TAFE MUST BE THE FOUNDATION
LOBBY FOR TAFE
ART ATTACK!

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TAFE supporter comments

“The fundamental platform for a strong, safe, stable society is education - in all forms. Education is not an expense, it is an investment!”
- Des, WA

“It’s very important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a second chance in their education and careers, having an Aboriginal Access Centre is a vital part of TAFE.”
- Anita, South Australia

“TAFE is amazing for bridging the gap between academic and vocational training. There have been such deep cuts to TAFE over the last 15 years that I worry for its future. TAFE is a fantastic institute and when funded correctly, works beautifully. Complete privatisation of VET is insanity. Save TAFE: fund it and fund it properly. It really is too good to lose.”
- Lisa, Victoria

“TAFE has given a trade and profession to so very many, and a second chance to those falling through the cracks. The cuts are destroying an institution that is a national treasure.”
- Gillian Shadwick, NSW

“Keeping TAFE around is vital for the future of all Australians.”
- Una, Queensland

“Privatisation has given us many shonky operators and has lowered the reputation of our education system. We need to ensure a high quality education for VET students through the qualified teachers and systems control that TAFE offers.”
- Barbara, NSW
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Get involved, visit www.stoptafecuts.com.au

TAFE: TOO GOOD TO LOSE

/StopTAFECuts @TAFECampaign

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expenditure on VET FEE-HELP means that funding that the Federal Government will argue, that its the biggest risk to TAFE in the current process is for VET FEE-HELP expected to exceed $6 billion, Entitlement funding (vouchers). With the total bill expansion of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme, and mentions were responsible for the introduction and year. It is timely to remember that these agree- in recent years, and expire in the middle of this possible for much of the damage to the TAFE system properly resource the TAFE sector.

The 2012 National Agreements are respon- sible for much of the damage to the TAFE system in recent years, and expire in the middle of this year. It is timely to remember that these agree- ments were responsible for the introduction and expansion of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme, and Entitlement funding (vouchers). With the total bill for VET FEE-HELP expected to exceed $6 billion, the biggest risk to TAFE in the current process is that the Federal Government will argue, that its expenditure on VET FEE-HELP means that funding attached to the Partnership Agreement will be cut. In this edition we take a look at the Federal Government’s hasty attempt to “fix” the mess in New VET Student Loans don’t solve the problems with income contingent loans.

We are encouraging all our supporters to lobby Federal politicians to stop this cut to funding. We urge you to visit the Stop TAFE Cuts website for resources to help you in your visits to politicians. Have a look at our article How to call or visit your MP and stand up for TAFE – which provides information and advice on how to contact your MP and lobby governments around the renegotiation of the national agreements and to agitate for 70% guaranteed funding for TAFE.

Alongside our campaign focused content, we have several pieces from a range of TAFE insiders and academics. In TAFE must be the foundation, Aaron Devine the former TAFE GM sets out his ideas for a new policy future – one with TAFE and local communities at its centre. In Art attack – time to reverse government cuts to arts education we look at the ongoing cuts to arts courses in vocational education, despite their intrinsic value to the community.

In Reimagining gender equity in trades, Anne Jones discusses her research into the recruit-
ment and retention of women in traditionally male trades. While not all the findings are positive, it is important to discuss these issues. In How do we support quality teaching in VET Valerie Braithwaite examines regulatory frameworks, and how they can interact with teaching in VET; both in placing constraints on those providers doing the wrong thing, but also in praising, supporting and recognising dedicated teachers in the sector who are vital in maintaining and raising standards.

Gavin Moodie discusses the research he and Leesa Wheelahan have undertaken for Education International. Vocational education in an inter-
national context looks at the different contexts in which vocational education occurs, and argues that postsecondary education qualifications must fulfil three roles – a labour market role; an educational role; and “a social role to contribute to equity and social justice.”.

2017 will be a critical year for TAFE in Australia. We are urging all our readers to join the Stop TAFE Cuts campaign and get involved by organising a visit to your local Federal politi- cian. TAFE teachers are powerful and effective advocates for the TAFE system. •
The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) is the Special Purpose Payment for the vocational education sector, and the National Partnership for Skills Reform (NP) was the mechanism by which the Commonwealth “rewards” states and territories for meeting certain requirements. These requirements included:

• The implementation of a National Entitlement to training for Certificate I-III
• A requirement that states open access to government funding to private for-profit providers
• Liberalising restrictions on the VET FEE-HELP scheme.

In short, the Agreements required states to enact policies that fostered privatisation — a voucher system; contestable funding; and entrenching income contingent loans in the system.

Both the NASWD and the NP directly led to the exponential growth of private for-profit, low quality vocational education providers.

However, while private, for-profit providers cherry pick cheap to run courses at high student volumes, TAFE continues to do the “heavy lifting” running more expensive courses.

With less funding, TAFE suffers and so do students.

The growth of private for-profit providers has left many students vulnerable to unscrupulous providers — leaving some with large debts and worthless qualifications.

Privatisation has also entrenched the concept of income contingent loans and a user pay system in vocational education — when not that long ago TAFE courses were available for a modest fee.

For those students at TAFE, they are seeing firsthand the effects of underfunding in these institutions — cuts to courses, fewer staff, and higher fees.

TAFE and vocational education are the lowest funded education sector with funding declining by more than 20%.

Two funding agreements between state and federal governments in 2012 have led to budget cuts for TAFE, higher fees for students and the growth of low quality private for profit providers.
than 24% since 2008. At the same time fees have increased by 245% from $4060 in 2009 to $14,018 in 2015.

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) and the National Partnership for Skills Reform (NP) both expire at the end of June this year. We need to lobby governments to make the renegotiation of these agreements, with extra funding for TAFE, a priority agenda item, and that the new agreements support the crucial role of TAFE in the vocational education sector.

It’s vital that TAFE teachers, students, graduates and supporters get in touch with their Federal MP to let them know this issue is important to the community.

What should the Federal Government do?

• Support the crucial and unique role of TAFE
• Real investment in public vocational education
• Guaranteed funding for TAFE

What do I do?

Politicians now regularly screen and auto-delete many emails. It is far more valuable to call, send a personally written letter or meet with your Federal MP in person.

How to make a call

• Call the Electorate office of your Federal MP. Details are available at www.aph.gov.au.
• It is unlikely you will get to speak to your MP, but important you leave a clear message with the staff member who answers the phone.
• Introduce yourself and let the staff member know where you live in the electorate.
• Leave a clear, concise message. For example – I am a TAFE teacher and I am concerned about the inaction in relation to the re-negotiation of the NASWD and the NP. I am also concerned about the lack of guaranteed funding for TAFE. I want my Federal MP to raise this with Simon Birmingham and Karen Andrews.
• Be sure to ask for your MP to call you back.
• Be polite and courteous at all times.
• If your MP asks you a question and you don’t know the answer — tell them you will get back to them and follow up with a phone call or email.

