How to fix the problems in vocational education:

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Shaibu spent three years living in a car. With little understanding of his options and no work rights, he received no support until he arrived at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC).

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When Shaibu was finally recognised as a refugee, we were humbled to receive support from him as a volunteer. He wanted to give back. Now studying a diploma in community development, he wants to use his experience to help other refugees and people seeking asylum.

The assistance that Shaibu and more than 3,200 people receive each year is only possible through the support of people like you – our community. As an independent organisation, we can only continue to provide life changing assistance to people seeking asylum through your donation.

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‘What they do at the ASRC is amazing, just amazing. It’s like you are in the community, so you are happy. You can talk to anyone, you feel valued.’

SHAIBU, FORMER ASRC MEMBER
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

MICHELLE PURDY, AEU FEDERAL TAFE PRESIDENT

This edition of the Australian TAFE Teacher will come out only days before the 2016 Federal Election, an election which will be crucial to the future of TAFE, as evidenced by the on-going publicity surrounding the activities of an out of control private sector, and the gutting of TAFE nationally.

In this edition we invited the Coalition, the ALP and the Greens to contribute pieces describing their vision for the future of TAFE in Australia. You will find articles by Senator Scott Ryan, The Hon. Sharon Bird MP and Senator Robert Simms. ACTU president, Ged Kearney and the CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, Dr John Falzon have both contributed great pieces on the importance of TAFE to society.

We have also included contributions from Ian Curry from the AMWU, and Sandra Grey from the Aotearoa New Zealand Tertiary Education Union. Ian’s piece is an eloquent argument for our unions to continue to work together in the important area of public vocational education through TAFE, and Sandra gives us insights into what is happening to vocational education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Stewart Burkitt’s piece on Corrections Education has been written just as the NSW government announced the full privatisation of education in that state’s prison system, and the resultant loss of more than 140 positions. His piece persuasively describes the significance of public education in the sector.

Gavin Moodie’s article on VET FEE-HELP highlights the damage being done to vocational education as a result of this scheme in the context of the release of the government’s discussion paper. He argues that the problems with the vocational education sector are far deeper than the “redesign” contemplated by the discussion paper, and hopes that there won’t have to be more damage done to students, teachers and TAFE before the Coalition and the ALP address these deeper problems. It is a critical contribution which powerfully summarises the problems facing the sector.

Paul Hagar’s “Bringing TAFE to its knees” is a critical indictment of CBT in Australia, and its role in the erosion of the sector, and Gosia Klatt has contributed an article on VET in Schools.

Finally, we have reprinted an article written by Dr John Kaye for us in 2009. John died in early May, and he will be sadly missed for, amongst many, many other things, his great contribution to the fight to save our public TAFE system. We thought that the best way to honour John was to let him say, in his own words, why he thought it was important to keep the “E” in TAFE, and the “public” in education.

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How to fix the problems in vocational education:

Guarantee 70% funding to TAFE, and shutdown the VET FEE-HELP scheme

The Australian economy is in transition. We are currently facing skills shortages in some areas, while in other areas, industries are in decline, and people need to retrain, and have access to high quality vocational education.

PAT FORWARD

Here are some important questions facing Australia about the future of TAFE and vocational education: Will TAFE survive another three years of damaging cuts? Can the economy afford the waste of so much government funding being allocated to a discredited private for-profit sector? Which political party will have the courage to face up to the private for-profit VET sector and shut down the disastrous student loan scheme, VET FEE-HELP?

The Turnbull and Abbott governments have cut funding to the TAFE sector, refused to act decisively to control the activities of dodgy for-profit colleges, and failed to control the unprecedented growth of VET FEE-HELP. Vocational education once struggled for any recognition. It was the forgotten education sector. Not anymore. Every day, the news is full of stories about rorts; about action being taken by the ACCC; of the federal police raiding private colleges; of the government “toughening” regulations to stop the rorts. Every day, there is another story about another rip off.

At best, the Federal Government’s response has been piecemeal. It continues to blame the previous Labor Government for all the problems in the sector while all the time, trust in the sector is being destroyed, and its reputation is being trashed.

The Federal Government has said repeatedly that “toughening” the rules around VET FEE-HELP will fix things up. It hasn’t. The Government cannot keep up with the rorting that the private sector has engaged in. They cannot keep ahead of the tricks and scams. They cannot keep ahead because the flaw lies in the fundamental architecture of a system designed to mimic markets, designed to make profits, not to deliver a social good like education.

And just how serious is the Federal Govern-
Since the introduction of VET FEE-HELP, student fees have skyrocketed. The average VET FEE-HELP loan is between twice and five times the qualification price set by NSW TAFE. The amount of funding for loans has risen dramatically between 2012 and 2015 by 380% at TAFEs, but by 1,000% at private providers. And this study predated the rapid expansion of the VET FEE-HELP scheme and is based on profits made from recurrent government expenditure, not VET FEE-HELP.

The vocational education system is broken, and the future of TAFE is in the balance. Billions of dollars are currently being wasted-churned into profits by a voracious, and cavern-for-profit sector.

There is no evidence that the experiment with markets, market reform and competition has delivered anything positive to the Australian VET sector. Assertions by the for-profit sector that they have added value do not constitute evidence.

We cannot fix vocational education by redesigning the market.

We need to cut funding off at the source and shut down the VET FEE-HELP scheme. We need to guarantee 70% of recurrent government VET funding go directly to the TAFE system.

Australia as a society needs to consider whether any public funding should be allocated to for-profit colleges; but in the meantime, and as a first and modest step forward, we need to cap the amount of funding open to competition from the for-profit sector.

The Australian economy is in transition. We are currently facing skills shortages in some areas, while in other areas, industries are in decline, and people need to retrain, and have access to high quality vocational education.

Young people need a comprehensive vocational education that sets them on a path to learn and adapt throughout their lives, not “just-in-time”, narrow skills for today.

Australia needs to guarantee a minimum 70% funding to TAFE, and allow it to rebuild confidence and trust in vocational education.

There is a lot at stake if TAFE is allowed to die.

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary
The Abbott-Turnbull Coalition and Shorten Labor are at last taking the outrageous and hugely expensive scams of VET FEE-HELP more seriously. Both Government and Opposition are proposing to supplement their piecemeal changes since the scandals started attracting damaging publicity from 2011. But we can see how difficult it is to wind back the advantages of vested interests, even when they have been rorted so outrageously as VET FEE-HELP.

LABOR’S proposal to cap VET FEE-HELP loans at $8,000 per student per year with exceptions was predictably opposed by Australian Council for Private Education and Training. But it was also opposed by TAFE Directors Australia, which is meant to represent the interests of public TAFE institutes which have been damaged so greatly and undeservedly by the VET FEE-HELP rip-offs and the associated changes in funding. Apparently TDA prefers its institutions’ interests over the interests of the public they are meant to serve.

Year dot
The legislation for VET FEE-HELP was introduced into Parliament by the Howard Coalition Government and it started in 2009 under the Rudd Labor Government. It was opposed vigorously by the Australian Education Union, student unions and other advocates of progressive policies.

I and many of my colleagues supported VET FEE-HELP. I at least regret that I didn’t foresee the extensive damage it would do to public vocational education, which was clear to the AEU and others.

When it was introduced students could get VET FEE-HELP loans only if they were enrolled in a program which was accepted for credit towards a higher education award. Under these conditions take up of VET FEE-HELP was modest. Private higher education providers didn’t invest the
considerable effort needed to assess qualifications for credit when it wasn’t in their financial interests. Universities were as conservative in assessing qualifications for credit then as many complain they remain today.

In July 2009 the Rudd Government removed the credit transfer requirement in ‘reform’ states which made government funding available to all registered training organisations in the state. The only ‘reform’ state was Victoria, which became ground zero for the rorting and budget blowouts that became scandalously common. All other states followed by signing the Commonwealth’s National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform in 2012.

As the Abbott-Turnbull discussion paper on redesigning VET FEE-HELP notes, the credit transfer requirement was ‘a significant protection for students and the Commonwealth’. However, the discussion paper doesn’t raise returning the credit transfer requirement as one of the options for protecting students and the Commonwealth revenue.

Review process
The Abbott-Turnbull Government has released a discussion paper on redesigning VET FEE-HELP and has invited comments. The Government plans ‘an intense period of consultation’ on the options it outlined before submitting legislation to Parliament. While this is a considerable improvement on previous changes which have been made without public consultation, it is still too limited. Apparently the Government will not publish submissions. This is poor because publishing submissions helps to inform the public and develops mutual understanding of peoples’ positions.

More seriously, the review is limited to VET FEE-HELP. Yet, as we have seen, the introduction of VET FEE-HELP was related to the provision of public subsidies to private for profit providers. And we shall also see that it is also related to the level of funding for all vocational education programs and vocational education’s curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and quality assurance. The continuing attempts to change vocational education piecemeal makes it even more internally inconsistent and will fail to address fundamental problems with the way vocational education was changed in the mid 1990s. There needs to be a comprehensive and open public review of Australian vocational education.

Inputs, processes and outputs
It is crude, but still informative to consider education like any form of production which requires inputs and processes to produce outputs. Educational inputs include motivated students with some minimum preparation, able and enthusiastic teachers, a good curriculum, learning spaces and facilities, and other resources. Processes include creating and maintaining an environment that supports learning, pedagogy or a teaching-learning process, and student support.

Unfortunately we do not understand exactly what combination of inputs and processes are needed to produce educational outcomes. We know that students with strong school results who are taught a strong curriculum full time on campus by well qualified and paid teachers achieve good educational outcomes. But we also know that many of these inputs and processes are not necessary. Many students succeed without a strong educational background and by studying by distance or online learning. It is therefore tempting to conclude that all educational inputs and processes are contingent: that the only relevant factor is educational outcomes.

