



Australian Education Union

TAFE Division

Policy on The Role of TAFE in Education

As adopted at the 2001 National TAFE Council AGM



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That this report be adopted as a policy statement of the Australian Education Union with a view to positioning TAFE as the primary provider of vocational education and lifelong learning in Australia.

That the Australian Education Union call on Federal and State Governments to undertake an urgent review of vocational further education in Australia, with a view to:

1. ensuring the development of a system which balances the needs of all interested parties; namely, students, educators, industry, government and the community;
2. developing a vocational education system which is responsive to the equal opportunity needs of all Australians;
3. the development of clear articulation guidelines to allow students to move freely with appropriate credits between secondary schools, TAFE and universities;
4. producing clear and comprehensive curriculum for all vocational education disciplines with a review of the roles of Competency Based Training and Training Packages;
5. ensuring guaranteed specialist support for access and equity students.
6. That the AEU seek to achieve a commitment from Federal and State Governments to guarantee direct funding to TAFE for 90% of its course costs with a corresponding reduction in the funds made available for competitive tendering.
7. That the AEU continue to seek the raising of the minimum teacher qualification to a degree level and the possession of industry experience in accordance with AEU policy.
8. That the AEU demand and seek participative representation on all peak bodies relating to VET — in particular the ANTA Board, national TAFE qualification committees, national VET Boards and ITABs with particular emphasis on Training Package development and reviews appropriate teacher union representation on State/Territory union bodies.
9. That the AEU undertake negotiations with Federal and State governments to position TAFE as the external provider of first choice for VET in Schools Programs.
10. The following paper was endorsed as policy on ‘TAFE in Education’

Introduction

A 1991 report of the Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC) acknowledged the role of the Kangan Report in reforming TAFE in Australia as follows:

The 1974 Report on Needs in Technical and Further Education (the Kangan Report) was a turning point in vocational education and training in Australia. (Page 10).

The report defined TAFE's role and mission. For the first time, TAFE was regarded as part of the tertiary education sector. (Page 10).

The Kangan Report emphasised TAFE's social and community responsibilities. It emphasised recurrent education, particularly for adults who had inadequate initial education. (Page 10).

However, by 1991, other influences were acting on the directions set by Kangan leading to the following statement in the same ESFC report.

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, it has been argued TAFE was more innovative in providing second chance education to adults than it was in its main job of providing vocational education to the work force. (Pages 10 and 11).

By the mid-1980s, TAFE was increasingly criticised by industry groups and industry training authorities – with varying degrees of accuracy – for not responding to industry needs. (Page 11).

It was criticism such as this, and a desire by the Federal Government to address unemployment, which brought about the changes which are now contributing to the demise of educational rigour in many vocational education courses.

The desire to appease the industry bodies who continually criticised TAFE and the apprenticeship system caused successive Federal Governments to adopt overseas experiments with very little consultation with the Australian education community.

The industry/business influence and the lobbying of private providers resulted in the notion that government funds should be open to tender for the provision of courses. This development, in the absence of safeguards such as a requirement that “teachers” possess qualifications, meant that low cost operators could reap profits by winning contracts to deliver “training”.

Competency Based Training

The introduction of Competency Based Training and Training Packages has driven down the cost of vocational education to the detriment of standards. These initiatives derive from the apprenticeship system where it is appropriate that employees develop competencies to enable them to perform the jobs for which they have been employed. Unfortunately, there are distinct disadvantages for the majority of vocational education students who are not apprentices or trainees.

Community Needs in Vocational Education

The Kangan Report, on Page xvii, makes the following observation:

Technical and further education is an integral component of the national resources that make for technological development, a skilled and mobile labour force, personal work satisfaction and economic growth. Nevertheless, it does not seem to rank officially as

an integral part of the nation's education system.

While many would argue that the Kangan report has been superseded by later reports and Government policy decisions, this statement remains true. Technical and further education, which is largely conducted in TAFE Institutes throughout Australia, is treated by Government more as an adjunct to business and industry than as a part of our education system.

Evidence of this orientation is not difficult to find. The Board of the Australian National Training Authority is derived totally from industry and business. There is no educational representative. Government statements continually focus on apprenticeships and traineeships, valuable aspects of our vocational education system, but components which are fully industry related. Figures from NCVER (available on the web) show about 1.65m students enrolled in vocational education programs in 1999 and about 219,000 apprentices and trainees in training at 31 December 1998.

On those figures the current system has been developed around the circumstances which apply to about 14% of the vocational education community.

The elements of the system which are demonstrably aimed at satisfying employers who take on apprentices and employees, and which unarguably suit some of the requirements of apprentices and trainees, are Competency Based Training, training packages, workplace delivery and assessment and user choice.

It is extremely doubtful whether there is much benefit in any of these aspects of the system for those who are involved in other forms of vocational education, particularly those who enter for self-directed study as individuals.

Individual versus Industry Needs

Students who leave secondary school prior to completion of Year 12 have little other choice for further education than to enrol at a TAFE Institute or a private provider. Those students with small financial resources generally cannot afford private institutions.

Those who complete Year 12, if they desire to educate themselves further have the choice of university or a vocational education provider, principally TAFE. The competition for university places is well documented and only those who win places on academic performance or who have the means to pay full up-front fees are able to pursue those studies available through universities.

The remainder of the Year 12 completers, and those who leave prior to Year 12 completion, are the students who comprise a large number of TAFE students. Their reasons for enrolment at TAFE are varied and range from the simple need to learn skills for employment to bridging courses forming an alternative pathway to university study.

Some students who leave secondary school prior to the completion of the maximum attainment level find their way into TAFE or other providers by way of apprenticeships, or, more commonly today, the shorter traineeships. Because these students are employed and attending part time, their employer is vitally concerned that they learn efficiently and develop competency in their work.

Employers also have a legitimate interest in the standards of other vocational education courses which prepare individuals for work which they will be seeking in business or industry.

It is quite remarkable that both state and national governments have overreacted to the extent that practically all vocational education is controlled by business and industry representatives.

The needs of the majority of vocational students who come as individuals to further their education, and not merely to gain competencies, must be observed by a drastic reorganisation of the vocational education system. Bodies such as ANTA and its State counterparts and subsidiaries should be restructured to include a wider representation of interested parties

TAFE and Secondary Schools

A recent development is the attempt to broaden the curriculum in secondary schools to enable students whose interest is in the vocational education area to undertake appropriate learning experiences.

The AEU is committed to its policy that Vocational Education teachers possess appropriate industry qualifications and experience.

This policy states:

VET courses in schools should only be conducted if the same standards of workshop, tools, safety regulations, teacher qualifications and relevant industry experience as found in TAFE applies. This should be for all levels of vocational training.

There are ample indications that industry shares our concerns in this area.

The introduction of these initiatives at secondary level with little resourcing has resulted in a poor development of cooperative arrangements which will allow students to progress to enrolment in TAFE courses. The conduct of practical learning is made difficult because of the unavailability in secondary schools of industry-standard equipment.

It is crucial that considerable thought and resources be devoted to developing a viable curriculum progression which will allow students to move smoothly through secondary school and into vocational education guided by teachers with appropriate skills and experience. The provision of physical resources and professional development for teachers at secondary and TAFE levels must also be addressed.

Conclusion

The Kangan Report in 1974 advocated that TAFE should be woven into the fabric of Australia's education system.

TAFE is a major contributor to the economic well-being of the nation. This contribution will only continue if high standards of curriculum and delivery are maintained.

Government decisions have gradually ensured that TAFE has become industry-controlled and that, by attempting to create an artificial training market, TAFE has moved towards the development of competencies at the expense of learning.

The possession of qualifications in vocational education in Australia is lagging behind other OECD countries, a matter which must be addressed if we are to maintain reasonable standards of living in an increasingly technical and competitive world.

While universities perform this role well for some school leavers and members of the workforce, including professionals, current developments and lack of adequate funding is reducing the capability of TAFE to cater for those who do not need universities and those from the workforce and universities who rely on TAFE.

It is imperative that there be a reassessment and realignment of vocational education to ensure that TAFE fulfils its much-needed role at both the secondary and tertiary education levels.

Strategies for Implementation

The achievement of this policy is a longer term proposition. It will involve publicity and consultation with our colleagues in other education sectors to educate the public, politicians and industry/business personnel of the need for a vocational education system which caters for the diverse needs of the community.

The level and amount of activity will depend on our resources, particularly financial, in the coming twelve months.

Depending on those resources, the National TAFE Council Executive should pursue the following elements of a campaign to develop community awareness of TAFE's role in education with a view to exerting pressure on Federal and State Governments to accept the terms of our policy.

- This policy and its recommendation should be publicised as widely as possible and forwarded to Federal and State Members of Parliament throughout Australia.
- Material should be prepared to educate members with regard to our goals and to assist them to propagate and argue for this policy.
- This policy should constitute a major part of our election platform for coming State and Federal elections.
- Particular efforts should be made to discuss this policy with industry personnel with the aim of gaining their support.
- The National TAFE Council Executive should continue the development of this policy by building on the arguments and research evidence to support our arguments. The Executive should incorporate this policy into the National TAFE Campaign over the coming twelve months.

- The Federal Office is requested to provide to the Branches/Associated Bodies ongoing summaries and analysis of relevant research and reports into the VET sector.