How to organise a visit

• Call the Electorate office of your Federal MP. Details are available at www.aph.gov.au.
• Introduce yourself and let the staff member know where you live in the electorate. Let them know you would like to meet with your Federal MP on the issue of TAFE funding.
• Politely answer any questions asked of you. It may help to have a short summary of what you want to discuss prepared. For example: I am a TAFE student and I am concerned about the lack of guaranteed funding for TAFE. I want to talk to my MP about the National Agreements that are about to expire, and ask him/her to talk to the Minister about it.
• Be polite but persistent about scheduling a meeting in the next few weeks.
• At the meeting be yourself, and tell your story.
• Be polite, calm and on message.
• If your MP asks you a question and you don’t know the answer — tell them you will get back to them and follow up with a phone call or email.
• Before you leave, do your best to get them to commit to speaking to the Minister and Assistant Minister.

A personal letter

• If it has to be written communication it must be a personal letter.
• Write to the Electorate office of your Federal MP. Details are available at www.aph.gov.au.
• Provide a return address to let them know you live in their electorate.
• Be brief — no more than 1 page.
• Be yourself, and tell your story.
• Explain things in your own words. Don’t be tempted to copy and paste from the Internet. Explain why guaranteed TAFE funding is important to you.
• Ask for them to speak to the Minister and Assistant Minister on your behalf.
• Be polite and use calm language.

Let us know how it goes!

Whether you called, visited or wrote – please let us know. Drop a quick email with all the details to rscroggie@aefederal.org.au. This helps us keep track of who’s been lobbied, and where we need to find more volunteers.

For more information head to our website - www.stoptafecuts.com.au
Vocational education is embedded in its context

Vocational education is distinctively embedded in its context. The curriculum for schools and higher education either comes from the education system or it originates from occupations but is strongly reinterpreted by educationalists. In contrast, the curriculum for much vocational education derives much more closely from work. Australia’s training packages are unusually bad in seeking to exclude teachers’ construction of the curriculum and qualifications.

Some schooling includes work experience and some higher education programs such as nursing and teacher education have extended experience in the workplace, but this is strongly framed by the school and by the campus. Much vocational education is based heavily in the workplace and there is less learning on campus or even in purposely designed learning spaces in workplaces.

School and higher education is assessed by educational criteria. Australian vocational education is meant to be assessed by workplace criteria. This leads to a lack of appreciation of the role of teachers and teaching in vocational education because it is based on the erroneous assumption that it is possible to ‘read off’ a curriculum from workplace criteria. Vocational
education teachers must interpret the knowledge and skills and attributes required for occupational practice and to support students’ educational and personal development.

**Vocational education’s context is very varied**

Because economies, industries and workplaces differ markedly by countries, states, regions and employers, it is harder to generalise vocational education across different contexts. For example, some 34% of Australian students at secondary school and above study at least 1 vocational subject. This is rather higher than Aotearoa New Zealand (25%), the USA (12%) and the whole world (14%), and is closer to Italy (36%), Finland (35%), the Netherlands (33%), Switzerland (33%) and the UK (32%). This variation was a major difficulty that we encountered in our report for Education International on Global trends in technical and vocational education and training: a framework for social justice.

The AEU is a member of Education International, the federation of 396 associations and unions which represent some 32.5 million teachers and other employees in all forms of education: early childhood, primary school, secondary school, vocational, university and adult education. Education International represents organisations from 171 countries which are served in five regions: Africa, North America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America.

**Under provision of vocational education in developing countries**

Vocational education is vital for developing and sustaining economies and for supporting social inclusion and social mobility, yet low and lower middle income countries are grossly under represented in vocational education. Some 49% of the world’s population live in low and lower middle income countries according to the World Bank’s definition, yet our best estimates are that these countries have only 22% of the world’s vocational education.

Some of this apparent under provision of vocational education is probably due to under reporting. Data on educational orientation are expensive to collect and report, and poorer countries have the fewest resources to devote to collecting data. Some vocational education is in the informal economy, which is estimated to be much bigger in developing than developed economies. And the volume as well as the nature of vocational education needed by an economy is probably related to the extent of its development as well as its structure.

Yet the under representation of vocational education in low and lower middle income countries is so stark that vocational education is likely to be underprovided in the countries that need it most. This is because vocational education is expensive. Equipment, workshops, training facilities, simulated workplaces and supervised work experience are much more expensive to provide and maintain than classrooms for general education.

Teaching costs are much higher for quality vocational education. Vocational teachers have to be expert not only in teaching but in their occupation, and the best systems ensure that vocational teachers maintain their industry knowledge and skills. Vocational teacher-student ratios have to be low to protect students from injury in some industry areas to give students enough personal guidance and supervision to ensure they acquire skills at the appropriate level.

It is easy to understand developing countries’ prioritisation of basic general education. Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to full participation in social, economic and political life, and are the foundation of further education, including vocational education. It is also tempting to prioritise more advanced general and academic education. The individual and economy wide returns on investment in higher education are well known to be high, and universities have higher status locally and internationally than vocational institutions. There is, however, growing attention internationally by policy makers about the role that vocational education plays...
in supporting economic and social development and in building inclusive, tolerant societies.

**Qualifications’ three purposes**

Sometimes employers use qualifications as a signal that graduates have specific knowledge and skills needed for a job they want to fill. Examples are nursing diplomas, engineering degrees and welding certificates. The content of these qualifications is specified tightly and often their teaching is also specified to include minimum experience in the workplace. This describes an occupational labour market, where entry to and progression in these occupations is via specific qualifications. The qualification and occupation is often regulated by a government body, by an occupational association or by employers and unions.

Other times employers use qualifications to screen applicants for potential to undertake a variety of jobs. Examples are year 12 certificates and diplomas and degrees in business, general arts and sciences which might be used to screen applicants for jobs such as administrator, analyst, carer, clerk, machine operator, manager and salesperson. While labour markets for these jobs do not specify occupationally specific qualifications as a condition of employment, they may be identified by sector such as finance, hospitality, property or transport. These jobs are subject to only general regulation such as of occupational health and safety, anti discrimination and minimum wages.

Unregulated occupations may be located within internal or external labour markets. An internal labour market is where employers use the initial qualification to screen the potential of employees upon entry, but then provide within the firm enterprise specific training to graduates as part of their employment and progression to higher level jobs. In contrast, an external labour market is where entry to and progression is through the competitive market external to the employer. In external labour markets graduates must ‘second-guess’ the labour market and often provide their own continuing education.

A qualification can be both a signal and a screen. Common examples are law degrees and qualifications in commerce and mathematics. Law firms use a law degree as a signal of legal knowledge and skills when hiring first year associates but many other employers use law and other degrees to screen for graduates with putative high intellectual ability. Some employers use commerce and mathematics qualifications to signal a specific ability, but many employers use these qualifications to screen for applicants with general business or quantitative skills.

