The Australian TAFE Teacher

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

MICHELLE PURDY, AEU FEDERAL TAFE PRESIDENT

IN THIS last edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher for 2016, we continue to examine the parlous state of TAFE colleges around the country, amidst the ongoing uncertainty of daily reports of the nefarious activities of for-profit private providers. Ironically, as media reports of qualifications being withdrawn and private providers registrations being cancelled continue, it is the Training Awards season — and as we showcase in this edition — TAFE and its students continue to do well. TAFE continues to prove itself to be the trusted quality provider of vocational education, despite, rather than because of governments' policies to privatise the sector.

In this edition Gavin Moodie examines the future for TAFE in the context of an argument that “solutions seem as remote as ever because vocational education is limited by seemingly intractable constraints, some of them contradictory, and many extending far beyond vocational education.” Ultimately, Moodie argues, “the long term future of vocational education cannot be determined in isolation from higher education.”

Ian Curry, a regular contributor to The Australian TAFE Teacher writes about the future for apprentices and apprenticeships in Australia, drawing on a recent visit to Germany. In the end he concludes “There will be no building the Australian economy, or the society it is meant to serve, without first rebuilding our skilled workforce, and as we know, that starts with defending and rebuilding TAFE.” Ian continues to argue persuasively for unions to continue to work together in the important area of public vocational education through TAFE.

John Mitchell puts a compelling case for a thorough national inquiry into vocational education to restore confidence in the sector. He says the federal government needs to stop blaming others and commission a thorough, independent analysis of the flaws in the sector and fully respond to that analysis. He says that the review needs to investigate the major flaw in the sector’s recent history because insufficient safeguards for students and inadequate requirements for new RTOs were put in place before governments recklessly started shifting funding from the public provider, TAFE, to the private sector. He concludes by arguing that governments around Australia from 2009 onwards should hang their heads in shame for this irresponsible and calamitous behaviour.

Theresa Millman’s contribution investigating the dichotomous relationship between neo-liberal human capital approaches and social capital outcomes in TAFE education policy is a terrific contribution to the discussion around vocational education. Dr Don Zoellner has a look at reforms to the UK’s vocational education sector, where the government has adopted the recommendations from the review, including a decision to stop funding for-profit vocational education providers.

Finally, this issue focuses on asylum seeker, refugee and migrant education. Sue Webb examines what the recent increase in state government funding in Victoria will mean for asylum seekers and the community. An article from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre shows us how education programs for asylum seekers operate in practical terms. And finally, an article from Michael Michell, President of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations looks at the proposed downgrading of Adult Migrant English Programs and what that means not only for migrants, but for teachers.
Minister Simon Birmingham’s recent announcement that he will smash the “business model” of dodgy VET providers is hard to take seriously because his government’s track record on addressing the crisis in vocational education is so poor.

The language is tough – but it has no substance. There is a crisis in the vocational education sector, hardly a week passes without reports of for-profit private providers doing the wrong thing – rorting funding, ripping off students or targeting vulnerable members of our communities. Yet the crisis continues.

In recent times, successive reports have highlighted the negative consequences of market reform on the vocational education sector. The Final Report of the Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform and the Redesigning VET FEE-HELP Discussion Paper are both scathing of the impact of VET FEE-HELP on the vocational education system. The recently released Preliminary Findings Report of the Productivity Commissions Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform used the examples of reforms in the vocational education sector as an example of the “damaging effects” of governments introducing policy changes without adequate safeguards.

While the public debate focusses on blame for the mess that the sector is in, what underpins the confected outrage of political leaders is a steadfast refusal to admit that the bipartisan attempt to privatise TAFE in Australia has failed – even where government’s own inquiries have highlighted the failure of the reform process. It has resulted in billions of dollars wasted on courses which haven’t even been “delivered”, or the delivery of courses of such low quality, and usefulness that the reputation of the sector is in tatters.

By any measure, including the government’s own key performance criteria for the current National Agreement, privatisation of TAFE has failed.

If governments were serious about re-establishing trust in vocational education, and supporting this crucial education sector, they would restrict all government funding to TAFE institutions, and refuse to provide government funding to for-profit private providers, as the UK government has recently done.

The vocational education sector urgently needs its own independent review if it is to survive and overcome the current mess that it is in.

In the meantime, however, there are three things which really would destroy the “business models” of for-profit VET providers, and stop the rorting of the system:

• Establishing a cost of delivery and regulating fees. No-one knows the cost of the multitude of VET courses which dodgy colleges can charge students thousands of dollars for – and for which there is no regulation of fees at all. In other words, state and federal governments are handing billions over to for-profit colleges, often in a faux “competition” for funding with TAFE colleges, having little or no idea how much the courses actually cost to deliver. This has been going on throughout VET FEE-HELP’s history and the government has refused to properly investigate the actual cost of delivery of a VET course, and to regulate fees in the sector.
By any measure, including the government’s own key performance criteria for the current National Agreement, privatisation of TAFE has failed.

• Setting a minimum number of hours that providers have to deliver. There is no requirement for a minimum number of hours of training to be delivered, and until very recently, no requirement for any training whatsoever. As Phoenix head Ivan Brown famously said – it’s much cheaper to run a college when students don’t turn up! This has been going on throughout VET FEE-HELP’s history and the government has refused to mandate a minimum number of hours which providers must “deliver”.
• Banning brokers. Large proportions of the government funding handed to private colleges are channelled into brokers, whose job it is to spot and sign up students. This is part of the so-called “business-model” that allows private colleges to prey on disadvantaged people, charging them in many cases twice as much as the rest of the community for courses, which are, in many cases, worthless. This has been going on throughout VET FEE-HELP’s history and the government has refused to ban brokers.

Implementing these three things would smash the “business model” of shonky providers overnight. However there is no indication that the current government “review” will consider any of these common sense strategies.

If the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, this next review will continue to concentrate on the blame game. Whose fault it is becomes less important as time marches on. A deep attachment to marketisation hobbles governments from making the necessary changes to the system. They will not mandate minimum hours, ban brokers or work to establish the cost of delivery and regulate fees precisely because these strategies would rapidly smash the business model of so many private providers.

Eighty-four per cent of VET FEE-HELP funds go to private-for-profit providers. The bill for the scheme in 2015 was $3 billion — more than half what governments spend on recurrent VET funding, a third of which ($1.5 billion) also went to the private for-profit VET sector in 2014.

Vocational education really is big business.

And the reality is that there is no market in vocational education. There are expensive, and poorly regulated state administered schemes which incentivise entry into the sector of for-profit operators, many of which have sprung up overnight to make money out of successive governments’ ideological obsession with privatisation.

And then, on top of this, there is the scandal plagued VET FEE-HELP scheme.

The TAFE sector in Australia is being destroyed. Thousands of teachers have lost their jobs in the last five years. Thousands of young people are carrying debt — many unaware because they have nothing to show for it — no “training”, no education, no idea that the “free” course and laptop came with strings attached. Campuses have closed across the country. Those who turn up to enrol are being turned away, or being charged, sometimes tens of thousands of dollars for courses which, only a few years ago, governments provided at modest cost through local TAFE colleges — because the value of these courses to individuals, industry and the community were certain.

Enrolments in vocational education are crashing — by 11% last year. TAFE share of government funding has fallen to 47%. And this does not count the funding going to the for-profit sector in the form of VET FEE-HELP.

Not one cent of the government funding being churned into profits by the for-profit sector in VET is re-invested in education. No other sector of education allows for-profit providers access to government funding. As the TAFE sector languishes as the most poorly resourced education sector, its role in providing skilled people for industry, and well educated community members for society is unchallenged.

Despite the funding cuts, the campus closures, the loss of teachers and courses — TAFE has survived. TAFE to the general public is still the place you go for an apprenticeship; a second chance; a new beginning. While conservative governments accuse critics of the system of “talking down” TAFE; TAFE is still a respected part of communities across the country.

TAFE doesn’t have an image problem — it has a huge problem with its owners - governments - who steadfastly refuse to support it, and who turn their backs on the evidence of the failed privatisation experiment, and who, far from taking a stand against the “business models” of the for profit sector, continue to actively support billions of government dollars going to private for-profit providers.

If Minister Birmingham really wants to fix the crisis in vocational education, it is going to take much more than another “crackdown” from the Coalition. The AEU supports the call for an independent, Gonski-style review; and an outright ban on any government funding going to for-profit private providers. The conservative UK government has just done exactly this. In the meantime, three simple changes — establishing cost of delivery and regulating fees; setting minimum hours; and banning brokers would be a good first start.

Pat Forward is Federal TAFE Secretary and Deputy Federal Secretary of the Australian Education Union.
Stop the scams

State and federal governments are at last trying to end private for-profit providers’ schemes which are illegal, and to make illegal their schemes which are dishonest without simply breaking the law. Governments are hampered in this by having such weak institutions for policing and enforcing the law in education. Strong enforcement isn’t needed in school education because for profit schools are illegal and it isn’t needed in higher education because higher education providers must have education as their main purpose and because higher education standards specify extensive inputs which are readily checked and thus less expensive to police.

Governments are starting to require more and better specified inputs into vocational education, but the requirements remain very weak and accordingly governments are having to spend a lot more on policing to stop the scams. Presumably governments will continue to change the balance from expensive policing to requiring standards which are cheaper to enforce, and such standards could improve the quality of vocational education as well as stop the scams. But governments are doing this very slowly and apparently reluctantly, so extensive expensive enforcement will continue to be needed for a considerable time.

The future for TAFE in Australia

Australian vocational education is beset by several big problems that have accumulated and enlarged over decades. But solutions seem as remote as ever because vocational education is limited by seemingly intractable constraints, some of them contradictory, and many extending far beyond vocational education. So pervasive, longstanding and deeply embedded are many of these problems that perhaps the only feasible approach may be to start with undoing the simplest and most blatant of the problems and progressively work towards improving the system.
Stop the exploitation

The exploitation of students has so outraged the public that governments are also at last trying to stop providers’ behaviour which isn’t illegal or even dishonest yet clearly takes advantage of mostly vulnerable students. Again, this is more difficult in vocational education because of governments’ reluctance to reintroduce what might be thought of as an activity test in vocational education.

Higher education has fairly clear expectations that teachers will present and students will participate in classes in person or online and submit and assess assignments. Higher education students are careful about incurring this responsibility, as vocational education students were before the expectation was undermined by the introduction of competency based training and the great expansion of recognition of prior learning in vocational education. The lack of a universal expectation that vocational education students have to invest substantial effort in their study makes it much easier for recruiters to recruit students with promises of a valuable credential with little or no cost to them.

While governments seem a long way from requiring that vocational education have teaching-learning processes, they at least seem likely to stop the more outrageous selling ploys that have so undermined vocational education’s standing and credibility.

Cut the budget blowouts

State governments’ extension of public funding to private for profit providers and the introduction of the heavily subsidised VET FEE-HELP has led to an explosion of private for profit providers which have a direct financial interest in at least continuing and preferably expanding government subsidies. Some argue as if they had a proprietary interest in government programs from which they profit. A Labor proposal to cap VET FEE-HELP loans at $8,000 a year was criticised even by TAFE Directors Australia, the peak body of public providers which hopefully will one day return to seeking the public interest rather than the financial interest of their institutions and members.

But the introduction of student entitlements in vocational education has led to big blowouts of state government budgets, while the introduction of VET FEE-HELP has led to an extraordinary increase in Australian Government spending, much of it unlikely to be recovered through student loan repayments. State governments have responded to the explosion in their subsidy of private providers by slashing funding for TAFE institutes. But so big have been the budget blowouts that governments have felt the need to cut subsidies overall and the Australian Government is limiting VET FEE-HELP despite the protests of the self-interested providers.

The state and Australian governments’ attempts to limit their budget blowouts should at least stop the expansion of private for profit providers and hopefully therefore also the cuts to TAFE.

Efficiency

Efficiency is the production of the most output for the least input. State governments have cut funding per vocational student contact hour relentlessly for over a decade. Only in vocational education would such extensive and prolonged cuts be considered an increase in efficiency because the cuts would be of only waste. In every other sector cuts in funding per student would be understood to risk quality, and this is now belatedly being understood for vocational education. The difficulty is that vocational education no longer has a good measure of units of production let alone of units of output against which to measure efficiency.

Notional student delivery hour has become so debased and so detached from what many providers offer that it is no longer a reliable indicator of the effort invested by providers in qualifying their students. Again, a similar problem does not arise in school or higher education. Any higher education provider which proposes to offer a qualification with substantially less input of time than the standard duration set out in the Australian qualification framework is required to justify their approach in detail by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. Unlike in vocational education, it is not credible for a higher education provider to claim that they can assess their students as competent in a diploma after a fortnight’s teaching-learning.

It is hard to see how to restore a reliable measure of efficiency in vocational education without monitoring much more rigorously the standard durations of qualification specified in the Australian qualification framework. This in turn undermines the whole concept of competency based training, that students continue learning not for a specified time but until they are assessed as competent. Nonetheless, the Australian Skills Quality Authority seems to be expecting providers to justify programs that are radically shorter than the specified minimum.

Notional student delivery hour is of course a measure of an input. In principle it is far better to measure efficiency not by inputs but by outputs, such as competencies achieved or programs completed. However, this would be a strong incentive for providers to further lower standards of assessment and program completion requirements and should not be pursued without far more rigorous methods for ensuring the standards of assessment and completion.

Effectiveness

There is no point in being efficient without being effective, or achieving valuable outcomes. Of course specifying valuable outcomes raises the purposes of vocational education. The trite claim is that vocational education’s purpose is to increase graduates’ value in the workforce. But this is too narrow even by the remarkably narrow criteria that shape Australian vocational education policy. Surely vocational education should not only increase individual graduates’ employability but also increase the productivity of the workforce as a whole. This implies anticipating future needs and supporting the development of whole regions, industries and sectors rather than just meeting the current needs of individual graduates and employers. But even this can’t be a complete purpose since much vocational education is of lower level certificates which don’t and are not designed to increase graduates’ direct employability but to prepare them for further study.

Privatising TAFEs is an obvious corollary of competitive neutrality (making all providers compete against themselves equally) and contestability (the jargon for making public subsidies available to private providers). Yet all governments seem to reject privatising TAFE institutes or even granting them more autonomy so they may compete against each other and against private providers. Indeed, Victoria’s stacking of TAFE boards and NSW’s ‘One TAFE’ program are reducing institutes’ independence and making them more an instrument of government policy. So even the most rabid marketisers see a distinctive role for TAFE, or at least recognise that a substantial part of the population values a distinctive role for TAFE. It is worth elaborating TAFEs distinctive role, and this could be part of describing vocational education’s effectiveness.

“Surely vocational education should not only increase individual graduates’ employability but also increase the productivity of the workforce as a whole.”
An integrated tertiary education sector?

Some of us have been arguing for some time for an integrated tertiary education sector. This has been rejected consistently, even by members of the Bradley Committee which recommended the introduction of the demand driven system of public higher education. This removed the limits on the number of Bachelor students that could be enrolled by public universities in all fields except medicine, and has resulted in universities enrolling in degrees substantial numbers of students who would probably have otherwise enrolled in vocational diplomas and advanced certificates. So enrolment targets for vocational education can no longer be set in isolation from enrolment trends in higher education.

The roles of vocational education diplomas and advanced diplomas overlap considerably with those of higher education diplomas, associate degrees and baccalaureates. Yet vocational education’s funding rates and conditions are grotesquely poorer than those for higher education. These different funding rates and conditions can be maintained only by maintaining that the sectors are fundamentally different.

The conditions for VET FEE-HELP are very similar to those for higher education’s FEE-HELP for fee for service programs and are not very different from HECS-HELP for subsidised places at public universities. Yet VET FEE-HELP has financed huge problems and scams, which have been mostly absent in higher education. The fact that substantially the same loan scheme can have markedly different outcomes in vocational and higher education suggests that the standards and institutions and processes that support them are much weaker in vocational education than in higher education.

For these and other reasons the long term future of vocational education cannot be determined in isolation from higher education.

Gavin Moodie is Adjunct Professor, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, OISE, University of Toronto and Adjunct Professor of Education at RMIT University, Australia
Apprenticeships are again the flavour of the month, as they tend to be every once in a while. It seems it’s easier to talk about these things than actually do anything about them, isn’t it?

**APPRENTICESHIPS AND TAFE:**

**WORTH FIGHTING FOR**

IAN CURRY

The Commonwealth recently released yet another report prepared by another group of well-meaning people who have produced yet again a range of observations about what could be changed in the apprenticeship space without, yet again, outlining what problem they are purporting to solve, and how their observations are going to solve it.

The NSW Government have released a Consultation Paper asking if we need apprenticeships at all!

For over 600 years now young and not so young people have learned their craft from those around them, in a workplace where they can contextualise their learning in order to develop the capability they need to be functioning and productive workers.

In days gone by that learning would have taken place entirely in the workplace under the guidance, and often stern hand, of the Master and woe betide the apprentice that failed to heed the direction of the Master.

Indentured as they were from a very young age apprentices spent many years learning and honing their skills in the hope that they too could become the ‘journeyman’ tradesperson and ply their trade and perhaps make a living along the way.

Thankfully, we have moved on somewhat from what was essentially indentured servitude into a more sophisticated employment-based relationship between apprentices and their more contemporary ‘masters’.

Gone is the indenture that I signed as a 17 year old at a ritual signing ceremony at which ‘it was expected’ that parents would attend, and at which apprentices ‘were expected’ to be suitably attired, complete with tie.

Gone also is the notion that training for the skilled trades could take place entirely in the workplace, as technological advancements and evolutions in systems and processes demanded ever more knowledge to underpin productive performance. A partnership between industry and professional VET teachers, almost exclusively TAFE Teachers, evolved and trade training found its groove.

We had, for many years, a proper balance between high quality formal trade training based on sound pedagogy, integrated with good work and learning experiences, effective mentoring and above all else, an understanding that whilst new skills can be taught, it takes time and practice for them to be learnt and perfected.

I’m reminded of the time when, as a young(ish) fabricator on the tools I got a drawing from an engineer that required me to cut the ends off a couple of disused oil tankers, weld them together and put a lid on one end and a funnel on the other end with four legs to produce a vertical silo for sand. The finished product was around 20 metres tall.

On completion, the engineer, fresh from his fully institutional university degree, came down to look at the final result and stood with his mouth open muttering ‘gee, it’s big isn’t it’!

I often think of that experience when I hear of yet another government sponsored review charged with reforming apprenticeships. It seems clear to me that the so-called reforms governments are looking for are simply ways to make trade training cheaper and quicker. More often than not they are based on an assumption that sophisticated trade skills can be taught quickly up front and ‘practised’ later. But as we know, good skills aren’t cheap, and cheap skills aren’t good.

The challenges that the Australian economy confronts will not be overcome by a workforce that is trained on the basis of a handful of down and dirty ‘skill sets’ added to an institutionally based pre-employment program. I cannot think of a time in Australia’s history when great reforms and nation building feats have been attempted without skills being at the forefront.

There will be no building the Australian economy, or the society it is meant to serve, without first rebuilding our skilled workforce, and as we know, that starts with defending and rebuilding TAFE!

From a purely manufacturing and engineering point of view we have $60 – 70 billion of
It seems clear to me that the so-called reforms governments are looking for are simply ways to make trade training cheaper and quicker.

Federal Occupational Standards, in-company training standards, Vocational Training Framework Curriculum and independent assessment regimes are all the subject of collaboration between both the social partners and government and the publicly funded Vocational Colleges.

Notwithstanding the criticisms of the German system, that it is too rigid, that it forces young people to make choices at far too young an age, I wonder if there is a middle ground between the obsession Australian governments have with ‘markets’ and maximising flexibility in the system, often at the expense of quality and coherence, and what appears to be certainty and rigidity on the part of the German system.

According to the German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training in a presentation during my visit, the system works in Germany because the following conditions are met:

• Long-standing history of Dual VET
• Strong small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)
• Interest, commitment and capability of companies to train
• Strong and competent representation of employer and employee interests (chambers/ labour unions)
• Broad-based acceptance of VET standards through strong involvement of social partners in VET and culture of cooperative engagement
• Strong regulatory capacity of government
• Competent TVET teachers and trainers.

Meanwhile, here in Australia we have the myopic NSW Government questioning whether we need apprenticeships at all, and the ARAG report proposing a review conducted by the Productivity Commission, more co-contributions by students, more employer incentives, and exploring the potential for integrating pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programs with ‘work-based welfare programmes’, oh, and more commercial brokers!

And of course we are tearing down the only institution that could hope to give us the high quality leading edge skills we need.

Rather than more reviews and reforms, why don’t we remember that the problem we are trying to solve is not how to make skills cheaper, or to subsidise the bottom line of employers, it is the production of the skilled workers we need to build the future we want? TAFE is central to that.

It’s worth fighting for.

Ian Curry is the National Coordinator for Skills Training & Apprenticeships at the AMWU
AsQA: THE LATEST TARGET FOR BLAME

The recent announcement that the Chief Commissioner for the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) would be replaced by a person who would “help restore confidence” in VET raises a number of issues, not least of which is whether ASQA, with its current powers and responsibilities, is capable of restoring confidence in a sector that is in unprecedented chaos.
THAT chaos is illustrated by the raft of scandalous revelations in the national media in the last few months about the large number of dodgy providers and exploited students. For instance, the Sydney Morning Herald (11 August 2016) reported that “more than 4,000 Victorian students have been forced to change courses following an unprecedented crackdown on dodgy providers”. This disruption to students is because the Victorian state government “has terminated the contracts of 18 providers, and is set to recoup up to $50 million from the scandal-plagued sector”.

18 RTOs in Victoria alone is a significant number. Plus, a “further 16 providers are being monitored, five have been imposed with restrictions and four have received termination notices”. Running total: 43 RTOs. All credit to the Victorian government for this extensive purge.

In the same newspaper report, Victorian Training and Skills Minister Steve Herbert, using the expression now employed by the new Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, Karen Andrews, in announcing the recruitment process for the new ASQA chief commissioner, said he “wanted to ensure confidence in the sector”. To his credit, in his home state Minister Herbert is taking responsibility for ridding the sector of rogues, not focusing on blaming, or waiting for, others to clean up the mess.

When she described the type of person she wants recruited as the new Chief Commissioner for ASQA, Minister Andrews, inferred, perhaps unwittingly, that to date ASQA has underperformed. She said: “A high performing ASQA is fundamental to a high quality, diverse VET system”. As if she views the incumbent commissioner with limited capabilities, she also said that the government would be looking for a candidate “with rigor and judgment, a background in regulation of quality, but not necessarily in VET”. They will also have legislative experience and the energy to support wide-ranging reform.

Who is to blame, ASQA or others?

Is this yet another example of the Federal Government looking for someone to blame for a mess for which it doesn’t wish to take responsibility? Like the previous Minister, Senator Scott Ryan, in his discussion paper last April, blaming the federal Labor Party in 2012-13 and shonky providers for the massive blow-out in VET FEE-HELP debts, without highlighting that the federal government from 2014 onwards had lax methods for vetting providers seeking to offer VET FEE-HELP loans to prospective students.

Some of those lax methods were exposed by the ABC investigative reporter Paddy Manning earlier this year in two reports on the Radio National program Background Briefing. To the embarrassment of the Federal Government, Manning found that the Department for Education and Training did not visit RTOs requesting the ability to promote VET FEE-HELP loans to future students: the bureaucrats simply did a desk audit.

Manning also found that the department did not pass on to ASQA which providers were signing up massive numbers of students for VET FEE-HELP; that is, ASQA was kept in the dark. Apparently the accidental source of this information was the ASQA Chief Commissioner in an interview with Manning, and, given how inept the Federal Government emerged from this anecdote, the Federal Government is probably pleased it will be appointing a replacement soon. Potential applicants, take note: don’t be open with the media.

At present, ASQA is limited in what it can do within the sector, mostly by the requirement that it seek to ensure the standards set out in the Standards for RTOs (2015). Those standards are set so low that shonky individuals and companies are attracted to the sector. An example of how low the bar is set is that an RTO does not need an accountable educational officer; that is, anybody can own and operate an RTO, no educational knowledge required.

Notably, the Department of Education and Training oversaw the process for developing and finalizing the Standards for RTOs (2015) and during that process the department rejected the proposal that RTOs needed an accountable educational officer either on staff or available to the RTO, for instance through a pooled arrangement with other RTOs.

Arguably the major achievement of the current Chief Commissioner of ASQA, the widely respected Chris Robinson, was the production of a series of strategic reviews since 2013 on scandals related to training in the construction, security, equine, aged care and child care industries. Each of those reviews made a range of recommendations, particularly about reviewing related weaknesses in training packages. It appears that most of these recommendations have languished except for the current review being conducted into a major weakness of training packages, the issue of the duration of courses.

What can be done?

Clearly, ASQA has not had sufficient legal powers to investigate shonky providers, evidenced by the fact that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has moved into the sector and is taking exceptional legal action against providers that have rorted VET FEE-HELP. ASQA was not set up with the same legal muscle as the ACCC to investigate and prosecute criminal behavior.

Hence, if the Federal Government wants the new Chief Commissioner for ASQA to help restore confidence in VET, first the government needs to tighten the standards for RTOs that it authored. Second the Federal Government needs to improve its methods for approving and monitoring VET FEE-HELP providers. And third, most of its work will be in addressing the large number of recommendations from ASQA’s strategic reports since 2013. Some of that work will be reviewing fundamental elements of training packages, a task that deserves input from educators, not just bureaucrats, advisers, lobbyists and donors to the Coalition.

Fourth, to restore confidence in the VET sector, the federal government needs to stop blaming others and commission a thorough, independent analysis of the flaws in the sector and fully respond to that analysis. Importantly, that review needs to investigate the major flaw in the sector’s recent history, that insufficient safeguards for students and inadequate requirements for new RTOs were put in place before governments recklessly started shifting funding from the public provider, TAFE, to the private sector. Governments around Australia from 2009 onwards should hang their heads in shame for this irresponsible and calamitous behaviour, although the present Victorian Government is to be commended for trying hardest to rectify past mistakes.

Some of the results of that sector review might be tighter standards for RTOs, stricter requirements for VET FEE-HELP providers, better framed training packages, tougher demands on private providers seeking public funds and increased powers for the regulator, ASQA. Hopefully, as one part of this improved framework for the VET sector, the new Chief Commissioner for ASQA will be set up for success, not blame.

Dr John Mitchell is a VET researcher and analyst. See www.jma.com.au.
England makes a strategic retreat from VET markets

Dr Don Zoellner

At this year’s Group Training Australia conference, one of the speakers proposed that Australian VET policy tended to mimic the United Kingdom with a five year time lag. While I have argued that each country has historical paths that constrain the options available to political decision-makers, it is nevertheless instructive to observe the government policy announcement on Technical Education in July 2016 that was overshadowed by the Brexit campaigns in the United Kingdom.

The Post-16 Skills Plan is the British Government’s response to the Sainsbury Review of Technical Education which recommended a comprehensive and integrated overhaul of educational pathways for students who reach 16 years of age. In a historically rather unusual response, Minister Boles announced that his conservative government would avoid the continued tinkering with training policy that had characterised the past half-century and accept all of the recommendations subject to the overall budgetary constraints facing the nation.

The traditional academic pathway to university remains, of course, and it is anticipated that about 60 per cent of students will continue in this option. However, there will be two other offerings leading to a mere handful of technical qualifications; employment-based and college-based. The first is the traditional apprenticeship that must have at least 12 months employment on-the-job training and is primarily funded by an employer levy on large companies with a payroll of over three million pounds. The second means of gaining the same industry-specified nationally consistent qualification is through colleges that must have a substantial and fully-funded work placement. There will be ‘bridging’ courses that will allow students to move between the three streams.

In addition, thousands of current qualifications that have been provided by a wide-range of organisations operating in a marketplace will be reduced to a common framework of 15 ‘routes’ across all technical education that will be managed by a single national body. There will only be one approved technical level qualification for each of these occupational clusters. These new qualifications will be centrally sanctioned by industry in a clear recognition that the English market in qualifications has produced ‘a race to the bottom’ with a proliferation of easy and cheap qualifications at the expense of the more highly skilled technical qualifications required for emerging industries. Occupations that have little or no technical knowledge and skills that can be learned on the job will fall outside the scope of the new national technical education system and, consequently, not receive public funding.

Some elements of market-driven behaviour will remain in place such as using a competitive tendering process to grant exclusive technical level qualification development licences. Both public and private providers will continue to compete for the apprenticeship levy funds through the use of vouchers issued by industry-controlled bodies (rather than government) that will finance the off-the-job training component, however, other market-driven initiatives are being dismantled.

Minister Boles described that “the current network of colleges and other training providers is financially unsustainable” and has accepted the review panel’s recommendation to restrict public funding for education and training to institutions that reinvest any surplus into the country’s education infrastructure rather than taking a profit. In other words, there will be no further allocation of public training funds to for-profit private providers. In addition, there will be a series of ‘national colleges’ established for quite specific and detailed observations of ‘high performing technical education systems’ in other nations. It might be of some interest to local policy commentators that Australia did not get a mention even though one of the review panel members was in the country during the preparation of their report. While it will be interesting to see if Australia does imitate these English policy changes in the next half decade, it seems likely that the traditional barriers and the politically bi-partisan acceptance of competition policy will limit the possibility of bold change and the capacity to recognise, let alone accept, the limitations of market-driven behaviours in the vocational education and training environment.

Finally, the Sainsbury Review made a number of quite specific and detailed observations of ‘high performing technical education systems’ in other nations. It might be of some interest to local policy commentators that Australia did not get a mention even though one of the review panel members was in the country during the preparation of their report. While it will be interesting to see if Australia does imitate these English policy changes in the next half decade, it seems likely that the traditional barriers and the politically bi-partisan acceptance of competition policy will limit the possibility of bold change and the capacity to recognise, let alone accept, the limitations of market-driven behaviours in the vocational education and training environment.

Endnotes

Dr Don Zoellner is a Research Associate at Charles Darwin University, Alice Springs.
TAFE is the worst funded of the education sectors, as evidenced by the year-on-year decline in funding recorded in the Productivity Commission’s Report of Government Services. The most recent Productivity Commission Report shows that TAFE and VET funding has continued its annual decline, with a drop in funding of 11 per cent between 2013 and 2014. A recent report from the Mitchell Institute shows that the decline in VET funding between 1997 and 2014 has been a staggering 42 per cent.

Funding has declined by 42% since 1997
- 24% since 2008
- 11% since 2013

The amount of funding per hour has declined nationally from $16.64 in 2005 to $11.40 in 2014 – a decline of over 30 per cent. In Victoria, the decline is even more nearly halving from $15.18 in 2005 to just $7.80 in 2014.

<table>
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Government recurrent expenditure per annual hour

Nationally, the TAFE share of government-funded delivery is 50.3 per cent, down from 75 per cent in 2005. In Victoria, however, TAFE share of delivery has dropped below 30 per cent, and more than 80 per cent of funding is allocated contestably. In Queensland, market share has dropped by more than 20 per cent in the last year to 38 per cent. Regrettably it is now the case that TAFE is a minority provider of vocational education in three jurisdictions.

TAFE share has declined by 33.6% between 2011-2015
TAFE has 50.3% market share in 2015

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1. NCVER 2015 Students and courses
2. 2016 Productivity Commission ROGS Table 5A, 34
3. NCVER 2015 Students and courses Table 18
Nationally, more than $2.4 billion (around 46 per cent) of government funding is now allocated contestably and open to the private for-profit VET sector. More than $1.5 billion of this funding goes directly to private for-profit providers; an increase of 222 per cent since 2005. But this is not the only source of income for the for-profit VET sector. The now-discredited VET FEE HELP scheme has blown out from $25 million in 2009 to an astronomical $4 billion in 2015, 80 per cent of which is going to the for-profit sector.

Growth in the amount of funding to private for-profit providers 2005 – 2014

Growth in proportion of funding allocated contestably 2005 – 2014

1 2016 Productivity Commission ROGS 2005-2014
### Government Funding Sm (2014)\(^5\)

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<th>C’wealth</th>
<th>NSW ($491.3 (31.41%))</th>
<th>VIC ($383 (27.51%))</th>
<th>QLD ($300.4 (32.97%))</th>
<th>WA ($171.8 (27.37%))</th>
<th>SA ($99.1 (24.99%))</th>
<th>TAS ($33.9 (25.98%))</th>
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<td>$455.8 (72.63%)</td>
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<td>$96.6 (74.02%)</td>
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<td>$1,391.7</td>
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### S per student contact hour\(^6\)

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### Government funding competitive (2014)\(^7\)

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<td></td>
<td>$326.3</td>
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### Gov’t funding to PP (2014)\(^8\)

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<th>%</th>
<th>$/hour</th>
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### TAFE market share (by hours of delivery)\(^9\)

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<td></td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>-33.6%</td>
<td>-24.2%</td>
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</tbody>
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\(^5\) ROGS 2014 Table 5A,10; \(^6\) ROGS 2014 Table 5A, 34; \(^7\) ROGS 2014 Table 5A, 10, 8 ROGS 2014 Table 5A, 9, 9 Students and Courses 2015 Table 13.
How do we measure the ‘unmeasurable’?

The dichotomous relationship between neo-liberalist human capital approaches and social capital outcomes in TAFE education policy.

THERESA MILLMAN

Abstract
The VET sector in Australia has traditionally been linked to workforce participation goals and outcomes. As such, the purpose of VET as defined by policy and practice has always been to provide opportunities for the skilling of participants preparatory to either joining the labour market or upgrading the skills and qualifications of those already in employment. However, research in adult education and training in recent years suggests that ‘hidden’ social capital outcomes can be complementary to human capital outcomes in a course of study. However, to date, adult education and training policies, particularly in VET with their emphasis on human capital, have not formally recognised social capital models, nor seen the need to be inclusive of social capital in planning, policy and implementation of adult education.

What is human capital?
Human capital has been defined by the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD, 2000, in Allison, Gorringe & Lacey, 2006) as the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the workforce. Although there are variations of this definition, for example, the OECD later added personal, social and economic well-being (Watts et al, 2006), generally the emphasis of human capital models is on economic returns from an investment in education and training. In describing human capital theory Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008, p. 158) state, ‘human capital theory emphasises how education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings’. Such a model, it has been criticised, tends to the mechanistic view of humans as, ‘one-dimensional’ and is not inclusive of other factors such as human sociability and the social context of learning (Baptiste, 2001, p. 195).
The limitations of a human capital approach

McHugh (2007, p. 10) puts forward a compelling argument on the limitations of a human capital model in adult education and training by suggesting that while it is impossible, and indeed undesirable to undermine the ‘logic of neo-capitalism’, it is still possible to consider social capital and the role of human agency. Critics of human capital models point out that the success of the application of skills and knowledge developed in the classroom may very well depend on other factors around the learner, for example, their networks of family, schools and local communities. As Cote (2001, p. 31) argues, ‘it is essential to understand [human capital’s] role in economic growth against a wider backdrop of institutional, social and cultural arrangements’. Cote (2001) further suggests that ‘non-economic’ outcomes such as improved health or sense of well-being, while not readily measurable, do ultimately add to the overall economic development of a country simply through improved efficiency and greater economic output. Baptiste (2001, p. 198) also argues that human capital theory in educational practice and policy is limited, mechanistic and takes no account of the social nature of the individual. He sees educational programs ‘wedded to human capital theory’ as ‘apolitical, adaptive and individualistic, and refers to the ‘social bankruptcy’ of human capital approaches which seek to ignore the social connections and networks humans bring to the learning process.

What is social capital?

The key concepts of social capital have been propounded by theorists such as Bourdieu (1985) Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995). Bourdieu, viewed social capital as containing two essential elements; firstly, the social relations people have which give them access to resources, and secondly, the quality and amount of resources available (Pope, 2003). Coleman (1988) took a functionalist approach to social capital which he referred to as, ‘obligations, expectations, trust, information potential, norms and effective sanctions, authority relations, appropriable social organizations, and social networks’ (PRI Project, 2003, p. 6). Putnam expanded upon Coleman’s idea and defined social capital as, ‘features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks’ (1995, in PRI Project, 2003, p. 6). Field (2003, in Stevens, 2005, p. 1) states that social capital can be succinctly described as, ‘relationships matter’. Field (2003) emphasised the importance of the connections that people make and the networks these connections relate to. Balatti, Black and Falk (2006, p. 6) define social capital developed through adult education as, ‘changes… which lead to more involvement in society’.

References


Diagram 1: The imbalance between human capital and social capital outcomes

The importance of Social Capital to Adult Education and Training

While acknowledging the difficulties inherent in trying to add an extra dimension to adult education in terms of accreditation and reporting, McHugh (2007) calls for new adult education policies which take account of the role of social capital; its presence and value. Golding (2007, p. 13) suggests that while social capital and lifelong learning are different concepts, together they can be, ‘mutually reinforcing’. This strengthens the notion that TAFE can play a fundamental role in the development of the ‘hidden’ or unmeasured outcomes of education. As Schuller (2001) argues, social capital should be seen as complementary to other areas of policy, rather than oppositional or indeed, inconsequential. When considering the importance of acknowledging the social capital returns possible in adult education, Feinstein and Hammond (2004, p.199) argue that while research in education has produced a great deal of information on the ‘economic returns’ of adult education, ‘there is far less hard evidence on those returns to learning that are not primarily economic’. Significantly, Townsend refers to the transformative nature of adult education and advocates the need for recognition of social capital alongside human capital as a valued outcome of educational programs.

How can social capital be measured?

Perhaps because of the difficulties of defining the intangible facets of social capital, measuring it is not generally pursued. As Golding (2007, p. 13) points out, ‘it is…difficult to measure social capital quantitatively or to attribute it as a direct outcome of learning’. This is especially the case when it is seen as a by-product of learning which comes ‘free’ (Golding, 2007). As Cote (2001,p.31) states, much of what is relevant to social capital is ‘tacit and relational, defying easy measurement and codification’. However, as the research indicates, social capital does appear to be a significant outcome of engagement in adult educational programs such as those offered by TAFE. Diagram 1 highlights the potential returns of both human capital and social capital. The imbalance may be attributed to the richness of social capital outcomes unmeasured but perhaps ultimately outweighing the more tangible human capital outcomes in terms of personal and social value.

Conclusion

Educational policies which are primarily economically driven by productivity demands have a one-dimensional human capital approach. As such they are limited in scope and vision. Inclusive social capital approaches however, provide a more comprehensive picture of the gains that are actually taking place in adult education today, gains which are both pecuniary and non-pecuniary, but equally important and equally deserving of recognition. In promoting the need for recognition of the multi layered outcomes of adult education and training, there should be no suggestion that human capital is undervalued, on the contrary, it is an important gain for all participants, especially those wishing to enter the workforce or upgrade competitive workforce skills. However, the research suggests that there is a need for social capital to be recognised, valued, encouraged and accounted for in program development, delivery and evaluation.

Theresa Millman is a Doctoral Candidate at the School of Education at the University of Wollongong. She is also a Lecturer in Academic Skills at both UOW and The University of Sydney.

SPRING 2016 • THE AUSTRALIAN TAFE TEACHER 21
Until now the Victorian Government has funded 300 training places for asylum seekers so this shift in policy is significant in scale. The media release provides a rationale for the policy through attributable quotes from the Minister for Training and Skills, Steve Herbert, who said ‘People come here looking for a fair go — and we’ll do everything in our power to give it to them’ to gain ‘access to the training they need to get a proper job, to reach their ambitions and full potential so they can play a productive part in the Victorian workforce’ (Victorian State Government 2016). Clearly, integration of migrants through education for employment is at the heart of this policy with the expectation that public investment for integration will have long-term beneficial effects by reducing welfare dependency and increasing productivity. Encouragingly, the media release also identifies a strategy of support and professional development to train providers working with asylum seekers and refugees to develop an ‘Integrated VET Learning Plan’.

Providing this broad approach to integration appears to be in line with the humanistic and holistic approach to education encouraged by UNESCO (2015) that identified migrants and those affected by countries in conflict as essential foci for activities to rethink education for development. Acknowledging that the increasing levels of social and economic complexity provide challenges for education policy making, UNESCO (2015) specifically highlighted the need to consider how to respond to the increasing mobility of learners and workers across national borders and the need for new ways of recognising, validating and assessing learning that result from these new patterns of knowledge and skills transfer. In Victoria, the recent proposals include customised language and literacy through TAFE and VET for refugees and asylum seekers.

In September 2016, the Government of Victoria announced $15 million over two years to fund 3000 people on temporary protection visas to study in areas lacking skilled workers, such as hospitality and aged care (Victoria State Government, 2016).
programs and the development of integrated learning plans, which have the potential to be game changers in supporting the integration of new migrants. Similarly, elsewhere in Europe, attention has turned to the effects on labour and welfare models of recent increases in refugee migration (Webb, Hodge, Hollord, Milana and Waller 2016). Improving access to formal education to increase knowledge and skills, support higher level technical language learning for specific jobs and to assess and recognise existing skills have been promoted by a recent report from the Nordic Office (Djuve 2016).

Investment in education and training to ‘manage’ migration is regarded as essential to avoid labour market segmentation in which migrants become the supply chain to low skilled labour only and results in the creation of poor migrant communities, greater social inequality, and potential political instability. In Germany too, a program of ‘Integration through Qualification’ (IQ) is designed to increase access to education and training, including specialist language development and to networks to support the recognition of existing skills and qualifications to improve the labour market integration of refugees and migrants (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016).

Arguably, these policies are driven by the idea that having an opportunity to access education and training supports pathways to employment and social inclusion. However, does this happen, and will this happen with the latest initiative from the Victorian State Government?

The answer to this is an empirical problem. However, there are already indications that the implementation of the policy needs to be carefully monitored to ensure there are no unintended consequences. For example, there is already evidence across the European countries of Denmark, Germany, Italy, Romania and the UK, that vocational education and training programs tend to maintain race hierarchies, in part through the use of language as a barrier, and the lack of flexible provision for recognising prior learning and for providing career advice for refugees (Chadderton and Edmonds 2015). In Australia, the Commonwealth policy to train up and make people ready for work for the future (COAG 2011) has divided responsibility for the task of building the future workforce between the vocational education and training sector and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection that oversees the skilled migration and humanitarian programs. To date, the consequences have been paradoxical. Regardless of whether migrants entered Australia on ‘skilled migrant visas’ or are asylum seekers on temporary protection visas, they often share the difficulty that they are unable to secure employment in the fields and at the levels in which they have prior qualifications and experiences (Webb 2015). Whilst the reasons for this are varied, they include for example: problems with the recognition or applicability of their qualifications and experiences to the Australian context and occupational regulations; limited financial resources to fund further education and training because they are treated as ‘international students’ who need to pay tuition fees at full economic cost, with no access to public funding; and the inability to practice in the field in which they are qualified which leads to further skill underutilisation or under-employment as skills becoming past their use by date or become lost through atrophy. Consequently some migrants lose confidence and retreat into whatever support systems and community groups they can find, along with increasing their dependency on public funding through the social benefits systems. However, there is another side to the history of migration in Australia. This is the story of creativity and entrepreneurialism. For example, the contemporary cultural narrative of Australian society since the Second World War has celebrated expansion through migration to the ‘lucky country’, even though many migrants experience ‘subterranean’ forms of racism and practices that exclude the recognition of their qualifications and experiences (Wagner and Chils 2006, 49). How then can migrants’ creativity be harnessed by the education and training system and ‘subterranean’ forms of racism be challenged?

Economic growth and global mobility are the signifiers of current times. Therefore, ensuring that the education and training system is able to respond and lead appropriately is a crucial task in the foreseeable future. As education and training institutions consider how to develop and position themselves to implement the Australian National Strategy for International Education 2025, the hope is that this article contributes to a debate about how to realise the strategy’s Goal 6 ‘enhancing mobility’, in ways that take up the challenges of mobility faced by those who are refugees and asylum seekers.

Sue Webb, Faculty of Education, Monash University

References:


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WHERE can a disability qualification take you? Two Tasmanian women are on the way to finding the answer to that very question. Both made the choice to be stay at home mums and give their children a good start in life but then there came a time when each knew they needed to look at how they could achieve their personal goals to gain a qualification that would lead to meaningful employment. While both had a similar starting point with the Certificate III in Disability through TasTAFE each has since trodden a different path.

MICHELLE PURDY

CARLA WILLCOX believes that she is on a journey of learning. In 2015 her original ambition was to gain the Certificate III in Disability and get an entry level job as a support worker but along the way Carla’s vision changed and now she aspires to eventually set up her own business in the disability sector or follow a pathway into management. Either way she wants to support others to become disability support workers as well as push the boundaries for more inclusion for people with disabilities. She believes that through the NDIS her clients can be a valuable asset to the community. Through Active Support methods those working in this industry can help bridge the gaps to make disability clients’ worlds as near to normal as possible.

Carla must have impressed the employer when she did her course work placement as she was offered work soon after. Coastal Residential Services on the North West coast has since made Carla permanent part-time and she puts in 60-100 hours per fortnight which enables her to integrate her clients into the community.

When asked what qualities and skills she thought disability support workers needed she thought “The industry needs people with lots of life skills, a broad range of interests and hobbies as well as being active in their community. The people we work with have high needs and are high functioning with mental and intellectual disabilities. Our clients need workers who can problem solve and tweak or find ways around barriers so our clients can find a way to help themselves and become as independent as possible.”

Before returning to study Carla wasn’t sure if she could cope with the demands of caring for her four children, a fly in fly out husband and full time study. She puts her success down to being very goal orientated and the wonderful support, mentoring and education she received at TasTAFE. She feels very fortunate to have had a teacher with such passion for the disability support industry whom she could always count on for advice. Earlier this year Carla won an inaugural TasTAFE Student Excellence Award for her studies. Since then she has become a confident public speaker and has had the opportunity to speak at industry and student groups on a number of occasions. Now studying her Certificate IV in Disability Carla is finding working in the disability industry a most rewarding career.

"Our clients need workers who can problem solve and tweak or find ways around barriers so our clients can find a way to help themselves and become as independent as possible.”
I would like to work in various health care industries, including my own Aboriginal community and be able to deliver Indigenous appropriate health care to help empower my people.

Lydia Scotney is an Aboriginal woman living in Hobart with a different story to tell. After a 15 year study break where she had 3 children and went through the heartbreak of losing her son Cohen who passed away in late 2014 after being diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2009, Lydia realised she could either let life destroy her or she could continue on with the courage and strength that her son showed during his illness and push forward. She really wanted to assist people in enriching their lives for the better, whether it was to help maintain dignity and compassion at the end of life, reaching independent goals, aiding in the advancement of people to live their life to the fullest potential or helping to teach lifelong skills that would hopefully aid in good life choices. With this in mind, Lydia looked into courses at TasTAFE because she had heard so many great stories about the way teaching was delivered.

In just 12 months Lydia completed Certificates III in Aged Care, Home and Community Care and Disability as well as the Intro to Nursing. During her studies in 2015 Lydia’s focus crystallised and she realised she wanted to work more broadly in the health industry. This had been influenced by her son’s illness and death the previous year.

Lydia has a very clear plan for the future; finish the Diploma of Nursing which she started this year and work in the industry for six months before enrolling in the Advanced Diploma and working for a further two years to gain experience before training to become a registered nurse. Her one regret is that she won’t be able to finish her training with TasTAFE to become a registered nurse. Lydia can’t speak highly enough of her TAFE training and how it has changed her life and outlook. TAFE has been adaptable for her needs as a mature student and boosted her self-confidence immensely. Unexpectedly it has also brought her many sustained friendships to help her through difficult times.

Lydia states: “I would like to work in various health care industries, including my own Aboriginal community and be able to deliver Indigenous appropriate health care to help empower my people and to hopefully show my community that I am dedicated to improving our health care system, especially a health care system that will be able to support their needs. I hope to educate non-Indigenous workers in our rich heritage and show us as a proud people to aid in the understanding of the deliverance of health and how important this is. I have not worked in my community as yet, but am eager to participate and become a community member that people will be proud of and to actively participate in the delivery of health care services to assist in achieving Close the Gap targets.”

Her mantra has become “Choose courage over fear”. Lydia acknowledges that if she had given into her many fears she would still be hiding in her house. Although she still feels blue and the fears haven’t gone away she has learned to live by those words as she has people depending on her. By choosing not to let her fears win she says “returning to study has given her a new life and TAFE has been a big part of that.”

At the 2016 Tasmanian Training Awards in Hobart on 2 September both women were recognised for their outstanding achievements. Carla Willcox was announced Vocational Student of the Year and will represent Tasmania at the Australian Training Awards in Darwin in November. Carla wants to use the awards, both state and national, as a vehicle to advocate for people with disabilities and create a greater awareness in the community.

Lydia Scotney was a finalist in the Aboriginal Student of the Year award and received a Certificate of Commendation. Both Carla and Lydia speak highly on the benefits of their education through TAFE and the difference it has made to their lives and in turn how their study continues to make a positive impact for their families and the people they work and study with.

Michelle Purdy is an Aboriginal VET Officer at TasTAFE. She is also Federal TAFE President of the Australian Education Union.
TAFE an ACT election issue

As I write this, we are only a few weeks out from the October 15 ACT election in which we have made the future of Canberra’s TAFE, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), a central issue.

GLENN FOWLER

In the ACT, we are a relative calm in the storm that has confronted the TAFE system right across the country for several years now. We know the stories of billions of dollars transferred out of TAFE to private providers, what that has done to TAFE and what it has meant for quality. We know about the shonks who set up private for profit providers, rack up student enrolments in exchange for government handouts, and count their pennies when only a handful of students ever gain a qualification. As the regulator tries to catch up, thousands of students who were awarded sub-standard qualifications from private training companies have had these qualifications revoked. The ACT has, thus far, avoided the excesses of this unacceptable trend.

In the ACT, we are acutely aware of our opportunity with only one TAFE (and its numerous campuses) to be a beacon of hope for the national TAFE system, and to lead the way when it comes to a reversal of some of the more extreme government policies.

THE AEU’s election pledge recognises the importance of protecting CIT. We seek a guarantee that at least 70% of all public VET funding will go to CIT and therefore that contestability is capped at 30%.

The Canberra Liberals have offered the least impressive commitment, although perhaps ‘statement’ is a more apt word. Steve Doszpot, a Liberal Sitting Member and Shadow Minister for Education, has stated, “The Canberra Liberals will continue to support and encourage CIT to operate in a contestable and competitive market – locally, nationally and internationally”. The Canberra Liberals’ offer no reassurance that they will not follow in the footsteps of other conservative governments who have wrought havoc on TAFE.

In stark contrast is the Greens. All five lead candidates across the five ACT electorates have signed our 70% guarantee for CIT funding. We commend Shane Rattenbury, Veronica Wensing, Indra Esguerra, Caroline Le Couteur and Michael Mazengarb for signing our pledge.

In the Greens election platform, they have doubled down on their commitment by stating, “The ACT Greens will safeguard CIT against any threat of privatisation”. It demonstrates that the Greens have listened, and that they will endorse the expertise of educators. The Greens’ commitment is also politically powerful. As is currently the case, Greens are likely to hold the balance of power after the ACT election and sign a parliamentary agreement with one of the two major parties. We would embolden them to make this matter a high priority in that negotiated agreement.

ACT Labor is the final piece in the ACT electoral puzzle. Over a period of months, we have negotiated with Labor for a better commitment on guaranteeing CIT funding. At the very last minute, ACT Labor sent through this statement:

“ACT Labor’s funding record for the Canberra Institute of Technology has seen it educate thousands of Canberrans and help them into great jobs and careers. Labor will continue to provide the vast majority of government VET funding to the Canberra Institute of Technology in order to guarantee its place as our premier VET provider into the future.”

This is an important step. Subsequently, Chief Minister Andrew Barr, Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research Meegan Fitzharris and Education spokesperson Yvette Berry have released this statement:

“ACT Labor will ensure the CIT remains the primary provider of high-quality vocational education in Canberra. ACT Labor commits to providing a secure funding future for CIT and will maintain CIT funding to a minimum of 70 percent of total ACT Government funding for VET.”

ACT Labor is not there yet. We will continue to seek a signed guarantee that a minimum of 70% of all government funding will go to CIT. Obviously this is best achieved through legislation.

I hope to be able to report to you in an upcoming edition of TAFE teacher that the new ACT government has announced its commitment to ensure 70% guaranteed funding that we know is so important for CIT and so important for TAFE across the country.

