



OFFICE OF SENATOR ROBERT SIMMS

AUSTRALIAN GREENS SENATOR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA

21 June 2016

Dear Ms Simon,

Thank you for your correspondence on behalf of the TAFE Community Alliance seeking our commitment to protect the TAFE system nationally.

The Australian Greens are committed to ensuring TAFE is restored to its central place in the VET system. We have been strong advocates for TAFE and public education. We will continue to fight for a strong and affordable public TAFE system, regardless of who is in government. We want to ensure TAFE is restored to its central place in the VET system. At a federal level, the Greens have initiated a Senate inquiry into TAFE that clearly exposed the impacts that market contestability and funding cuts are having on TAFE institutes across the country with major losses of staff, resources, and infrastructure.

The Greens want to abandon the failed market contestability model by reversing the trend of public funds away from TAFE to private for-profit providers and reinstate core public funding to TAFE as the primary provider of VET in Australia. We want to prioritise budget spending on the public TAFE system. To provide the high-level skills and workforce development so vital to our economic future, the Greens will deliver an extra \$400 million per year for TAFE, at an overall cost of \$1.2 billion over the forward estimates from 1 July 2014. Competitive tendering has driven up fees and shifted costs onto the community via student loans. Teachers are under more pressure to do more with less, overworked and facing salary attacks. Some private providers have won the tender to deliver courses, then sub-contracted them back to TAFE. There is still a shortfall of qualifications being gained in key skills shortage areas.


Public funding and for-profit education institutions do not mix. The incentives do not line up, for the chief outcomes of the higher education sector: qualifications, training, research, teaching; are so difficult to quantify and diverse in their qualities that the profit incentive, even with regulation, almost invariably leads to rorting. The inquiry into the for-profit VET sector by the Education and Employment References Committee found that "expanding a demand driven entitlement to the private sector to access Commonwealth subsidies for bachelor and sub-bachelor degree programs would entail unacceptable risk to the reputation of Australian higher education." It is vital that we provide TAFE with the funding it needs so that it remains a high quality provider of vocational education. The Greens want to phase out public funding of privately provided VET where TAFE can provide the same educational and training outcomes.

The Greens want a substantial increase in the availability of apprenticeships, in rural and regional Australia and other locations where there is a shortage. We want direct government support for apprentices, including to help pay for apprentice training, tools and equipment, and a living allowance.

We believe that all students should have the opportunity to study at TAFE regardless of their private capacity to pay for their education. The Government should abandon any moves to a Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) style university loans scheme for TAFE students. We support a fee and charges free TAFE system, where income contingent loans are unnecessary and the Commonwealth government increases its contribution to the costs of a high quality accessible system.

Thank you once again for contacting the Greens seeking our commitment to protect TAFE and for sharing your concerns. If there is anything else with which we can assist you, please do not hesitate to contact the office of Senator Robert Simms, who is the Greens spokesperson for higher education.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Simms', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Robert Simms

Australian Greens Senator for South Australia