**These different characteristics of qualifications are shown in the accompanying table.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>SIGNAL</th>
<th>SCREEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification role</td>
<td>To indicate specific skills</td>
<td>To indicate general potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification specification</td>
<td>Tight</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>Usually specific</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>Occupational</td>
<td>Internal and external</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Our analysis of vocational education in Australia and Canada finds very loose links between vocational education and occupations. In Australia, the student outcomes survey reports that only 37% of vocational education graduates work in the occupation for which their training package ostensibly prepared them. The percentages are much higher at around 80% for qualifications which prepare graduates for regulated occupations such as nursing and the traditional trades.

So despite the best efforts of policy makers, graduates of most...
vocational qualifications are not using their qualification for entry to a specific job, but for broader entry to and progression in the workforce, and for progression to further education. Vocational qualifications also have different relations with other qualifications. Some vocational qualifications have high proportions of graduates proceeding to qualifications at a different level in the same field while other qualifications have low proportions of graduates proceeding to qualifications at a different level in the same field.

We therefore argue that all postsecondary education qualifications should have three roles:

1. A labour market role to prepare graduates for entry to and progression in work;
2. An educational role to prepare graduates for further education;
3. A social role to contribute to equity and social justice by widening access to postsecondary education and supporting disadvantaged students to enter higher studies and occupations.

All three purposes are needed to support both educational and occupational progression, to strengthen the links between qualifications and jobs, and to support social inclusion and social mobility. However, qualifications differ in the way they serve these purposes and this is largely related to how they are used in the labour market.

The balance between the purposes that qualifications play may vary depending on the relationship between the field of education and the occupational field of practice, and whether occupations are regulated or unregulated. Qualifications for strongly regulated occupations would emphasise the labour market purpose, while they must also include the educational purpose to support progression within the occupation, and they can be evaluated by the extent to which they serve the third purpose. Qualifications for unregulated occupations would emphasise the educational purpose of qualifications because this enables graduates to gain higher-level qualifications and the broader knowledge and skills that they need for a wider range of occupations.

**Productive capabilities**

Our paper for Education International offers a framework for strengthening vocational education that applies general principles of strong vocational education to local contexts. It is based on productive capabilities, which applies Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to vocational education. Productive capabilities are the resources and arrangements of work and the broad knowledge, skills and attributes that individuals need to be productive at work, to progress in their careers, and to participate in decision-making about work.

Because capabilities are embedded in their social context and manifest differently in different contexts, they require local engagement with social partners, educational institutions and a nuanced understanding of the different kinds and levels of resources needed by different learners. To develop students’ productive capabilities vocational education needs to develop individuals in three domains:

1. The knowledge base of practice;
2. The technical base of practice; and
3. The attributes the person needs for that occupation.

Productive capabilities rest upon broader social, economic, cultural and technological resources. For example, individuals need to have the language, literacy and mathematical skills for engaging and progressing in study and work. They need to have access to the social and economic resources that facilitate their participation in study and work, such as the necessary housing, healthcare, transport and childcare, as well as enable their participation in civic society and in their communities. And they need to have the knowledge, skills and attributes required to navigate, negotiate and engage in these aspects of life; the capacity to be skilful at work emerges from broader knowledge, skills and attributes.

While vocational education should develop a broad field of practice, it should also contribute to and benefit from helping students develop the building blocks of these broader capabilities. Qualifications may do this in different ways, depending on their relationship with the structures of the labour market.

Productive capabilities would be realised in different ways not only between nations and regions, but also between industries and fields of practice. They provide the conceptual basis of qualifications, but the specific focus and content of teaching and learning and curriculum requires deep understandings of the contexts for which students are being prepared, engagement with local communities of interest, and negotiation over the outcomes.

**Vocational education needs strong institutions**

Vocational education cannot contribute to developing individuals’ and society’s capacity without it itself having the capacity to do so. This requires an appropriate curriculum and the pedagogy and the resources to support high quality teaching and learning. Those resources include appropriately qualified teachers with enough time to devote to their students’ and their own development, and facilities in which they and their students can work. As with any other form of education, vocational education also needs the structures and physical and social institutions to accumulate expertise, transmit knowledge from the past and anticipate and codify future needs. In many jurisdictions, vocational education institutions need to be further developed and strengthened to increase their contribution.

**Social partners and social dialogue**

Because of its direct interaction with both work and general and academic education, vocational education particularly needs to collaborate and coordinate with other sectors. Strong collaboration and coordination may be achieved by engaging vocational education in a social dialogue with social partners. The European Union understands the social partners to be organisations which represent the interests of workers and employers.

The social partners’ participation in deciding and implementing vocational education policy is highly desirable to maximise workers’ participation in decisions that affect their work and futures, to encourage participation in continuing as well as initial vocational education, to support close cooperation between vocational education and work, to facilitate vocational education and work responding to their changing conditions, and to contribute to active labour market policies. Employers’ participation in vocational education programs encourages their acceptance of students on work placements and their employment of graduates since they have direct knowledge of students’ strengths.

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**Full paper**

A summary of the paper is at DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.33196.87685

The full paper is at: DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21452.82561

TAFE must be the FOUNDATION

Have hope, the Vocational Education and Training system has finally reached the bottom and government, industry, peak training organisations and policy makers are ready to start the long climb out of the hole dug by failed policies. They simply need a ladder.

AARON DEVINE

The ladder is an alternative VET policy and purchasing framework that builds skills and innovation and is of value to students and communities. TAFE must be the foundation of that policy and central to its formation. The private RTO charlatans who have left students, taxpayers and the community with debt, meaningless qualifications and a loss of confidence in the value of qualifications have evidenced the failure of a market system based on profit and profiteering.

The comments from Mr Rod Sims1 from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission as reported in The Sydney Morning Herald are noteworthy:

“In a blistering attack on decades of common government practice, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chairman Rod Sims said the sale of ports and electricity infrastructure and the opening of vocational education to private companies had caused him and the public to lose faith in privatisation and deregulation.”

Mr Sims comments are telling and support the need the for fresh thinking in vocational education following the recent changes from Ministers and governments who are talking tough, changing legislation and cracking down on poor behaviour. The changes in legislation are biting and no advocate for TAFE will celebrate RTO closures, as it lays bare the human cost of people losing their jobs and highlights students left with debt and shattered dreams. However, it also highlights an ever-present reminder of greed and unconscionable conduct that should motivate real policy change.

The current legislative changes, while welcome, are best characterised as a holding policy, focussed on building barriers to stop students (and the taxpayer) from continuing to throw themselves over the metaphorical cliff into debt and poor outcomes. VET policy needs to look beyond this holding pattern and focus on how Australia builds the skills bridge over the cliff to enable us to engage and thrive as a community in the modern world economy.

While never forgetting the lessons of the recent past, TAFE must now shift from focussing on the failures of the system to creating a new future. TAFE leaders and staff should courageously look to new thinking and policy that will stabilise our training system and focus funding and activity back to training and meeting the needs of industry and communities.

Central to any new policy model for vocational education is that ‘for profit’ training organisations should not have access to government funding or government loan schemes. While the behaviour of the market is evidence enough for this change, there is also international support for this position as outlined by the Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education2 for the Conservative Government in the United Kingdom:

“... given what appears to be the highly unusual nature of this arrangement compared to other countries and the high costs associated with offering world-class technical education, we see a strong case for public funding for education and training to be restricted to institutions where surpluses are reinvested into the country’s education infrastructure.”

International comparisons show a growing realisation that institutions with deep community links and strong industry engagement are needed to build the skills of tomorrow. Institutions that have learning and teaching deeply engrained into their organisational culture are best able to support re-engaging learners and those from social disadvantage.

Internationally, VET system are being directly guided by their governments, with long term plans and industry specialisations being carved out based on the identified skills needs of the future and not a laissez faire student entitlement model and Adam Smith’s invisible hand. Specialist infrastructure, curriculum and investment in the development of leading educators in new industry areas are being established and supported by governments looking to the future needs of their industry and society.

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A tiered approach to regulation based on risk is imperative. Any future model for vocational education should encourage the development and progression of our TAFE colleges into self-accrediting institutions, in equal status, academic freedom and capability as our universities. The costs and benefits of moving away from national training packages to allow development of new local curriculum linked to local community and industry needs to be considered. Self-regulating institutions underwritten by their state governments, should hold accountability for their outcomes and report to their communities and state government. While this journey will take time and investment in capability, it should be a guiding goal. Light tight regulation as experienced by our universities is a good model for consideration for our TAFE system. It is imperative that every dollar possible is spent on training and building workforce capacity, community demands and less on regulation and oversight.

TAFE staff will continue to be on the front line with second chance learners, managing significant social and economic disadvantage; while also dealing with innovation and technological change of modern workplaces. Rebuilding the TAFE workforce and their educational capability will take time, yet security of employment and long term funding commitments will encourage the attraction and retention of great talent. Purchasing policy needs to recognise the costs and benefits of efficient and effective learner support models. Any new purchasing model should also seek to recognise the need to fund and support community based learning that reengages those of social disadvantage into learning and eventually onto a pathway for employment based learning.

Australia has been the developed world’s most radical follower of a free market philosophy in vocational education and training. This experience has produced clear evidence that government funding of for profit training organisations has not delivered the outcomes expected or desired. The restriction of government funding and loans to not for profit training organisations, should be the basis of any new funding model for VET.

In addition, reform of purchasing policy to establish a community and provider model that allows for local industry priorities to be outlined, funded and supported should be considered by the Federal Government to allow for differential pricing, priorities and regional specialisation. The booming tourism and hospitality industry of the Gold Coast has significantly different training needs and priorities to that of Mt Isa and different again from those of Cape York, yet we seek to establish a one size purchasing model independent of local needs.

Student demand and student entitlement has had no discernible positive impact on skills shortages and not resulted in increased industry satisfaction. It has encouraged a race to the bottom on quality, based on price and shorter training duration. It is time to encourage communities with their local TAFE to take control of their own educational and industry needs.

Many opinions and solutions exist to rebuild confidence in our training system and it is time to start outlining them and debating their strengths and weaknesses. Quality training in quality facilities from quality staff, based on the aspirations of our community should be the basis from which to build this new future. That is a future with hope for all Australians.

Aaron Devine was the General Manager of TAFE Queensland – Brisbane. He is now Managing Director of Devine Management Consulting

(Endnotes)
New VET Student Loans don’t solve the problems with income contingent loans

IN December 2016, the notorious VET FEE-HELP scheme was replaced with a new scheme – VET Student Loans. The Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham, claimed the new scheme would “secure the future and reputation of Australia’s high quality vocational education and training system.” The new loan scheme includes some key differences to VET FEE HELP, including:

• Limiting loans to courses included on an approved course list
• Introducing loan caps of $5000, $10,000 and $15,000
• Requiring existing VET FEE-HELP providers to apply and be approved to offer VET Student Loans
• Introducing an application fee for bodies to apply to become approved course providers

The government also argues that there are strengthened compliance, governance and payments arrangements

Despite the change of name, and restrictions on the amount of money that students can borrow under the scheme, the VET Students Loan scheme is essentially the same as its now notorious predecessor.

Not all loans are created equally

In examining the VET Student Loans, it is important first to remember the rationale for introducing income contingent loans (ICL) into vocational education in the first place. It was claimed at the time that the introduction of an ICL scheme would open access to vocational qualifications to students prevented from studying due to prohibitive costs in the sector. It was promoted as a HECs-like arrangement.

Neither of these things were true.

At the time of its introduction, students had access to high quality courses in TAFE colleges across the country at a modest cost. The costs for higher level vocational qualifications was growing, but on average the cost was in the hundreds, rather than the thousands of dollars. VET FEE-HELP was never simply HECs for VET. It was an income contingent loan, but it was fully fee for service. Students were required to borrow the full charge for the course, whereas in Higher Education the government subsidises about 60% of the cost of the qualification—recognising the broader societal benefit of an educated population. This government assistance was not extended to the vocational education sector.
sector. In fact, fees in the vocational education sector were entirely unregulated leaving providers able to charge whatever they liked for courses. The only limit was the borrowing limit of the scheme — around $100,000.

VET FEE-HELP was a major public policy shift, but it was introduced with no public discussion and inadequate preparation. In stark contrast when HECS was introduced in 1989 it was on the recommendation of a major national public inquiry into higher education financing. There has been no public inquiry into vocational education financing since the Kangan Review in 1974. VET FEE-HELP was introduced, and then radically extended, without public scrutiny or debate.

New and improved VET Student Loans?

The changes in the new loan scheme — VET Student Loans — do nothing to address the stark inequity between the vocational education and higher education sectors — students in higher education will still have 60% of the costs of their degrees met by the government; the amount of money that can be charged through HECS is set by the government; and private for profit providers cannot access HECS.

It is increasingly difficult to see the differences between the sectors as being errors or oversights.

Aside from the sector inequity; a number of the other changes proposed in the new scheme will do little to address the issues of rorting and quality.

Linking courses which are eligible for loans to areas of industry need or skills shortage is a largely discredited process. The “science” behind it is imprecise, and at best, it leaves students and the sector playing catch up, with course offerings lagging behind real-time demand.

As for the much lauded loan caps, limits on the amount of money students can borrow will not stop rorting. It will simply restrict how much profit can be made. Similarly setting completion rates will not necessarily ensure higher completions, but it will most likely encourage an even laxer approach to quality.

In short — the new VET Student Loans scheme may look like it is attempting to fix the problems in the scheme, but on closer examination it is just another band aid solution.

How can we fix this mess?

It is important to make the point that the problems with VET FEE-HELP, and now VET Student Loans cannot be considered in isolation from the other problems which exist across the sector. Many of the problems — low quality provision, low student engagement, poor progression, inconsistent assessment, low completion rates, unscrupulous providers and wasted financing are all evident across the whole sector, have not been confined to VET FEE-HELP provision and will not end with VET Student Loans.

These problems all broadly stem from the marketisation and privatisation of the sector, and will continue as long as both major parties remain committed to more market design as the solution to poor market design.

A sensible first step would be a full and independent Inquiry into the funding of the vocational education sector to examine the underlying funding problems in the sector, and to set benchmarks around both the cost of provision and nominal hours required for qualifications. Without having these base facts — any loan scheme open to private for profit providers is able to be rorted. Meanwhile, a comprehensive and meaningful consultation with all stakeholders needs to take place to ascertain what the community wants from its vocational education sector, including whether income contingent loans are appropriate in the sector.

It is our belief that real investment in public vocational education coupled with guaranteed funding for TAFE will best serve our society. While VET Student Loans may not be the complete debacle VET FEE-HELP was, it is by no means a silver bullet for the crisis in vocational education.

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary and AEU Deputy Federal Secretary.
The 2017 Productivity Commission Report on Government Services (ROGS) confirms that per student contact hour funding has plunged almost one-third in a decade. Government spending averaged $13.99 per student hour in 2015, down from $16.42 in 2006, a decrease of 14.8% since 2006. Government expenditure per student contact hour increased nationally by 1.5% in 2015.

This is the first time in several years that there has been an increase, and it is a result of policy changes in NSW which resulted in a decrease in counted hours of delivery, not an increase in funding overall. In 2014, the decline in expenditure nationally was 10.5%. Government real recurrent expenditure per annual hour fell by 7.5% in Queensland.

NCVER’s 2015 Financial Information found that overall government expenditure had fallen more than $433.5 million in 2015, a decrease of 5.7% on the previous year.
The amount of recurrent funding now going to private providers has also increased dramatically from $474m in 2005 to $1492m in 2014, but there has been a slight decline in 2015.

This represents 27% of recurrent funding nationally. In Victoria, the proportion of government funding allocated to for-profit providers is 55%. In Queensland, the figure is 40%.

There has been a small decline in the proportion of government funding allocated contestably, from 46% in 2014, down to 44% in 2015.

The increased funding to private providers is most dramatic in Queensland (from 39% to 49% in 2014-15), but there have also been increases in all jurisdictions except SA, where the decline is significant, and Victoria where it is slight.
Vocational education remains the worst funded of the education sectors. Continuing lack of investment by Australian governments in TAFE and in vocational education and training sends the strongest possible message to the sector as a whole, but also to the Australian community that governments hold the sector in low regard.

Failure by successive governments to address poor investment in vocational education, and the lack of decisive action around the activities of a corrupt private for-profit sector combine to damage the sectors reputation, and problems with the now defunct VET FEE-HELP scheme cannot be addressed without examining investment in the sector as a whole.
## Vocational education funding table

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
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<th>NT</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gov’t Funding $m (2015)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>C’wealth</td>
<td>$584.0</td>
<td>$456.6</td>
<td>$369.6</td>
<td>$200.6</td>
<td>$117.7</td>
<td>$39.7</td>
<td>$19.3</td>
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<td>(36.18%)</td>
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<td>(68.91%)</td>
<td>(65.38%)</td>
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<td>(80.47%)</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>$1298.0</td>
<td>$941.2</td>
<td>$645.3</td>
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<td>$117.6</td>
<td>$98.3</td>
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|                |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| **$ per student contact hour** |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| **$/hour**     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2006-15        | 34.65% | -39.78% | -21.12% | -6.30% | -18.44% | -3.66% | -11.23% | -13.65% | -14.80% |
| 2014-15        | 58.88% | 8.36% | -7.50% | 6.15% | 8.05% | 1.05% | 17.48% | 5.48% | 16.10% |

|                |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| **Gov’t funding competitive (2015)** |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| $m            | $369.3 | $949.6 | $457.1 | $252.0 | $143.0 | $46.7 | $36.7 | $20.7 | $2275.0 |
| %             | 22.88% | 73.16% | 48.57% | 39.05% | 42.06% | 39.71% | 37.33% | 21.47% | 44.17% |

|                |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| **Gov’t funding to PP (2015)** |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| $m            | $96.3  | $717.1 | $370.5 | $114.6 | $70.9  | $17.9  | $14.1  | $7.8  | $1,409.2 |
| %             | 6.0%   | 55.2%  | 39.4%  | 17.8%  | 20.9%  | 15.2%  | 14.3%  | 8.1%  | 27.4%  |

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<td>TAFE market share (by government funded students)</td>
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<td>67.3%</td>
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<td>2014-15</td>
<td>-3.57%</td>
<td>-1.22%</td>
<td>-23.37%</td>
<td>-4.32%</td>
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(Footnotes)


5. NCVER 2016, Australian vocational education and training statistics: government-funded students and courses 2015, Table 13, NCVER, Adelaide.
SUPPORTER COMMENTS

"The TAFE system should not simply be about business... TAFE is an absolute institution in this country. It started the lives, and saved the lives of many, many people, and we need to keep funding it. We can't simply be an economy, we've got to be a society."

Senator Doug Cameron

"I cannot believe that this Government thinks it's a good idea to totally destroy the brilliant public TAFE system and replace it with a totally overpriced, shonky and untenable private system. This is a disgrace and should stop NOW."

-Judith, NSW

"The destruction of TAFE is appalling. The TAFE system is envied in other countries, yet our governments have an agenda to hand education over to for-profit providers."

-Toni, NSW

"Taxpayers money is being wasted propping up dodgy private educational colleges which promise much, but deliver so little. Young people are being left with huge debts without proper training and qualifications. TAFE colleges have proven themselves over decades and the government should support them adequately."

-Janice, NSW

"TAFE taught me something school did not. TAFE taught me how to learn."

Alan, NSW

"TAFE is vital to the progress of rural communities. Our youth need education and job training that can be relied upon."

-Margaret, NSW
ART ATTACK
— time to reverse government cuts to arts education
TAFE Colleges, and their predecessors, have long fostered the growth of Australian artists, and the cultural and artistic landscape in Australia.

ROSIE SCROGGIE

FROM pre-eminent Australian painters such as Sidney Nolan and John Olsen to street and contemporary artists like Rone and Tracey Moffat; musicians and bands such as Augie March and Troy Casser-Daly; fashion designers from Akira, to J’Aton Couture to Lisa Ho; filmmakers, animators, dancers, writers – so many of the talented people who have shaped Australia went to TAFE.

Cultural, creative, and artistic industries are intrinsically valuable – UNESCO’s Cultural Times notes that “undeniably, culture and creativity have been the cement that binds together not only hearts and souls, but entire societies and nations.” It is art that helps us make sense of our identities, our values and our place in the world. Art helps us to maintain traditions and histories – and to forge new ones.

