



from the president
Linda Simon, Federal President of the
TAFE Division of the AEU

Rudd Government moves quickly, but is it the right direction for TAFE?

‘A real social inclusion agenda would recognise that short courses lasting only a couple of months will not necessarily provide people with the skills they need to gain employment’.

The convincing win by the Federal Labor Government in November 2007 gave us all momentary hope that public education would become an important government issue. Momentary unfortunately, for despite the new Government and its Education and Training Minister Julia Gillard moving quickly to make changes in the area of vocational education and training, TAFE has hardly figured in the policy debate.

The Rudd Government has a significant opportunity to include VET in its policy and planning to redress disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and at the same time to build an economy firmly based on sustainability and renewable energies. Neither of these opportunities

appear to have been pursued.

The Government has moved quickly to establish Skills Australia, and to consider membership of its Board. The ACTU might be offered a position on the Board, but we doubt that the AEU or teacher representatives will have a voice, despite undertakings by the former Shadow Education Minister Stephen Smith that a Rudd Government would redress the exclusion of educational stakeholders by the previous government. At this stage it looks like Skills Australia will play a similar role to that of the previous ANTA Board, providing policy advice to the Government.

The AEU continues to pursue the question of how our voices can be heard on TAFE issues with



Hot dates for 2008

NCVER events

‘No Frills’ – 17th National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference

Launceston, Tasmania
9 – 11 July 2008

The best value event on the VET calendar; the conference aims to bring together staff interested in education and training research from TAFE institutes, universities and private registered training organisations, as well as consultants.

To register your interest to present or attend, visit
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/trconf/trconf17.html>

Apprenticeships: Sustaining Australia’s skills base

– NCVER Research Forum

Melbourne, Victoria
15 August 2008

A one day national forum that will unravel the apprenticeship maze—their growth and the drivers of increasing numbers—and explore the future of Australia’s apprenticeship system.

Email events@ncver.edu.au to register your interest.

Research Bites series

Selected cities
Late 2008

A national series of short research briefings which will be hosted over lunch. Further information will become available on NCVER’s website or email events@ncver.edu.au to register your interest.

the new Government and the Federal Minister. It is concerning that there appears to be no plan to significantly change the Howard Government's policy direction in relation to vocational education and training. The appearance of the Boston Consulting Group report, and adoption of many of its recommendations in formulating proposals for the consideration of National Senior Officials and the State and Territory Ministers, is of great concern.

The new Government continues to follow the agenda adopted by COAG under the old Government. The Rudd Government's pre-election policy 'Skilling Australia for the Future' stated:

As the single largest provider of training in Australia, TAFE remains an important part of Australia's training system. The TAFE system will continue to receive funding for existing places, and it is expected that, as a major training provider, TAFE will receive a significant proportion of these new training places.

Unfortunately this was the most positive statement about TAFE in the policy document, and it is obscure enough to be able to be interpreted in many different ways by the Government.

The campaign to ensure continued funding for TAFE and to oppose any increase in contestable funding is critical, and should be taken up by every TAFE teacher across the country. Not only is it critical for the future of public education, but also for the jobs, pay and conditions of TAFE teachers.

The TAFE sector has a significant and proven record in addressing disadvantage and social inclusion. Many TAFE access and outreach programs are specifically designed to support those who have been excluded from optimising their participation in society and work. The Government's new policy document 'An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda' refers to "a co-operative Federal-State framework based upon investment in people and communities that deliver the right interventions, at the right time, in the right place – the localised setting".

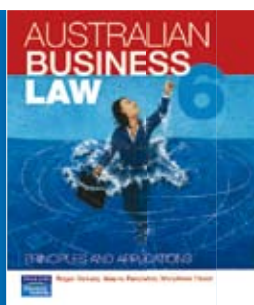
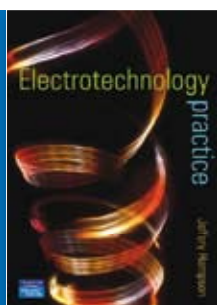
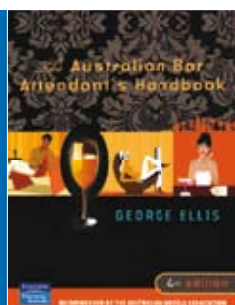
The Government claims its Skilling Australia for the Future policy with 450,000 additional training places over the next four years will assist people "currently outside or marginally attached to the workforce". Yet voucher systems have been proven to be dismal failures, as demonstrated by the Howard Government's programs. So why would the Rudd Government adopt such an approach when they have the opportunity to use the proven TAFE system? A real social inclusion agenda would recognise that short courses lasting only a couple of months will not necessarily provide people with the skills they need to gain employment. Far more is needed in terms of support, confidence building and specialist services, which a well funded quality TAFE system can deliver.

TAFE is doing it hard and consequently TAFE

teachers are doing it hard. Little credit or support is given to our members by State/Territory or Federal governments. In every jurisdiction, TAFE teachers are either campaigning for their right to be paid a decent salary in line with the expectations of our profession and to prevent their working conditions being degraded, or to stop another wasteful restructure of their educational sector.

The National TAFE Council AGM in Sydney in January considered professional and industrial issues for teachers, recognising the need for the AEU to undertake further research around workload of teachers and maintenance of professional qualifications. Despite all the evidence from overseas and from Australia's own experience, governments still fail to recognise the links between a quality education system and a well paid and supported professional workforce.

One message amongst many that we could give to the new Federal Government at this time is that quality education is not about 'gimmicky' announcements attracting media attention that need to be introduced at a terrifying pace, but rather about engaging the teachers, students and other stakeholders to develop real policy that supports public education and teachers for today and far into the future. Such an approach would do more for the skills shortages in this country than any current program on offer. ♦



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