

TAFE Futures—A National

The Australian Education Union is holding a national inquiry into the future of the public TAFE system. PAT FORWARD reports.



“The TAFE system is an integral part of public education in Australia. The capacity of TAFE to deliver high quality, timely educational outcomes is a critical adjunct to other areas of post compulsory education. This inquiry into TAFE will enable a comprehensive analysis of the effects of government education and training policy on the ability of TAFE to deliver sound outcomes. Its outcomes will enable the union movement to ensure TAFE develops in a positive way that continues to meet the needs of Australian students, workers and employers.”

—Sharan Burrow ACTU President

The Inquiry will be conducted by Associate Professor at the University of Wollongong and President of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, Peter Kell. The Inquiry will seek written submissions from stakeholders of the TAFE system, conduct face-to-face consultations across the country and establish a website to encourage and facilitate contributions to the Inquiry.

The public TAFE system is facing one of the most challenging moments in its history. At a national level, the organisation of the system has changed significantly following the abolition of the Australian National Training Authority in June, 2005. The ongoing tension between the state and territory, and Commonwealth governments over funding of the system has left unresolved the issue of sustained resourcing of a system which is so critical to the future of Australian society.

It is the purpose of the Inquiry to focus on the positive achievements of TAFE, and to examine its future within the Australian vocational education community within the context of key issues which have emerged over the last ten years. These include:

- The role of TAFE and its relationship with the Australian education system
- The expectations of stakeholders, the impact of recent government and the strategies that could be developed for the future to strengthen TAFE's role
- VET funding trends and possible models that



could be adopted for improved delivery of funding to TAFE

- Outstanding features of VET curriculum and pedagogy, and examples of good practice in TAFE
- Learning and teaching in TAFE, and the alternative scenarios that could realise a TAFE system which best serves its students, the community,

industry and the TAFE workforce.

The Inquiry will give a voice to teachers, students, industry and community groups, and will be open to contributions from a broad cross-section of Australian society. The Inquiry is particularly keen to hear from people in regional areas. Face-to-face consultations with Peter Kell will be conducted around the country throughout July and August, and venues for a range of consultations will be advertised on the Inquiry website to encourage participation in the process. The Inquiry will be open to a range of submissions which can address any or all of the key terms of reference, but also be open to any other contributions from the TAFE community and key stakeholders.

The Inquiry was launched at Canberra Institute of Technology's public education celebration on May 15. A few days later, the website was launched, www.tafefutures.org.au. The website contains information about the round of consultations, the reference group, how to make a submission and about the Chair, Peter Kell.

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary

Inquiry

“TAFE remains the backbone of skill development in this country, whatever jargon we hear about the “training market.” However, TAFE also has a broader role in developing capacity within communities and re-engaging both individuals and employers in vocational education. The cumulative pressures of poor resourcing, casualisation and competition have made traditional TAFE Institute roles and responsibilities less clear and, in some cases, unsustainable. This inquiry is a great opportunity to reflect proudly on what TAFE does well and where the system should and could head in the future if adequate support and leadership were provided.”

—Leigh Hubbard *National Secretary
United Firefighters Union of Australia*

“This year’s COAG reference on skilling shows that together we must review strategies for the TAFE sector. A national shortage of skills is the continuing and paramount issue, but how this challenge is managed is a test for unions, TAFE institutes and government. The AEU has shown this inquiry will be open, with a cross-sector reference group, and for this reason TDA was pleased to be nominated for this group. We hope the inquiry contributes to knowledge on how the TAFE sector can grow as our leading national vocational education brand—as a preferred partner in VET. TAFE needs to meet industry-led training, engage Australian youth and at the same time attract great staff to grow with these new needs.”

—Martin Riordan *Executive Director
TAFE Directors Australia*

“The TAFE Inquiry is important because it gives all of us an opportunity to think about the kind of VET system that Australia needs. The Inquiry is asking questions that go beyond the current narrow focus on skills, particularly in the traditional trades. It asks about, and provides opportunities for teachers to contribute to a discussion about, the kinds of knowledge, capacities and skills we need to build a competitive economy, and a democratic, fair, tolerant and inclusive society.”

—Leesa Wheelahan *Griffith University*



“This Inquiry will listen to what the users of TAFE have to say—the students, the employers and the community. And it will also listen to what the teachers have to say, because their views have too often been ignored by governments.”

—Linda Simon *AEU Federal TAFE President*

New Industrial Relations Laws

Fewer rights for Australian workers

The Federal Government has introduced new industrial relations laws that affect all Australian workers.

The laws benefit employers by reducing the rights of working Australians.

They were introduced despite overwhelming opposition from the community, churches and unions.

The laws:

- Remove protection from unfair dismissal for millions of workers.
- Make it easier for employers to push workers onto individual contracts that undercut take home pay and employment conditions.
- Strip back award conditions.
- Make it easier for employers to cut penalty rates, overtime pay, holiday loadings, public holidays, redundancy pay and work allowances.
- Make many ordinary union activities illegal.
- Reduce the power of the Industrial Relations Commission.
- Change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower.

With these laws in place it is more important than ever that people belong to a union. Union workplaces deliver better pay and stronger conditions for workers. Collective bargaining has set the standard for workers across the economy for over 100 years. If attempts are made to change your pay and conditions you need someone who can support you.

What you can do...

INFORM your work colleagues, family and friends about the Government’s industrial relations laws.

SIGN ON to the ACTU campaign website and receive regular campaign updates at www.rightsatwork.com.au

BE ACTIVE through your union – strong unions are the best way to protect your rights at work.

DONATE to the ACTU campaign at www.rightsatwork.com.au so that unions can continue to take our message to the public through our TV advertisements.

FIND OUT MORE about your rights and our campaign by calling your union or the ACTU on 1300 362 223.

What the Federal Government’s changes mean for you

ACTU

Unions protect their members at work

What I Say

“Taking away the rights of working people – like job security and protection from unfair dismissal – is a threat to every working family.”

your rights at work
worth fighting for