There is also economic value to investment in arts and culture. Jason Potts, Professor of Economics at RMIT University concluded from his analysis for The Conversation that according to ABS Satellite data for 2008-9 “the contribution of cultural and creative economy to Australia GDP was $86 billion which is almost 7%. The cultural and creative sector produces more GVA than health care, but less than construction.” According to ABS statistics GVA (gross value added) for Arts has grown steadily throughout the 00s and into the 10s.

Despite the economic and intrinsic value of healthy cultural, creative and artistic industries, funding for arts education, particularly at TAFE, continues to be cut by governments.

In 2012 in TATT we reported that state budget cuts in Victoria – designed to reign in the massive growth of private for profit providers – were having a devastating effect on the whole sector, including TAFE. Arts courses at TAFE colleges were a major victim of these budget cuts in Victoria. Similar scenarios have played out around the country with devastating effect.

In NSW for example, the introduction of Smart & Skilled, left most Arts courses without government funding – forcing students to pay exorbitant up-front fees to undertake, or complete, Arts courses.

The reform agenda imposed by governments on the vocational education sector has continually undermined the provision of Arts courses in TAFE colleges. It has done this through not only continued underfunding of TAFE colleges and removing subsidies from Arts courses, but by entrenching income contingent loans in the sector.

Income contingent loans, first VET FEE-HELP and now VET Student Loans, have not been positive for Arts courses in TAFE. Despite the rhetoric around access and affordability, and unlike similar schemes in Higher Education, VET FEE-HELP transferred the entire cost of courses onto students by way of a debt. Courses that had previously been available at TAFE for a modest fee, were now only available to students either prepared to pay a large fee up front, or take on a debt.

Under the new scheme, VET Student Loans, this continues. However, in an attempt to reign in unscrupulous private providers profiteering through vocational education income contingent loans, the list of courses that are eligible for VET Student Loans has been greatly reduced – particularly in the arts, creative and cultural industries. The government claimed that eligibility for VET Student Loans would be limited to courses that “have a high national priority, meet industry needs, contribute to addressing skills shortages and align with strong employment
outcomes.” This has translated to an absolute decimation of Arts courses available under VET Student Loans.

According to media reports, of the 57 courses previously able to access VET FEE-HELP that were broadly in the “Creative Arts” area, only 13 will be eligible for VET Student Loans. Courses in musical theatre, professional writing and editing, jewellery and object design, ceramics, dance, styling, journalism, broadcast technology, acting, circus arts and floristry will no longer be available under a loan scheme. Students wanting to study in these areas will need to pay full fees, straight up – if they can find their preferred course still being offered somewhere after the past decade of cuts to Arts programs in TAFEs.

The Federal Education and Training Minister, Senator Simon Birmingham, justified the reduced list of courses eligible for loans claiming that many courses were “lifestyle choices” that would not lead to work. This casual dismissal of creative courses of being pointless plays into the long held view by some elites about TAFE: that it is a place of “basket weaving” and “cake decoration” and that those skills are useless and lead to nothing.

We of course know this isn’t true. According to NCVER figures – over half of all Creative Arts students at TAFE in 2015 were employed by mid-2016. What the data doesn’t tell us is what the remainder are doing. While Senator Birmingham may assume these students are just on the dole, we know that many of these students will be busily creating, performing, undertaking work experience, setting up businesses or going on to further study.

We hear so many stories from TAFE teachers and students where an Arts course at TAFE has been the first step in a longer journey. After time away from education, or after a negative experience at school – Art classes are often a sanctuary and a first positive learning experience for many people. After experiencing success in Arts – many students go on to further study in different departments. For these students, Arts education has been more of a lifesaver than the alleged “lifestyle” Senator Birmingham refers to.

In 2015, the Australia Council undertook a study which culminated in the landmark report *Arts Nation: An Overview of Australian Arts*. The report noted that 85% of Australians think the arts make for a richer and more meaningful life. The report also noted the strong, and varied, economic contributions of the arts. The “reforms” in vocational education – reduced funding; entrenching income contingent loans; and removing government subsidies from Arts courses act against the vast majority of Australians who understand how important the art, cultural and creative industries are to our society; and the economy.

Art does not happen in a vacuum. Like any other industry or profession, education is vital to the ongoing growth of the sector. While Higher Education institutes have a part to play in arts education, it is vital that the vocational education sector is encouraged and assisted to provide affordable and high quality arts courses – particularly in those more practical and vocationally oriented disciplines.

It is vital that governments realise the importance of art, and arts education, and come to the natural conclusion that to ensure a vibrant future for these industries in Australia they must guarantee funding to TAFE. TAFE has for generations taught, inspired and moulded some of Australia’s greatest artists, performers and creatives. For TAFE teachers to nurture the next generation of George Gittoes, Catherine Martins and Lanie Lanes – there must be funding and support for TAFE colleges.

Rosie Scroggie is an Administrative Officer at the AEU Federal Office.
How do we support quality teaching in Australian VET?

Vocational education and training once held a proud place in Australia’s education system, providing opportunity along a less academically and more practically oriented path.

Valerie Braithwaite

There is still high interest in, and need for, vocational education and training but the sector has been drawn into a downward reputational spiral.

Reforms have been introduced in abundance to reverse the problems caused by the privatisation of VET, but instead have contributed to loss of status and scandal after scandal.

At the heart of the debilitation of the VET sector has been lack of respect and support in the reform process for the professionalism and skill of teaching.

This has been compounded by the drop in funding to TAFEs, which has for years been at the core of the vocational training system in Australia, and the repository of much of the sector’s expertise.

Restoring, recognising and encouraging quality teaching in both public and private VET are the key to lifting standards and restoring VET’s reputation.

Delivery of quality education and training is much touted, but a schism sits below this mantra. Privatisation has failed to reward quality teaching, and has in fact led to an increase in lower-standard providers, damaging both TAFEs and better quality private operators.

The market failures of the privatisation of VET, were recognised by the Federal Government decision to end the VET FEE-HELP loans scheme from December 31, 2016.

The expectation was that the scheme would create a more equal playing field and a more integrated tertiary education sector. Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) approved by government were able to receive the benefits that previously had only been offered to universities - to enrol students with a VET FEE-HELP loan.

This would expand the market in vocational education providing easier pathways for students moving between the vocational and university sectors.

These expected benefits, however, have been overshadowed by unanticipated failures. The reputation of the VET sector has been marred by high incompletion rates, high student debt, bankruptcy among colleges, and predatory behaviour by RTOs to enrol students and obtain government funding.

Privatisation rewarded the significant proportion of providers whose...
At the heart of the debilitation of the VET sector has been lack of respect and support in the reform process for the professionalism and skill of teaching.
is synonymous with motivating quality teaching in the VET sector.

For the dedicated teachers in the VET sector who do their best to maintain standards, any suggestion that teachers are to blame for the problems will be repugnant and rightly so.

