



Australian Education Union

TAFE Division

Policy on Funding for TAFE

As adopted at the 2001 National TAFE Council AGM



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Public TAFE

TAFE is owned by the public and provides a social and economic benefit to the Australian community. The large majority of public vocational education and training funding and resources are allocated to TAFE to undertake this service on behalf of government and the public. In this role TAFE should be publicly funded to deliver 'quality assured' learning to assist individuals and communities to enhance their 'life chances' and to guarantee that learning leads to national portable qualifications.

In this way the role of TAFE encompassing the notion of public good, differs from private education provision. TAFE has a responsibility to the whole community. Whether employed or not individuals, industry and communities, expect TAFE education and training to be available and accessible.

The AEU recognises that there are other organisations and institutions providing vocational education course including schools, universities and private education institutions. However it is opposed to competition for vocational education funding and supports TAFE alliances and partnerships with other sectors of education in the delivery of vocational education. Access to public funds by non public education bodies should only occur where public providers are unable to deliver these courses.

In recent years the federal government and some state governments have pursued a policy of deliberately undermining the public training provider by reducing funding and contracting out traditional TAFE services. Outcomes rather than ensuring adequate inputs is then used to measure success. The consequences of this are that efficiency and cost reduction become the focus for measuring success and the downward spiral continues.

A commitment to a new funding model is needed which recognises the need to increase the level of education expenditure to at least the average of industrialised nations within the OECD.

Such a funding model would be based on a commitment to provide high quality vocational education and training accessible to all Australians. Access for all within a framework of equity and social justice should be guaranteed in legislation.

A quality VET system is made up of a complex range of human, physical and other resources. A quality system requires fully qualified and securely employed teaching staff. All these aspects of the system need to be recognised and funded in any model.

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, community and industry access.

In broad terms, subject to the detailed outcomes of those reviews, a framework for a new funding structure should be adopted which involves both Commonwealth and State elements.

The framework should include commitment by governments to:

1. Increased base funding for TAFE to redress the transfer of funding to private VET providers, to redress the reductions in overall state and territory contributions since 1991/92 and the impact of the federal funding cuts and to ensure viable funding per Annual Hours Curriculum. This could ensure stability of profile funding and enhance TAFE's capacity to meet complex individual, industry and community needs, to reduce current student fees and charges and to reduce the trend to casualisation of the teaching workforce.
2. Federal funding to meet enrolment growth must be reinstated to address current levels of unmet demand and to enable all young people to access at least one year of post-compulsory education (the 'youth guarantee').
3. The Federal government 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 (in line with the 1998 House of Representatives' Standing Committee recommendations 6.1 and 6.2).
4. A Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) should be jointly funded by the federal and State and Territory governments, additional to profile funding 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.
5. Federal and State and Territory governments should jointly establish an Education Equity Program (EEP) which would ensure that services, programs and support structures meet the needs of disadvantaged students and local communities. Such a program should be linked to a Disadvantaged Regional Areas Program (DRAP) 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, including relevant education unions, students, the union movement, industry, community groups and state training authorities and governments. This includes representation of the AEU on national vocational education quality assurance bodies.

AMES

1. That in the lead-up to the Federal Election the AEU seek a commitment from the Opposition and other major political parties to abandon the tendering of funding for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and to restore recurrent funding to the public sector.

The preferred way of achieving this is for the Commonwealth to fund the States and Territories to administer the AMEP on the basis of the full cost of 510 hours of tuition for eligible migrants or refugees.

Funding to the States and Territories should be on the condition that tuition be delivered by the

public sector on a non-competitive basis.

3. That the AMEP be extended to cover refugees on Temporary Protection Visas.
4. That AMES funding be used for English-language education and not for custodial purposes, as has been reported in the case of refugees detained at Pt Headland.