This is the promise of competency based education: that students are not judged by their previous educational attainment or by how long they spend studying, but by their achievement. There are indeed successful educational systems that work along these lines. The University of London was founded in 1836 initially solely as an examining body for its colleges and other approved institutions, and now 54,000 students study for University of London degrees by distance education in 180 countries. The NSW Legal Profession Admission Board administers the student-at-law examinations which meet the academic requirements for admission to practice as a lawyer. But both these bodies administer examinations which meet the academic requirements for admission to practice as a lawyer. But both these bodies administer examinations which meet the academic requirements for admission to practice as a lawyer. 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From the mid 1990s Australian vocational
education has been based on competencies with little or no monitoring of inputs and processes. But whereas the University of London and the NSW Legal Profession Admission Board administer rigorous comprehensive external exams, almost all Australian vocational education assessment is conducted internally by the providers and usually by the people who are expected to do the teaching. And when Australian governments made big financial rewards available to for profit vocational education providers there was a direct financial incentive for providers to cut their educational inputs and processes and lower their assessment standards which resulted in the degradation of standards and poor quality that plague the sector now.

VET FEE-HELP was modeled on HECS-HELP for higher education, but such problems could not arise in higher education partly because higher education monitors inputs and processes closely. Thus, standard undergraduate arts, sciences and business degrees take 3 years of lectures, tutorials and practical classes. Exceptions are accepted only if they are justified extensively. VET FEE-HELP may be redesigned extensively to stop blatant rorts attracting headlines and blowing out government budgets, but the more fundamental problems of vocational education’s quality and standards won’t be addressed until either governments require external assessment or they pay far more attention to vocational education’s inputs and processes. This will require vocational education to discard competency based education’s preoccupation with outcomes and replace it with a balanced attention to inputs and processes as well as outcomes.

Completion is an indicator of success because it has better outcomes

The Commonwealth’s discussion paper notes the common claim that completion rates aren’t meaningful in Australian vocational education because many students enrol in vocational education to complete just a few units. This claim would be relevant if students who completed only a few units had strong outcomes in transfer to further education, employment or higher pay so that they could repay their HELP debt. But low completion is as much an issue for vocational education as it is for school and higher education because students who do not complete vocational education qualifications have poor outcomes: few transfer to further education, few improve their employment position and few earn higher pay.

Governments should therefore start paying far more attention to completion as an indicator of quality and success in vocational education.

The scams and explosive growth have been by the private for profit providers

The Commonwealth’s discussion paper wrongly claims that the problems with vocational FEE-HELP tuition fees are from twice to five times the price of corresponding NSW TAFE courses. The discussion paper reports that the amount of VET FEE-HELP loans increased from 2012 to 2015 by a very strong 300% at TAFEs, but it exploded by 1,000% at private providers (Table 1). The problems with VET FEE-HELP are not only a failure of markets but are mostly a failure of private providers.

The failure of markets

Conservatives in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, the UK and USA believe that public social goods such as education and health can and should be allocated by markets. The obvious and extensive failures of allocating social goods by markets are ascribed to gaps or weaknesses in market information, market regulation or market design. The Commonwealth’s discussion paper on redesigning VET FEE-HELP notes the numerous different designs and redesigns of
markets in Australian vocational education. All have caused major problems, requiring substantial changes which in turn cause new problems which have led to more subsequent changes and redesigns. Yet the discussion paper insists that all that is needed to end the current problems arising from the designed market is yet more market design.

Public social goods such as education and health require substantial public investment, partly because high quality education and health services are expensive and partly because some of their important benefits are long term, general and hard to evaluate. Markets are a very poor way of allocating these public investments because the separate decisions of individuals ignore the shared interests of society and because in the end allocating public goods relies on values and judgments of the public interest. Market designers try to rejig their market to reflect their view of the public good, but collective and shared goods cannot be achieved by the separate and individual decisions of market actors.

Embedded programs are a problem only for VET FEE-HELP

Embedding or nesting subjects and sometimes whole programs in higher level programs is quite common in higher education, as it is in vocational education. But it causes problems for VET FEE-HELP mainly because providers are keen to embed low and mid level vocational courses in high level courses for financial rather than educational reasons and because VET FEE-HELP introduces an artificial distinction between high level vocational education eligible for VET FEE-HELP and low and middle level vocational education which is not eligible for VET FEE-HELP.

Embedding would not be a problem for VET FEE-HELP if lower and middle level vocational education were better funded and if grossly excessive fees were not available for high level programs through VET FEE-HELP. VET FEE-HELP’s problems with embedding should therefore be solved not by making embedding harder but by increasing the funding of all vocational education and by not making VET FEE-HELP available for exorbitant fees.

Industry contributes very little to publicly funded vocational education and little to enrolments supported by VET FEE-HELP. Industry is not a ‘stakeholder’ because it contributes no stake.

‘Industry needs’ should not defeat students’ interests

The discussion paper asks whether VET FEE-HELP should be related to ‘industry needs’. This would make vocational education different again from higher education which the government supports with HECS-HELP according to students’ interests, not an assessment of industry needs. There is no rigorous national mechanism for determining ‘industry needs’ and it is very doubtful that the state mechanisms for determining ‘industry needs’ are rigorous. Labour market forecasting is notoriously unreliable: it was invented to give astrology a good name.

Industry contributes very little to publicly funded vocational education and little to enrolments supported by VET FEE-HELP. Industry is not a ‘stakeholder’ because it contributes no stake. In stark contrast to industry, students contribute substantially to VET FEE-HELP. Students also contribute their effort, time and foregone income to education. Students should be supported in their choices where to invest in education, which should not be distorted by the interests of industry or governments’ attempts to read the employment market. Of course students need more support and protection against being gulled into incurring debts that are of little value to them and are unlikely to be repaid, but that should be to advance students’ interests, not industry’s.

Bigger changes needed

It is good that the Coalition and Labor are finally trying to fix the mess that they created with VET FEE-HELP. But the problems are far deeper than the different ‘redesigns’ that they are contemplating. Hopefully there won’t have to be more damage to students, teachers and TAFE institutes before the Coalition and Labor address vocational education’s deeper problems.

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

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Source: adapted from Australian Government (2016: 28) Table 8: Loan amounts by provider type (millions $).
Keeping the “E” in TAFE and the public in education

DR JOHN KAYE

AUSTRALIA as never before needs a well-funded, vibrant, public provider of Vocational Education and Training. Yet proposed market-based changes to the funding and regulation of the sector will inevitably undermine the nation’s TAFE systems and with it the ability of working people to adapt, innovate and participate in the nations’ political, cultural and economic life.

It is a matter of urgent national priority that the marketisation agenda be reversed and that the nation’s politicians and population be reminded that the “E” in both TAFE and VET stands for Education. The delivery of quality education as an integral component of vocational training will not survive the competitive funding structures being designed and implemented around Australia, yet it is essential to addressing the key challenges of climate change and global economic collapse.

The undermining of the public nature of TAFE and the consequent downgrading and elimination of education in skills training would not only impoverish Australia; it would weaken the democratic system under stress from economic and environmental pressures.

There is no economically successful response to climate change that can be based on repeating past patterns of production. The development of new industries in sustainable energy technologies and public transport solutions will require a workforce that is innovative and engaged.

If reducing emissions is to produce a boom in employment and wealth generation, then Australia will require workers who can develop new skills and have an intellectual commitment to their workplace. This requires education and lots of it.

Climate change will also place enormous stress on social cohesion as water resources and food become scarce, disease spreads, sea levels rise and extreme weather events become more frequent.

Making complex decisions in the face of an increasingly hostile climate will require a citizenry that can weigh up complex choices and express a new collective wisdom. This too will require lots of education and not just for the elite and the traditional political classes.

A strong and economically buoyant Australia will not be built from the wreck of the global economic meltdown by simply boosting the numbers of work-ready young people with skills to immediately commence traditional jobs. What is needed is workers focused on problem solving, self-training and working collaboratively with workmates to build innovative solutions.

This is the worst of all possible times to separate skills formation from education.

Yet that will be the inevitable outcome of the marketisation of VET. Australia’s future economic success, cultural vitality, democratic health and social empowerment are being put on the line by the ideology that places competition ahead of cooperation.

Contestable markets for VET dollars will irresistibly converge to the cheapest solutions to training needs. Providers who focus on education outcomes, especially for students with diverse learning styles, will find their ‘products’ priced out of the market by the lowest common denominator profit-driven competitors.

The market environment will deliver bucket
loads of narrow competencies but a poverty of education.

In post-school education, the word ‘public’ is tautological. The only institutions that can be sufficiently freed from the profit motive to focus on the development of the whole student are those that are publicly funded and have a culture of focusing on the needs of the individual and of society.

It is criminally naïve to expect to derive the same benefits from private providers whose focus on bottom line profits. Marketisation will leave behind students with diverse learning styles, special needs or who live in rural and regional Australia.

Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations official Jim Davidson, speaking at the January 2009 AEU National TAFE Council AGM, identified a number of challenges to TAFE, including the bargaining power of customers, the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers and the threat of substitute products and services.

He missed, however, the greatest threat of all: the development of a market that forces TAFE to contend for funding against private providers that can lower costs by ignoring educational and social justice objectives.

It is the competitive environment itself much more that the private players within it that places at risk the ability of TAFE to deliver quality public benefits.

The euphoric celebration of the defeat of the Howard government on the evening of 24 November 2007 was profoundly soured by the words of the then Prime Minister-elect in his victory speech:

“I want to put aside the old battles of the past, the old battles between business and unions, the old battles between growth and environment, the old and tired battles between federal and state, between public and private. It is time for a new page to be written in our nation’s history.”

This was no call for an outbreak of dialect peace but a warning that his government would deliver victory to one side and one side alone. For Kevin Rudd Labor it was the articulation of a manifesto that pays preference to business over unions, growth over environment, federal over state and private over public.

For the campaigners for a just and sustainable future, it was a laying down of the gauntlet to defend the values of unionism, environmentalism, decentralised decision making and public undertakings.

This is the battle for the next decade. It is the battle for who determines Australia’s future and what it looks like.

The response of the progressive movements to Kevin Rudd’s challenge will determine if it is a decade of greed or ten years of generosity of spirit. It will decide if competition triumphs over the values of cooperation.

The response will decide if market forces and large multinational corporations make the key decisions affecting the future of all Australians, or if it is all of us, acting collectively for the common good.

In 2019, the movements will look back on either the achievement of public education and training or a wasteland of a privatised, market driven training industry.

In January 2007, AEU Federal TAFE Secretary Pat Forward in a well researched and thoughtful report identified the key challenges facing TAFE as marketisation, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and human capital theory. The significance of the latter two only became apparent to many observers some time after Pat’s presentation.

For many this did not happen until October 2008 with the leaking of a discussion paper from the COAG Working Group on the Productivity Agenda.

This was the nation’s leaders’ perfected embodiment of human capital theory, where producing armies of specific job focused workers on the cheap takes precedence over the long term values of an educated society.

The document called for a National Partnership that would ensure that:

“All public funds for the delivery of training
within a jurisdiction are open to all RTOs registered within that jurisdiction.3

In COAG’s nightmarish dystopia, TAFE would be forced to compete for every dollar of public funding. The discussion paper advocated competitive neutrality in which the vestiges of public focus are beaten out of TAFE lest it appear to offer unfair competition to private providers.

COAG also wants to introduce HECS-like income contingent loans for all publicly subsidised courses. Apprenticeships are to be further undermined by causing training packages to ‘[move] beyond occupational standards’.4

When the Greens received the leaked document, we worked hard to expose the consequences it would have for TAFE and for Australia’s future. Reactions from state ministers to the ensuing media coverage can be paraphrased as moving from “what COAG paper?” to “oh, you mean that COAG paper” and finally settling on “don’t be silly, we would never do that”.

The Ministerial Council on Vocational and Technical Education in late November 2009 finally took the heat off the issue with a “dog ate my homework” excuse. In light of the global economic crisis:

“the National Partnership on VET Market Design will not be considered at the next COAG meeting and Ministers agreed further work would be undertaken on the national partnership on VET reform.”5

It would however be a grave mistake to think that COAG has abandoned the marketisation agenda. VET market design is just one of many facets of the political erosion of TAFE. From salaries and productivity offsets to casualisation, undermining teacher qualifications and constant restructures that reduce teacher autonomy and support, Australia is in the grip of a conspiracy to reduce TAFE to a shell.

The inevitable consequence of these ‘reforms’ would be TAFE systems that at best act as purchasers of training and on-selling it to students. At worst it would see the complete privatisation of TAFE.

The motivations of the state and federal leaders range from a naïve faith in markets to deliver social outcomes to slashing costs for governments that thrive on tax cuts to the wealthy. Underpinning each and every politician involved in this conspiracy is an ideological obsession with destroying public ownership.

The only antidote is re-igniting a widespread understanding that education is a crucial underpinning of successful skills formation and that only public provision of vocational education and training can secure the economic, social and environmental future.

This is much more than arguing for a massive boost in TAFE funding to address unmet demand and boost per student expenditure. It is more than pushing up salaries of TAFE teachers to be commensurate to the importance and difficulty of the task. It is more than removing the threats of destructive competition. It is more than teacher workforce development and mechanisms such as an ombudsman.

While all of these and many more are central to the future of TAFE, the breakthrough will only come when the passion for public education is reignited.

That passion begins with the collective commitment and dedication of TAFE teachers and grows into a vision for the future of Australia that transcends the smooth words of bureaucrats and duplicitous politicians.

It is a vision that says that the future is too important to be handed over to the short term profit fixations of corporate board rooms.

It is a vision that says that the future should be determined by all of us, acting collectively for our common good and for the good of our children and grandchildren.
Elections are always a referendum on the future, but this year’s contest is shaping up to be even more critical than usual with the major parties starkly divided in their approach to a fundamental policy challenge: education.

The government’s lack of commitment to Gonski schools funding is at odds with public sentiment, and its efforts to deregulate and defund the university systems is raising legitimate fears of US-style $100,000 degrees and ballooning student debt.

But perhaps the most immediately threatened link of our education system is Vocational Education and Training.

The VET sector has suffered a litany of cuts, privatisations and other meddling from governments at all levels for a number of years — and the net result is that one of the key drivers of economic development and jobs growth is not able to effectively perform its primary purpose.

From the outside, the situation is incredibly frustrating — and I can’t even imagine what it must be like for TAFE educators continually seeing their efforts undermined by misguided government policies.

This is no longer a theoretical policy argument: these policies are starting to have real effects.

In Victoria, enrolments have fallen 31% since 2012, with the state losing 46,000 students last year alone. And these figures are indicative of experiences nation-wide.

People are losing faith in this bedrock institution, and it’s critical that whichever party wins the next election takes immediate steps to arrest the damage and restore the strength of the TAFE system.

Vocational training should be the engine room of our economy, and it can be that again.

Unions are committed to seeing increased investment in a TAFE system that works. We want to see the government clamp down on rorts and ineffective incentives in the private education market while moving to ensure the best possible outcomes for students.

It’s also critical that we maintain the highest quality of education staff — and this means protecting teacher’s pay and ensuring certainty around conditions and job security.

We welcome the ALP’s budget response announcement of capping VET loans for students enrolled at private education providers as a great first step. We need to see more similarly bold policies from all parties at this election.

The key question that must drive the approach to TAFE, as well as all levels of education, is what sort of Australia do we want to live in?

Do we want a government that will invest in education and training — or one that just rips money out? Do we want to see a plan for our young people’s future employment rather than $4 jobs masquerading as internships?

I think the answer is pretty clear — and certainly the conversations we are having with community members across Australia is telling us that come July 2, this is an issue that is going to be driving people’s voting decisions.

It’s high time the Government starts to take serious notice.

Ged Kearney is President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.
DR JOHN FALZON

A GOOD budget would not leave people who are unemployed or insecurely employed to wage a daily battle for survival from below the poverty line, when even the likes of the OECD and KPMG call for an increase to Newstart. It would certainly not blame or punish people for being locked out of jobs. And it certainly would not have attempted to palm off a cynical industrial relations policy dressed up as a social policy, in the form of PaTH (Prepare, Trial, Hire), a profoundly exploitative scheme that does nothing to address youth unemployment but does much to subsidise business, including by the bypassing of the minimum wage and penalty rates.

In a good Budget, the government wouldn’t just show us the colour of its money but the breadth of its vision for a fair and equitable Australia. In this year’s budget we see neither. We see no plan for jobs. Just a fervent but misguided belief that wealth will trickle down. We see a desire for innovation but no real love for education.

A good budget would have opened the doors to fair, free and well-resourced TAFE and university education pathways. It would have re-invested the $1 billion it has cut from apprentices and apprenticeship support (which is coincidentally what it is investing in PaTH!).

How can we imagine that we can be an innovative nation when we systematically undermine and dismember one of our nation’s greatest innovations, TAFE? How can we pretend that we care about pathways out of poverty, when we prefer to force people to rely on charity rather than providing access to high quality education and training? How can we pretend to care about economic efficiency when we rip the guts out of TAFE in order to please the private purveyors of commodified “education” who, in the pursuit of profit, have no qualms about preying on people experiencing poverty?

TAFE is a national treasure, not least of all because, when properly resourced and protected, it has the capacity to significantly address both the structural causes and the symptoms of inequality in prosperous Australia.

A good Budget would reduce, rather than entrench, inequality. For a failure to fight inequality is a failure to govern.

The role of government is to redistribute resources for the benefit of the many instead of doggedly defending the privileges of the few. We can ignore the deepening rupture in the economy. We can blame people for being locked out of the jobs. We can even pretend that they will get a job if we put the boot into them. But if we are serious about fixing the problem; if we actually want to heal the rupture in society; we would invest in a jobs plan instead of a putting-the-boot-into-the-unemployed plan or a ripping-into-penalty-rates-and-the-minimum-wage-plan. We would increase the unemployment benefit because living below the poverty line does not help people into a job. We would follow through on the Gonski reforms because no child should be denied the best education resources. And we wouldn’t close the door on a fair crack at happiness for young people by undermining TAFE or making university unaffordable.

Budget 2016, with its crumbs from the table for the essentials of life, will increase the need for ordinary people, good people, to rely on charity. And we will be there. But make no mistake. It is not charity that people wish to rely on. It is fairness they want to count on. And this budget fails to give them that.

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Dr John Falzon is the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.
SENATOR SCOTT RYAN

N March, I was pleased to accept an invitation to speak at the AEU National TAFE Council AGM in Melbourne.

In my address, I outlined the Turnbull Coalition Government’s commitment to vocational education and training (VET), including TAFE, emphasising our strong support for the sector.

This year, under the Turnbull Coalition Government, $7 billion will be directed to VET, to support students from pre-apprentice to advanced diploma level. Of this, $1.8 billion has been directed to the states and territories to support the operation of their training systems, including TAFE.