Committed teachers and providers are doing an extraordinary job keeping the sector going in spite of the problems it is experiencing. Recognition of their efforts, however, does not negate the proposal that there are not enough of these committed professionals to steer the VET sector out of trouble.

This raises the question of pathways. What is it that committed VET teachers can do practically to steer their colleges and their industry into the space they want it to occupy – good quality provision of education that makes a difference to the lives of students, their families and the nation?

This is where a regulator can praise and support and help revitalise the sector. An effective regulatory system should identify these positive pathways and support them – and reward those taking them every bit as enthusiastically as they close down illegitimate pathways that undermine quality education.

The regulatory mission includes tending the pathway of recruitment and retention of teachers, trainers and managers who have high professional standards. After all, they become the internal benchmark for staff development in the organization.

These pathways to lifting standards through actively supporting high performers are not discussed in the VET regulatory space. We are not recognising that expertise in teaching is essential to build our capacity to innovate.

Part of the explanation is policy makers’ blind faith in markets. But part is also likely to be regulatory constraints on course structures and delivery that discourage innovative teaching and experimental partnering with industry.

The VET landscape seems to be trapped in a pattern of attack and defensiveness, with little trust between those who need to work together to repair the sector: governments (at different levels), teachers and trainers, business and industry, RTOs, unions, the regulators (ASQA as well as the consumer protection regulators), peak bodies, licensing bodies and professional associations.

Experts in vocational education and training have suggested ideas for redesigning curricula and bringing more educational coherence to what has become a modularised skill delivery structure. Along with these reforms, regulatory reforms are necessary to establish a sensibility of best practice training and teaching in the sector.

Three stages are begging attention: (a) legitimising ASQA; (b) building a public coalition around ASQA and best practice standards; and (c) using enforcement to sanction poor practice that puts students, government funding, industry and the public at risk.

Underpinning reform is a change of culture from conflict and domination to collaboration and resource pooling.

The most important repair job for the VET sector is to encourage, recognise and praise quality education. In the current situation, regulators can only do so by co-opting professional teachers and trainers onto their panels for site visits and opening up regulatory debriefings to students and other stakeholders when plans of action are formulated for correcting compliance problems.

There is no suggestion here that professional educators and trainers and other stakeholders (industry, consumer bodies) replace auditors and business advisers.

However, including others strengthens the regulator’s legitimacy as it plays a leadership role in lifting standards in the sector. This is not to challenge the regulator’s independence as a decision maker, which in governance speak needs to be safeguarded.

The issue is the process by which decisions are made and how a shared sensibility for high standards is developed and shared, not just in terms of understanding, but also practice. High standards become embedded in the culture.

Leadership for protection of this culture then occurs within organizations and outside.

At the outset, however, leadership for change demands a resourced alliance of knowledgeable and respected vocational education devotees, in and outside government.

Valerie Braithwaite is a Professor in the Regulatory Institutions Network at ANU. Valerie is an interdisciplinary social scientist with a disciplinary background in psychology.
Over the last three years Victoria University’s Work-based Education Research Centre (WERC) team has undertaken a series of studies into the recruitment and retention of women in traditionally male trades such as automotive and electrical.

In our most recent research we investigated the experiences of tradeswomen and female apprentices in the electrical and electro technology industry. In this article I’m going to discuss a few of our findings including some implications for TAFE teaching.
The purpose of our work is to assist tradeswomen’s networks, employers, teachers, industry organisations and other stakeholders to increase the participation of women in trades roles. NCVER data collated for the last 10 years show the proportion of women in training in any given year for electrical, plumbing, automotive, engineering and construction trades has remained below 4%. Of the small numbers of women commencing traditionally male apprenticeships half withdraw early on.

This matters for several reasons. First, for individual women, increased access to these occupations unlocks opportunities for interesting work and, often, increased remuneration and career prospects:

For me, a big one was you really do feel like you’re contributing something, to community, to people. So, it’s really rewarding when even if it’s something small as putting in a new power point for somebody versus when I was with XXX, we’d build whole substations. There’s chamber substations, there’s zone substations to power a whole building or a whole suburb. So, it’s pretty cool driving round in your community and seeing things that either you’ve built or contributed to or whatever (Nicole, electrician).²

Second, employers often identify increasing the pool of potential employees as a benefit; this is particularly the case for occupations experiencing stubborn skills shortages such as motor mechanic and air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanic.² Internationally and in Australia, there is also good evidence that increased employment of women improves business productivity by broadening the range of capabilities available in a workplace. For example, research by Goldman Sachs has shown that the rise in female labour force participation since 1974 has improved Australia’s economy by 22% and that closing the gap between male and female labour force participation rates could boost the Australian GDP by 11% (Goldman Sachs, 2009).² Out of 51 employers we have interviewed in our studies, most of those who have worked with tradeswomen have reported that women in trades roles are more organised and better problem solvers than males.

Fiona works as the apprentice recruitment coordinator for a large electrical industry GTO. She is responsible for selecting approximately 80 electrical apprentices each year and told us:

Our contractors say yeah, this person is really - they’re just switched on. They know what they’re doing. They’ve researched. They know what they’re doing before they get to site. They’ve got all their tools. They’re ready to go. We always have that comment come back from the female apprentices that we send out. I think it’s because they feel they have to be better. They have to be smarter. They have to be faster.

Michael is the General Manager for a state branch of a large national electrical contracting company which unusually employs 20% female in trades roles. Michael reflected:

…my personal experience has been that the working with female tradespeople and apprentices is they’re - they have been incredibly diligent. They have been the ones that came off the tools - as you say - and came into the office. Became great managers - project managers and CAD drafting people – and they built their careers from the tools through into the office. To my mind, they became better managers and better employees than most of the males because the egos were left at the door. It was about their job and working as a team, as opposed to any competition that may have existed in the male workgroup.

Finally, our own and others’ research into female participation in traditionally male trades indicate that these highly gendered workplaces incubate rigid attitudes to gender roles that are harmful to society. For example, the recent Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence reminded us of the
Amongst construction workers aged 15 to 24 – ‘more than twice as high as other young males’ has been attributed to the fact that the industry has ‘…a male culture on steroids’. Planning our study, we were mindful that there have been many failed attempts to increase the participation of women in traditionally male trades. As the 2011 Apprenticeships for the Twenty-first Century Final Report concluded ‘…despite a number of initiatives undertaken by governments and industries, such as the Queensland Government’s Women in Hard Hats and Group Training Australia’s Gender on the Agenda, very little progress has been made.’

For inspiration, we looked at research and successful interventions into other obstinate social problems such as long-term unemployment, gambling and family violence. A team member with a sociology and gender background led us to apply an ecological framework adapted from a model developed by Brofenbrenner in the 1990; an approach several career choice theorists have applied to understanding gendered career choices.