Glenn Fowler is Branch Secretary of the AEU – ACT Branch
3,000 people seeking asylum given access to VET courses in Victoria

In September, the Andrews Labor Government announced $15 million in funding to provide 3,000 placements for VET courses to people seeking asylum on eligible visas in Victoria from July 2016 to June 2018.

This has been made possible through an Agreement between the Victoria State Government and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) who will directly refer 1,000 of the 3,000 places into TAFE and other training organisations through their Education Program. Helpdesk services will also be set up by the ASRC to assist providers to enable people seeking asylum to access the additional 2,000 places. Workshops will also be developed providing professional training to staff in training organisations. This will be the biggest education program for people seeking asylum in the country.

Thanks to its relationship with the State Government, the ASRC has placed 751 people seeking asylum in VET courses to date. Of this number, 92% of students seeking asylum completed their course, compared with 43% of students, as recorded by the Department of Education when measuring Government subsidised course enrolment completions, 2010-2015. They have done so because of their resilience, commitment to succeed and the support of ASRC staff and volunteers in the Education Program.

This new opportunity not only provides access to job opportunities across the State, it will help people gain confidence, build on their skills and contribute to our communities.

A member of the ASRC and a TAFE student speaks below of how significant this access to accredited education in Australia has been to his life.

“I would like to begin by thanking the ASRC for giving me the opportunity to study at TAFE. My experience in my previous life was in the teaching profession. I taught for 13 years: Urdu Literature, South Asian History and the Study of Pakistan. I was Principal of a Secondary School for two years in my country prior to coming to Australia. But when I approached schools in Australia for opportunities to work I was unsuccessful in meeting the criteria required when applying for work. “Work is what I want to do. It is good to work, to feel independent, to feel that I am contributing to society and that I am a vital part of the community. And for self-respect. So I approached the ASRC to find a way to get a job. “My first priority was to find a course related to schooling. My education adviser assisted me over six months and she helped me to enroll in a TAFE course, a Certificate IV in Education Support. This course gives me the experience that enables me to meet the criteria for a position as a Teacher’s Aide. “The Certificate IV in Education Support is essential to opening the door to employment in Australia. I am gaining work experience through work placements in two primary schools. My study at TAFE and this work experience will help me to meet the criteria essential to gaining a job in Australia. “On my first day of work experience in primary school in Australia I felt like a kid in a school on their first day. Everything was completely new; learning, teaching, the way the children are treated, the modern facilities... it was a whole new system of education for me to learn. “I am very grateful to all the good people who have helped me. I feel this gratitude not only for myself, but for others who are starting their life in this country.”

About VET placements offered by the ASRC Education Program

Through a joint initiative of the ASRC with the Victoria State Government, 1,000 referrals per year to Government subsidised training will be made available through the ASRC Education Program, from July 2016 to June 2018. The ASRC will further support the referral of individuals into the remaining 2,000 placements through help desk services. The ASRC will also provide professional development workshops with government contracted training organisations delivering courses to eligible people seeking asylum. This partnership is the only one of its kind in Australia, thanks to the Andrews Labor Government.

Each member of the Education Program also receives comprehensive education casework so that people have a planned pathway from education to employment which meets their goals and needs.

Through the support of over 80 volunteers and 2.2 EFT staff, the ASRC’s Education Program also provides over 2,000 hours of EAL (English as an Additional Language) classes from beginners to intermediate levels, English for Hospitality, Home English Tutoring and IELTS preparation courses, annually.

For more information please visit www.asrc.org.au
Government plans downgrading of Adult Migrant English Programs

In its just-released draft Request for Tenders for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) for 2017-2020, the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training plans to downgrade and de-professionalise the AMEP and take it back to its post-World War II beginnings.

Expert teaching in the AMEP necessarily involves knowing how to teach English phonology and pronunciation, graphology, syntax, vocabulary and discourse patterns reflecting Australian social and cultural norms to diverse learners from a wide array of language, literacy and educational backgrounds. As far back as 1978, the Galbally Review of Post Arrival Programs into two ‘streams’: a Pre-Employment Stream and a Social Stream. The Social Stream allows impossibly large ‘conversation’ English classes of up to 25 students to be taught by teachers without any specialist English teaching or even general teaching qualifications.

The proposed tender arrangements will encourage employment of cheaper, unqualified graduates who may think teaching ‘social English’ classes involves little more than chatting with students. The draft Request for Tenders reflects the view that English conversational ability is easily acquired by beginners and can be taught in large groups by anyone with fluency in English. It signals a return to a pre-professional era when the thinking was ‘if you can speak English, you can teach it’.

In the draft document, the Department proposes splitting the program into two ‘streams’: a Pre-Employment Stream and a Social Stream. The Social Stream involves little more than chatting with students. The draft Request for Tenders reflects the view that English conversational ability is easily acquired by beginners and can be taught in large groups by anyone with fluency in English. It signals a return to a pre-professional era when the thinking was ‘if you can speak English, you can teach it’.

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In this context, establishing two unequal ‘streams’ allows impossibly large ‘conversation’ English classes to be taught by teachers without any specialist English teaching qualifications. The proposed changes will particularly disadvantage vulnerable new arrivals in need of most support — predominantly women with childcare responsibilities, the elderly, and refugees with limited/no previous formal education.

Numerous reports, including AMEP-commissioned research, show that adult learners with low literacy and minimal previous education particularly require expert teaching.

It signals a return to a pre-professional era when the thinking was ‘if you can speak English, you can teach it’.

and Services to Migrants recognised that adult migrant English classes required such expertise through provision of qualified TESOL teachers.

To participate fully in Australian society, refugees and migrants need to acquire functional levels of English proficiency. This recognition has underpinned successive bipartisan policies that have supported the AMEP since its establishment in 1948. It underpins the legislated, guaranteed minimum of 510 hours English language tuition for newly arrived migrants with less than “functional English” under the Immigration (Education) Act 1971. As acknowledged by all Australian Governments and agencies involved in migrant resettlement, this guarantee is the bedrock of settlement services for migrants to Australia and is crucial to the success of the nation’s long-standing immigration program.

Creation of a ‘lower track’ social English steam threatens the quality and effectiveness of the AMEP as a whole. With lower teaching standards, the quality of new arrivals’ guaranteed 510 hours of English tuition is eroded and their once-only English entitlement potentially wasted. Employment of unqualified teachers in the social English stream can only increase student drop-out rates along with unused English tuition entitlements. The best such social English steam classes can be expected to produce will be stigmatised speakers of ‘broken’ English with limited opportunities for social and employment participation.

As the social English stream classes will be cheaper to run, they will be attractive to those competing for AMEP contracts and looking for every possible means of keeping their bids low. In this context, establishing two unequal ‘streams’ creates perverse incentives that lock vulnerable clients into inflexible, inferior second-class English tuition. The lowered requirements for the Social English Stream — and the fact that it is mandated — incentivises providers to place and keep clients with very low English proficiency and minimal/no previous education in this stream in order to create viable class numbers and minimise costs.

The draft Request for Tenders document’s frequent use of ‘flexibility’ as a key rationale for the second-class social English steam signals the beginning of a deregulation agenda for the AMEP. ‘Flexibility’ is being applied to the AMEP’s rigorous, internationally-respected, competency-based curriculum framework — The Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE). The draft Request for Tenders proposes circumventing quality assurance requirements for TESOL teacher qualifications attached to CSWE imple-
mendment by making its use non-mandatory. This change will allow the next round of contacted providers to employ non-TESOL trained teachers using alternate (but yet to be developed) curriculum.

In proposing the twin-track, deregulatory changes to the AMEP, the Government has ignored the long-standing, primary settlement objective of the Program as reaffirmed by recent findings from its own comprehensive review of the Program. The ACIL Allen Evaluation Report found that ‘the AMEP plays an important role in assisting clients achieve settlement outcomes. Participation in the programme helps clients access services in the general community, develop networks in their community, understand their rights and obligations and can provide a pathway to employment and/or further study or training’ (ACIL Allen Evaluation AMEP Review, Key Finding 19, p. 68).

Increased class sizes, employment of unqualified teachers, and relaxed curriculum standards in AMEP tender arrangements delivers significant cost savings to Government. Under pressure to achieve “efficiency dividends”, the Government’s creation of a sub-standard, lower-cost English stream is a back-door attempt to reduce costs through internal, contractual-administrative processes, rather than through open, transparent and contestable legislative change.

At the same time as the Turnbull Government is committing itself to increasing Australia’s refugee and migrant intake, its short-sighted, covert cost saving strategy threatens to undermine the capacity of the English program that has played a key role in Australia’s successful resettlement and integration of newcomers.

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) wrote to Education Minister Birmingham on August 30, outlining its concerns and calling for revisions to the final Request for Tenders for the AMEP for 2017-2020. Recently the Australian Education Union also wrote to the Minister expressing its concerns in support of ACTA’s representation.

