

## **Federal TAFE President's speech to National TAFE Council** **AGM 2009**

Welcome to the 2009 National TAFE Council AGM to our international and Australian guests and to Federal Officers and delegates. I would like to thank you for all your good work at the Federal and local levels on behalf of the AEU and its members. I'd like particularly to thank Pat Forward, Federal TAFE Secretary, for her amazing work over the year, and to Paula Messer for her work and support in the TAFE Division.

2008 was not the year we expected it to be. Whilst we were under no illusions as to what a new Federal Labor Government might deliver, given our past and present experiences of Labor Governments, I think we all expected a far greater commitment to TAFE and public education than has been the case. And there were probably some of us who welcomed the appointment of Julia Gillard as Education Minister, yet few Ministers have been as unwilling to engage with the AEU as she has.

What is apparent to us is that this is a significant time for TAFE. Will TAFE continue with its traditional roles, or is the TAFE of the future going to be vastly different from the one that we teach in today? As one Federal bureaucrat said recently- TAFE can either grow or become residual. Government policies at all levels appear to be pushing towards the latter. TAFE is being put on the same footing as any Registered Training Organisation, and as we know government policy seems to suggest that the supposed advantages that TAFE now has in gaining government funding may no longer continue.

The Boston Consulting Group report, Government funding agreements and negotiations, and the most recent recommendations arising from the Review of Australian Higher Education, the Bradley Report, propose new funding models based on student entitlements. As we know this is the model being adopted by the Victorian Government. It is also the model the Bradley Review recommends for universities, and the review also proposes a 'continuum of tertiary skills provision, primarily funded by a single level of government and nationally regulated rather than the two sectors configured as at present.

Such a funding model enables a student to be entitled to pursue a course of study with any RTO able to deliver it, and all students with the prerequisites would have the right to undertake that study. An RTO would succeed or fail on the basis of its outcomes for students, and the market would prevail.

It is hard to even imagine what this could mean for TAFE, and how quickly some RTOs might collapse leaving students stranded and tax payer funds wasted. It's also hard to imagine what this might mean for quality education, and students gaining underpinning knowledge and transferable skills for careers of the future, other than just the here and now. For Australia to go down this path, it will undertake a journey that no other country has pursued so fervently, and where countries such as England have, they have shown it to fail. Decisions are being made on the basis of the market ideology which surely is on shaky grounds at this time, rather than good pedagogical practice.

It is unfortunate for us that governments look for scape goats and that TAFE and TAFE teachers are being made the scapegoat for skills shortages and dissatisfied industry.

Such a funding model would go hand and hand with increased fees, especially for higher level courses and income contingent loans schemes. It is quite reprehensible that the Federal Government appears to again be going to let industry off the hook in terms of making their

contribution to education and training, and will even through the Productivity Places Program; put the responsibility for the 10% contribution on to individuals.

A number of these proposed changes were part of the Federal Government's market design principles. These, as we know, were not adopted by the COAG meeting in November, but Ministers agreed that further work should be undertaken. We don't know what this actually means, and neither do some of the Ministers, but it does give us a small window of opportunity to construct an alternative vision of TAFE to the one that governments are presently pursuing. In constructing this vision, we need to consider.

- Do we want one tertiary education sector with universities?
- Do we want schools and community providers to completely take over lower level courses, including language, literacy and numeracy courses?
- Do we want industry to pick up more and more training in the workplace?
- Do we agree that private providers should be able to compete for all or much of government funding for VET?

If not, then what should TAFE be? How do we ensure funding is channelled to TAFE to continue its role in quality VET, and to maintain the salaries and conditions of our teachers and educational staff?

As we know from Branch reports, our very jobs are under attack. Along with the future of TAFE, we need to consider the future of TAFE teachers. What do you we want our role to be in the future?

All of these things you will have the chance to consider over the next couple of days, both inside and outside the AGM. Once again it is critical that we use the time to put together a plan for 2009, and develop strategies to put forward our views on the TAFE of the future, and our continued role as educationalists.

**Linda Simon**  
**Federal TAFE President**