The economic case for a strong TAFE
Across the globe, Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA is working with unions and campaigning organisations to defend the rights of working people, support migrant workers and refugees, build the collective power of women, and secure climate justice.

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The work of building solidarity across borders depends on the efforts of thousands of Australian unionists who raise funds for overseas projects and educate at home. By contributing a monthly donation, you will be helping to continue the long tradition of Australian union solidarity.
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Although this year was a little different, it was one of the best National TAFE Days we have ever had. As well as providing opportunity for TAFE staff and students to come together to celebrate the importance of our work, it was also a chance to remind politicians and the public that TAFE is valued and will be essential to Australia’s post-COVID recovery. A huge thank you to everyone involved; you’ve helped keep TAFE on the public and political radar.

I spent the day lobbying federal MPs with the AEU leadership, talking about the groundbreaking research undertaken by the Centre for Future Work which was launched to coincide with National TAFE Day. It sets out an irrefutable financial case for TAFE, proving it boosts the national economy by $92.5 billion while only costing $5.7 billion (or 0.3% of GDP) – an astonishing 16 times the return on investment. If the Prime Minister is serious about the need to look at “better targeting of federal funding support” then I don’t think he will find a more economical way. Instead the flow of economic benefits generated by well-trained, better-paid VET graduates is in jeopardy from funding cuts. The report generated a lot of interest when it was presented to the cross-party Parliamentary Friends of Education Group. If you missed it in the news, an overview of the report is presented on pages 5-8.

The Centre for Future Work promoted the research at a webinar on National TAFE Day with the economist and author of the report Alison Pennington.

ACTU Federal President Michelle O’Neil and AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe. It was fantastic to see an all-female panel presenting the findings and leading on how we need to support and grow TAFE to improve the economy and to improve social outcomes, too.

Messages of support
If you weren’t able to take part on the day, you can take heart in the messages supplied to us by prominent Australians, from authors and academics through to the president of the Country Women’s Association who added their voices to our campaign on why they value TAFE and TAFE teachers. See pages 15-17.

New campaign
In line with our post-election campaign review, work is underway to rebrand our national TAFE campaign taking into consideration all the feedback supplied by members and aligning with the challenges and opportunities that are arising from the pandemic. Make sure you are signed up to the Stop TAFE Cuts website (www.StopTAFECuts.com) and you’ll be one of the first to find out about the new brand.

In the meantime, stay safe.

Michelle Purdy
AEU Federal TAFE President

From the president

Although TAFE members are currently managing staffing and delivery of courses in less than ideal ways, I hope you were still able to take some time to celebrate National TAFE Day on 13 August.
The economic and social benefits of the TAFE system

On National TAFE Day, the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute launched the first national study into the economic and social benefits of TAFE. It sets out how Australia's historical and current investment in TAFE generates annual economic benefits of $92.5 billion, which exceed the $5.7 billion annual cost of the system by a factor of 16, while promoting wider social benefits critical to addressing inequality.

**Article by** Alison Pennington

Despite chronic underfunding and failed market-led VET policies, Australia’s historic investment in the TAFE system continues to generate an enormous and ongoing dividend to the Australian economy.

**TAFE’s economic footprint**
The direct operation of TAFE institutes results in over $3 billion in additional economic activity in Australia each year, including around $2.3 billion in wages, salaries and other employment benefits paid annually. Purchases and supply chain inputs associated with TAFEs extend and multiply this impact on the broader national and regional economies, generating another $1.6 billion per year in ‘upstream’ economic benefits. Counting indirect jobs in the TAFE supply chain, a total of $3 billion in employment incomes is generated by TAFE institutes each year. In turn, that income translates into an additional $1.5 billion in incremental consumer spending on Australian-made goods and services. Including the direct activity of the TAFEs, its supply chain, and ‘downstream’ consumer spending impacts, we estimate that a total of over $6 billion in economic activity, supporting 48,000 positions (directly and indirectly), is generated by the presence and activity of Australia’s TAFE institutes.

**Increased earnings and productivity**
Students who complete VET qualifications with TAFE institutes move into the labour force with skills that generate higher earnings compared to the earnings of workers without post-school qualifications. Employees and owner-managers with VET qualifications (including Certificate I/II/III/IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma) receive a wage premium of 39% compared with those whose highest educational attainment is Year 12 or below.
Future work

“The flow of economic benefits generated by well-trained, better-paid VET graduates is in jeopardy today.”

In addition, a more skilled workforce yields significant productivity benefits to employers, as well as higher tax revenues for government. The total annual benefit that the TAFE system generates thanks to its accumulated contribution to the skills of Australians is estimated at $84.9 billion. Some of this is paid in higher incomes to workers; some of it is captured in higher profits by employers. And some of it is paid in incremental taxation revenues to government, which we estimate are worth $25 billion per year – several times more than governments currently allocate to the cost of running the entire TAFE system.

**TAFE increases employability and lowers unemployment**

After training, TAFE graduates are more likely to be employed and less likely to be unemployed than workers with less training. Moreover, with increased access to skilled workers, industry can expand production and employ more people, increasing total output across the economy. We estimate the TAFE system has increased the employability of the VET-educated population, relative to those without post-school education, resulting in an increase in employment of around 486,000 positions.

**Reduced social and healthcare spending**

The TAFE system increases employability, thereby lowering unemployment and supporting a healthier workforce and society. An important consequence of this is reduced social assistance and public healthcare expenditures. We estimate the annual value of reduced social expenses at some $1.5 billion per year ($1.2 billion in reduced welfare and $289 million in reduced health costs).

**Combined annual economic benefit**

The total annual benefit (driven by the accumulated historic and current investment in the TAFE-trained workforce) is estimated at $92.5 billion. That represents around 4.5% of Australian GDP. Those benefits can be traced back to the extra employability, productivity and incomes (and associated savings on social benefit costs) demonstrated by the TAFE-educated workforce.

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**Wider social benefits**

The substantial economic benefits supported by the TAFE system do not tell the whole story about the importance of TAFEs to our all-round economic and social wellbeing. The TAFE system also underpins a wide range of broader social benefits that are harder to quantify. For example, TAFEs promote stronger economic and labour market outcomes in regional areas. They help ‘bridge’ access to further education and jobs pathways for special and at-risk groups of young Australians. They ensure greater social cohesion, and help to reduce crime. TAFE students are more likely to come from the lowest quintile of society according to socio-economic disadvantage, more likely to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and more likely to identify as having a disability compared with students of private VET providers or universities. All these features confirm that TAFEs are critically important in addressing systemic inequality in Australia’s economy and society.

**Modest running cost**

Compared to the preceding inventory of direct and indirect economic and social benefits, the costs of operating the TAFE system are modest by any measure. The costs of operating the TAFE system accrue to governments, students and employers in the delivery of vocational education through TAFE institutes. We estimate the combined costs of the TAFE system – including government funding for training and administration, employer and student assistance, loans and income support payments, student fees, and employer apprenticeship and traineeship training costs – at $5.7 billion per year. That represents only about 0.3% of Australia’s GDP.
The TAFE system has made a leading, decades-long contribution to training and skills in the Australian economy. On the basis of historical enrolment data, we estimate that 72.5% of Australian workers currently holding VET qualifications received their training through the TAFE system. Hence, Australia’s historic investment in quality public vocational education generates an enormous and ongoing dividend, in the form of the enhanced productivity, higher earnings, increased tax payments and reduced social benefit costs associated with those workers. This is a valuable and continuing payoff to the funds that were invested in TAFEs, both now and in the past.

There is no doubt that the benefits of TAFE education to individuals, employers, the government and wider society far outweigh the costs. As noted, the combined annual costs for operating the TAFE system’s 35 institutes last year were modest – $5.7 billion. In contrast, the annual economic benefits generated thanks to investments in TAFE-provided training were estimated at $92.5 billion. In other words, the flow of annual benefits resulting from the present and past operation of the TAFE system exceed the current annual costs of operating that system by a factor of 16 times. The increased tax revenue generated through the operation of TAFE is $25 billion annually, and this alone is more than four times its total cost.