While the Commonwealth is a major VET funder, it does not own a single TAFE. That is a key role and responsibility of state and territory governments — and rightly so.

There are areas where the Commonwealth can assist, and indeed, under the Coalition, lead, when it comes to VET. These areas include improving coordination and cutting red tape so that training providers and employers can more easily operate across state borders, and bringing industry and educators together to ensure training is working to meet its objectives — getting students into real work.

One area where the Commonwealth has a direct role is the VET FEE-HELP scheme. Over the life of the expanded VET FEE-HELP scheme, TAFEs have benefited from more than $1 billion.

However, it is obvious to all that there are significant and fundamental flaws in the VET FEE-HELP scheme as a direct consequence of its expansion under the previous Labor government.

It is sadly all too obvious that the previous Labor government did not put sufficient safeguards in place when the VET FEE-HELP scheme was expanded in 2012. Students, training institutions and taxpayers have borne an unacceptable cost for this failure.

However, Labor continues to take the same approach to VET that will see the mistakes of 2012 repeated.

We know that Labor’s proposed review of VET will see no reform to the sector for a minimum of two years, and potentially longer.

Labor’s $8000 VET FEE-HELP cap was announced without consultation with the sector, including TAFE. This is yet another knee-jerk reaction to their VET FEE-HELP mess and will see some students, enrolled through both TAFE and private providers, pay up-front fees for their diploma or advanced diploma.

Labor’s approach to VET is unacceptable, it is ill thought out and does not have the best interest of students at heart.

Only a re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government will redesign VET FEE-HELP for 2017 to better serve the interests of students and taxpayers.

The Coalition has made it clear that reform is needed now to best serve students. I have led a series of consultations around the country and was pleased that many TAFE representatives attended.

These consultations informed the Redesigning VET FEE-HELP Discussion Paper, which is open for public comment until 30 June 2016. I have encouraged everyone with an interest to work with the Turnbull Coalition as we build a better system that delivers the best outcomes for students, VET providers, taxpayers and Australia.

The Coalition is committed to a strong and diverse VET sector that achieves quality outcomes for students and industry.

Our commitment is to students, the students who choose VET pathways to find employment, start businesses and train the next generation of employees. And under a re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government that commitment will continue.

Senator Scott Ryan is Minister for Vocational Education and Skills

THE HON. SHARON BIRD, MP

The future of TAFE is a critical issue for Labor in this federal election campaign. Labor has always been the party of TAFE.

Last year, on National TAFE Day, Labor Leader Bill Shorten and I announced Labor’s plan to back TAFE into the future. A Shorten Government will develop a comprehensive National Priority Plan that will, for the first time, define the unique role of TAFE as our public provider and deliver on this by working with the states and territories to provide ongoing guaranteed TAFE funding.

Labor is determined that TAFE must remain an essential part of Australia’s skills and training sector as it plays a vital role in servicing our regions, industries in transition and disadvantaged groups.

You can’t talk about jobs and growth without a commitment to vocational education and training and it is absolutely critical that we invest in our public TAFE sector.

There are challenges in the way the vocational educational sector is funded which has led to the decline of the TAFE sector nationally. Bill Shorten has made it clear that there has been a failure in the market as we have seen the proliferation of opportunistic and sub-standard training providers costing the taxpayers and students millions of dollars.

This needs to stop.

Vocational students need to have access to good quality training but we need a better system in place to ensure TAFE’s viability and strength into the future. The fundamentals of an effective market are clearly missing and no amount of regulation, as important as it is, will change this. Labor believes the market must find stability through a predominant public provider, complemented by a quality private sector.
political parties to put forward their vision for TAFE. These are the contributions we received.

Under Labor’s plan for TAFE, a Shorten Labor Government will work with Premiers and Chief Ministers on a comprehensive National Priority Plan that defines the unique role of TAFE and places it squarely as the public provider within the VET sector – as the cornerstone of our economy’s need to train and retrain its workforce and to deliver on improving the participation, productivity, innovation and growth efforts required for the nation.

We will work with the states and territories to rebalance the contestable and non-contestable funding model to ensure it delivers the outcomes that are intended. In his Budget Reply Speech Bill Shorten stated: “Labor will make training and skills a national priority.

• Creating jobs in our regions;
• Re-training adult workers; and
• Helping modernise our industries and technologies.

And tonight, I declare the pendulum has swung too far to private providers – Labor will be backing public TAFE.

We will restore integrity to the training system, by cleaning out the dodgy private colleges who have been ripping Australians off for too long.”

The Abbott/Turnbull Government has been silent on any commitment to TAFE. Their leaked COAG document at the end of last year proposed a federal takeover model that repeated all the problems of the Victorian sector under the previous State Liberal Government. This would be a disaster.

In comparison, Labor is firmly committed to a strong TAFE sector.

We understand how critically important TAFE is to so many students, communities, industries and businesses. It is a national asset and we must work across all levels of government to ensure its future.

The Hon. Sharon Bird MP is Shadow Minister for Vocational Education

SENATOR ROBERT SIMMS

TAFE is a critical part of the Australian education system with more than a million students enrolled across hundreds of campuses throughout the country. From the desert town of Coober Pedy to Thursday Island in far North Queensland off the Cape York Peninsula, TAFE provides an invaluable opportunity for Australians to further their education and increase their skills in the workforce. TAFE has been a leading provider of vocational education and training for more than a century and the Greens understand that we must have a well-funded TAFE system to continue to provide these opportunities for Australians into the future.

Students shouldn’t be penalised for the poor policy decisions of the Liberal and Labor parties which have led to the government writing off billions of taxpayer dollars due to bad debts associated with the for-profit VET sector. Everyone agrees the current for-profit model is broken. It is time to start looking for genuine solutions, rather than lumping more debt on students who are already under immense cost of living pressures.

The Australian Greens are urging the government to scrap using taxpayer money on the broken for-profit VET sector rather than trying to protect their image with Band-Aid solutions.

The government must go further than banning training colleges from telling students they could access the taxpayer-funded VET FEE-HELP scheme. The ALP’s counter offer of capping the government-funded component of for-profit VET courses at $8000 fails to show leadership on this issue. To have a real effect on the education outcomes of students and the budget bottom line, drastic change needs to occur.

Under The Greens proposal, the government would stop pouring money into the for-profit VET sector that rips off a third of students who, according to the Education Department, will not finish their studies and be left with massive debts. This funding belongs in the TAFE sector.

While reforms passed by the Parliament last year provide some safeguards, the for-profit model will never guarantee high quality courses for students. It needs to go further. TAFE institutions around the country are vital in providing people with access to tertiary education, a pathway to a career change or a specialist course in a field they are passionate about.

The for-profit VET sector has been a complete mess and we need to provide TAFE with the funding it needs to remain a high quality provider of vocational education for students.

The challenges currently faced by TAFE are unprecedented. The slash and burn approach by the government along with commercialising the sector has forced down TAFE’s market share of VET students, plunging from 74% a decade ago to 52% in 2014. Not only have these changes reduced the number of students attending TAFE but it has resulted in fees skyrocketing and campuses being forced to abandon many courses deemed unsuitable due to this commercialised approach. Where previously a loan would not be necessary to attend TAFE we are now finding students forced to take out a HELP loan just to further their education.

Whilst these are huge challenges facing the sector the Greens believe this presents an opportunity to set things right. An opportunity to reform the sector, so it is designed to provide high quality affordable and accessible education for all Australians.

Senator Robert Simms is the Australian Greens’ spokesperson for Higher Education.
BRINGING TAFE TO ITS KNEES

A short history of recent Australian VET
The 1970s and 1980s were a golden era for Australian VET. For the first time a Commonwealth government committed itself to properly fund and expand Australia’s VET system.

Technical education, after languishing for more than a century as the Cinderella of the education system, was thereby given a new identity as Technical and Further Education (TAFE), along with a greatly enhanced mandate and role.

After a period as a TAFE teacher, I became heavily involved in TAFE teacher education from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. This included frequent visits to many TAFE classes. My most lasting impression from these experiences was the powerful educational motivations displayed by teachers at all levels. They took evident pride in their skills and exhibited a strong commitment to develop and nurture these skills in their students. This era also saw the implementation of teaching qualifications for all full time TAFE teachers, comparable to school teaching qualifications. At the same time there was significant growth in TAFE, both in student numbers and in the range of its course offerings.

However, since the 1990s the fortunes of TAFE have continued to decline significantly. Misguided efforts by governments of all persuasions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of skills development in Australia have led to a significant running down of TAFE, balanced by unprecedented growth of private colleges. The net result of these changes has been a marked impoverishment of skill formation arrangements in Australia.

The gradual dismantling of TAFE was brought about by successive governments from the 1990s onwards. The centre-piece of these failed policies was the adoption of competency-based training (CBT) for all VET courses, whether offered by TAFE or through private provision. This initiative was widely supported at the time by diverse stakeholders because it was believed to be the key to the economic success of the Scandinavian countries.

Unfortunately, CBT as it was widely adopted in Australia centred on a very narrow understanding of competence, one that assumed that the practice of the occupation is reducible to a set of discrete competencies. Once trainees had demonstrated satisfactory performance of each of these competencies, they were to be deemed to be competent practitioners. Too often assessment of competence became mere ticking off of a checklist of discrete competencies.

However, this approach to judging competence is invalid. It represents skilled performance in an overly simplistic way. Here, the sum of the discrete parts does not in itself constitute the whole. As well any convincing account of skilled performance requires a degree of holism, as the following everyday example illustrates. Consider what is necessary for skilled driving of a motor vehicle. We can easily identify a set of discrete skills (starting the ignition, making a 90 degree right turn, applying the foot brake, etc.). Suppose that we had identified a complete list of motor vehicle driving skills, (say sixty of them).

Suppose further that a learner demonstrated that they could perform each of these sixty discrete skills. Would it follow that they should certify them as a skilled driver? Clearly not – skillful driving involves more than being adept at each of these discrete skills. There is no contradiction in the claim that someone is adept at each of these discrete skills, yet is still a very poor driver. Skillful driving involves something more; the capacity to enact a holistic driving performance that matches the particular road and traffic conditions and many other circumstances that obtain at a particular time. So the real skill of driving resides not so much in having the discrete skills as in the capacity to put them together in effective combinations that meet present conditions.

This holistic capacity is underpinned by less tangible ‘competencies’ such as perceptual discrimination, persistence, attention to detail, planning ahead, judgement, etc.

Thus, genuine competence incorporates a vital holistic dimension that eludes CBT checklists. No doubt there are many able VET teachers who understand these matters and incorporate them into their teaching, whilst at the same time paying lip service to the prescribed CBT framework. However, the system as a whole continues to present the flawed CBT approach as the model of sound vocational preparation. This has led to the present dire situation of VET in Australia which features widespread low quality training delivery, along with increasing instances of malpractice and fraud.

The anti-educational tendencies of the CBT approach have only been amplified since the 1990s by policies designed to greatly expand the private provision of VET. Whilst there are doubtless private providers who are motivated to deliver quality VET courses, they are also constrained by the need to ensure a profit.

As governments have increasingly allocated VET funds via competitive tendering between TAFE and private providers, the pressure to resort to minimalist CBT has only intensified. Even providers motivated by strong educational considerations have been squeezed into lowering their aspirations. At the same time governments have greatly increased the cost of VET qualifications and instituted a system of repayable loans to encourage student demand. This has led to a flood of unethical and fraudulent activities in the VET sector.

The last year alone has seen a growing number of large private VET providers going into receivership after having absorbed significant public funds, yet leaving their students without the contracted training. There have been many instances of unethical and fraudulent student recruitment practices, for example using the inducement of a ‘free laptop’ to pressure naive would be students to sign up for a course whilst incurring an accompanying large debt.

There have also been many instances of poor training or even non-existent training. Whole cohorts of ‘graduates’ have had their qualifications revoked,
as the flimsiness of the training that they received has come to light. Courses supposed to have been delivered by on-the-job training have turned out to involve minimal training, with the trainees instead being used as cheap labour.

All these failings are highly predictable in a system that encourages would-be entrepreneurs to set up private colleges, not from any commitment to skills formation, but rather to gain their share of the VET ‘cash cow’.

In short, using the profit motive to drive VET provision has proved to be very short-sighted in relation to quality skills formation. The mantra of successive governments at both the Federal and state levels has been the reform of VET to prepare Australia for a high skills future. It is ironic then that reliance on a Fordist factory CBT approach to achieve this worthy aim has only produced the exact opposite.

In contrast to this gloomy depiction of VET, it is worth noting that since the 1990s most Australian professions have also adopted a competence system, but one that is very different from CBT – one that might be called ‘competence-informed professional education’.

Here the competence statements, which attempt a rich description of key aspects of professional practice, are employed holistically. This plays out in several distinctive ways. One is that any slice of actual professional practice will simultaneously involve several of these key aspects. Thus assessment activities must focus on selected slices of actual practice, rather than on the key aspects of professional practice taken one by one. Another is that the competence statements are not to be confused with a curriculum, as too often happens in CBT.

Further, it is stressed that professional practice is a whole that cannot be captured comprehensively in the competency statements. For example, competency statements cannot account for crucial tacit aspects of practice. Nevertheless this integrated competency approach has proved to be a very useful tool for enriching understanding of the holistic nature of actual practice situations. It provides very useful input into a variety of activities for which professional boards and associations are responsible, such as judging applications from prospective

Courses supposed to have been delivered by on-the-job training have turned out to involve minimal training, with the trainees instead being used as cheap labour.

migrants to practice in Australia, accrediting tertiary courses, designing refresher courses for professionals returning to practice after years of absence, and so on.

Significantly, this holistic approach to professional competence accords closely with research findings on workplace learning and professional practice. Perhaps the major principle established by workplace learning research is that proficient performance in occupations that are even moderately complex involves seamless know how, the development of which requires significant workplace experience. This means that highly skilled performance cannot be produced by formal education alone. This is so because the nature of practice-based know how is that it is often imprecise, implicit in character and contextualized. It is therefore very difficult – in some cases quite impossible – to explain it in abstract, theoretical terms.

As well, for many occupations in recent decades, changes in technology and advances in knowledge have outstripped the capacity of formal courses to keep up-to-date. This has meant that ongoing learning, much of it from actual practice, is needed even by experienced practitioners simply to maintain their proficiency. The moral of these findings is that workplace know how, i.e. the capacity to make sound occupational judgements, is always in the making. It is an ongoing process.

What do these findings suggest for contemporary VET systems? Firstly, completion of a vocational preparation course should be presented as starting novices on an ongoing learning journey, not as achieving fully-fledged competence. The major purpose of VET should be to assist students to embark on a fruitful learning trajectory. The importance of occupational know how, or professional judgement, as an ongoing work-in-progress should be a standard focal point of VET curricula.

Unfortunately the rising costs of Australian VET courses, together with the growing trend for students to be bound by repayable loans, only encourages providers to ‘sell’ their products as gold-plated guarantees of competence.

Whilst it is desirable that VET courses include learning experiences that approximate real workplace conditions, they cannot fully replicate the specifics of actual workplace situations. However, where possible links between VET course experiences and workplace conditions should be fostered.

The above points may appear familiar as they are broadly consistent with how well-structured and delivered apprenticeships have traditionally operated. But they are less in accord with the many kinds of other course patterns that have emerged as VET has expanded over the last century.

All in all, skills development in Australia has a very long way to go if it is ever to approach the best international standards such as those that obtain in Germany.

Paul Hager is Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Technology Sydney
IAN CURRY

In the face of the entrenched neo-liberalism that abounds across the commonwealth, the states and the territories, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) must continue to find opportunities to pursue our common interests. We must work together to maintain our jobs, our TAFEs and secure a better future.

The prevailing political mantra is still that, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, somehow ‘the market will provide’!

In some cases that mantra is a reflection of a deep seated ideological view, but sadly, in many other cases it is simply the result of lazy, self-interested political careerism.

Careerism that puts at risk our nation’s prosperity, destroys the aspirations of coming generations, whilst simultaneously and cruelly undermining the prospects of those that are being displaced and discarded by successive free trade agreements.

By lazy, I mean the incredibly destructive practice of state governments finding more and more incomprehensible ways to manage short term training budgets based on the electoral cycle, rather than managing efficient education, training and skilling systems designed and resourced to produce the well-rounded, literate, numerate, innovative skilled workers and citizens our society demands.

The AMWU represents manufacturing workers, who, more than many others, rely on the quality and portability of their skills, and on the opportunity to exercise those skills, for their livelihood.

It’s hardly surprising that the long term survival and prosperity of the industries that employ our members, as well as the structures that underpin the delivery, the recognition and credentialing of skills are of critical importance to them.

Education and training, in our view, have been, are, and will remain central to the future of manufacturing.

They have been, are, and will remain central to the future of our country as a whole.

Skills matter, and TAFE is the brand that manufacturing workers trust to deliver them. We have seen ongoing catastrophic refinements in the free market and contestability obsession so dearly loved by conservatives. These “refine-
For example, I recently received correspondence from Tracy:

My name is Tracy. My son, Daniel, is 28 and is on a Disability Pension.

He has High Functioning Autism (Aspergers), Attention Deficit Impulsive Disorder, as well as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Daniel was approached at Stocklands shopping centre in Townsville, by a broker representing a private for-profit training College. He told the recruiter he enjoyed computer gaming and was encouraged to enrol in a Diploma of Interactive Games and Development.

He was told that he would get a free Alienware gaming laptop valued at over $4,000, as well as $1,000 worth of software if he enrolled, and at the end of the course, the laptop was his to keep.

He was told that the fees for the course would be “paid by the Government’s VET FEE Help, and he wouldn’t have to pay anything back unless he was earning over $50,000 a year” and that the course was easy and he wouldn’t have any trouble completing it.

He signed up online.

Everything was ok at the start, Dan was doing the course and he was ahead with his assignments. But then the work became harder.

He sent messages to his nominated tutor to get help via Skype. His tutor gave him appointment times to contact him, but when Daniel tried to contact him at the prearranged times, the call rang out and was never answered.

This happened numerous times. Daniel ended up contacting his 2nd tutor who said he’d arrange for the main tutor to be on Skype at a certain time. The subsequent calls kept ringing out.

After much frustration, Daniel was put onto a third tutor who helped him with one of his assignments, then passed him back over to his previous tutors.

The no shows on Skype continued and Daniel became further frustrated and began phoning the College.

The College wouldn’t call him back and neither would the Student Representative.

Daniel ended up quitting. Due to the lack of support from the tutors, he couldn’t simply complete his assignments to complete the course.

Daniel still has the laptop. We don’t know whether the cost of the laptop has been added to his VET-FEE-HELP debt, and Daniel still doesn’t know the extent of the debt that he has amassed under the program.
to restore fairness, decency and opportunity to Australian workers and their families.

We have lost none of our drive to secure decent jobs for Australians.

**High skill, high wage jobs!**

*We recognise that we simply cannot achieve our objectives without the contribution that committed AEU members make to the education and skilling of the Australian community in general, and to our members specifically.*

That’s why the defence of a fair, open, well-resourced public education and training system is core business for manufacturing workers. The jobs that manufacturing workers will work in will be much more sophisticated and knowledge intensive than those we know today.

