

# Federal TAFE President – Linda Simon

## Address to National TAFE Council AGM

### Friday, 15 January 2010

Good afternoon delegates,

Today, I'll give my final opening address as Federal TAFE President, and in doing so thank those of you who have been supportive over the years and share my passion for TAFE and its work. I congratulate Paul Reardon on his election as President, but assure you that I will be continuing to work in support of TAFE and public education both at a state and national level.

As we face another Federal election, we will all be needed to continue the TAFE campaign. Our slogan this year focuses on the quality that TAFE provides in terms of vocational education and training, but previous election slogans including 'Vote 1 TAFE' remain just as relevant today. In my opening address I will focus on some of the challenges ahead of us, and other work we need to undertake not just over the course of this AGM but throughout the year. Our campaigning will be even more difficult as a result of the growth in numbers of private providers in the training market, the attacks on the working conditions of TAFE teachers at a state and territory level very much as a result of competition and marketisation, and the trend to drop the TAFE brand in order to emulate private providers and/or Universities.

Last year we held the inaugural National TAFE Day, and having started this it is important that we keep it going, and that this year's National TAFE Day is bigger and better than ever. One of the important lessons that this celebration highlighted was the need for us as AEU members to be innovative and proactive in our campaigning.

It is not always easy, as we don't necessarily have the time and resources of governments or stakeholder groups that may not support us, but the celebration in Canberra last year was great, the atmosphere was positive, and the crowd was cohesive and supportive. They welcomed the recognition of the importance of TAFE educationally, economically and socially.

The Deputy Prime Minister in her address highlighted two areas that remain important for TAFE, in playing a part in the economic recovery and in creating green skills. It seems to me that we can further our positive input, and work with a range of stakeholder groups, by also focusing on TAFE's important role in these two areas. But perhaps the most significant thing that Julia Gillard had to say at this event, was to recognise that it is the 'educators and teachers that make a difference'. She went on to say that '... as we celebrate TAFE this evening, we celebrate the people who make TAFE such a success. The greatest tribute we can pay you is to ensure the people who follow you have the resources they will need to continue TAFE's great job into the future.'

The Deputy Prime Minister has recognised the role of educators and teachers (not trainers) and the need for resources in TAFE. Unfortunately, the quote makes it clear

that these resources may not be made available tomorrow, but they will be there in the future and on a continuing basis. The funding that has been provided to TAFE for capital works is having a significant impact, with new and renovated buildings. This then opens the way for us to now focus the campaign on funding to support teachers, and teaching and learning in TAFE. We need to consider what resources are needed so that TAFE remains cutting edge and teachers industry relevant. We need to consider the resources required for the upskilling of teachers to take on programs in new and innovative skills areas including those referred to by the Deputy Prime Minister in skills for the economic recovery, generally referred to as 'rebound skills', and for a green economy.

There appears to be some recognition at a Federal Government level of the need to support teachers in these areas, and recognition that state and territory governments may not be providing the funding required. This year is an important year to lobby the Federal Government to provide targeted funding to support TAFE teachers. Such funding and recognition at a Federal level, would help to prevent state and territory governments operating at the lowest cost levels in funding vocational education and training, and force them to differentiate between TAFE teachers and educators, and trainers and assessors in enterprises and other RTOs. There are opportunities now to fight back to regain our professional status, and through our work on TAFE teacher qualifications, research being undertaken by NCVET and other groups, and the review of the Certificate IV TAA and the Diploma TAA, to establish acceptable high teaching qualifications for TAFE teachers and a possible accreditation process. The issue of qualifications will be discussed by a panel of experts tomorrow, and you will have the opportunity to contribute in the workshops.

The role of the AGM is to very much set the parameters and focus on our campaigning over the year, and in this important year you have the responsibility to ensure the campaign agreed upon is achievable, and will be whole heartedly supported by AEU TAFE members back in your states and territories.

In her speech on National TAFE Day, the Deputy Prime Minister indicated that further changes would be taking place in the VET sector, and we know this through the work of COAG and the number of reviews occurring. Our response to Julia Gillard was to ask her to work through these changes with us, and not to exclude the most important part of the VET sector.

Over the next year, we will see a review of the 'Productivity Places Program' funding and it is critical that our voices are heard in highlighting the problems with this competitive tendering, and the way it is undermining TAFE's role. In no state or territory is TAFE winning the share of funding it should be entitled to, and what this process is doing to quality educational programs is appalling. This review gives us another chance to point out the inappropriateness of market design principles being used to determine educational programs.

Further work will take place around regulation of the sector and in bringing VET and Higher Education closer together. The Bradley Review and COAG have put this agenda clearly on the table. Again it is an area where we need to be actively involved to put forward our views. One of the possible benefits to these proposed changes, is a relook at competency based training in the VET sector, and the appropriateness of Training Packages. This is an area close to the hearts of many of our members, who

will want to have their say about the sort of changes required so they can be supported to deliver the best educational programs possible, in whatever context and to whatever groups of students.

So many changes ahead make this a very challenging year and make your jobs over the next couple of days very important. I hope though that you also find time to enjoy the AGM and to network with your colleagues from other states and territories. We always learn so much from each other.

Thank You