

Members are being encouraged to support the Invest in Quality, Invest in TAFE campaign as the union pressures all parties to promise additional funding at the 2010 election.



Building on the announcement of new funding in the Budget, the campaign will continue until election day at a national level and in key marginal seats.

So far, neither major party has outlined their election commitments on TAFE.

In a worrying sign, the only announcement from the Coalition has been the abolition of the Productivity Places Program — a substantial cut to VET funding of more than \$1 billion (**see below for more details**).

AEU Federal TAFE secretary Pat Forward said it was vital members continued to get behind the campaign for increased TAFE funding.

"The election is a chance for all parties to outline their plans for vocational education and those plans must include greater resourcing for TAFE," she said. "So far the response from members has been fantastic and we need to continue the effort."

Campaign So Far

The **Invest in Quality/Invest in TAFE** campaign got off to a great start with strong support from members around the country.

Campaign launches in WA, SA and Tasmania during April were highly successful, with significant interest from media in the impact of under-resourcing on TAFE institutes, especially those in regional areas.

Our first objective was to pressure the politicians to commit to greater TAFE funding in the Federal Budget. More than 1600 emails were sent by members to the Treasurer Wayne Swan, the then Education Minister Julia Gillard and local MPs.

Greater Investment in the Budget

Within the skills package announced in the Budget was \$130 million to improve the standard and quality of vocational education.

This is the first ever direct Commonwealth

investment in the training sector. The money will be shared among the 100 largest RTO's (including the 59 TAFE Institutes) and will be allocated against specific performance benchmarks, including lifting the quality of teaching and student achievement and expanding access to training.

TAFE will be in a strong position to get the bulk of this money given the quality of provision and rising levels of demand demonstrated in our national survey. We will be pushing for investment in teacher training, additional staff and new equipment.

The Federal government has substantially invested in TAFE infrastructure. \$400million of additional capital funding has been invested from the \$500million Teaching and Learning Capital Fund. \$200 million has been invested in the Better TAFE Facilities scheme and \$200million from Training Infrastructure for Tomorrow.

The Government's decision to extend the EIF to VET is welcomed, however, in the first

two rounds of the EIF only \$159 million of the \$1.5 billion allocated has gone to VET projects. Further details of the third round of funding are not yet available.

However, the Federal government remains committed to market mechanisms in the allocation of funding in the VET sector. This is a serious and ongoing problem for the sector, challenging the capacity to build a high quality public vocational education system.

Increased investment in the public TAFE system is a key focus of the Invest in Quality campaign, and it is critical that the government continues to hear the messages directly from members about the importance of public funding for TAFE.

Coalition Plans to Cut Funding

So far, the Federal Opposition has only announced cuts to spending in the VET sector. The promised abolition of the Productivity Places program will have substantial implications for a number of the more positive announcements in the Federal budget, including the \$130 million Quality Incentive Fund.

The Opposition has also announced the abolition of the \$968 million school-based Trade Training Centres Program. Despite considerable concerns about both these programs, such significant funding cuts will substantially disadvantage TAFE and schools.

Their only other initiative is the re-introduction of Australian Technical Colleges — the Howard government's failed attempt to address skills shortages and divert funds away from TAFE institutes and public schools.

The AEU will be pressuring Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to abandon the proposed cuts and, at a minimum, commit to additional funding for TAFE.

For the latest campaign news visit www.aeufederal.org.au

'Expansion of the VET FEE-HELP system is an abrogation of government responsibility to properly fund TAFE and also undermines the fundamental value of TAFE as a place where all Australians can access low cost training and education.'



THE QUALITY OF TAFE TEACHERS

Pat Forward

There are two things which have always seemed ironic to me in the ongoing discussion about teaching in TAFE and VET.

- The first is that the core of TAFE and VET's work is vocational education, and yet the system undervalues this work by showing such little regard for teaching expertise in the workforce.
- The second is that the currency of the VET sector is qualifications, and yet this currency is publicly devalued by denying TAFE and VET teachers' access to, and support for high quality teaching qualifications.

For almost twenty years the debate about teaching qualifications in vocational education has simmered along. It has become intertwined with other narratives in the sector — narratives around reduced government funding and competition for scarce resources,

and the primacy of employers in the determination of VET policy and outcomes. The introduction of Competency Based Training and Training Packages threw into sharp relief the critical importance of teachers in the learning process in VET, but teachers were actively excluded from involvement in the development of CBT in Australia. The debates about the importance of on-the-job training and recognition of prior learning — these things are crucial to the emergence of the contemporary VET sector in Australia. But these things have one single thread which holds them all together, and that is the absolute centrality of education in vocational education.

Why is it then that even now we continue to have to debate the issue of not just *what* qualifications teachers of vocational education need, but *whether* they actually need them at all? This is not overstating the problem. The required minimum qualification in the sector, the recently revised CIV TAE — is held in such low regard by the

TAFE teaching profession, both because of appalling delivery practices, and because of the package itself, that many question its value at all.

Why is it that in 2010, we debate from a position, as a profession, which is so weakened that we do not know with any certainty how many TAFE or VET teachers there actually are, let alone what qualifications they have?

The things we do know should trouble us greatly, because they hold the potential to undermine the centrality of education in the sector, and to cast the public VET sector — TAFE — adrift at a time when it needs to mount the staunchest defence of its crucial role in vocational education against successive governments' ideological creations — private RTOs.

Marketisation and underfunding of TAFE and VET have taken their toll. There are some who would say, with some justification, that it is the paucity of funding and resourcing alone which has led to the current crisis in the



sector in relation to the teaching workforce. These in concert with the imposition of a market agenda have undermined the capacity of the whole sector.