Disruption and technology convergence means that certainty in skills will be a major risk in realizing the potential that Australia’s manufacturing industries have, and yet we still have governments that repeatedly underestimate what it takes to produce skilled workers, which as we know is code for ‘we want to make it cheaper’.

In response to that we say:

**Good work ain’t cheap, and cheap work ain’t good!**

It is likely now that at least some of the shipbuilding and submarine manufacturing will take place on-shore in Australia rather than in Japan as Abbott appears to have promised the Japanese as he desperately pursued a free trade agreement.

We met with one of the biggest naval ship building companies in the United States down at the TechPort facility in Adelaide last week.

Unlike most of the international delegations that hunt us down now that our campaigning is starting to pay dividends, they weren’t here lobbying for the union’s support to secure engineering work associated with the submarine or warship programs, they were here offering their 130 years of experience in managing skilling programs for naval warship manufacturing.

It was refreshing to hear of an organisation for whom through-life development and maintenance of skills and capability was considered to be their competitive advantage. They spoke to us about their pride in the fact that over 6,000 of their 35,000+ strong workforce had been with them for over 35 years. But not because they loved them!

They suffer the same ‘Valley of Death’ that we do, but they have done the math’s on what it costs to retain the capability that the core of a skilled workforce represents, compared with callously ditching them at the first opportunity, as so many Australian companies do, and hoping you can get them back when the work picks up.

They clearly understand how vulnerable Australia is right now when it comes to skilling, and have spotted an opportunity.

We understand how vulnerable we are too.

We have restructured internal resources and are setting out to ramp up our industrial bargaining around skills, much as we did in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.

But the environment in which we operate is much different now.

But, as it was back in the 80’s & 90’s, for manufacturing workers, TAFE is a trusted brand.

We want to work closely with the AEU and TAFE on our quest to ‘reclaim our space’!

‘Reclaiming our Space’ is the title of the AMWU’s 3-5 year plan designed to counter the fragmentation of the National Training System, the attacks on TAFE, and to rebuild our bargaining power.

Essentially it is based on one of the objectives of our 1980’s strategy which set out to position skills formation at the centre of industrial relations.

We wanted the skills and capability of our members to be the new industrial currency.

Sadly back then the emergence of Enterprise Bargaining in the early 90’s cost us some critical momentum before we could consolidate enough of the fundamentals to get us where we wanted to be.

We think that, in the environment we are in today, our strategy from the 1980s, based on skills and capability being the new industrial currency represents unfinished business.

We want skills and capability to be front and centre in our bargaining and organising going forward, and to that end, we are looking to significantly ramp up our relationship with the AEU and TAFE and secure our future by using our collective agreements to embed key skills, training and apprenticeship provisions that can drive apprentice training plans, preferred pathways to higher level qualifications, as well as assessment methodologies which we would like to work with the AEU and TAFE to establish.

The central theme we are looking to consolidate is a mandated role for TAFE in the delivery and assessment landscape of manufacturing.

Ultimately we want to reclaim our space and we are keen to work with the TAFE workforce and the AEU to see if we can stem the tide and restore decent union values, equity in employment opportunity, and rebuilding our sense of collective and progressive responsibility.

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Ian Curry is National Coordinator, Skills Training & Apprenticeships
Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union
Education is provided in NSW gaols by permanent, publicly-employed Senior Education Officers, Education Officers and Teachers. A broad adult education curriculum offers accredited courses in some basic subjects to inmates, such as Literacy & Numeracy, English as a Second Language and Information Technology. Some gaols also offer courses and classes in Art, Music, Horticulture, Koori education and Small Business.

**STEWART BURKITT**

**VOCATIONAL** education and training is generally supplied by means of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with TAFE and covers employment-related courses in areas like hospitality, warehouse operations, horticulture, construction, food processing and other work ready courses – usually to complement prison industries and to allow inmates to gain qualifications in industries where they work while incarcerated. There are also courses for forklift training, WHS for the construction industry, electrical testing, tree pruning and other employability skills.

Distance education is facilitated and tutorial support provided by education staff for those approved to study externally.

Education staff also run and operate the prison libraries and have facilitated access to legal resources – both statutory obligations within the prison system.

There are approximately 160 staff currently employed across NSW prisons, with extensive experience in what is a unique and volatile environment.

**Education in prisons**

Overwhelming research demonstrates that prisoners who engage with adult education have a reduced level of re-offending, in the order of 15%. Education provision by highly-qualified staff (all NSW prison teachers have Degrees in Adult Education) is crucial to meet Corrective Services stated aim of reducing re-offending. This is especially important with a ballooning prison population currently over 12,500 and rising and a recidivism rate of more than 40%.

Quality adult education is critical for:

- **Prisoners** — improves their knowledge, skills and capacity.
- **Prisons** — reduces tension and assists with a safer environment by providing productive way to spend gaol time.
- **Community** — provides economic benefits by avoiding further...
contact with the justice system and contributes to a safer society by releasing prisoners with skills and qualifications to adapt and a chance to embark upon a more productive life on the outside.

Permanent prison educators, due to their ability to re-schedule classes when required and being onsite; have the flexibility to continue to deliver courses, classes and education and employment counselling, despite centre lockdowns, Wing closures and Education Unit closures.

Prison educators are also heavily involved in case management processes along with custodial and other civilian staff, and their value lies in their experience within the prison system.

Our students
According to literacy and numeracy assessments, approximately two thirds of prisoners in NSW gaols are at or below Certificate II level in the ASQA framework and are therefore below a functional level of Language, Literacy and Numeracy. Many have had disrupted or unsatisfactory educational backgrounds and have either dropped out of school or been excluded.

In addition a large number of prisoners have high levels of mental health issues, addiction histories, intellectual or learning disabilities and antisocial histories and attitudes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent almost 30% of the NSW gaol population. Despite the recommendations from the Indigenous Deaths in Custody Report it appears that there are no plans for provision for this population.

The education review
This review, first floated three years ago, was originally stated to be concerned with the efficient allocation of resources around NSW. There was a pledge made that there would be no overall loss of education positions.

Despite many offers and suggestions of professional adult educator expertise from the Corrective Services Teachers Association, to assist with the Review, no such involvement was ever allowed.

During Joint Consultative Committee meetings, in response to union concerns, we were assured that the review team would be made up of educators from the wider community.

The last comments on this from the Assistant Commissioner were that the review team would be made up of accountants and consultants who had experience in education reviews. That is, as we discovered, people who had experience in attacking public education provision in other contexts.

The attack on prison education in NSW
Proposals submitted by KPMG, supported by the Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (the internal RTO responsible for education in NSW gaols) and now approved by the Minister – mandate the sacking of all teachers in NSW gaols (except for 16 in Intensive Learning Centres at four gaols) and the downgrading of Senior Education Officers and Education Officers, with a resulting pay cut.

... the review team would be made up of accountants and consultants who had experience in education reviews. That is, as we discovered, people who had experience in attacking public education provision in other contexts.

The Commissioner in an address to all staff, described the current education staff as 'lacking expertise'. The solution, apparently is to dispense with qualified, experienced teachers and hire (presumably on contracts for sessional work) under-qualified and inexperienced trainers.

Statistics cited, obtained through a failed data system, are at best misleading and at worst a deliberate attempt to distort the actual nature of what is occurring within our education settings.

The privatisation of education often leads to payment by results with the threat to the integrity of provision and qualifications. The disastrous situation in the adult education and VET sector that has unfolded over the last few years has clearly demonstrated that education for profit and quality education are mutually exclusive concepts.

The Universities and Colleges Union in the UK, which covers members in the UK prison system, cites the ample evidence of harm done to quality provision and any sense of continuity by the ongoing competitive tendering and changes in providers.

Compared to other jurisdictions across Australia, NSW is taking a leap into the dark with its proposals. All other states, with the exception of Queensland, provide education either by permanently employed departmental workers or by TAFE (or in Northern Territory by the university sector).

Campaign
The Corrective Services Teachers Association and the New South Wales Teachers Federation completely rejects this attack on quality public education provision in NSW gaols, which caters for some of the most disadvantaged members of society.

Prisoners in NSW gaols will be unable to access a quality adult education curriculum, including language, literacy and numeracy courses — taught by qualified, experienced adult educators.

The ideological motive behind these proposals is clear. The aim is to replace permanent, experienced, qualified staff with low-paid, under-qualified trainers. None of this will be a surprise to our colleagues in TAFE who have been experiencing this race to the bottom for a number of years. It is a critical component of the objective to downgrade adult education, to in fact remove education from the equation and to entrench ‘training’ as the only model worth government support.

The insults to the staff, made both by the Commissioner and the Assistant-Commissioner are unacceptable and false, and resulting sackings will further exacerbate the employment situation, especially in the regional areas where a large number of gaols are located.

At a mass meeting, addressed by NSW Teachers Federation President Maurie Mulheron, prison educators passed a resolution “condemning the Baird Government’s decision to tender to external training providers the public education services in NSW gaols”.

We will continue to campaign under the Education Beats Crime banner by coordinated political, industrial and community action.  ●

Stewart Burkitt is a Correctional Education Officer and member of the NSW Teachers Federation.
Austerity budgets and the drive for mechanical efficiency (‘more bang for your buck’); along with an environment in which staff are viewed as self-serving, are having detrimental effects on New Zealand’s vocational education and training system.

We need to unpack each of these elements to understand the long-term damage that they are doing to education in New Zealand.