Benefits far outweigh costs
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There is no doubt that the benefits of TAFE education to individuals, employers, the government and wider society far outweigh the costs. As noted, the combined annual costs for operating the TAFE system’s 35 institutes last year were modest – $5.7 billion. In contrast, the annual economic benefits generated thanks to investments in TAFE-provided training were estimated at $92.5 billion. In other words, the flow of annual benefits resulting from the present and past operation of the TAFE system exceed the current annual costs of operating that system by a factor of 16 times. The increased tax revenue generated through the operation of TAFE is $25 billion annually, and this alone is more than four times its total cost.

$92.5 billion
The annual economic benefits generated thanks to investments in TAFE-provided training

$5.7 billion
The combined annual costs for operating the TAFE system’s 35 institutes

Keep in mind that the flow of these economic benefits resulting from a better-skilled workforce is the legacy of Australia’s historic commitment to high-quality public vocational education. But that commitment has been undermined in recent years by reductions in fiscal support for public VET, and failed policy experiments with privatised, market-delivered, but publicly subsidised VET programs. As a result, the flow of economic benefits generated by well-trained, better-paid VET graduates is in jeopardy today. Australia is not replacing its stock of high-quality TAFE graduates – which means that over time that flow of economic benefits will inevitably decline. Reported problems encountered by many industries and employers in recruiting and retaining adequately skilled workers in numerous occupations attests to the growing costs of Australia’s underinvestment in reliable, publicly delivered VET.

Imagine a well-built house: it generates value each year that someone lives in it. But if the house is not maintained, and its structural integrity assured, then that flow of benefits will quickly erode.

TAFE as anchor of COVID recovery
As the economy staggers in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting global recession, we need expanded access to VET education, stronger pathways from training to work, and a more cohesive and coordinated post-school education system. Revitalised TAFE institutes, as the most reliable ‘anchors’ of vocational training, must be at the centre of that reconstruction process.

After the Second World War, Australia launched a coordinated national training

“The annual return on past and present investment in TAFE is $92.5 billion, 4.5% of GDP, while the costs of delivering TAFE are modest – only $5.7 billion per year. That represents only about 0.3% of GDP.”
strategy, as a key part of a national reconstruction plan aimed at ensuring returning soldiers would have productive employment opportunities—and making sure the economy did not slip back into a stubborn depression. We need a similarly comprehensive national strategy for skills and training today, starting with the urgent restoration of public funds to the most experienced, reliable and high-quality, national-level, vocational training provider in Australia: the TAFE system. Our findings demonstrate that there is strong economic rationale for strengthening and expanding VET access for young, at-risk groups, and for all workers who lack post-school qualifications. Australia will squander the demonstrated and ongoing economic benefits generated by our investments in TAFE institutes, and unduly limit our post-COVID reconstruction opportunities, if we do not act quickly to reinstate the funding and critical role that TAFE plays in Australia’s society and economy.

The fully referenced report ‘An Investment in Productivity and Inclusion: The Economic and Social Benefits of the TAFE System’ by Alison Pennington, Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute can be found at futurework.org.au.

ALISON PENNINGTON Senior Economist, Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute.

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National TAFE Day

CELEBRATING NATIONAL TAFE DAY

The pandemic didn't stop people celebrating the achievements of the TAFE system on 13 August, National TAFE Day.
“On national TAFE day we should celebrate the contribution that TAFE has made and continues to make to our community. It is a public institution that supports social justice and social inclusion.”

Professor Leesa Wheelahan PhD, William G. Davis Chair in Community College Leadership

“These times should cause us to rethink our TAFE system. A vital cog that keeps industry going. An institution geared to student success. A lighthouse that signals to the community the path of learning to success in life. The things that matter.”

Craig Robertson, CEO, Tafe Directors Australia
The day kicked off with extensive media coverage of the Centre for Future Work’s launch of their research into the benefits of TAFE. Entitled ‘An Investment in Productivity and Inclusion: The Economic and Social Benefits of the TAFE System’, the report revealed that despite chronic underfunding and failed market-led VET policies, Australia’s historic investment in the TAFE system continues to generate an enormous and ongoing dividend to the Australian economy.

The report set out this year’s theme of ‘Investing in TAFE for Australia’s economic recovery’ and was backed up by a strong social media campaign. Prominent Australians added their voice to the campaign and spoke up for TAFE, prompting thousands of people to join the conversation and add their support.

TAFE teachers and students stopped work for a few moments to pose with signs and, of course, to cut cake!

AEU TAFE members and leadership met with federal politicians by Zoom to set out the case for more government funding, including an audience with the Parliamentary Friends of Education Group.

Over 500 people attended a webinar hosted by the Australia Institute with AEU president Correna Haythorpe, ACTU president Michele O’Neil and senior economist Alison Pennington to discuss the critical role of TAFE in Australia’s economic recovery.
Skills matter! Without them our prosperity will be constrained

There is no doubt that skills and high quality vocational education and training are central to Australia’s future.

Article by Ian Curry

Workers at the frontline
2020 has brutally exposed many of the underlying weaknesses in our society. Weaknesses that are the result of decades of slavish adherence to failed neoliberal economic doctrine. A doctrine where the economy ‘trumps’ all else. Where self-reliance and individualism are preferred over social responsibility. A doctrine where privatisation, corporatisation, casualisation and contracting out of public services are touted on the promise of more efficient delivery leading to better outcomes for all.

Anyone else’s mind drifting to flying pigs?
We’ve mindlessly handed public services over to private interests, and those private interests have been callously dismissive of any suggestion they owe anything to the society they profit from.

Between devastating bushfires and a global pandemic we are reminded that, when it really matters, it is not the captains of industry, $20 million CEOs or economists that we turn to; it is the aged care workers, nurses, cleaners, food processing workers, retail workers, essential services workers, police, ambulance officers, and, of course, the teachers, early childhood educators and other critical support workers.

Nearly every facet of our society has been severely tested, but it is the skills, dedication and sense of collective responsibility of our frontline workers, rather than the ‘thoughts and prayers’ of politicians, the economic rationalists, or...
the corporate leaders who were among the first to put their hands out, that we depend on.

Australian workers, often the victims of the callousness of corporate Australia, have every right to note the incongruity in government responses when capitalist markets operate exactly as they are meant to and throw a massive wobble.

They immediately call for governments to roll out huge dollops of nasty, evil socialism to stimulate the economy in order to save good wholesome capitalism from itself.

I’m not opposed to a bit of socialism, far from it. I’m keen, however, to make sure it operates to fix the underlying problem, rather than simply rewarding the bad behaviour of the capitalists that got us into strife in the first place.

Importance of TAFE
Which brings me to skills and the importance of TAFE. We simply cannot continue to get skills and workforce development wrong.

Whether in the workplace, negotiating with employers, or on the committees and boards where decisions are made about skills, the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union approaches our engagement with the vocational education and training system based on the following principles:

• Vocational skills are central to our ambition to create a well-educated, socially capable and resilient Australia with the skills to face the future;

• Vocational education and training is essential to creating industries and enterprises that are productive, can compete globally and can provide secure employment and career path opportunities for workers;

• A skilled and adaptable workforce, productively deploying its skills in the economy, represents a high value public good that is worthy of public investment;

• Dodgy, for-profit VET providers are failing to produce a skilled and adaptable workforce;

• We need a high-performing, well-resourced, public TAFE provider at the centre of the VET system.

Manufacturing workers, more than most, understand the transformational power of a high-quality vocational education delivered by a publicly owned TAFE. For most of us, the skills and capabilities we developed at TAFE have underpinned our working lives and enabled us to establish and maintain a decent standard of living.