I don't want to dwell on this at this point. Rather I want to present this as one of the contexts within which we are currently working.

I also want to list a number of other points which I think are uncontroversial, or at least uncontroversial in the sense that however the following issues play out, they are currently shaping the future of the sector:

- A compact across all levels of government around the need for a more highly-skilled and therefore highly qualified workforce — the COAG and other targets;
- The emergence in policy and rhetoric of a tertiary education sector, sitting across or re-conceiving vocational and higher education;
- Policy initiatives to increase participation in higher level qualifications (and specifically degrees) of students from low SES backgrounds;
- A focus on pathways between sectors;
- The growth in higher level qualifications in TAFE — particularly degrees.

The most serious response that the sector can make in the present context is to argue for the centrality of education in the VET sector. A discussion around the quality of teaching in the sector must take as its starting point this central shift in thinking. It is this shift which will allow the sector to re-focus itself in the coming period, when the challenges

of the last two decades, particularly around the questions of marketisation and funding, are likely to accelerate and when we will face head on the very real question of whether public provision, and therefore education — and in particular vocational education — as a public good, will survive.

The AEU is critical of the CIV TAE for three fundamental reasons. The TAE TP denies teachers access to the knowledge and theory which underpins vocational education practice, and which is essential if teachers are to become effective practitioners. It is, in many cases, poorly delivered by opportunist private providers who have conceived of it as a commodity in a training market, a money making venture, rather than an educational activity. Finally, the TAE Training Package has not been developed in serious consultation with the profession. It is the product of an exercise in excluding TAFE and VET teachers, and universities who previously held the ascendancy in vocational teaching preparation.

The issue is whether we start from a position of reforming the Training Package — trying to “fix” something which is fundamentally flawed — or from a position of positing a new approach to the conception of vocational education teaching qualifications.

It is critical to make the point that a rejection of the TAE TP is not about wanting to return to a romanticised past, where preparation for teaching was owned and controlled by the universities, with this the path to parity of esteem in the education

sectors. There are fundamental and well justified criticisms of the teacher preparation courses offered by universities in the past, and for many these criticisms have not been answered.

The question about where a teaching course for teachers in the vocational education sector should be conducted goes less to the question of elitism, and more to the question of the restrictions on the types of qualifications that the VET sector can offer as a result of the complete ascendancy of CBT and Training Packages.

Problems with CBT and Training Packages are at the heart of TAFE and VET teachers' criticisms of the Training Packages they deliver, as well as the Training Package that is the mandated qualification for their work.

It is clearly, in our view, no longer sufficient to dismiss the criticisms from TAFE and VET teachers as merely resistance to change. By dismissing teachers' criticisms of CBT and TPs, the sector denies itself access to the capacity to transform the vocation education sector, building on the strengths of its rapid growth, and the appetites of governments to reconceive it as part of an expanded tertiary sector. Reconceiving and rebuilding vocational education qualifications are the only pathways to positioning vocational education to achieve what should be its two greatest aims — a highly skilled, adaptive workforce, and a more equitable and socially cohesive society.

Currently, the sector offers very narrow, employer-determined skills for specific tasks.

TPs deny students access to knowledge, and therefore to power in society. The push to include generic skills, or employability skills within Training Packages is about acknowledging the fundamental weakness of CBT and TPs. It is about artificially trying to put back into training those things that CBT has excluded.

Where there is (and there is) high quality teaching practice in the sector, it is arguably because teachers are able to overcome the restrictions of CBT by applying the knowledge and skills of their own educational expertise to teach to accommodate the deficits of CBT. Qualified and experienced teachers can do this because their own educational preparation through curriculum based courses has prepared them for this task.

And this is why the conundrum of the present situation is potentially so devastating for the sector. The VET and TAFE teaching workforce is, as we know, increasingly unqualified, increasingly casualised and increasingly aged. Those with curriculum based teaching qualifications are set to retire.

They are the teachers who have carried the CBT revolution in the VET sector and made it work. What will remain is a workforce whose core is CBT-trained, casualised, overworked and under-valued. They will

have much greater difficulty mediating and remedying the flaws in the current CBT-dominated system. This will have a detrimental impact on the whole VET system, but for TAFE the story is far worse. For the public providers, they will have much greater difficulty arguing for the much higher quality they can provide in the inevitable competition for diminishing government resources with the private sector in the attenuated standards regime which we are in.

‘A new settlement around TAFE teaching qualifications is crucial to the whole VET sector for TAFE to remain the standard setting repository of quality education against which all other providers must measure themselves.’

And this is why a new settlement around TAFE teaching qualifications is crucial to the whole VET sector. TAFE must remain the standard setting repository of quality education against which all other providers must measure themselves. If the criticisms of CBT and Training Packages in the broader workforce are rejected, then at the very least the sector must mount the argument that its own teaching workforce has to be prepared both to offer high quality vocational education, and to ameliorate the flaws of CBT and Training Packages.

My argument is that the quality of TAFE teachers is crucial to the future of vocational education; that investment in TAFE teachers, long overlooked by the sector, is an investment in the future of vocational education — an investment which will pay dividends to the Australian community.

A highly qualified, high quality TAFE workforce must become the benchmark for the whole VET — and reconceived tertiary sector. This single thing is the best hope for the survival of public provision and for guaranteed provision of quality education across the whole VET sector. ♦

Pat Forward is AEU Federal TAFE Secretary



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