

TAFE Community Alliance Launch – 22nd February, 2013

Can I begin by acknowledging that we're meeting on the land of the Burramattagal People of the Gadigal nation and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

There are some things which are just too awful to contemplate. Total and comprehensive destruction of TAFE, something I through I would never say to a meeting like this, in my lifetime in politics, is now a real and present danger that threatens not just the teacher workforce, not just the existing students within TAFE, not just the future students within TAFE, but our very society itself.

The very essence of social justice relies upon a quality, innovative, public provider of vocational education and training.

Private providers simply will not give the same quality second-chance education to those who have complex learning needs, and are consequently quite expensive to educate.

Mary, quite dramatically and excellently, outlined some case studies which show absolutely the contribution that TAFE has made to making a fairer NSW. It's also kids with special needs, young adults and older people with special needs whose opportunities to reengage with society, reengage with the economy, reengage with our culture, are at risk if we lose our TAFE system.

And people from disadvantaged communities. As I've been travelling around NSW, I've been enormously impressed by the number of students who have spoken to me who say: "without TAFE, I would be not the first person in our family to get a

qualification, I would be one of a family that never got a qualification".

But also rural and regional communities, Western Sydney and the semi-rural fringe of Sydney, not served by private providers – the so called "thin market problem" – but left to their own devices, without the capacity to improve their own regional economies. There's no question, if you get outside of Sydney, that TAFE is the lynch-pin of a strong regional economy. Without TAFE, so many regional economies are going to go belly up. In a time where they are faced with enormous challenges, challenges to do with changes in climate, challenges to do with difficult markets for their produce, they will be left without the skills to diversify their economy.

But even more so, we are now at 2013, this is the beginning of the greenhouse century. And what we do now in terms of the skills and the education we give to our workforce will determine our capacity to cope, not just with the legacy of the greenhouse gasses we have put into our atmosphere, but also with our capacity to innovate and change, and to profit by producing and innovating in those solutions, which are so essential to reduce the world's green house gas emissions.

Without TAFE, without a public provider which focuses on not just training but also education, we will not have that innovative workforce, we will not prosper, we will be left in a resource based dead end that will leave us declining slowly into unpleasant poverty.

None of these benefits will survive unless there is a 180 degree turn in the O'Farrell Government's approach to TAFE. What we've

seen, and that the other speakers have spoken very eloquently, about is 800 jobs cut out of TAFE. You read that in the newspaper and you think “800 jobs, that’s terrible”. But then you go to Richmond TAFE and they tell you about the fact that they will have no Outreach next year and that agriculture courses, the only inside the Sydney area, they’re going to disappear.

You go to the Northern Institute of TAFE and they tell you about their Library disappearing and their IT and Arts courses disappearing. And so the list goes on. The reality is that those 800 jobs disappearing, are disappearing from an organisation that has already been cut to the bone. That has already seen \$980m in per student terms, adjusted for inflation, cut out of its funding, its state funding over the years 1997 to 2010.

Already cut to the bone, there are no efficiencies to be gained. I would argue there probably weren’t many efficiencies to be gained in the first place, but now no more efficiencies to be gained. Every cent that is taken out of TAFE is another job loss from TAFE, is another student who loses their course part way through. Another young person or older adult who cannot get access to quality training. Another person who is abandoned to a market that cares, not for them, but only for the bottom line.

On top of that we’ve seen a massive increase in fees. Often already inflated fee base that came out of the last 16 years the O’ Farrell government wants to increase average fees by 9.5% and in some courses those courses are now becoming full-fee based courses and we are seeing students who cannot afford to engage in their further education. Smarter and Skilled, a voucher system that is going to begin half-way through next year, a voucher system which is based on the idea that education and training is a commodity, not a community services, a voucher system that if it is not stopped, will see TAFE entirely privatised. Throwing TAFE into competition

against lower quality, lower cost, lower waged private providers is a one-way trip to no TAFE at all. Is a one-way trip to privatisation.

Adrian Piccoli, egged on by the National Government, by the Australian Government through the National Partnerships wants to replace a commitment to students in community with an obsession on profits and market share. What Adrian Piccoli sees as a future, is a further entirely delivered by the private providers. And this doesn’t come out of the blue. We have had governments, state and federal, across all political complexions, who have inflicted massive cuts on TAFE. Who have inflicted a market and commercialisation environment onto TAFE. Who have been committed to increasing the funding of private providers. And I must say, if you really talk about markets, how can you have a market where public money is going into private providers? Surely that is an unfair market. How can you have a market where private providers do not have the same obligations or commitments to second chance education and to students with learning difficulties and difficult learning styles?

There is a dystopian future which is emerging from this debate, a dystopian future which ought to terrify everybody, regardless of their political persuasion. TAFE is nothing more than a brand name, a set of buildings, leased out at low cost to private providers who reap massive profits out of students and who only provide to those students who are easy to educate.

This doesn’t come from nowhere. The Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Chris Eccles, comes from South Australia and Victoria. In both those states we saw a massive destruction of the TAFE system. In Victoria the TAFE system is absolutely in crisis. One more strong northerly breeze and there are four or five



John Kaye

TAFE institutes that will fall over in Victoria. We have to ask the question: why did Mr O'Farrell employ a Director General for his Department who came with such an appalling track record. What is going on in the upper-echelons of the O'Farrell Government, that they would be prepared to employ a man whose whole career has been based around privatising TAFE?

I want to finish by congratulating the TAFE Community Alliance. There has never been a time when we have needed an alliance that cuts across political parties, cuts across the union movement, cuts across the community and draws us all together. And says that we will not contemplate anything as awful as the destruction of TAFE.

Our task is to make sure that every voter, no matter who they vote for, no matter where they are in NSW, knows what is happening and knows what is at stake. The Greens are committed to that, Labor is now committed to that, both unions involved in TAFE are committed to that. And there are people involved in the coalition, members of parliament in the coalition who do have the courage to listen to their constituents and hear what their constituents have to say.

Part of our job is to give those members in the coalition, as members of Parliament who have the Liberal party and the National party, the courage to take what they are hearing from their constituents and take it into their party room, and say to Barry O'Farrell, "you are facing a revolt". A community revolt that is so large that it will consume even your massive majority and drive you out of politics. Because this is not just about saving TAFE now. It is about sending a message to any future government, that any contemplation of compromising the future of TAFE is not only intolerable in terms of its impacts on NSW but it will be for you an electoral disaster.

Thank you very much indeed.