Future generations may be denied those opportunities as a direct consequence of the ideological obsession conservative governments have with ‘smaller government’ which is code for wealth transfer from publicly owned entities, operating in the public interest, to a rampant private sector operating solely for profit.

TAFEs regional footprint
This is particularly true in regional Australia where over 270,000 manufacturing workers are employed, almost twice the number employed by the mining sector.

Regional workers earn 20% less than their metropolitan counterparts, experience higher levels of unemployment and have poorer access to vocational or university education.

If regional Australia is to survive and prosper, there is no doubt that skills and high quality vocational education and
Skills matter

Training will be central, as will reversing the idiotic decisions of conservative governments to source major purchases offshore solely on the basis of upfront contract price. As the AMWU stated in its submission to the inquiry into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas:

“This is perhaps best characterised by the New South Wales Government’s decision in 2016 to award the contract for the new Intercity Regional Rail fleet to a South Korean consortium. The 512 rail cars are set to be delivered for a contract worth $2.3 billion over a 15-year period. The state government decided to procure the cars in South Korea, despite one of the primary rival bids proposing to manufacture and assemble them in Illawarra, creating 600 direct jobs in one of New South Wales highest unemployment regions.

As described in the Centre for Future Work’s report ‘Penny Wise and Pound Foolish’ the claim that the South Korean bid was 25% cheaper at face value does not stack up when factoring in the positive externalities of large-scale investment and manufacturing when it occurs in regional areas – direct employment, benefits to upstream and downstream industries, expanded supply chains. The project itself has also been plagued with delays and issues regarding the upgrade of stations to accommodate the new trains.”

Decisions such as these weaken our national workforce capability and exacerbate the boom-bust nature of our economy. The damage plays out in lost learning and job opportunities for coming generations, and in our ability to develop the skills we need to build the future we want.

That is one of the many reasons we need a well-resourced, publicly owned network of TAFEs to rebuild our national skills base and provide opportunities for coming generations. The alternative is to leave vocational education and training to the very ‘market’ that is currently destroying our social and economic cohesion.

Industry 4.0
The challenges to manufacturing workers posed by increasing integration of digitalisation, cyber-physical systems and remote sensing (often referred to as Industry 4.0), naval shipbuilding and the plethora of other opportunities heading our way, require a comprehensive response by government, employers, the VET sector and, of course, unions.

The Morrison government has no plan to deal with this, other than to let ‘market forces’ and discredited trickle-down economics rampage through the economy.

COVID-19 has also taught us how quickly things deteriorate when national consensus degenerates into jurisdictional squabbling.

We think there are several changes required in the system:

- The restoration of genuine tripartite leadership with industry, employers and unions at the forefront.
- Unambiguous commitment to maintaining a strong competency-based national training system, backed by an equally strong commitment to high quality vocational education available to all.
- Less bureaucratic jurisdictional micro-management of the system.
- Reducing proliferation of training products and concentrating training packages on articulating occupational standards for appropriate occupations such as the trades.
- The establishment of industry endorsed National Framework Curriculum aligned to occupational standards to rebuild certainty in training outcomes and manage the debacle that is the current approach to training policy based on an ideologically driven obsession with competition and choice.
- The establishment of a funding and compliance regime that is based on a realistic cost of delivering high quality training and assessment that will produce the skilled workers we need.

Above: The power of a high quality vocational education delivered by a publicly funded TAFE can be transformative.
Prominent people speak out for National TAFE Day 2020

These experts weigh in on the importance of TAFE.

PROFESSOR PETER DOHERTY
Immunologist and Nobel Laureate

I AM A product of public education. I went through state high schools and primary schools in Brisbane and then a state university. I trained in veterinary science which, in a sense, is a trade and I’m very conscious of the fact that while universities are very suitable for some people they are not suitable for all. What’s most important is that every young person is able to pursue the interests and skillsets that interest and focus them. We have an enormous need for well-qualified people in trades and all those areas of activity that are so important for our daily wellbeing. Public TAFE to me is just one of the most important educational sectors in the country. Its graduates go on to become extremely useful members of society, and it must be available to everyone.

SALLY MCMANUS
ACTU Secretary

THIS NATIONAL TAFE Day I would like to recommit ourselves to rebuilding TAFE. TAFE must be rebuilt, because our country needs it and our young people deserve it. It’s been privatised for far too long, and gutted right across our country, and it’s time to turn it around. Both of my brothers got their trades at TAFE; it allowed them to build their families and to contribute their skills to society. We are going to recommit ourselves to public sector TAFE.

“Both of my brothers got their trades at TAFE; it allowed them to build their families and to contribute their skills to society.”

TONY BIRCH
Author and academic activist

IN 1987 I attended the new TAFE college in Broadmeadows in Melbourne’s north. I was approaching 30 years of age and had been out of the education system for 15 years after being expelled from high school as a teenager. I had a thirst for learning and welcomed a second opportunity to study. I enrolled in the Year 12 program (then known as HSC) and studied English, legal studies and politics. The teaching staff were passionate and dedicated. I owe my second chance at education to the incredible support I was given from both staff and students. I was encouraged to continue my studies and eventually completed a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of Melbourne. I then taught in the Arts faculty at Melbourne University before being awarded a Professorial Fellowship at Victoria University in Melbourne’s western suburbs. I have also been fortunate to have a career as a writer. My books have won major literary awards and in 2017 I was awarded the Patrick White prize for my contribution to Australian literature. Whatever I have achieved in education, teaching and writing I owe to TAFE. I will be forever in gratitude to those who offered their knowledge and generosity.
Prominent people

JANE CARO AM
Writer and social commentator

GOSH, TAFE IS an awesome organisation and the people who teach there are remarkable, and the workforces that they have produced for this country are remarkable! I mean, for goodness sake, where would we be without TAFE?

Unfortunately, because of the lack of support for technical and further education by successive governments, we have come perilously close to finding out. I don’t understand this stupidity and I don’t understand why you don’t get the funding you need, the support you need and the respect you deserve, but I tell you what you get the latter from me. Thanks for all you do.

“...I don't understand why you don't get the funding you need, the support you need and the respect you deserve, but I tell you what you get the latter from me. Thanks for all you do.”

DR JOHN FALZON OAM
Senior Fellow, Inequality and Social Justice, Per Capita

TAFE IS MORE than a public good. It’s a national treasure. It’s time for the federal government to lead the way in ensuring that TAFE is treated with the care and respect it deserves as a much-loved and trusted public institution. It’s time to completely abandon the disastrous neoliberal experiment that oversaw the outbreak of predatory profiteers in the VET space, much to the detriment of all of us. When TAFE, as a public institution, is undermined, the people of Australia are undermined. A strong, well-resourced, public TAFE system is a powerful means of addressing inequality. It is an engine for inclusive economic development, a safe space for personal growth, and an essential building block for the achievement of social justice.

Now, more than ever, in this time of the pandemic, as Australia looks down the barrel of a long-term social and economic crisis, TAFE must be properly resourced and recognised as being central to our national reconstruction, as per the sensible plan proposed by the ACTU. TAFE has long been a haven of hope and a pathway to social and economic participation for so many. It is time to place the public TAFE system at the centre of the collective hope we must now embrace, a hope that we can rebuild our lives and our livelihoods, not by returning to the past, but by shaping a future in which the economy, rather than indulging the narrow self-interest of the few, is reconfigured to serve the needs of the many.

TANYA CAMERON OAM, President of the Country Women’s Association of Australia

THE COUNTRY WOMEN’S Association of Australia has long been a supporter of equitable access to high quality educational options for rural, regional and remote Australians, particularly those that are place-based. We have all witnessed the improvements to our online connectivity during the pandemic, especially those of us who choose to live outside larger urban areas, so we now know what is possible and accordingly expect that there will be no limits to what is achievable. If governments are serious about improving the liveability of rural, regional and remote communities then they MUST include the opportunities that a publicly funded TAFE system can offer.
MICHAEL MANSELL  
Chair, Aboriginal Land Council, Tasmania

MANY ABORIGINALS WALK away from schooling with a sense of relief – it was an unenjoyable experience that they couldn’t wait to get away from. Inevitably, these kids will join the ranks of the unemployed as there is no expectation pathway for Aboriginal youth to enter government, run businesses or educate the next generation. Stolen lands are run by white people, not Aborigines. Consequently, Aboriginal school students have no incentive to learn while at school in order to once again manage their lands.

Despite these unfortunate facts, these school dropouts have enormous untapped talent – artistic, articulate, hands-on and practical. These are the areas of training and stimulation that Aboriginal youth need to throw off their belief that they are failures because of their bad school experiences.

TAFE offers such courses. Short courses provide a great reintroduction to formal education. Practical courses in the trades, arts and design, building and construction through to horticulture and environmental management are relevant to many Aboriginal teenagers and older Aboriginals who thought their education days were done. TAFE offers them another chance.

The more Aboriginals who participate, the greater the attraction to other Aboriginals. Nothing substitutes for a shy Aboriginal entering an educational institution than seeing a group of their own people at the college.

One day, Aboriginal people might self-determine and run our own programs for our own people. Until that unforeseeable day comes, TAFE fills a vital gap in the lives of Aboriginal people seeking to better themselves and desiring to make a greater contribution to their community.

TONI JORDON  
Writer

WHEN I WAS in my mid-thirties, I decided to start my own business as a technical writer. I already had a science degree and most of an MBA from excellent universities, but I was looking for something different: something more practical and flexible. A TAFE course seemed a logical choice.

It was only after I started at TAFE that I realised how lucky I was. The real-world experience of the teachers and the wildly varying backgrounds of my fellow students was astonishing to me. I’d never ‘learnt by doing’ before; I’d always studied something theoretically before turning a tentative hand to trying it myself. In my TAFE course, though, everyone was experimental and brave. Everyone broke new ground and helped each other succeed. I’d never studied in that way before. It blew my mind.

At the end of my first year at TAFE, we were given a creative writing assignment. I started writing a story about a woman who counted things. I’d never written fiction before but this story didn’t come from thin air: it was a direct result of my TAFE course’s support for creativity. Throughout my second year I kept working on this story, with the feedback and advice of my teachers and fellow students. Gradually, that story became my first novel, Addition, which went on to be published in 17 countries around the world.

I’m sure of one thing: If I hadn’t enrolled in TAFE, I wouldn’t be a novelist today.
TAFE: Community in action

As more than a million Australians are forced into unemployment by the COVID-19 crisis, TAFE’s anchor role in providing place-based training that allows people to retrain and gain skills without being forced to leave their communities is more vital than ever.

Article by Michelle Purdy

TAFE offers a lifeline for regional and rural communities, promoting stronger economic and labour market outcomes and helping to ‘bridge’ access to vocational education and jobs pathways for students with higher needs.

The campuses that are managing to survive in the regions despite a 30% loss in funding over the past decade are bearing considerable marginal costs to provide the opportunity to access a quality education in less profitable, thin markets.

Unfortunately, these opportunities have significantly diminished under this government’s policies, which have seen huge numbers of TAFE campus closures and a 60% drop in the number of TAFE providers in recent years.

Put back funding

The AEU has long called for a coordinated plan for federal support to TAFE. To date, the Australian Government has relied entirely on state and territory governments to ensure the ongoing viability of TAFEs. Now the Prime Minister has stated that future federal contributions will be contingent on state and territory funding, despite the Mitchell Institute report showing that Australia’s total investment in the VET sector is at its lowest level in real terms since at least 2008.

The AEU’s federal budget submission argued that the government must act urgently and decisively to restore the gradual and systematic erosion of TAFE funding, or TAFEs role in the Australian education system would remain under threat. Correna Haythorpe, AEU Federal President said: “If the government doesn’t address education funding it will further entrench deep inequality across Australia and it will further reduce opportunity.”

And it is not just the unions that are calling for national investment. As the President of the Country Women’s Association of Australia said on National TAFE Day: “If governments are serious about improving the liveability of rural, regional and remote communities then they must include the opportunities that a publicly funded TAFE system can offer.”

Productivity boost

This sentiment was echoed by the CEO of the National Farmers Federation, Terry Mahar, who in response to the Prime Minister’s announcement that there would be no new funding said: “Evidence-based reforms to the vocational education and training sector,
including a rational approach to funding arrangements, are sorely needed. For a long time now agriculture has been an afterthought when it comes to the formal skills development system and the programs that support it.

“Farmers would very much welcome a framework that builds and recognises the many skills required in farm businesses. Our goal is to double the number of tertiary and vocational agriculture graduates and to increase the overall available farm workforce by 2030.”

In order to rebuild Australia’s economy and workforce, a clear and strongly supported national workforce strategy is required. This is particularly important to address the escalating rate of youth unemployment in areas where population densities are low and geographical spread is wide. A true strategy for workforce renewal can only be achieved through national support for TAFE, and by acknowledging the capacity of TAFE’s longstanding partnerships with industry and partners that ensures that the right mix of skills are delivered to address the particular needs of the community.

People
The pandemic has certainly shone a light on the need for more skilled aged care, disability and childcare workers.

“For a long time I didn’t feel like I had a lot to offer or the life experience to be a carer. Once my family grew up I could see that it was time to make a career change.”

Angela Weeks
TAFE Student

To meet the demand, students in regional communities will need access to local training, and for those who left school with no qualifications or who were disengaged from education, TAFE can provide students the extra support they may need.

For Tasmanian Angela Weeks, 2020 was the year to make her long held dream come true. After six years working at Huon Aquaculture she took the plunge and enrolled part-time in the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing, Home and Community) at TasTAFE’s Devonport campus.
“For a long time I didn’t feel like I had a lot to offer or the life experience to be a carer. Once my family grew up I could see that it was time to make a career change” she said.

There have been a number of challenges as Ange hasn’t been in the education system for many years. Her enthusiasm and bubbly personality carried her through the first part of the course but there was a gap in her level of understanding and ability to stay on task with her written assessments and a new industry-based language to learn. Having TAFE in the community allowed Ange to start accessing the Drop-in Study Support until COVID-19 hit and everything went online. She then started working with a tutor weekly by distance to better understand the assessment questions and develop the writing style needed.

Ange finds her teachers passionate, very supportive, professional and extremely knowledgeable about the aged care industry. Ange is very excited at the prospect of her local work placement at Tandara Lodge in her home town of Sheffield later this year so that she can put in to practice what she has learned about providing the best care possible. We will need thousands of people like Ange if we are to deal with the crisis in aged care into the future.

Place
At the heart of communities, TAFE also puts the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities, who reside in rural and remote areas at the centre of its teaching.

Pakana Ranger Brenton Brown is a Palawa man working at Preminghana on the far North West of Tasmania which is owned and managed by the Aboriginal community. The land is beautiful with long windswept beaches on the edge of the Tarkine with the background music of crashing waves and the roaring 40s.

He and the other rangers are currently rebuilding traditional bark huts at Preminghana so that the community, particularly the children, can reconnect with their culture and for the general public to learn respect through knowledge.

Brenton has almost completed his Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management with TasTAFE while working on the job. He explained that reading and writing have never been his strong points and he’s never done well in big groups. It is only through the support of his teacher meeting with him out on country where he can provide verbal answers and demonstrate his knowledge plus the occasional one-on-one catch-up on campus that has got him through the course so far. Brenton knows what he is doing while working on the job and can identify the native plants, animals and weeds and how to manage these as the ranger program works on managing this precious land, however putting it down on paper was a barrier. Concerns over his literacy stopped Brenton from signing up for the Certificate III course for several years until he built up his confidence.

“If it hadn’t happened this way I don’t think I would have done the course. Study has opened up my mind and I have learned a lot about land management.

...“You can’t just light a fire. You need to think about the fauna and native trees and the reason for the fire before starting it.”

Brenton Brown
Pakana Ranger

Brenton Brown
Pakana Ranger

You can’t just light a fire. You need to think about the fauna and native trees and the reason for the fire before starting it.” said Brenton.

As the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education concluded back in 2018, “TAFE has to be put back into the regions, closer to people, places and the heartland of much of Australia's productivity.” Now more than ever TAFE needs guaranteed federal support.

MICHELLE PURDY
Federal TAFE President, AEU.
Recognising and rewarding

Nominations open for the Arthur Hamilton Award

This is your chance to celebrate AEU members who are making an outstanding contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

The Arthur Hamilton Award commemorates the achievements of Arthur Hamilton, a Palawa man who was active in promoting cross-cultural awareness, recognition of Indigenous peoples and the right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to access a high quality public education.

The winner will receive a $1500 prize and be flown to Melbourne to accept the Award at the AEU’s annual Federal Conference in February 2021.

All nominees will receive a certificate from the AEU.

Get nominating!
Download your nomination form at: aeufederal.org.au/our-work/indigenous
or request a nomination form from Suzanne Lowndes: (03) 9693 1800 slowndes@aeufederal.org.au

Find out more
Visit aeufederal.org.au/our-work/indigenous
or contact AEU Federal Secretary, Susan Hopgood, aeu@aeufederal.org.au

The 2019 Arthur Hamilton Award went to the Port Augusta Children’s Centre.
The award was presented by Correna Haythorpe, AEU federal president (left), to Mandy Dempsey, director, Port Augusta Children’s Centre, at the 2020 AEU Federal Conference.
Vox Pops

Members speak out

TAFE teachers around the country had to adapt quickly and embrace new delivery methods to ensure students remained engaged during the global pandemic. We asked members to tell us about the challenges of teaching remotely.

**DAMIAN VON SAMORZEWSKI**
Advanced Skills Teacher, TasTAFE

The biggest challenge to teaching online is the cognitive bias shown by management, using a white, middle-class perception of access to the required technology.

A 2017 TasC OSS report into technology access ‘Understanding Digital Inclusion in Tasmania Report on Research Findings’ shows 60% of low-income families in Tasmania have zero access, apart from intermittent mobile device technology. With the recent isolation requirements of families, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the push has not considered different family situations, particularly access to technology in the home. One student recently provided insight into her plight. She has four children at home, two old laptops and only mobile phone data to access the internet. How is she expected to continue with her studies? Conversely, if we had resources to suit all students and not just those with technological access, we would be an inclusive organisation.

The push to get learning online severely disadvantaged the most disadvantaged in our Tasmanian community and the divide continues to grow, driven by government policy.

**PENNE AMIET**
ESL Teacher, TAFE Queensland

Researchers say that children learn exponentially more in their first five years than they will in the rest of their lives. This statement comes to mind when I reflect on the remote learning (due to COVID-19) that occurred here at TAFE Queensland in the second term of 2020. I teach in the English, Language and Migrant Education Faculty (ELME) so the swap to teaching remotely was a very steep learning curve for both teachers and students.

The cohort I teach are predominantly humanitarian refugees with a smattering of migrants who by their very existence are ‘survivors’. They adapted to the sudden change in the learning environment and embraced it to the best of their abilities. However, the challenges that arose in this period should not be ignored going forward.

The major challenge was, of course, technology or lack thereof. Educators only had a few days to prepare students and themselves for online delivery. Many of our students did not have an email address let alone stable, reliable and affordable internet connectivity. To compound this the majority of teaching occurred via Zoom with students participating on mobile phones. Some students went to extraordinary levels to participate, including walking around Kmart stores to pick up free internet! Others relied on generous providers giving unlimited access on all plans. Out of the 40+ students I taught, only a handful had a personal computer. They also had to participate with children on their laps and in the background at times. Furthermore, some students felt being on video was intrusive and made them feel uncomfortable. Obviously, this is not an ideal learning environment for the teacher or student although we all learnt a lot about remote learning.

The biggest challenge I believe, was the lack of physical contact with the students. Teachers felt isolated and confined for long periods of time. Educators could not effectively judge students’ engagement and participation. Of course, due to the numbers in the Zoom classes, it was near impossible to improve oral and aural skills which rely heavily on face-to-face instruction and socio-linguistic support. Similarly, assessment in this environment is not plausible for several reasons even with breakout rooms.

Another important challenge of remote learning is the workload for both teachers and students. Delivery for long periods of time online is exhausting especially in our area as teaching is largely face-to-face instruction with only limited amounts of independent study feasible. Teachers also needed time to research, implement and teach students new platforms of delivery which was stressful for all.

Remote learning for ESL students, especially humanitarian refugees, should only be used as a last resort. The cohort improves in proficiency by direct instruction in a face-to-face environment. Highly traumatised students also need this contact with their teacher and classmates.
**NONI MORSE**
Diploma of Nursing Teacher, TasTAFE

WITH INSUFFICIENT TIME and technology skills at the beginning of COVID-19, I threw several techniques together despite clinging to my preference for face-to-face delivery and belief that relationships underpin effective teaching and learning.

What did I do? I faked it. I treated the circumstance like an opportunity to develop other skills. I told students that flexibility and adaptability are essential skills for nurses.

I followed the ‘How to Teach Online’ course template to check how my students were transitioning to online learning. The challenges students faced related to study skills (motivation and procrastination), workplace demands (working in health and aged care meant more work and potential exposure to COVID-19) and support (bouncing ideas off each other and isolation).

When it became obvious that teaching online wasn’t a momentary blip, I decided to run online classes via Microsoft Teams. These were short, tightly structured events to ensure important information was conveyed – very much like the old ‘chalk and talk’ or PowerPoint lectures but with more interaction. Students were invited to arrive early and stay beyond scheduled start and finish times to allow for discussion and questions.

Meanwhile, we have resumed small group activities on campus which has lessened the reliance on online techniques. However, limiting the number of students on campus translates to an increase in teaching hours and less time to plan how to use online techniques strategically.

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**CHRISTINE ALLSOPP**
ESOL teacher, TAFE NSW

I’VE BEEN TEACHING online from home since Term 2. The first challenge for me has been the increased workload and number of hours spent working, despite the reduced hours in our online classes, on extra admin and emailing students and other staff. Absolutely everything is being done online; for example, typing and uploading lesson records, attendance, finding appropriate online resources and scanning resources, saving student work and uploading it, and of course, our classes.

All of this is very intense and tiring. I almost always feel that most tasks need to be done right now, which leads to very long days. As I’m working from home and hardly ever see my colleagues, it’s easy to feel isolated and a bit lonely at times.

Health issues, both physical and mental, are a challenge for many of us. Our employer provides information about self-care and well-being but our work demands are so great that it’s hard to manage to put some of this advice into practice.

Some students have poor internet and some of them don’t have a computer, just a smartphone. In the last two weeks, two of my students have withdrawn because of connectivity and childcare issues. Students can use a computer at the TAFE library but mostly they are too worried about COVID-19 to go there. Many students have delayed their study until we return to the campus but most of our current students are not prepared to return to campus yet.

This is different at other campuses where there is a mix of online and on campus classes or even all back on campus.

As my students are adult migrants and refugees learning English, online classes have been a challenge in terms of their learning, especially with speaking because it’s difficult to get enough useful practice online. Online classes are particularly difficult for lower-level learners.

In the end, we are dealing with these challenges to support our students and keep them engaged in learning.

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**ANIA HOLMES**
Lecturer, Health, Community and Foundation Skills, TAFE SA

BEFORE COVID-19 we were delivering Certificate III in Children’s Education and Care face-to-face with students attending weekly five-hour workshops. We had already been using the online classroom (Learn/Moodle model) for about six years. We were using the flipped classroom methodology where students are expected to complete the learning online and then we would discuss content and work on scenarios or practical tasks in workshops. We had already discovered that some students didn’t do the learning or flicked through the learning without exploring all links and readings. This was apparent through questioning and was a challenge we were already dealing with.

Students with chaotic home lives that made spaces to study difficult or with limited internet would often come into the library to study or onto campus after hours to catch up. This was no longer possible.

Many hours of work went into changing our five-hour workshops into two-hourly Skype sessions. We had a very large group and to stop the platform crashing we had to deliver two groups each day. Exhausting groundhog days!

We spent many spare hours taking photos of experience setups and mini videos to role model techniques. When communication is 60% nonverbal and 40% verbal does that mean students are only receiving 40% communication from me online and am I only getting 40% communication from students? We were all counting down the days till we got back on campus.
Making our words and actions meet

A groundbreaking AEU survey reveals that while most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators generally feel welcome and respected in the workplace, this is not the case for all. Darcel Russell, AEU Aboriginal Officer explains.

Merv King is telling me about the first time he attended a Queensland Teachers’ Union training meeting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, held at the end of 2018 at the union’s Milton office in Brisbane. “I walked into the room,” says Merv, “and I thought, I’m here with mob. I’m here with family.” It was a great feeling, he says. “But then I felt embarrassed for feeling like I was the only First Nations employee with union values in my workplace for so long. All my working life I’ve gotten used to being one of very few.”

Merv is a Waanyi man from the Gulf of Carpentaria. He was “born and bred” in the western Queensland mining town of Mt Isa and now works as an electrical trades teacher at Bundaberg TAFE in Queensland. As we talk, he describes feelings of professional and cultural isolation in the workplace that are all too familiar to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. But he’s also describing the relief that comes from finding mob – the (statistically speaking) few other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and workers in the education and training industry.
A recent national survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AEU members on their perceptions and experiences of racism in the workplace confirms what Merv is saying. The survey finds that there is a lack of employer-provided collegial and professional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers across the public education system nationally. Indeed, in many states and territories, the AEU, its Branches and Associated Bodies are leading the sector – being one of the only organisations in the education industry to regularly bring together groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, principals and education support professionals for professional and collegial discussions.

The need for the survey was identified by the Yalukit Yulendj, the AEU’s national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (General and TAFE division) committees, in response to the many years of reports from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members about their direct and indirect experiences of racism in the workplace. A scan of national workforce data outlined in the Diversity Council of Australia’s State of Exclusion Survey (2019) shows that almost one in two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers (48%) indicated they had ‘experienced at least one incident of (workplace) harassment and/or discrimination in the past 12 months.’ However, there was no national data specifically focused on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.

Three hundred and ninety-nine, or 16%, of the AEU’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members responded to the survey which set out to gather evidence on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public education workers in Australia perceive and experience racism in their workplaces and across the system more broadly. The survey was structured into categories in order to gauge members’ perceptions and experiences of the extent to which racism manifests in the following interrelated workplace contexts and situations:
Workplace – perceptions and experiences in the current workplace;
Professional – perceptions and experiences of professional support and structures;
Personal – perceptions and experiences of personal occurrences and impacts;
Colleagues – perceptions and experiences of occurrences on colleagues and impacts;
Systems – perceptions and experiences of systems responsiveness.

A key finding of the survey is that while most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in most workplaces feel mostly welcome and respected, this is not the case for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. One of the reasons for this is a lack of stable and consistent systemic support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and employees.

Systemic stability and support
In a roundabout way, it was lack of systemic commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training programs in the privatised mining training and employment industry that led Merv to TAFE and the union in the first place. Merv started his career at NORQEB (now Ergon) as an electrical apprentice in 1983. From there, he worked in the mining industry as an electrician, first as a FIFO worker in hard rock, copper, silver and zinc mines and then as a shift electrician in the underground coal industry in central Queensland. An incident on a mine site led to a real-life evacuation, which put an end to his work in underground mining. Soon he found himself in the Pilbara, working as a plant electrician for the Rio Tinto mining company, which led to a training job at the Tom Price mine.

“I recognised that the young Traditional Owners were not being treated fairly,” Merv tells me. “When the mine was advertising for apprenticeships, there were no applications from young local Aboriginal people.” So Merv contacted management and raised concerns about the mine’s application process, including the requirement for applications to be submitted through the internet when most local Aboriginal kids had no internet access. “I asked the company, ‘how can I help?’” says Merv. “I wanted to show these young kids it is possible to work in the mining industry. Our kids are just as capable. We can be equally successful as long as we have opportunity, education and ambition.”

Merv King
Electrical trades teacher, Bundaberg TAFE

Our kids are just as capable. We can be equally successful as long as we have opportunity, education and ambition.”

He began working with the local school and helping with the homework club.

“It was my way of helping and assisting young people in the Pilbara,” he says.
At that stage, Merv tells me, he felt like the company was completely committed to the work he was doing – training young, local Aboriginal people for work in the mine. Over time, Merv’s role in the organisation expanded, as his work became known across the company. He was training other trainers and developing training programs for high voltage electricity. He was flying all over the country and even went to the London Olympics. But despite this success, in 2014 when the price of iron ore dropped, Merv was made redundant.

“I was awakened to the training industry’s vulnerabilities to the economic system,” says Merv. “It is all driven by the economics. Currently the rate of funding decline in the TAFE sector provided by both state and federal governments is resulting in a deficit of thousands of trained and qualified tradespersons nationally.”

Merv’s statement reflects the general fragility of past systemic commitments from both private and public sectors to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the plethora of broken promises that these commitments have come to represent.

The findings of the AEU survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members concurs. While there are a range of policy commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and programs within the public education system at any given time, implementation is not systemically embedded. Rather, implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training policy is largely reliant on circumstance, individual personalities, certain locations and the individual commitment of those in paid leadership/managerial positions. And as Merv says – the almighty dollar. Following his redundancy, Merv moved to Bundaberg to be closer to his parents. He got a job teaching electrical apprenticeships at Bundaberg TAFE, joined the union, got active and here we are today.

Making our words and actions meet

“It’s frustrating when what a company writes and what they do are not the same, or for that matter a government,” says Merv. “But with the union, I see that our words and our actions are meeting.”

Data from the survey shows that Merv’s comments reflect the views of most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our union, with 86.6% of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the union is a strong advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and 88% of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the union is a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.

The union is national and organised and being heard, says Merv. “Since becoming a member, I have had the opportunity to convey my opinions and concerns on how we can improve employment conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in education. For all workers in education. And results can occur. Through the unions, it really can occur.” A recent example of this happened during the early days of the COVID19 pandemic. Realising that there was very little government policy on vulnerable worker status, Merv expressed his concerns to union organisers at the state and federal level. The union responded by raising these concerns at the highest levels of government and the problem was resolved quickly.

There are a range of systems and structures to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement across all levels of the union. Merv is now elected as the TAFE representative to Gandu Jarjum – the QTU’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education committee – and the TAFE division representative for the Queensland branch on the AEU’s National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee – the Yalukit Yulendi.

“I’ve always been a quiet bystander,” says Merv. “Since becoming a member of the union, and experiencing cultural safety in the workplace, I now have the opportunity to convey my ideas and concerns and put forward options on how we can improve things. How we can improve employment conditions for our mob in working in education and how we can improve education and training for our kids.”

Through the union, Merv tells me, he’s seen that results can happen.
CIT HAS BEEN ‘big news’ in these extraordinary times as the ACT Government’s plans for a new campus at Woden CBD progress. It is a $300 million public investment over the next four years with the new campus opening in 2025. While there are mixed views about the location, style and impact of the development, it is close to public transport, community facilities and retail areas and will generate much needed jobs. Replacing the existing CIT Reid Campus, in the central Canberra CBD, the Woden campus will focus on contemporary education and community integration. The vacated site will be fully redeveloped by UNSW. It is interesting that a university can make this investment in the primary Canberra CBD while the TAFE moves to a less prestigious CBD location, but the new site is central, accessible and a modern campus is urgently needed.

This news forms part of the ACT Government’s campaign for the ACT general election on 17 October 2020. It is a big, public statement of support for CIT which makes it difficult to be complaining about other things that may not be satisfactory. We are all grappling with the pandemic and CIT challenges include not adequately understanding or capturing the additional workload for teachers and support staff generated by social distancing, the continuing need to rapidly transform training and assessment for online, delays in practicals and placement, and additional support needed by many students including international students. And, departments are still expected to meet budget. It is a very tough time for the frontline educators and their support colleagues.

Staying focused on the ACT election, the ACT AEU is asking candidates to support its seven pledges, the final one being ‘Bring CIT into the Education Portfolio’. There is an intention to foster debate and discussion about all educators being within the one portfolio. There are multiple examples of successful partnerships between CIT and ACT secondary schools, but the alignment needs to be strengthened with all ACT educators working and developing together for the current and future of education in the ACT.

PHILLIP CHADWICK

NSW TAFE TEACHERS are covered under the TAFE Commission of NSW Teachers and Related Employees Enterprise Agreement 2016: this agreement expired on 3 February 2020. In March, Federation and TAFE NSW reached agreement on a timeframe to allow those covered by the EA to receive a pay rise of 2.5% from 1 April with subsequent annual increases and on a more secure pathway to permanency for long-term temps.

In March, only days after putting the agreement to TAFE TA Council and Federation Council to endorse, the TAFE MD advised the government was implementing a pause on the agreed timeline and TAFE would not be putting the agreed EA to ballot. Federation responded to both the TAFE MD and the minister stating (among other things) that:

“The last pay increase for teachers occurred from 24 November 2018 and despite Federation’s commitment to the bargaining process, four months have now elapsed since the current EA expired. Teachers are the one group employed by TAFE NSW who are yet to receive a pay rise. As such, the Federation calls upon you to ensure that the agreement which has been negotiated in good faith is honoured.”

The minister responded: “Despite being covered by the Commonwealth Fair Work legislation, TAFE NSW is one of many agencies in the NSW Government sector that is awaiting further developments with respect to the pause on pay rises for the sector and whether it will go ahead or not.

Accordingly, it is prudent at this time for TAFE NSW to continue to pause the completion of enterprise bargaining for the new TAFE Teachers EA.”

(please note, those further developments relate to the matter of a public sector wage freeze being heard in the state Industrial Relations Commission. This matter has been ongoing and has been set down for additional hearing days this week).

In June, Federation provided TAFE with formal notice under s229(4) of the Fair Work Act 2009, that in relation to the proposed agreement, the union has concerns that the TAFE Commission of NSW has not met the good faith bargaining requirements Federation submitted in the Form F11 Application for the Commission to deal with a bargaining dispute. The parties met with Fair Work Deputy President Anna Booth. She suggested settling on some issues that might enhance members’ working lives, but at no cost to TAFE NSW while both parties await the outcome of the state wages matter.

Federation agreed to meet with TAFE outside the Commission and put forward a series of proposals. TAFE
NSW did not put forward any proposals.

On 10 August, the parties again came before DP Booth to report that TAFE NSW had not agreed to any of the proposals put by Federation and that TAFE NSW had not put forward any proposals, other than to include additional wording in one of Federation’s proposals. The parties will meet with DP Booth again in one month’s time.

In the meantime, Federation has encouraged members to continue to meet with their local MP to ask them to lobby the TAFE minister and the premier to honour the agreement made with Federation in March.

Towards the end of June, the number of new COVID-19 infections had dramatically declined. TAFE NSW staff were advised that from the start of Term 3 TAFE NSW would move to a controlled campus-based delivery model. All staff would progressively return to the workplace in August.

In July there were a few outbreaks that were well covered by the media. Federation continues monitor the situation and provide advice to members.

QUEENSLAND

DAVID TERAUDS

TERM 3 HAS brought a return to face-to-face teaching for most staff in Queensland. Meanwhile the Queensland Government legislated a pay rise deferral for public sector workers, ostensibly based on maintaining employment. It was objected to by most unions as they maintain no empirical case was made as to why it was necessary. However, given the pay deferral has been legislated there was no choice but for TAFE QLD to redraft and have certified a new version of the recently agreed EA reflecting

an altered pay schedule. The union confirmed the changes outlined in the replacement EA met the requirements of the legislation.

All increment increases and structural changes remain and are actioned according to the previous arrangements, but the 2020 pay increase is deferred to 1 July 2021 and the pay increase for 2021 is rescheduled for January 2022. The new replacement EA reflecting those changes has been certified by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and is now in place.

In a direct response to the COVID-19 crisis impact on university budgets and as per the final change proposal, Central Queensland University (CQU) has implemented a round of voluntary separations and redundancies and is progressing with proposed campus closures.

CQU is currently campaigning, as the public provider of vocational education in Central Queensland, for infrastructure funding to replace aging TAFE facilities in Rockhampton. The state minister for training has stated the importance of the development for CQUniversity. The training department is working with CQU to assist CQUniversity to develop a detailed proposal.

QUT has commenced the process of consulting with members regarding the Log of Claims for the upcoming CQUniversity enterprise bargaining round. The current agreement nominally expires on 30 June 2021 and bargaining is to commence no later than 30 March 2021.

Finally, given the federal government’s lack of support for international students during the COVID crisis many are struggling to support themselves. The QTU is still donating supermarket vouchers to TAFE QLD international students who are financially at risk as they have not been able to work due to lockdowns.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ANGELA DEAN

WHILE THE INITIAL COVID response from TAFE SA was supportive, the return of students to on-campus studies has brought about new issues for staff. There was consistent messaging from leadership backed up by extensive risk assessment documentation. However, regular cleaning between class groups is not being done by contracted cleaners; instead it falls upon lecturing staff to complete. PPE is in short supply across most campuses. Room signage that indicates room capacity limits is based off floor plans, not taking into account any furniture or workshop WHS requirements. This leads to overfilled rooms and students not being able to maintain social distancing requirements. Limits in the TAFE SA budget are often noted as the issue.

During the COVID crisis, TAFE SA were still required to meet their $15 million budget cut requirements from the state government. There have been ongoing offers of Targeted Voluntary Separation Packages (TVSPs). Additionally, contractual and casual staff have lost their positions during the TAFE SA COVID response, as many programs are still delivering online with minimal permanent staff.

The employer has also chosen to use COVID as a tool to force many courses into online delivery. As a part of TAFE SA’s current Alternative Education Project (AEP), all courses that TAFE SA offers are being reviewed to assess what can be moved to permanent online delivery. The Executive Director of Education Operations confirmed that a key target for the AEP is that 50% of all educational delivery at TAFE SA will be online by Semester 1 2021. Educational staff are now forced to complete extensive program reports to prove why their course needs to return to face-to-face delivery.

We are also still in the midst of enterprise bargain negotiations, while there has been some consensus between the employer and the AEU in the negotiations on provisions that address gender equity and provide monetary compensation for staffs use of personal vehicles for business purposes.

So far, the employer’s proposals on workload are only geared at increasing staff work hours for the year, reducing leave provisions and taking away the ability for staff to consult on manageable workloads. The employer is also seeking to increase the limit on annual delivery hours for hourly paid instructors (HIPs) and remove the clause that requires review of their employment type when HIPs are timetabled regularly in programs. They are also seeking to remove base locations for lecturing staff and any travel provisions attached to base locations. These are just highlights of the drastic changes the employer is proposing. Their main argument for these proposals is that they “just need to get more out of the staff they have”.

