

Speech in support of Greens Bill

TAFE Changes Moratorium (Secure Future for Public Provision of Vocational Education and Training) Bill 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the TAFE Community Alliance. We are a small but growing voice in the campaign to retain a strong viable public TAFE system in NSW. Thanks to Jamie and to John for their continued work in support of TAFE and public education.

I want to briefly make comments on two aspects of the Greens' Bill, the importance of increased funding for TAFE and TAFE's role in second chance and further education.

A report commissioned this year by TAFE Directors Australia, demonstrates that the real annual rate of return on additional investment in VET, targeted at Certificate III and above, is estimated at a high 18%. Wouldn't it be great to get an 18% return on your own investments. Yet despite this evidence, funding for VET and in particular TAFE, has continued to fall. The importance of this Bill in the maintaining of funding at no less than its 2010-2011 level is critical. Somewhere we have to draw the line and say that there

is a level of funding required to ensure NSW has a public VET system that will continue into the future and is accessible to all its citizens, and the Greens have done this for us today. The O'Farrell Government claims it has a commitment to TAFE and that it does not want to destroy TAFE. If that is the case it too needs to recognise the funding issues and return TAFE to this realistic and viable funding level.

I don't know about you, but every day my email is bombarded with reports from industry groups and others calling on Australia to lift its productivity, to diversify its economy and to increase opportunities for the unemployed and under-employed to be part of the workforce and to have fulfilling jobs. Yet, conservative governments continue to undervalue the impact that VET, but particularly TAFE can have in this regard. TAFE doesn't create the jobs, but it does provide the educational skills and opportunities so that Australians can take up these jobs and contribute to Australia's productivity and growth.



But TAFE is not just about skills development and assisting students to gain employment, it is also about second chance and further education. This part of TAFE's role is enshrined in the TAFE Commission Act. It would be interesting to mount a challenge around this issue given the current cuts and demise of these educational courses in TAFE. Cuts to second chance education, along with the increased fees proposed in the IPART review, will prevent many disadvantaged students from undertaking courses in VET, and from gaining the opportunity to expand their own horizons as well as contribute to their communities. The Alliance believes that this is a critical issue that we need to campaign around urgently and welcomes the recognition in the Greens Bill that fees must be frozen so that TAFE courses remain accessible.

Dr John Falzon in a paper provided to the Alliance entitled 'Every Breath is a new Beginning', said "we should do everything to ensure that public resources are used to arm the people with knowledge, with literacy, with numeracy, with the tools to analyse social conditions, and the building blocks for creating a fairer society; which is why the provision of the highest quality public education at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels is critical for our

national future." Why is this so difficult for so many of our politicians to understand?

We have been disappointed, although not surprised, at the increased attacks on TAFE by the O'Farrell Government. This has been exemplified by their current refusal to agree to the proposed amendment to the Skills Board Bill 2013 that would recognise TAFE as the major provider of vocational education and Training. If they don't want TAFE to remain the major provider, then you have to ask what they do want as they move to a marketised and privatised model of vocational education and training.

The Greens Bill today is a further focal point for those of us committed to public education and for ensuring the retention of a strong vibrant public TAFE system, to rally around. The TAFE Community Alliance congratulates the Greens for this important step and calls on the NSW Government to support this Bill. We will continue to work with the Greens, Labor Independents and any politicians committed to fighting for TAFE. As our website says: TAFE is too important to lose!

Linda Simon