The foundations of tertiary education in New Zealand sit in public investment in public institutions, though this investment has shrunk over the last eight years. Cuts by the current National-led government have resulted in the tertiary education budget dropping from $4.6 billion in 2009 to $4.2 billion this year.

The solutions to the shortfall are familiar to those in other English-speaking further education systems: find money from private sources (business and international students) and cut staff costs (through casualisation, increasing workloads, and de-unionising).

The government also plans to increase competition by allowing public money to go to private training establishments.

When the current National-led government came into office, public money went to public institutions. Last year, all of the money for lower level qualifications (Level 1 and 2 qualifications) was opened to competitive tendering from both public and private providers.

The result; in 2013-14 around $21.5 million went to polytechnics, $18.5 million to wānanga (Māori training establishments) and just over $13.5 million to private training providers.

Added to this, in the drive for efficiency public institutions are carving off tasks and contracting to the private sector; their assumption being that private providers will do things more cheaply and efficiently.

An example is the decision to contract out student support services at an Auckland polytechnic, taking 60 staff out of the public sector and union jobs into a call centre run by a private company less than enamoured with unions. Now a private company is taking taxpayer money to make a profit with little accountability back to the community.

The government’s focus on mechanical efficiency has also led to both funding and students being funnelled away from ‘low value courses’.

The Ministry of Education (2001: 11) noted it was important to ensure it was “redirecting government expenditure away from low value spending, such as adult and community education courses for personal interest, towards higher value spending, such as degree level study.”

It is not that the government dislikes vocational training it is just that it wants people to train to wear blue surgical gowns, not blue overalls; and to do degrees, not certificates.

No government should design its tertiary education system based on what jobs pay in a free market. We know that female-dominated professions are underpaid. We know that class-based prejudices lead to an under-valuing of manual work. We should not devalue vocational education and training because the market place has devalued the jobs vocational education and training students get during their lifetimes.

Even our institutions are voicing this narrative. In a competitive environment it is well worth Universities NZ (the lobby for the nation’s eight universities) pointing out to young New Zealanders “the value of investing in a degree, with a typical graduate earning around $1.6 million more over their working life than a non-graduate.”

Lobbying by university bosses means they have not suffered funding cuts quite in the way vocational education and training have.

To improve performance in tertiary education the government has also ramped
up its collection of metrics to allow it to manage ‘underperforming’ providers and to provide incentives for institutions to manage ‘underperforming’ staff. This low trust approach to the governance and management of tertiary education is one in which staff are characterised as self-serving and resistant to change.

Academic leaders manage their institutions to meet Education Performance Indicators set by government around completions, retentions, and progression. These help the government measure how much education contributes to economic growth.

The results push staff to meet targets. As one polytechnic academic commented to the TEU: “These government funding policy decisions about completions lead institutions to make a rational response; to prioritise passing students at all costs. One staff member - who was being forced to pass sub-standard work - left.”

When you are a meeting targets set by government there is little room for collegial decision-making. In a survey of nearly 3,000 staff from across the tertiary education sector staff consistently cite the ”insufficient staff involvement in decision making” (Bentley, McLeod and Teo 2014:3). When you are a meeting targets set by government there is little room for collegial decision-making. In a survey of nearly 3,000 staff from across the tertiary education sector staff consistently cite the “insufficient staff involvement in decision making” (Bentley, McLeod and Teo 2014:3).

The building of a new trades space at a North Island polytechnic is a clear example of how disconnected decision-making is from the staff in labs, lecture spaces, and workshops.

At the polytechnic in question trades tutors expressed concerns about the open-plan workshop being built and the high-tech classrooms. But the building went ahead despite their warnings. And now students have laid health and safety complaints about the dangers of working in the cramped, multi-million dollar building.

This is an example where the professional knowledge of tutors in a polytechnic was dismissed. There are many like this. Over an eight-year period, the government has moved the purpose of vocational education from serving communities to serving the economy. To ensure this occurs, decision-making is not left to trusted professionals, rather it is done through performance management in which staff are enticed or cajoled into meeting government targets.

We should not devalue vocational education and training because the market place has devalued the jobs vocational education and training students get during their lifetimes.

While the current destination is currently a long way from where the TAFE sector is, the road to privatisation is certainly under our feet. The question is what do we do about it?

Well the government has launched a Productivity Commission inquiry into ‘New models of tertiary education’ aimed at overcoming the inertia in the sector and making it responsive to new technologies, globalisation, changing needs of students and employers.

The chief executives and other senior managers in our sector have responded by meeting the targets set by government and avoiding rocking the boat.

Most students are responding as consumers, demanding value for the money they pay through student fees and service levies. When student debt is $15 billion who can blame students (NZUSA, 2016)? And staff? Well, most are keeping their heads down just trying to get through the increased workloads that have come because of the drive for efficiency.

It is the unionised staff and some student activists who are moving to demand a better future (NZUSA) and to reclaim public tertiary education (Te Kaupapa Whaioranga, 2013).

The question is, can we restore the purpose of polytechnics to one which meets the needs of communities – including employers, but not exclusively – and trains life-long learners, not just workers with just-in-time skills?

Let us hope so, as the destination of the current road, the place TAFEs find themselves in is not an enviable place to be.

Dr Sandra Grey is National President of the Aotearoa New Zealand Tertiary Education Union

We should not devalue vocational education and training because the market place has devalued the jobs vocational education and training students get during their lifetimes.

References

PREPARING school students for adulthood and for the world of employment is an increasing policy focus in Australia and internationally. Supporting young people preparing for work, while they are still at school, is a complex task and schools cannot do it in isolation. Since the early 1990s, when Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs were introduced into Australian secondary schools, the growth of partnerships between schools, TAFEs, workplaces and community organisations has been unprecedented. The majority of secondary schools form partnerships with a number of organisations, ranging from other education and training providers to community groups, businesses and associations to support attainment, qualifications and pathways to work. Over the last three years, I have undertaken research in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia to explore how schools manage these partnerships and consider the benefits for students. From my conversations with more than fifty secondary school students and a number of school principals, VET coordinators and VET teachers, my observation is that this is a complex and challenging task. Some schools are more successful than others. Most importantly though, these partnerships should be benefiting students. So, what do the effective partnerships look like? And how challenging are partnerships for schools?
What are the most important partnerships for schools?

In 2014 there were almost 250,000 VET in Schools students in Australia with the majority of them supported by a partnership between their school and other organisations (through training delivery and work-placements). The major partners, in terms of numbers involved, are VET programs providers – TAFEs and private RTOs – as well as local businesses. These partnerships play an important role in providing technical skills, technical expertise and infrastructure enabling students to achieve better educational outcomes. Local businesses are the largest non-educational partners involved with schools. The majority of them are involved as work-placement providers for compulsory structured work-placements.

What are the benefits for students?

Building partnerships for VET delivery requires significant time and effort on behalf of schools, however schools recognise that these partnerships provide a number of benefits to VET students. In response to the growing demand and complexity of these partnerships, schools are learning how to manage and how to increase the number of partners they link up with to deliver a very broad spectrum of qualifications with hundreds of programs available on a ‘choice’ basis. This strategy provides access to a variety of hands-on skills and is shown to increase student engagement and retention in the senior years of schooling.

Employability skills are one of the most important benefits students gain through partnerships between schools and organisations. Structured work-placements, in particular, influence students’ employment outcomes post-school. These young people get a ‘head start’ in their selected industry or a taste for different industries, which enables them to make more informed career choices. The secondary school students I spoke with generally have a very positive view of work-placements and work in diverse areas: music studios, trades, early learning centres, manufacturing, cafes, pharmacies, accounting firms, libraries, farms and building sites. The overwhelming majority of students I talked to loved their work-placements. They valued the opportunity to learn new skills and develop knowledge about workplaces.

For students from regional areas and those with lower social capital, access to workplace learning at school helps ameliorate the effects of disadvantage, especially when workplace mentoring is provided. Furthermore, some students consider a vocational pathway to be superior to the general curriculum pathway for several reasons: it encourages them to think about what they want to do after they leave school; it enables them to be employed full time when they leave school; and it provides them with work experience and qualifications. Students also appreciate the adult learning environment they experience in TAFEs, which makes them feel more mature and behave responsibly.

Focusing on employability outcomes of VET students as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of these partnerships does not give full credit to other important benefits resulting from these partnerships. Self-esteem, confidence, informed career choices, increased engagement and ability to manage different demands of schools and external learning environments play an important role in strengthening the youth transitions from education to work. For students who have traditionally not been successful at school the applied learning and work-placement re-engages them with learning and school.

What are the main challenges for schools?

For partnerships to be effective and beneficial for students many factors need to be considered. It is clear from our research that some schools have found it challenging to form meaningful partnerships and to interact effectively with a diverse range of employers, community groups and government agencies. The growing demand from students for access to a broad range of VET qualifications puts significant pressure on schools in terms of coordination and monitoring of external learning. The main concerns raised by the schools I visited relate to the quality of delivery, frequent staff turnover in RTOs and TAFEs and a lack of established and formalised communication channels so the schools can monitor the progress of each student. Schools also struggle with finding appropriate and relevant work-placements for all the students. On many occasions students are made individually responsible for finding an industry partner. This is acutely felt in rural and regional locations with limited number of industry partners.

Many schools create databases of current employers or even establish formal industry school boards to assist in planning and designing vocational courses and training. To support these processes schools create industry and work-placement coordinator positions which require new skills, including knowledge of local industry, networking and negotiating skills. Schools emphasise that limited human and financial resources remain the biggest barriers. Even under the most favourable conditions, aspects of the current system’s weaknesses undermine the positive impact of these partnerships. These include inconsistent funding arrangements, frequently changing regulatory provisions and a narrow understanding of learning on behalf of policy-makers.

