



from the president

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

Invest in a TAFE teacher today!

A media release on 19 June from Mark Arbib, Acting Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, announced that 32 TAFE Institutes across Australia would share in \$200m for training infrastructure “which will keep Australia working”.

The \$200m *Training Infrastructure Investment for Tomorrow* (TIFT) Federal Government fund is part of a plan to “modernise and improve the quality of teaching and learning across the vocational education and training sector”. Despite the stated intent, the funding is all capital funding, and whilst it is being targeted to emerging training needs and green skills requirements, it has to be asked where the funding is for teaching and learning to support these programs. It is great to get new and updated facilities and there is no doubt that TAFE Institutes are in need, especially if they are to continue to deliver courses that are industry relevant and competitive. However, there continues to be a lack of investment at all levels in that most important asset, teachers.

This concern is even more significant as we consider some of the issues that are facing us currently, and the emerging training needs. Where is the funding to support teachers taking up the green skills challenges, to be able to train in these new and niche markets? And whilst governments are loathe to recognise the problem, there continues to be a shortage of TAFE teachers in many of the traditional trades areas, in which we should be training and expanding to ensure we have the skilled workers to meet the needs of a more buoyant economy.

The VET sector again sits on the edge of major structural changes. In July we move to one Ministerial Council for VET and Higher Education — the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education — fulfilling one of the recommendations of the Bradley Review into Higher Education. Denise Bradley, author of the report, also recommended that funding arrangements for the two sectors should be aligned, with the Commonwealth Government taking over responsibility. This she sees as making sense, especially in light of both universities and VET providers offering common courses and therefore, according to her, both needing to adopt demand-driven entitlement funding models. In other words, a voucher-type system as has been taken up by the Victorian Government for TAFE and VET from July this year. There is no doubt many groups will be carefully watching the rollout of this scheme in Victoria.

One of the aspects of the new Victorian arrangement that has been somewhat hidden, is that government funding is available for a place at TAFE or VET provided you are planning to study a course at a higher level than your current qualifications. If, as many of us do, you are studying at the same level or starting a new area of study at a lower level, you will probably have to pay full fees. These can be around \$10,000 upwards. So much for increasing student access and qualifications! But, of course, HECs type loans schemes are available.

Given the ability for TAFE students at present to access such loan schemes, as well as the supposed encouragement for TAFE to increasingly move into the higher education arena, we can expect to see an increase in TAFE degree and post graduate courses. All states and territories appear to be in some rush to carve out a part of this marketplace for themselves. If this is the future for TAFE, what does it mean to our traditional role in apprenticeships, entry level qualifications and second chance education? The only real additional government funding on offer for TAFE programs is competitive, and it seems the delivery of higher education programs can be quite lucrative. So where are we likely to see the efforts of TAFE management being focused? What will it mean for many of our students from not so advantaged backgrounds and their ability to gain needed skills and qualifications?

Governments say they don't want to diminish VET's special role, but there is no doubt that the push to focus on money-making ventures is having just that impact. And again, what does it mean for our teachers? Where is the investment in them to gain added qualifications to take on degree programs? Should TAFE be forced into the position of offering cheap higher education programs and our teachers expected to teach these programs without the sort of facilities, resources and support that lecturers in universities have?

The issue of the professional status and qualifications of TAFE teachers is one that the National TAFE Council Executive has been addressing. What is the right sort of educational course for our profession? How do we ensure that TAFE employers support teachers to gain the necessary qualifications? Should these be delivered in TAFE or in universities?

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There are some significant issues to be considered and questions to be answered, but one thing we are sure of is that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is not a professional qualification. It was originally designed as an entry level qualification for trainers and assessors, basically those who had no other qualifications and needed skills to train and assess in the workplace. Another challenge we have ahead of us is to ensure that the CIV TAA again becomes the qualification it was designed to be, and that governments then see the way forward to invest in programs to ensure the professionalism of TAFE teachers and the

continued delivery of a wide range of programs for our diverse student groups.

On 28 October, we shall be celebrating National TAFE Day all around the country. It will

be a day to recognise the important role that TAFE plays in education, as well as the significant effect that TAFE courses and TAFE teachers have on the lives of many students. It will also be a day to call on politicians not just to invest in TAFE, but also in TAFE teachers. ❖



Longitudinal
Surveys of
Australian Youth

POLICY FORUM

Young people:

Finding their way in a new era

Drawing on current research, this event seeks to inform policy-makers about the lives of young people, with a focus on:

- improving education outcomes
- providing skills for the contemporary labour market
- social engagement.

Keynote speaker: Adam Smith from the Foundation for Young Australians.

To register or view the program, visit
www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/events.html

Where:

Melbourne Park Function Centre

When:

10 November 2009

Enquiries:

events@ncver.edu.au or (08) 8230 8491

Earlybird registration:

\$230 (by 25 September 2009)



Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations