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The AEU has asserted that the employer is no longer bargaining in good faith. We commenced the bargaining process in August but in February 2020 the employer proposed to remove education managers from the organisation and replace them with senior business managers, as part of an Educational Business Unit Restructure. This type of change to TAFE SA’s educational staff is substantial and will significantly change the job roles of all remaining educational staff members. The outcome of the dispute will shape our next steps in the bargaining process. During the Educational Business Unit Restructure dispute with TAFE SA, despite the call for the status quo from the AEU, the employer continued in their plans and offered TVSPs to 16 educational managers. The AEU took the matter to the South Australian Employment Tribunal and gained a legal victory to retain educational managers on 26 June 2020. TAFE SA was ordered not to take any further steps towards filling senior business manager positions, and not to declare any additional educational managers excess other than positions vacated by education managers taking TVSPs. These orders remain in force until the matter is heard in late September. For the interim, the employer has backfilled the vacant positions with principal lecturers working higher duties. Workload issues are still the main cause of concern. Staff are facing overloaded teaching schedules with little to no consultation in the process. The push for continued online learning is further exasperating the issue. With no clear class size limitations being set on online programs, some staff are being requested to teach subjects for all the students enrolled across the entire state, which pushes their assessment and reporting requirements to unmanageable levels. Many staff are being informed of their actual workload only days prior to programs starting.

Coupled with an increasing administrative workload, this has seen many lecturers completing WHS reports due to stress and anxiety caused by excessive workload. The AEU SA Branch is already representing numerous individual staff members and whole workgroups in workload disputes with the employer.

Due to these excessive workload requirements and TAFE SA’s ongoing focus on becoming a competitive training provider, staff morale is at an all-time low. Some of our members that chose to take TVSP offers indicated that they could no longer work for an organisation that seems to value profits over people. This is a sad reflection of how the fully contestable VET market in SA is negatively impacting TAFE staff, students and our community. This was further highlighted when the AEU SA Branch President met with our state treasurer to ask for clarity on the future of TAFE in South Australia and was told that “they need to be more competitive”.

TASMANIA

SIMON BAILEY

Since the last edition things have almost returned to some sense of normality. Classes around the state have resumed at all campuses, however in some cases in a drastically reduced format.

We are finalising a survey for members to see how these changes have impacted on their programs and students. Some members have reported a drop-out rate as high as 70%, so these figures and claims need to be researched further.

The state government launched a series of free programs for the public who have become unemployed. However, these programs are causing delivery programs issues because some teams are understaffed, and staff therefore must cancel planned delivery to accommodate. This means that students who may have planned to do higher level programs after completing their current program now need to wait to until next year.

Pre-apprenticeship/service programs have also been drastically affected with many programs being cancelled for the second part of the year. Again, this is impacting the unemployed and people wishing to get into a particular trade and or industry.

The state government’s interim report, which was completed by the Premier’s Economic and Social Advisory Council (PESRAC), states that Tasmania’s youth unemployment rate was already sitting at 12.9% before the COVID-19 pandemic and from March to May this year nearly one in five Tasmanians aged 15-24 lost their jobs. As of July, new apprenticeships have declined by almost 400.

Recommendations covering TasTAFE are:

• The state government should fund a program of free VET courses in qualifications directly related to demonstrated jobs growth. These should be delivered rapidly and flexibly by TasTAFE and other training providers endorsed by industry.
• Group training organisations, labour hire firms and other job matching services should be funded to support recruitment, mentoring and rotation of apprentices, trainees and short-term workers across employers that cannot currently commit to long-term employment contracts.
• The state government should fully fund the Rapid Response Skills Initiative (RRSI) past 2020.
• The state government should enable TasTAFE to implement an internal workforce transition plan to ensure TasTAFE’s trainers have up to date and contemporary industry skills.

Last month we were informed that Jenny Dodd, TasTAFE’s current CEO, is not intending to renew her current contract. While it is true that her focus was on quality and improving assessment practices for teachers, little has changed. We find ourselves further removed from any decision-making processes. In fact, less than six weeks ago we had our third restructure and now have a field of directors to help run the organisation.
As we head towards the end of the year, we enter the preparation period for our next EBA negotiations. Expressions of interest have been called for members to join the EBA working group to consider how we can better manage teacher workloads and to review family friendly working arrangements. I encourage all members to engage with these working groups.

VICTORIA
ELAINE GILLESPIE

THE SECOND WAVE of COVID-19 hit Victoria hard, with the wearing of masks compulsory for everyone over the age of 12 across the state.

Although Stage 4 restrictions have made things clearer for our teachers in TAFEs, the same cannot be said for our TAFE teachers providing education in the prison system. For many teachers, their courses are not on the expected list and yet they are being required to teach face-to-face. We are continuing to lobby DET to ensure the health and wellbeing of these teachers.

There have now been positive cases at almost all metro TAFEs and several in the regions. As part of the institute’s COVID-19 plan, TAFEs were required to develop a reporting procedure which included notifying DET, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and staff and students.

However, some TAFEs were not reporting cases unless the whole campus had to be closed. Thankfully after much lobbying and commencing OHS PINs the TAFEs are now required to report all positive cases to DET, DHHS and now also to WorkSafe. Although improving, reporting to staff still lacks consistency and we will continue to work to have this improved.

When the first lockdown was implemented back in March, TAFE teachers were required to redesign and develop teaching and learning strategies suitable for remote delivery within a very short timeframe which meant that any workplans that had been completed were no longer current.

Quality pedagogy was replaced by a need to work remotely. As a result, theory was delivered in isolation of applied learning by way of practical classes. The ability to engage students was more challenging which lead to more work as teachers tried to keep students interested.

The plan for most was that theory would be delivered during the restrictions and when the restrictions were lifted the practical could be delivered. However, for many courses the ability to deliver on campus has not returned. For those who have been teaching face-to-face a new issue has arisen due to the reduction in class sizes necessary to meet social distancing requirements. Where previously there may have been 24 in a practical class there may now be as few as eight, which means the teacher must teach that class three times rather than once. Consequently, a significant number of teachers will reach their 800-hour teaching cap much earlier than originally timetabled.

This will trigger excess teaching duty hours, overtime and possibly the need to employ more staff.

The Victorian Government commenced a substantial review into the state’s post-secondary education and training system earlier this year. The AEU collected feedback from our TAFE members and made over 20 recommendations.

WA
GARY HEDGER

WE HAVE BEEN extremely lucky (for the moment) that our state government has taken measures to keep us locked up and minimise exposure. The impact on TAFE at the beginning was massive with the sudden and total shift to online delivery at the end of March.

The impact was different, with some coping extremely well as they had a large part of their delivery materials already online, and others completely lost as to how to proceed.

What did come through was the ability of the lecturing staff to quickly react and support students throughout the transition, despite the many hurdles that had to be overcome with setting up Zoom classrooms, blackboard delivery and limited face-to-face delivery. Students and lecturers did amazing things to keep the system running in a way that attempted to ensure that no one become lost and slipped through the cracks.

We have since returned to a form of normality in the way we are delivering to students, however during the intervening time between the initial lockdown and the present, there have been a lot of press releases that talk about TAFE and the role that it is expected to play in the economic rebuild of the state’s economy.

After all the hard work by members, meetings and negotiations, the 2019 TAFE General Agreement was formally registered by the WA Industrial Relations in August 2020.

Major wins include:

• Union representative time to allocate time off teaching for representatives to undertake their roles.
• Workload commitments to examine class sizes, student curriculum hours and implement timetabling principles.
• Increased job security, lecturers will be eligible to attain permanency any time after initial contract, regardless of reason for contract and will not have to reapply for same position.
• Long service leave and personal leave reinstated for breaks in service of up to six months.
• Pay increases of $1000 per annum over two years.
• The above base grade current entitlement to be in agreement, prior hours of casual service to be taken into account when determining commencement salary.
• No bar to grade progression after completion of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
• Bereavement leave increased.
• Cultural leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and blood/plasma donors leave.
• Paid superannuation on unpaid parental leave up to 12 weeks.
• Recognition of Prior Learning to be listed under teaching duties.
Investing in TAFE is an investment in AUSTRALIA’S ECONOMIC RECOVERY