Further information on the issue can be accessed on the ACTA website at: http://www.tesol.org.au/Advocacy/ADULT-ESL-NEWS-AND-ISSUES

Michael Michell is President of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations

NATIONAL TAFE DAY

National TAFE Day was held on Thursday 16 June this year. Celebrations took place around the country to celebrate the achievements of our TAFE system and to call for 70% guaranteed funding for TAFE.

The largest event was held in Adelaide at TAFE SA. Hosted by the AEU, the spirits of teachers and students were not to be dampened despite the heavy winter rain. It was a great opportunity to join together for a coffee and to hear from teachers, students and politicians about the importance of TAFE in the community.

As TAFE student Bassam Ashqar said on the day “I have learned a lot from TAFE. I have learned about Australian culture. I’ve learned how to live and settle in this country, how to integrate with Australian people... I ask all of you to speak up for TAFE!”

Along with the rally in South Australia a myriad of morning teas, BBQs and gatherings took place in every state and territory. Thanks to all the teachers, support staff, students and unions who took the time to speak up for TAFE.
NEW SOUTH WALES
MAXINE SHARKEY

NSW continues to bargain for a new Enterprise Agreement. The current Agreement concluded on 30 June 2015 and TAFE teachers have not received a salary increase since the beginning of January 2015. In support of a new Agreement the Federation has agreed to the inclusion of the new positions previously under trial and identified under the current Agreement as well as the implementation of a more flexible college year. Senior Officers have met with the Premier and the Minister in an attempt to bring bargaining to a conclusion. Federation Council has passed a motion to allow Senior Officers to commence a Protected Action Ballot through Fair Work should this be deemed necessary to draw bargaining to a conclusion.

Parallel to this, TAFE NSW has launched a TAFE NSW Strategic Plan 2016-22 Modernising TAFE NSW. This is being referred to as ONE TAFE. Federation is hopeful this may see an end to the duplication of administrative services and compliance requirements. Assurances have been made that any savings made will be put back in to teaching and learning. In regard to Corrective Services teachers, a meeting with the Minister in September 30.

Maxine Sharkey is the NSW member of the National TAFE Council Executive

QUEENSLAND
DAVID TERAUDS

On June 28, TAFE Queensland (TQ) issued notice of intention to bargain. TQ and the unions commenced bargaining as of the July 20.

TQ is pursuing a single agreement for all TAFE staff and this position is opposed by both the QTU and Together Union. However the unions have agreed to negotiate, not withstanding their opposition to the single document approach, on the basis that as reported previously in this column, the delays in securing a new agreement have been substantial. To facilitate an agreement, a “One SBU, separate agreements” stance has been adopted by the unions. No party wishes to unduly delay pay increases for staff.

The current state based TQ agreement expired at the end of June 2013.

Central Queensland University (CQU) will be undertaking bargaining for a replacement for enterprise wide HE and Professional staff CQU agreement. It has been proposed that the single agreement include the IVTAE VET educators as well. The QTU/AEUQ opposes this on the same grounds as we have in TQ. The current copied state agreement does not expire until 2018 but was based on an expired state agreement not containing continuing pay rises, wiping the IVTAE staff in the same position as TQ teachers re pay.

The QTU/AEUQ has sought support from the other unions for a “One SBU, separate agreements” approach to bargaining in CQU as well. Logs of Claim were to be presented to CQU by September 30.

David Terauds is the Queensland member of the National TAFE Council Executive

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
TONY SUTHERLAND

An Agreement has been reached between the South Australian Branch and TAFE SA on a new Enterprise Agreement for TAFE SA’s education staff.

After rejection by members of an earlier offer in February and several further months of negotiations, a second offer was considered by TAFE Divisional Council Delegates on 8 July who endorsed acceptance of the amended proposal. Subsequently the draft agreement has gone to an employee ballot where it gained 97% support.

Under the three-year agreement, education staff will receive annual salary increases of 2.5%, payable from the first full pay period in October each year from 2015 to 2018. This is an excellent outcome especially since the State Treasurer has recently announced a cap of 1.5% wage increases for public sector employees.

The Agreement also includes a new Redeployment, Retraining and Redundancy (RRR) policy as the result of the removal of the SA State Government’s no forced redundancy policy. The new Enterprise Agreement includes opportunities for retraining and redeployment but also introduces the option for TAFE SA to retrench employees following 12 months of being declared excess. Under the new RRR policy an employee who accepts a Separation Package within the first three months of being declared excess will receive a bonus payment of $15,000.

2016 National TAFE DAY

Around 200 hundred TAFE staff and students braved light rain to celebrate National TAFE Day on 16 June. The colourful and noisy rally in Light Square adjacent to TAFE SA’s Adelaide city campuses celebrated all that is good about TAFE and promoted the campaign for a 70% funding guarantee for TAFE. The sea of red AEU ponchos was treated to inspirational student speakers, cupcakes and coffee.
Students from AC Arts TAFE campus filmed and edited highlights of the rally which can be viewed through a link on the StopTAFEcuts website.

Tony Sutherland is the South Australian member of the National TAFE Council Executive

ACT
KAREN NOBLE

IT IS a very mixed space at Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). The CIT Board has released a Strategic Compass 2020 with the themes of: Shaping Change, Growing our region’s economy, advancing Canberra’s workforce and transforming our business. It is forward thinking and comes with a confident message about CIT’s future. The Strategic Compass is supported by the ACT Government with funding for innovation, partnerships etc. So, it seems to be full steam ahead but there is some understandable reticence about how it will all work, how quality education will be maintained and how teachers will be genuinely consulted and involved in the processes.

The greatest strain on teaching and administration staff is the workload associated with the CIT re-registration. The ACT AEU has surveyed teaching staff and is compiling evidence about the quantity of work required, inconsistency of resourcing the work and inconsistency in the messaging about what is required. Stronger and clearer information from ASQA would be useful as would be a review of the Training Packages and structure of competency documents. Many teachers feel the current competency format and anticipated ASQA requirements has led to tedious mapping, monitoring and ticking boxes with no space for creativity, flexibility and genuinely working with the learners.

Our new CIT organiser is connecting with Departments and Branches, gathering stories and building membership. We move into Enterprise Agreement negotiations in 2017 and are preparing our ideas now.

Karen Noble is the ACT member of the National TAFE Council Executive

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

GARY HEDGER

The amalgamation of the colleges as part of the TAFE reform process is still a shambles. After the announcement by the government earlier this year nothing has been fully resolved. The new MD’s still have yet to be appointed, IT systems are still to be aligned, websites do not support functions of the college and many other important operational functions required by staff are yet to be sorted.

Contract support staff members have month by month contract extensions, which has been devastating for them. Many contract lecturers have been given an end date (31st of December 2016) to their contracts, with no guarantee of what happens after that date. The Union is currently running a campaign around permanency and greater job security to help support these members.

Morale is low and the workload just gets piled onto lecturers just to keep the system going: further cuts to student curriculum hours and many cases of high class sizes and requirements to update compliance paperwork without resourcing.

The Government Training Sector Reform Project is currently examining the funding model with a view to implementing a new model in 2018. The Union has been involved in the consultation process.

Other issues being dealt with include: hours for online delivery and support of student in flexible delivery modes, lack of consultation around timetabling, unit allocations and other academic matters, overtimne, averaging and part time teaching hours and payment issues, excessive hours worked by casually employed lecturers and non-payment for attending meetings.

Gary Heder is the WA member of the National TAFE Council Executive

TASMANIA

PAUL LENNARD

TasTAFE (the only government provider in the state) has released a new corporate plan that will guide the direction of the organisation over the next three years. The corporate plan for 2016-2019, entitled “Moving from Good to Great,” has been developed with the consumers and end users of their products and services in mind — the students. The plan has been designed to provide their students with the skills and knowledge to be leaders in the workforce, and be recognised for their innovation, entrepreneurialism and highly developed skills.

The plan responds to the Tasmanian Government’s expectations about the role TasTAFE will have in the Tasmanian economy’s transition and the needs of a skilled workforce. Priority industry sectors for the Tasmanian economy all have specific workforce needs, and through this plan they will further enhance their networks with industry and employers to ensure industry needs are met. It is anticipated the new plan will create a more holistic system of vocational education and training across the state.

It is anticipated the journey from good to great will require TasTAFE to consider the needs of Tasmanians throughout their lifelong learning. It will require TasTAFE to share with other Registered Training Organisations, Schools, Colleges, and Universities to achieve the highest possible outcomes within a broad spectrum of industries.

THE AEU Tasmanian TAFE Division is commencing negotiation on a new EB agreement, heavily focussed on the results of a recent survey the AEU TAFE division undertook with all members. This will allow the negotiations to be focussed on the key concerns and challenges of all members, particularly those of salary, leave, workload, and life balance.

Paul Lennard is the Tasmanian member of the National TAFE Council Executive.
ASBESTOS

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