilling and meeting the needs of new and emerging jobs difficult.
- they are still too industry specific and do not recognise the fundamental need for development of transferable skills and knowledge.
- they are about atomised skills development, rather than a whole education and training process
- underpinning skills and knowledge and generic skills and knowledge are still largely ignored. There are occasional references to the Key Competencies and literacy and numeracy.

Work was recently carried out on a module on 'Innovation' to be incorporated into Training Packages. I am unaware that this has occurred and heard little of the commitment of employers or governments in this area.

At the same time we do not support the recent work undertaken in identifying generic skills required by employers. Once again, the one-sided approach taken is of concern. One Australian National Training Authority must move past its narrow focus on just employers, employer organisations and the needs of large industry, to include in such projects all of those involved in vocational education and training

We believe that the development and focus of Training Packages needs to be changed. If we are to have a national system of vocational education and training, there must be national curriculum and guidelines. But these must be based on a strong educational basis for skills development, not on the type of Training Packages that currently exist. Educationalists, with their expertise in this area, must be involved in their development and maintenance.

### **Consultation and Involvement of all VET Stakeholders**

The TAFE Teachers Association and the Australian Education Union have attempted to draw to the attention of all governments the need for involvement of all stakeholders in the VET sector, in determining the future directions and consequent funding priorities for vocational education and training, over a number of years now. I commenced this

submission by drawing attention to the wealth of knowledge and experience of TAFE teachers in relation to their knowledge of industry trends and skills needs. Yet, as TAFE TA Secretary, I am probably the only person who has asked these teachers what their views are on these topics. It is important that mechanisms for consultation and involvement of teachers and educationalists are set up by governments and RTOs. The lack of involvement of these people in decision making in the sector, has also led to those outside educational institutions assuming that this also indicates a perceived lack of interest. This is not the case, but must be addressed.

Consultation and involvement must also mean the inclusion of those that represent teachers and educationalists, ie representatives of teacher unions. The AEU has long been arguing for the need to have an AEU representative on the ANTA Board, but this has been ignored. In NSW, there have been some changes as a result of the leadership of the former Minister for Education & Training John Watkins, with both a TAFE Union Representative on the TAFE Commission Board and soon one on the Board of Vocational Education and Training.

At the same time, the supposedly industry led VET system must also be led by the community and by those involved in small businesses. Community groups have very little voice in decision making processes, and yet most students undertaking VET courses are either without a job or are training in areas outside their current jobs. Large industry and employer groups do not necessarily represent nor recognise the needs of these people. And what about the students themselves? Their voice in the VET sector is marginal. Governments need to consider how we give TAFE and VET students a voice, as university students have.

### **Areas of identified skills needs**

The following represents only some of the areas of identified skills needs in this state. Yet even these examples highlight a number of issues that we need to address.

**Child Care** - There is a shortage of qualified early childhood teachers and childcare workers. Places in TAFE courses are very competitive and we are not meeting the current needs. It also appears that in some colleges, students are using TAFE courses to gain entry to primary teaching, highlighting the need for additional places in both these fields.

**Aircraft Maintenance Engineering (Avionics, Mechanical and Structures)** – Last year Qantas had planned to recruit 200 apprentices but were well short of that number, and were seeking recruits in New Zealand. Cultural cringe attached to such job descriptions as ‘mechanic’, has possibly something to do with this problem. We need to look at appropriate names and how we lift the profile of all trades areas.

**Maritime Engineering** - There is a shortage of trained personnel.

**Manufacturing and Engineering** – There has been an increase in jobs associated with emerging export markets in this area, and the growth of small businesses in places such as south western and western Sydney. Identifying skills needs in these industries and providing for the needs of small businesses is critical for the future of manufacturing and engineering in this country.

**Building and Construction** - There has been an increase in enrolments in most construction areas across TAFE colleges in Sydney and outer Sydney areas this year. Whilst many of these students are involved in small businesses and/or are owner/builders, funding needs to be provided to support the increased number of courses needed. This phenomenon also raises an interesting question of how good our intelligence is on growth areas. Such demand was not predicted, nor allowed for within TAFE funding profiles.

**Administration and Teleservice area** – Research has identified skills shortages in the areas of:

- legal secretaries, paralegals, law clerks, practice managers. The whole legal industry is a growth area;
- medical receptionists, hospital clerks and coders. The existing Business Services Training Package does not recognise this area of shortage;
- payroll clerks, bookkeepers, accountants;
- desktop publishers

In the Business Services sector (HR, Sales and Marketing, Real Estate, Conveyancing, Logistics, Management, Small Business) both the teachers and students need high-level computer skills, which are not being addressed. TAFE NSW continues to try and address needs in the business area, especially as this is an area where a lot of workers will look for retraining. TAFE offers courses online, flexibly and face-to-face.

**Welfare** – There is a need for entry level staff in Community Services – welfare, aged care and disability work areas. There is a need for more community based (non-nursing) aged care workers who have skills in assessing and referral. 93% of older people remain in their own homes and are supported by family and/or community based services. Yet, the Union has had to fight in a number of Institutes over previous years to retain courses in Community Services. Moves to cutback such courses are very shortsighted. Our members suggest that governments should independent of interest groups, analyse the demographic trends and planning for ageing population in relation to such skills needs.

**Supporting and developing skills of new migrants** – Very recently governments have cutback specific funding for programs such as English for Specific Purposes, which integrate language development with vocational courses. These courses are aimed at providing relatively new migrants to this country with specific skills to gain licences and/or qualifications in their respective fields.

Members suggest that we have a poor record in Australia in capitalising on and making use of the skills brought to this country by migrants. How often in TAFE are we involved in teaching English or Communication to students with high qualifications and skills in engineering, business etc, who are working in factories? There is a lot more that we could be doing to assist such workers to adapt and use their skills within the Australian workforce. Funding such courses at TAFE is certainly one way.

### **Future TAFE teachers**

Rarely spoken about, but of great concern to many of our members in trade areas, is the predicted shortage of future TAFE teachers. In many areas, the age profile suggests that many permanent TAFE teachers will be leaving the TAFE workforce over the next three years. Yet neither TAFE nor governments have attempted to put into place programs to address this problem. The place of permanent trades teachers will not be taken by part time casual teachers in NSW. How many trades persons will give up their jobs during the day to work for TAFE at some \$47.00 per hour?

There is such concern from employers in this areas, that I have recently heard of one in the electrical trades in the St. George region, paying for his workers to undertake VET teacher training, so that there will be future TAFE teachers. Plumbing is another area where members believe there will be a shortage of teachers in the next five years.

There is a project being jointly undertaken with UTS, to support community workers to undertake teacher education and other formal qualifications, with the hope that they will enter TAFE teaching in areas covered by Outreach.

Yet I have never heard one Education Minister nor one Director General of the Department of Education and Training, identifying this as a skills shortage area that needs addressing.

If we in this country have such problems in training for current and future skills needs of workers and industry, then the situation in terms of our vocational education and training teachers is even more problematic. How do we ensure that there are TAFE teachers in trades areas in the future, and that they themselves have the skills to teach our future workers?

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