



# TAFE Works

## THE IMPACT OF THE RESOURCE PRESSURES ON TAFE

*The resource pressures on TAFE systems have impacted on students and on teachers, on accessibility and on the capacity of the national system to ensure quality outcomes. There is growing evidence of a crisis in vocational education and training.*

### Quality concerns

The Schofield reports on Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria have identified key concerns about quality in relation to New Apprenticeships, with the Queensland report finding that 19% of trainees received no training and 20% in Victoria believing that they were not learning new skills.

Of particular concern has been the issue of fully on the job training, leading to a recommendation in the Victorian report that no Victorian training funds should be applied to such training.<sup>1</sup> Fully on the job training has been listed by ANTA as a commonly reported strategy to achieve 'growth through efficiencies'.<sup>2</sup>

Schofield has raised a number of other concerns about quality: neglect of the needs of individual learners; too many inappropriate sign-ups; absence of training plans; widespread use of 'tick and flick' training practices; concerns about assessment practices. There are also management concerns including muddled policy objectives; inadequate quality assurance processes and poorly defined roles and responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

More generally, of the more than 200 TAFE responses to the 1999 ACTU Working Time and Job Security Survey, 89% agreed with the statement that 'I don't feel I can provide the right level of service or quality because there is too much work to be done'.<sup>4</sup>

### Students

NCVER Graduate Destination surveys have found that the vast majority of students found their course relevant and achieve their intentions in studying, whether it be to find employment, increased earnings, promotion, interest/personal development or other objectives.

There are clear signs that the resource and structural pressures are having an impact on the capacity of systems to adequately address the needs of many students.

Unmet demand for VET places was 48,100 in 1997 and 1998, including 35,200 people who were unable to get a place in TAFE in 1998.<sup>5</sup> Demand projections indicate growth in demand of between 2.8% and 5.7% per year.

Conversely, there is evidence that between 40% of trainees in 1995-96 and, in the case of Queensland in 1997-98, 2/3 of trainees were not successfully completing their course, for a range of reasons.<sup>6</sup>

The overall failure/withdrawal rate for students increased from 13.7% in 1997 to 17.3% in 1999.<sup>7</sup>

Researcher Damon Anderson has identified concerns about the fall in the proportion of total expenditure allocated to student services, in a context where a growing proportion of students are

disadvantaged and more money is being transferred to private providers who offer relatively little support.

He has argued that over one third of the people who dropped out of education courses in the last five years did so for reasons that could potentially have been addressed through student services.<sup>8</sup> Expenditure on student services has dropped from \$164.6m in 1997 to \$137.7m in 1999, or from 4.3% to 3.6% of operating expenditure.<sup>9</sup>

This has serious implications for the capacity of TAFE institutes to meet the educational needs of their communities. The reality is, of course, that the biggest group of clients in TAFE are individual students, who come with a wide range of aspirations and objectives. TAFE students are more likely to belong to a greater number of targeted equity groups than those who study with other providers.<sup>10</sup>

## Teachers

The pressure of resource cuts and competition, together with structural changes imposed by governments in at least some systems, have had a significant impact on the employment and working conditions of staff in TAFE institutes.

Employee costs have fallen as a proportion of total costs, from 68.4% of expenditure in 1994 to 60.8% in 1999.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the continued growth in enrolments and Annual Hours, which have increased by 57.8m hours, or 21%, to 331m hours over that

time.<sup>12</sup>

There has been a growth across Australia in the proportion of contract and casual/sessional staff. Already in 1995, 42% of teaching hours were provided by part time staff.<sup>13</sup>

The growth in precarious employment impacts on staff but also on their capacity to provide quality education to students. It is also linked to reduced access to professional development, particularly for the casual teachers themselves. Victorian data shows that they made up 20% of staff and received 3% of the staff development expenditure.<sup>14</sup>

More females than males have been employed in recent years. Because of the shift to contract and casual employment, women are more likely to be employed in those modes.

There has also been a massive increase in teacher workload. In their responses to the ACTU survey, 32% of TAFE workers indicated that they were working at least 45 hours per week, 48% of full time workers said that the hours per week they usually work has increased and 74% that the pace of their work has increased. In total 72% of the TAFE respondents indicated that they have considered resigning due to workload pressures, a situation even more alarming in the face of the emerging teacher shortage across all education sectors.<sup>15</sup>

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