

from the president



Linda Simon

Federal President of the
TAFE Division
of the AEU

The 2004 TAFE Campaign

Focussing the minds of governments and the public on TAFE funding is never an easy task, but one that is of utmost significance to TAFE teachers and educators in this Federal election year. We'd be hard put to find a politician who wouldn't give us all the right words about how important vocational education and training is to this country, and how we must ensure that TAFE is funded to meet the expectations of its dual roles in vocational training and adult education. Rarely, however, do these words actually translate into additional funding for TAFE.

The ANTA Agreement that was put on offer to states and territories in 2003 contained no new additional growth funding. Certainly the Federal Minister for Education and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, tried to claim for some time that the rollover of the growth funding from the previous agreement of \$100m, the indexation and the funding for mature workers and disability programs, was new money. However, he acknowledged when he met with the AEU in Canberra on 29 May 2003 that there was no new growth funding. The only new money had already been budgeted for in the Australians Working Together package and the training arising from the disability reform legislation, which has not yet passed through the Senate.

Each year around 40,000 potential students are turned away from TAFE colleges across the country. All states

and territories are reporting critical under-funding resulting in cuts to courses and/or course hours, lack of facilities, increased casualisation of staff and pressures to commercialise a greater range of courses. One of the most significant impacts of this funding freeze, has been the move to shift the costs of education from governments to the individual, particularly through the imposition of

**'Each year around
40,000 potential students
are turned away from
TAFE colleges across the
country'.**

TAFE fees and charges. The NSW experience is evidence of this, with fees increasing by up to 227% in the one year. But it is also apparent in other states such as Victoria where the cost of a tuition hour has been increased by 25%. More and more the costs associated with materials required for courses, are being passed onto students.

In their letter to Dr Nelson on 19 December, signed by all state and territory Education Ministers, they say: 'We find it extraordinary that you were able to negotiate an additional \$200m for universities but are

apparently powerless to address critical issues of skilling and training for which the Commonwealth must accept responsibility in the national interest.' The Education Ministers then quote the analysis of growth carried out by Access Economics for ANTA last year, which indicated that demand has the potential to grow by 5.2% per annum. This would translate into an additional \$348m over the life of the agreement.

Despite his stated commitment to assisting young people into education and jobs, the Federal Minister has put no new money on offer to fund the proposal for \$130m each year for five years to support a comprehensive and sustainable response to young people's transitions, as put up by Queensland and NSW Ministers, at a recent ANTA meeting.

As a result of their rejection of the new ANTA Agreement, the Federal Government has imposed 'provocative penalties' on the states and territories. The Government has rolled over the current agreement, but withdrawn the indexation of growth funding. In addition, instead of providing funds to states and territories to administer, the Commonwealth will directly purchase training places for people with a disability, parents returning to work and older workers, through brokers, to the tune of \$29.4m. Our experience of tendering to-date through Adult Migrant Education and Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programs indicates that much of this

money will end up funding the administration of the program rather than actually assisting the recipients.

The AEU's Alternative ANTA Agreement calls for growth funding of at least \$1080m for 2004-2006, to fund increased student demand and to compensate for funding cuts. In addition the AEU will be campaigning around additional funding for a range of quality programs for curriculum development, national staff and professional development and research projects, an Education Equity Program, funding for TAFE Institutions enrolling a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students, and increased capital funding.

The issue of fees, and capping fees at a level that makes TAFE accessible to all, will also become a public education election issue.

The campaign kicks off with the training of activists and lobbying in Canberra on 30 and 31 March. All political parties will have the opportunity to state their commitment to TAFE and to convince us of their support. TAFE teachers and educationalists from around the country will be lobbying politicians in both Houses of Parliament. From there, the campaign will return to the states and territories where TAFE teacher members will increase the lobbying and the pressure on political candidates to meet our demands.

The campaign has begun early. TAFE issues must continue to be raised right up until the elections. The Labor Opposition has already promised an additional 20,000 student places per year, but we want more. At the last Federal election, the most significant promise from the Opposition came just days before the actual election. A letter to the AEU from the then Shadow Minister for Education Michael Lee agreed to re-examine the ANTA Agreement, to develop an appropriate policy on user choice, and to address the needs of TAFE for growth funds. Three years down the track, we expect much more from all political parties, as do present and future TAFE students. ■

www.atpl.net.au

Visit our new site!



Australian **Training** Products
LIMITED



Check your orders online

Over 5000 products to choose from

Preview samples online before you buy

Free products to download for a limited period

Level 25, 150 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne 3000

Ph: +61 3 9655 0600
Fax: +61 3 9639 4684