

Senate Inquiry – TAFE in Australia

Sydney Hearings – 9 April – Jozefa Sobski - Statement

The TAFE Community Alliance is an advocacy and strategy group that recognizes the central role of a strong, comprehensive public VET provider in the building of social, cultural and economic capacity of communities across NSW. Our submission addresses the key terms of reference.

I am a member of the Alliance, but I was once a TAFE Institute Director and a TAFE College Principal as well as DDG of Education and Training. I have seen first hand the vocational education systems of Germany, Taiwan, United States and China. Now I also sit on the Sydney Committee for Regional Development Australia among other voluntary roles. I am an active retiree.

The TCA views TAFE as a public education and training system for building a productive and skilled workforce and an inclusive and fair society. We do not see the TAFE system as a business to make a profit by transferring all the costs of training to TAFE students or employers or industry, the majority of whom may not be able to afford to pay those costs, particularly those most vulnerable in the community or businesses with very narrow profit margins and workforce capacity. WE do not believe this TAFE system has reached its use by date which seems to be the view of some politicians and policy makers.

TAFE systems have evolved differently in different states. I would like to table for the senators' information a copy of a history of TAFE NSW from 1949 to 1997 entitled **From Tech to TAFE**. The technical and further education system in NSW has more than a century of history and service to hundreds of communities and thousands of people across the state.

1. It is a distributed network of campuses and colleges, well over 120 of them, across metropolitan areas and in most regional centres. From Hornsby to Campbelltown, Penrith and the Blue Mts. From Coonamble to Broken Hill to Bourke and Boggabilla. It boasted Mining at Kurri, Equine Studies at Scone, Wine Making and Food Technology at Griffith, Heavy Plant Mechanics at Wetherill Park, Hospitality at Ryde, a national Environmental centre at Thurgoona, Forestry Industry training in Tumut and so on. In the so called west of NSW, there are 24 Colleges and 60 associated centres.
2. It possesses the professional underpinning or foundation for the VET system. If it founders, then much of the so-called training market will struggle to produce quality training in many industry sectors.
3. It has depth and breadth of industry and educational support specialization among its teaching community. It is ready and able to anticipate changes in industry, technology and community and adapt courses accordingly.
4. It has or had sophisticated infrastructure, purpose built facilities and equipment across NSW.
5. It is focused on a number of key objectives: teaching the applied skills to become an efficient and productive member of the workforce; ensuring courses are accessible and students gain equitable access to them; providing opportunities for people to retrain, upgrade or update their skills and knowledge; offering customized programs; teaching literacy, numeracy and foundation

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skills; recognizing prior learning (or credit transfer) to facilitate pathways to further training or University education.

6. It has specialised support services and programs for the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised in our community.
7. It is part of the rural economy providing employment and purchasing goods and services from towns and districts of the state. It is essential public infrastructure for these communities.
8. It provides the economies of scale which systems offer because certain functions and services do not need to be replicated. It is efficient and offers savings through its networked system.
9. If it was not competing against itself and the 1500 or more private providers or RTOs in NSW, and, instead collaborating and cooperating with its partner Institutes, it could be one of the best education and training networks in the world.

TCA's submission addresses each term of reference comprehensively drawing on data, research and case studies to illustrate the commentary.

Some Issues:

1. Incremental commercialization or privatization of TAFE
2. Shifting the cost burden progressively onto domestic students and businesses
3. Dumbing down content and reducing the quality of courses.
4. Throwing TAFE into a wasteful bidding war for a share of public funds. Transaction and promotional costs.
5. Depressing the salaries of teachers and creating a part-time insecure workforce.
6. Enriching some individual private providers and allowing too many to be established. 5000 across the nation.
7. Increasing the cost of regulatory (audit and quality) framework to monitor compliance and manage risk of market failures without actually demonstrating how national education and training is improving in quality, effectiveness and efficiency.
8. Reducing the capacity of TAFE to respond relevantly and opportunely to skills gaps and shortages by decreasing public funding or making it uncertain.
9. Increasing the pool of unskilled or semiskilled workers by making courses increasingly expensive.
10. Reducing access and hence equity for the most vulnerable in the community and contributing potentially to the costs of social exclusion.
11. Failing to demonstrate how the creation of competitive or contestable training market has contributed to improving the skills base and productivity of the workforce.

NB The international student market relies on our TAFE system being publicly supported and quality assured. Its esteem and range and depth of expertise are a critical selling point. As the public system lurches from one reform to another and one funding crisis to the next with huge professional staff losses, that esteem and the confidence in our technical and vocational education will gradually be eroded. We are gradually killing the goose that laid the golden egg or to use another saying cutting off our noses to spite our faces. It is short-sighted and it will create a long shadow into our future as a productive, innovative, prosperous and socially just nation.

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