



# Queensland Skills Plan

IMAGE: PHOTOS.COM

**T**he VET White Paper, *Queensland Skills Plan* was launched by the Premier and Minister on 8 March. **JOHN McCOLLOW** summarises its major points.

**T**he *Queensland Skills Plan* gives a positive outlook for TAFE. It gives TAFE a prominent role in meeting the skills needs of Queenslanders, it shows a commitment to significantly increasing the number of training places and there is a significant injection of capital works funding for TAFE Institutes (an additional \$300m over four years). The paper's rhetoric is about valuing TAFE employees and makes it clear that they will remain a part of the public service. A boost for VET professional development will be welcomed by TAFE teachers.

It is also good to see that the paper recognises that skills shortages are linked to structural factors in the labour market rather than attempting, as some politicians do, to blame training providers. It would have been better, however, if the link between skills shortages and market-driven training provision had been recognised as well.

The paper sets as a goal greater cooperation amongst TAFE institutes and between schools and TAFE (for example in the use of facilities). School students undertaking TAFE courses as a part of their senior studies will be exempt from tuition fees where the qualification is part of or progresses to a Certificate III or higher.

The paper announces a review of apprentice wages to make apprenticeships more attractive. The length of apprenticeships will be shortened in a number of cases in order to address skills shortages. There will also be a review of school-

based apprenticeships and traineeships. Higher qualification courses (Certificate IV and diploma-level) will expand to meet the need to address the problem of an underqualified associate professional workforce.

The paper outlines a number of initiatives such as the establishment of a TAFE Queensland Product Services Unit to support product development and ensure accreditation and registration requirements are met, a TAFE Queensland Small Business Solutions Unit and a Skills Assessment Service.

It is commendable that the paper addresses social justice issues by specific initiatives for Indigenous people, people with disabilities, older people and people who are unemployed. Unfortunately gender issues in training are ignored.

Many TAFE Institutes will be restructured.

## 'the future of some programs and campuses is not spelt out'

The paper identifies a number of changes but the future of some programs and campuses is in doubt. In addition to the creation of three 'centres of excellence,' each institute in the State will become a 'lead institute for a key industry.'

The paper's ethos is one of making training even more market-oriented. After more than a decade of bending over backwards to accommodate a training system devised by industry without provider input and predicated on the creation of

Wayne Costelloe



**Wayne Costelloe** is the newly appointed AEU Federal Aboriginal Education Officer. He is descended

from the Ngugi–Nunukul Clans of North Stradbroke Island, Gungurri Clan of Mitchell and the Waragamay Clan of the Ingham area. Wayne comes to the AEU from the Queensland Council of Unions where he served as the Indigenous Employment Support Officer.

Wayne is a qualified primary school teacher and his teaching has included working as an Australian Volunteer Abroad in Thailand at the Phuket Teachers' College, teaching English as a foreign language. Wayne is currently completing his Masters of Arts (Indigenous Social Policy) through the University of Technology, Sydney.

Wayne has worked in policy and program development and project management in the Commonwealth and Queensland Public Services. He has worked in several State Government agencies including the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) where he wrote the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Career Development Strategy* and the *Partnership Commitment Strategy*. Wayne also worked in Education Queensland where he worked on literacy, VET in Schools and off-campus student support projects.

Wayne has extensive Community Development experience serving on Management Committees for Aboriginal community organisations. ❖

John McCollow



**Dr John McCollow** is to be an AEU Acting Federal Research Officer for the rest of 2006, a role which

he filled for four months in late 2005 and a position to which he is pleased to return. John has been a Research Officer with the QTU since 1987. With the QTU his work focuses on educational funding and organisation, VET, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and the education of students with disabilities. Prior to working for the QTU John was a secondary school teacher and has also worked for the former Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. He has lectured part-time in educational policy at the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland. John has written or contributed to numerous QTU and AEU reports and submissions and has published widely in union and academic journals. John's role with the AEU will involve working with both the general and TAFE divisions with a particular focus on funding issues and will include responsibility for *The Australian TAFE Teacher*.

training markets, TAFE teachers will be interested in the paper's view that 'we must move away from supply driven training.' A core, but unacknowledged contradiction running through the document is its emphasis on market solutions (which are by nature based on unregulated competition) and the need for greater planning and cooperation amongst providers.

The paper aims to increase the number of training providers by 'fundamental changes to user choice programs.' What these changes entail is not specifically spelt out. Private providers will also have greater access to TAFE facilities and institutes will be encouraged to enter into partnerships with private RTOs. Of concern is the proposal to make greater use of 'industry professionals' to provide teaching in institutes. This has potential implications in terms of the casualisation of TAFE employment and the number of teacher-qualified staff.

In line with the market ethos of the paper, the Government intends to implement 'a more independent commercial governance model' for TAFE institutes. While TAFE teachers will continue to be DET employees and public servants, more decisions will be made at the Institute level (exact details are not provided). Institute councils/boards will be reconstituted to make them more commercially focussed (and presumably less representative of stakeholders). The changes could have important implications for TAFE teachers' conditions and security of employment.

It is unlikely that TAFE employees would agree with the paper's characterisation of measures to create employment conditions that 'remove restrictive and unnecessarily complex arrangements'

and increase flexibility as measures designed to "support TAFE Queensland staff." The potential is for longer hours, less secure employment, increased workloads and loss of conditions.

While there are some measures that address social justice issues, the two drivers in terms of curriculum content and delivery in TAFE will be addressing skills shortages and meeting market demand. There is almost no recognition of the broader social and cultural dimensions of VET. There may be a contraction of activity in those areas of the VET curriculum which do not plug directly into the skills shortages/market demand model of curriculum provision. Regrettably the paper endorses the ACCI/BCA version of employability skills, which are predicated more on ensuring a docile and manipulable workforce than on delivering skills that are useful to employees themselves.

The paper sets out an ambitious and in some cases ambiguous agenda with little indication of the timelines for implementation. There is some indication that the plan for implementation is still to be developed. ❖

*John McCollow is currently the Queensland Teachers Union Research Officer. He is also a TAFE newsmaker for this edition (please see column to right).*