

## TAFE COMMUNITY ALLIANCE LAUNCH

Thank you for inviting me to speak today at this very important launch of the TAFE Community Alliance.

Congratulations to everyone involved in bringing this Alliance together – you have the strong support of the NSW Labor Opposition.

We recognise the vital role of TAFE as the pre eminent provider of quality vocational education and training and second chance education. And we recognise the vital role of TAFE in building the economic, social and cultural capacity of communities.

This is a critical time for TAFE in NSW. I'm sure it is fair to say that many of you have been disappointed at times with the support for TAFE from Governments of all persuasions - however I can't think of a time when there has been such a serious, concerted attack on TAFE and its very existence.

In the last 12 months in NSW we have seen budget cuts announced that will slash 800 teaching and other jobs in TAFE and increase fees.

We have seen the smart and skilled reforms which threaten the viability of TAFE campuses across NSW.

And now the Government is proposing to replace teachers with unqualified paraprofessionals undermining the quality of training TAFE can deliver and TAFE teachers have still not received the 2.5% wage increase that almost all other Government employees have.

These are grim times indeed and the disaster with the vocational and education reforms in Victoria, demonstrates the importance of strong and vocal advocacy. This alliance brings together the community, teachers, unions and

politicians to campaign against these retrograde changes.

People in NSW are rightly proud of TAFE – it plays a key role in tackling skills shortages, training the plumbers, electricians, hairdressers and chefs of the future.

It provides educational opportunities for those who have disengaged from education for whatever reason and gives people mid career or re entering the workforce the chance to upgrade their skills.

TAFE makes a great contribution to our creative and cultural life by training many of artists and designers.

And in regional and rural communities, TAFE Institutes are often one of the most significant employers and make all the difference to those communities economic and social life.

Barry O'Farrell's actions are placing all of this at risk. I have been inundated with letters, calls and emails from students, teachers, parents and community members outraged about these attacks.

Like everyone in this room, I have heard horror stories of young kids hoping to do a year 10 equivalent course, only to find out at the last minute the course won't go ahead, of teachers being pulled out of class to be told they will need to reapply for their jobs or of students having their course discontinued mid way through.

It is particularly concerning to see how the cuts have focussed on those units and programs that support people who are vulnerable or marginalised. Specialist units such as Multicultural, Outreach and Disabilities are under threat at TAFE Institutes right across NSW.

It is difficult to express and impossible to quantify in dollar terms the difference these programs make to the lives of individuals.

Unfortunately what we are seeing at the moment is just the beginning. The Smart and Skilled reforms are now being rolled out for implementation in 2014. Just this week the Government released the Draft Quality Framework for Smart and Skilled.

Despite this being one of the most fundamentals reorganisations of the delivery of vocational education and training, the draft framework is so vague that it is almost meaningless, offering none of the protections and guarantees that might help TAFE survive.

While I said at the beginning the community have a very high regard for TAFE, it is also the

case that unless directly affected by these changes, many people are unaware of just how serious the threat is to TAFE.

We have to make sure that people are aware of what is happening, we have to get them involved in the campaign, we have to hold the O'Farrell Government to account and make them understand they have a fight on their hands.

The future of TAFE, of quality vocational education and training and of all the people who rely on it, whether they are students, teachers or employers, is too important for us not to give this campaign all the dedication and commitment we can.

***Carmel***

***Tebutt***