



# TAFE Works

## A NEW DEAL FOR TAFE

*There is growing evidence of a crisis emerging in our national vocational education and training system. The structures and resourcing of the vocational education and training system must recognise that public TAFE is a vital community asset. A new deal for TAFE is urgently needed.*

### **The role of TAFE**

TAFE is a vital public asset which underpins the whole vocational education and training system and plays complex and multi-faceted roles in the development of Australia's educational and skills base, in the achievement of broader governmental objectives and in the social, economic and educational development of community and national life. Well over one million students enrol in TAFE each year.

As the 1998 House of Representatives Standing Committee report said:

*Institutes of TAFE play special roles which other providers of further education generally do not fulfill. TAFE's primary role is the delivery of vocational education and training but it strives to meet this role while monitoring social equity objectives. It is this unique aspect of TAFE that is its defining quality.*

(HRSCEET 1998: *Today's training: Tomorrow's skills*)

The House of Representatives Committee went on to identify a range of roles played by TAFE institutes in addition to the actual provision of education and training opportunities, particularly in regional areas: providing employment opportunities, keeping young people in the area, providing a skills base for local industry and contributing to local social infrastructure. The reality is that metropolitan TAFEs, particularly in

areas with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage and unemployment, can and do make similar contributions to the life of their local community.

Despite the efforts of TAFE institutes, there is growing evidence of a massive crisis emerging in our national vocational education and training system.

The financial viability of TAFE institutes in a number of systems has been substantially undermined and a number have faced serious financial crisis.

There are growing questions about the quality of some programs and of whether the current structures guarantee that the education and training requirements of students are properly met. The Schofield reviews have raised serious concerns about the structures and outcomes of the New Apprenticeship system.

Student services, integral to the role of TAFE in ensuring equal educational opportunities, are under threat. The quality of teaching is undermined by the growing casualisation of the teaching force and by massive workloads which impact both on teaching and learning conditions.

The voices of providers, of teachers, of students

and of local communities - and sometimes, local industry - have too often been marginalised or not heard.

But there is also evidence of a growing recognition that these issues must be addressed. At least some state governments are making efforts to redress resource pressures on TAFE. The states and territories as a whole have made clear that Commonwealth funding must be increased to meet enrolment growth and the costs of developing national consistency.

If TAFE is to meet the educational, vocational and social aspirations of Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the current structures must be reviewed. The resource pressures are the most critical element of this situation and must be addressed as a matter of national urgency.

Enrolment growth must be properly funded. National policy frameworks and directions must be centred on quality and effectiveness as the most critical elements of the system, rather than the current obsession with cost-cutting measures. They must recognise and build on the vital, complex and multi-faceted roles that TAFE plays as a public education system and community asset which underpins the vocational and education training system as a whole.

System and national reviews should be undertaken of current funding levels and financial situations of TAFE institutes across Australia, as well as the impact of funding models, user choice and contestable funding on the quality of programs, general and specific services and on student and community access.

In broad terms, subject to the detailed outcomes of those reviews:

- C Base funding for TAFE must be increased to address the transfer of institute funding to non-TAFE providers, to redress the reductions in overall state and territory contributions since

1991-92 and the impact of the Commonwealth cuts/freeze since 1996 and to ensure viable allocations per Annual Hour Curriculum.

- C Commonwealth funding for growth must be reinstated to meet current levels of unmet demand and to enable all young people to access at least one year of post-compulsory education.
- C The Commonwealth should contribute additional funds on a dollar for dollar basis to the states and territories to assist TAFE institutes enrolling a disproportionately large number of disadvantaged students.
- C A Quality Improvement Fund should be jointly funded by the Commonwealth and States and Territories, to provide for quality improvement strategies, including staff development, product/curriculum development, quality innovation projects, planning and consultation with local communities and stakeholders and increased cooperation between TAFE and schools in the delivery of VET.
- C The Commonwealth and states and territories should jointly establish an Education Equity Program which would ensure that services, programs and support structures meet the needs of disadvantaged students and local communities. This should be linked to a Disadvantaged Regional Areas Program which would provide resources for a whole of government approach combining industry policy, labour market programs, job creation, job placement, education and training and community welfare support and services.

In addition, new representative consultative and advisory bodies should be established at system and national levels to allow for the participation and representation of all stakeholders in the shaping of TAFE directions.

## **Further Reading**

See the TAFE page of the AEU web site at

<http://www.aefederal.org.au>

Authorised R. Hewett, AEU Federal TAFE Secretary