Stability and funding are paramount

Secondary schools have been successful in trying to overcome various challenges undermining effective partnerships. Nevertheless, system-wide improvements would strengthen the relationships with VET providers and industry partners. Schools need to have some funding stability so they can plan and build long-term partnerships. Funding was described by stakeholders I consulted as the biggest issue, as VET delivery is resource-intensive.

As the demand for larger and stronger VET programs in schools grows, so does the demand for stronger partnerships. Consequently, teachers have been burdened with ever increasing paperwork, so the changing regulatory requirements including assessment and reporting of competences need to be addressed. There needs to be an acknowledgement from policymakers that the traditional school’s structures, processes and tasks have evolved to serve a diverse range of students in cooperation with multiple stakeholders. The role of school has changed and therefore the funding, program delivery and education policy-making requires a new approach. ⚫

Dr Gosia Klatt is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Vocational and Educational Policy at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education
DESPITE the injection of additional funds into the public TAFEs and dual sector universities across Victoria over the last year, there has been a 19.6% decline in enrolments at our public TAFEs in Victoria.

Clearly the damage done to the Vocational Education and Training Sector by the ‘rorts’ in the private for profit companies continues to impact on the credibility of the sector as a whole. The TAFE sector’s share of the total government subsidised enrolments fell to 30% of all enrolments. Previously, TAFE enrolment figures as a percentage of total enrolments, have excluded the enrolments at the dual sector universities (as they are not part of the public TAFE sector) it is difficult to estimate exactly what the TAFE share has fallen to now given the inclusion of these enrolments.

Enterprise Agreement negotiations are still yet to commence due to a delay in the government approving the employers’ ‘log’.

On a positive note the AEU has been informed that at least one dual sector university wishes to be involved in the negotiations for a new Multi Enterprise Agreement (MEA) for TAFE teachers in the stand alone TAFEs. The AEU is aware that another dual sector university is also considering becoming stand alone TAFEs. The AEU is aware that another dual sector university wishes to be involved in the negotiations for a new Multi Enterprise Agreement (MEA) for TAFE teachers in the stand alone TAFEs.

It wasn’t that long ago that we faced the total dismantling of the collective agreement that covered all TAFE teachers across Victoria, including those at the dual sector universities. We appear to be moving closer to a position where all 12 stand alone TAFEs and two dual sector universities (87% of all TAFE teachers) will be covered by the same collective agreement.

There is still no clear indication of how many of the McKenzie Review’s 109 recommendations will be implemented by the government for 2017 but, the AEU will continue to ensure that the government commitment to ensure that “…TAFE institutes, the cornerstone of the system, will be put on a sustainable footing…” will be realised through positive policies that wind back the use of contestable policy settings in the Vocational Education and Training sector. Greg Barclay is the Victorian member of the National TAFE Council Executive

NEW SOUTH WALES

MAXINE SHARKEY

THIS term TAFE NSW unilaterally terminated bargaining for a new Enterprise Agreement for TAFE Teachers and Related Employees. TAFE moved swiftly to ballot in an endeavour to push through the proposed new Agreement which contained unprecedented attacks on TAFE teachers working conditions.

The proposal included:
- Teachers being required to teach 100 hours more per year,
- Teachers having to attend an additional 205 hours per year by moving the five hours off-site to an on-site requirement
- Teachers being required to attend work for five days, regardless of the number of hours worked on any day in their weekly timetable
- Part time casual teachers having no entitlement to related duties payment — a hard fought entitlement previously won by Federation members
- The introduction of a new position called Trainer, paid much less than a teacher and requiring lesser qualifications

The proposal was overwhelmingly rejected by employees with ninety one per-cent of ballots cast being NO votes. The TAFE Commission will now have to return to the negotiation table where Federation will continue to seek a new Agreement that provides a just increase in salaries and protection of working conditions.

In the same week that TAFE members were congratulated for their efforts in fighting for fair working conditions, our Corrective Services members were informed by their employer that their jobs are to be outsourced and deleted.

The 158 Corrective Services teachers were flown to Sydney from around the state to hear their jobs are to be outsourced and deleted.

Teachers will be able to apply for 67 new clerical positions, to assess inmate education needs and source training or “source and manage the delivery of education and vocational education programs”. The positions will not require a teaching qualification. Training — as opposed to the educating of inmates — will be provided by a yet to be named external provider.

Federation will continue to fight to maintain public education in the NSW prison system and to campaign for this to be delivered by qualified teachers. Maxine Sharkey is the NSW member of the National TAFE Council Executive

QUEENSLAND

DAVID TERAUDS

FOLLOWING months of negotiations, an agreed position (a “consent position”) between TAFE Queensland and relevant unions, including the QTU, was reached regarding a modern TAFE Award. The consent position was expected to be accepted and the modern award made when the matter was heard by the Full Bench of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission in late May.

In reaching the consent position, concessions were made by TAFE and unions. A union gain was TAFE’s agreement to include entitlements in the modern award that had previously been contained in Public Service Directives. On the other hand TAFE desired a single award covering all employees, while the QTU argued for a separate educator’s award. That issue was lost before the Full Bench in 2014. In light of that and the inclusions TAFE agreed to, the QTU acquiesced on the matter of the single award.

With completion of Award modernisation, the legislative obstacle to entering bargaining with TAFE Queensland will be removed and negotiations for a replacement Certified Agreement can begin. Bargaining for a replacement agreement has been underway since 2013 and stalled since 2014/15.

The QTU has commenced a consultation process to ascertain members’ views regarding priorities and inclusions in the Log of Claims. This Log will also inform QTU/AEUQ negotiations with Central Queensland University (CQU) for conditions for educators in the IVTAE or ‘TAFE’ division. The University has intimated that negotiations for a new agreement for VET educators will begin this year coinciding with the conclusion and renegotiation of CQU’s Higher Education Agreement.

The VET educators are those who moved across to the University during the merging of Central Queensland Institute of TAFE and CQU. CQU continues to explore the final shape of the merged entity and the IVTAE division with a further restructure having been announced and due for implementation in early 2017.

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

30 THE AUSTRALIAN TAFE TEACHER SPRING 2015
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

TONY SUTHERLAND

A new enterprise agreement to replace TAFE Enterprise Agreement that nominally expired on 31 January 2015 still seems to be some way off with negotiations stalled on the issue of Retraining, Redeployment and Redundancy. The AEU has sought the intervention of the Minister to help progress negotiations from their current impasse.

TAFE SA continues to struggle with diminishing Government funding and costly administrative and management structures that impose high overhead costs on program delivery. These overhead costs are proving an obstacle to TAFE SA being a viable and sustainable business in a competitive training market.

Current management structures have remained essentially intact for an organisation that has seen over 500 permanent lecturing and associated administration staff exit the organisation in addition to a large reduction in contract lecturer and hourly paid instructor employment. The continual review of Education Business Units leading to reductions in delivery staff with little consideration of the requirements needed to run a quality program and to grow the business.

The review Improving Access review has placed regional campuses under scrutiny. Regional communities have given TAFE broad support for a strategy of tailoring local courses to local needs, being innovative in how and where courses are delivered and strengthening ties with local industry.

In an endeavour to reduce expenditure TAFE SA has been actively looking to move TAFE from leased premises and to lease out surplus capacity. A number of TAFE campuses now house a national job network provider and private RTO.

Further scrutiny of TAFE will come from a Legislative Council Inquiry into TAFE SA. The function of the Council’s Statutory Authorities Review Committee is “to investigate matters relating to the role, performance and continuing relevance of state instrumentalities and independent public bodies”. The parliamentary committee has invited submissions on “whether the functions or operations of TAFE SA duplicate or overlap in any respect the functions or operations of another authority, body or person”. ●

Tony Sutherland is the SA member of the National TAFE Council Executive

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

GARY HEDGER

The state government has released its budget for next year, which is an election year in WA. When you dig down they are continuing their attack on TAFE despite saying that training is the only way forward to produce a skilled workforce for the future of the states economy.

In February, the minister announced amalgamations in the TAFE sector that would save $23 million dollars, but at the cost of over 240 positions. The budget has now taken this starting position and wielded the axe to TAFE.

Students are facing another 4% increase in fees which will take the total increase in fees to over 650% from the starting point where this government started attacking students. This will further reduce the amount of enrolments which has been estimated at over 9000 for 2013/14, with the government refusing to issue enrolment data for 2015.

On top of the cuts as part of the amalgamations the budget has announced a further $13 million to be stripped from service delivery costs for next year and a further $50 million to be cut from following year.

The budget also contained an amount of further savings of $80 million across TAFE through staff redundancies during the next four years. The system is being gutted in the name of balancing the budget. This can only result in an increasing workload placed on the remaining staff with less support available to students. ●

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

TASMANIA

PAUL LENNARD

Currently staff are being asked to respond to the State Public service “People Matters” survey and it gives all members the opportunity to provide feedback to management on issues that affect them. The final report could also assist in providing the AEU with valuable feedback as we move into an enterprise bargaining cycle. It is hoped all members take advantage of this valuable opportunity.

TAFE members in the state are still reticent to put themselves forward for positions within the Union, and this is understandable with the current excessive workloads many members are reporting. In our recent call for nominations there were many positions left vacant, and we need to remedy this, as in numbers is strength. We need feedback from strong branches to be pro-active in providing the best possible service to our members.

The Advanced Skills Teacher position is still creating challenges, with many members working outside their position description. The position description outlines this position primarily being as a mentor, and certainly not as a manager. We are monitoring the situation and will be seeking feedback from members who believe they are being pressured to work beyond this. ●

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