



Linda Simon

Federal President of the
TAFE Division
of the AEU

Post-election issues

The Federal election has just been called, and by the time you read this the results may well be known. If there is another Howard victory, the provision of vocational education through TAFE will continue to be seriously undermined, unless there is a radical change in current thinking.

Both the Prime Minister, John Howard, and his Education Minister, Dr Nelson, have made noises about the obvious fact that 'not everybody has to go to university'. The Prime Minister even suggests that such expectations of the necessity of a university education were created by Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating. Yet it appears that John Howard has only found this to be an issue eight years on from first coming to government, and during that time has been unable to address it.

As Federal Education Minister, Dr Nelson has spent considerable energy on waging a war on the Carr Labor government in NSW, criticising their introduction of student fees. Whilst we certainly agree with criticism of any government that attempts to shift the responsibility for education funding to individuals rather than governments, he has failed also to address at least one of the reasons why this cost shifting has occurred, namely the funding cuts introduced by his government.

In 1997, the Federal Government reduced the funding base for vocational education and training by a cumulative \$240 million, and in 1998 abolished growth funding. Through policies that have increased user choice arrangements in the states and territories, committed further programs to tendering arrangements and insisted on state training authorities demonstrating growth through efficiencies, the Coalition government has sought to undermine

'...a commitment by industry and the community to training.'

the public vocational education and training system to replace it with a competitive training market.

The result of this has been decreased opportunities for students, surely at least one of the factors leading to the current skills shortages in this country. Skills shortages have arisen as one of the major issues in this election campaign. There have been statements around skills shortages by most major stakeholders including the ACTU, the Australian Industry Group and the political parties; an indication of the problems that we are facing in this country.

More funding to TAFE will not solve the problem by itself. There does need

to be a change of attitude from a range of groups to the relative status of workers, and a commitment by industry and the community to training. Whilst over 40,000 students were unable to get a place in the TAFE course of their choice this year, the AEU believes that there are many more people out there in the workforce unable to take on the training they need because of job demands arising out of the shortage of skilled workers. At the same time one in five teenagers are looking for fulltime work and almost 400,000 jobseekers have been on unemployment benefits for more than 12 months.

As part of our election campaign strategy, AEU TAFE members have been inviting Federal politicians and candidates to meetings and in to TAFE colleges. It is easy for us to point out all the wonderful TAFE success stories and the need to ensure additional funding for their maintenance, but not so easy to point to all the potential students who would benefit from increased skills levels.

One telling point, however, has been the so-called increase in New Apprenticeships, most of which has been in short-term traineeships. Since 1997, 800 vocations have been created as traineeships, with 50% of these attracting 30 trainees or less.

Strongest growth has occurred in the intermediate level occupations in the production, transport, clerical, sales and service occupational sectors, not in those most significantly identified as being areas where skills shortages must be addressed. The Labor campaign policy on 'Greater Security, More Opportunities for Mature Age Australians' attempts to recognise the difficulties of mature age jobseekers in taking on apprenticeships or traineeships in areas of skill shortage, by providing a \$2000 Learning Bonus.

Throughout July and August the Federal Government has had almost nothing to say on TAFE. Dr Nelson has produced copious numbers of

media releases around funding for schools and universities, but has continued to ignore the needs of TAFE and vocational education and training, as has his government since coming to office.

The Labor Opposition has attempted to focus on some of the real problems and to integrate additional TAFE places into their policies on youth and mature age workers. However, 20,000 additional TAFE places will not go far at this time to address skills shortages nationwide.

The Greens and Democrats have continued to be supportive of TAFE throughout the campaign, and the AEU will continue to work with them

to exercise their influence in the Senate and to raise issues where the major parties ignore us. The same is true of Independents who, especially in regional and rural areas, have continued to demonstrate their recognition of the importance of TAFE to country communities.

Whatever the outcome of the election is, the new government needs to sit down with the AEU and industry and community partners to consider how we maintain a quality public vocational education and training system in this country, where job seekers and existing workers can be assured of a place and a course of study that will provide them with the best outcomes possible.

In partnership with Indigenous members

The Australian Education Union is proud to announce its

National Reconciliation Award for 2004



Eligibility
Who is eligible to be nominated for an Award?

- (i) an individual educator who is a financial member of an AEU Branch or Associated Body (Queensland Teachers' Union, New South Wales Teachers' Federation, State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia); or
- (ii) a school/TAFE or a group of educators who are AEU members as in (i) above.

Who can nominate?
The nominators must be from one of the following three groups:

- (i) an AEU financial member of an AEU Branch or Associated Body;
- (ii) a state or territory Aboriginal Education Advisory or Consultative Group, eg AECG;
- (iii) a school's Aboriginal Students Support and Parent Awareness Committee (ASSPA).

Award criteria
All nominations and accompanying submissions must address one or more of the five steps to reconciliation established by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation which can be demonstrated through the curriculum and enhances reconciliation within a school/TAFE or community.

These five steps to reconciliation are:

- Understanding and accepting the history of our shared experience between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community;
- Respecting Indigenous cultures and identity;
- Recognising that past injustice continues to give rise to present injustices for Indigenous Australians;
- Identifying what more needs to be done and making changes within Australian society;
- Revaluing citizenship so that Australians can live together in unity and harmony.

The 2004 closing date for nominations is **Monday, 22 November, 2004**. The Award will be announced at the AEU 2005 Indigenous Seminar on Thursday, 13 January, 2005.

Nomination forms can be obtained from the AEU on (03) 9693 1800 or fax: (03) 9693 1805 or e-mail: samg@aeufederal.org.au
Forms are also available on the AEU website at: <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Atsi/Nomform2004.pdf>

If you would like to know more please contact Sam Graziano, Administrative Officer or Rob Durbridge, Federal Secretary.