One research team, Cook, Heppner and O’Brien (2005), pointed out that ‘the ecological perspective’ demonstrates that behaviours such as occupational choice result from a dynamic interaction between individuals and the cultural and social environment in which they live. Our ecological analysis strongly implies that previous interventions aimed at increasing the participation of women in traditionally male trades have failed because they have been short term and one-dimensional.

The ecological approach suggests that strategies to increase the participation of women in male occupations must, like the problem, be multidimensional and complex; they must address the whole apprentice ecosystem. Taking an ecological perspective makes it clear that no single factor explains young women’s career aspirations. Instead, young women’s career choices are seen to result from the interplay of multiple variables that influence an individual’s career decision-making process. We used a simplified ecological framework developed by World Health Organisation (WHO) to understand the barriers and enablers that influence female occupational choice.

In this short article we can only give you a taste of the complexity we have observed and have chosen to give you a glimpse of how RTO representatives and tradeswomen’s networks. In our analysis we looked at the attributes that make a capable electro technology tradeswoman. Our data show how an individual’s personal characteristics and their interactions with family, school, employer, work colleagues and others influence their decisions to enter and stay in a trades occupation.

In this short article we can only give you a taste of the complexity we have observed and have chosen to give you a glimpse of how RTO representatives and tradeswomen’s networks. In our analysis we looked at the attributes that make a capable electro technology tradeswoman. Our data show how an individual’s personal characteristics and their interactions with family, school, employer, work colleagues and others influence their decisions to enter and stay in a trades occupation.

The ecological framework we used is illustrated in the figure above. It shows four levels of factors influencing a woman’s choice of, and retention in, a traditionally male occupation such as electrical trades. These influential factors interact with each other and change over time. The individual woman’s personal attributes, preferences and capabilities lie at the heart of the model. These develop in the context of her immediate relationships with family and friends, school and RTO teachers and other students, employer and work colleagues. Beyond the immediate level a range of community influences such as practices and culture in the workplace, at school and RTO also shape the individual’s experience. Finally and overarching, an individual woman’s choices are affected by societal beliefs about gender and what behaviours and work are appropriate for men and women.

For our study we interviewed tradeswomen, female apprentices and employers from every state and territory except Tasmania; from metropolitan, regional and rural locations; in small, medium and large businesses; and from many different industry sub-sectors including residential and commercial electrical services, construction, mining, power, security and instrumentation. In addition, we met with other stakeholders such as group training companies and RTOs, employer organisations, union representatives and tradeswomen’s networks. In our analysis we looked at the attributes that make a capable electro technology tradeswoman. Our data show how an individual’s personal characteristics and their interactions with family, school, employer, work colleagues and others influence their decisions to enter and stay in a trades occupation.

In this short article we can only give you a taste of the complexity we have observed and have chosen to give you a glimpse of how RTO experiences impact on female electrical apprentices. Twenty-four of the female apprentices and tradeswomen we interviewed chose to comment on teaching quality or other aspects of their vocational education experience. Most (23) of these women studied at TAFE. Thirteen were enthusiastic about their TAFE experience and the quality of the teaching:

*I found it to be a fairly high quality actually… the teachers that we had were very hands-on – and because they’d worked in the field and in the industry, they had experienced and knew what they were talking about* (Rachel, electrician)

*Oh, so far, all my teachers have been pretty good to deal with. Classes are good, it’s been – yeah, it’s really different to uni. It’s really slow paced, they really hang around until you get it, I guess and they offer a lot of tutoring so like all of that’s pretty good* (Olivia, electrical apprentice).

On the other hand, eleven of our participants described a disappointing TAFE experience often commenting on teaching that failed to engage them and meet their learning needs:

*I think sometimes they forget that we’re learning things for the first time, and that they’re reading directly from a structured course note… If you could just stop for five minutes, give me a little bit more information so I can try and process it a little bit better* (Belinda, apprentice).

For example, they have this thing called XXXX where you basically teach
yourself on a computer. I can’t do that, I have to be looking and watching and using my hands… They could see I was struggling and yet they wouldn’t really take me aside and go righto, we’ll go through these through your book instead of going - you having to read it all through on the computer.

(Zoey, apprentice).

Participants’ stories included evidence of the persistence of rigid thinking about gender roles:

There was myself and another girl in the class, and he said - it was a controls class. He said I hate to say it to you girls, please don’t take offence, he said, but you’re going to struggle in this course. He said it’s just the difference between the way the male and the female mind work. To me that was like a red rag to a bull. It was the class I got the best marks in, because again I was determined to prove him wrong (Lauren, electrician).

... the women teachers at XX Institute that were teaching electrical got treated very differently by all the guys in the class. They were normally the rowdier classes and the harder classes to learn in. The guys didn’t want to listen to the teachers.

(Chloe, electrician).

Luckily our participants tend to be resilient!

Our work and that of others show that TAFE staff can be part of a holistic approach to changing the apprentice ecosystem to increase the participation of women in trades roles. For all stakeholders, it is important to work on respectful relationships, positive behaviour and cultural change in workplaces, TAFE and other RTOs. For teaching staff, there are also unique opportunities to make trades learning spaces more inclusive through using a more diverse range of teaching strategies such as creating opportunities for conversation and interpersonal interaction in addition to hands on work with equipment and e-learning.

It is important to recognise that a complex change such as increasing the participation of women in traditionally male trades will require sustained effort. My colleagues and I look forward to sharing our full report with you later this year. If you would like to be on our mailing list please contact annet.jones@vu.edu.au.

Anne Jones with Berwyn Clayton, Naomi Pfitzner, Hugh Guthrie
Professor Anne Jones is an Emeritus Professor at Victoria University. Previously Anne was Executive Director Academic Affairs at Box Hill Institute of TAFE

1. NCVER data provided to the project team in August 2016.
2. Note that pseudonyms are use throughout this article for individuals interviewed for the study.
NEW SOUTH WALES
MAXINE SHARKEY

After almost two years of bargaining, a new TAFE NSW Enterprise Agreement has been agreed to by the parties and approved by Fair Work. The Agreement expires in January 2020 and includes a 2.5% per annum salary increase, with no change to teaching hours and all existing working conditions maintained.

Following a TAFE proposal being soundly defeated by teachers in April 2016, the NSW Teachers Federation held a Protected Action Ballot in October. The result of that ballot overwhelmingly endorsed taking protected industrial action. 63.7% of members state wide voted in the online ballot and an average of 91.5 per cent voted in favour of industrial action.

Simultaneously to the outcome of the Protected Action Ballot, TAFE NSW and the Teachers Federation came to an agreement on terms of settlement for a new Agreement. As well as maintaining all working conditions, the terms of settlement included a continuation of existing administrative arrangements for TAFE teachers to work five hours of related duties off-site, the implementation of the three trial roles, Head Teacher Band 3, Assessor and Educational Support Officer and the establishment of a joint working party to develop a comprehensive future workforce capability framework.

TAFE is now working toward the implementation of the new cooperative, ONE TAFE model. Ten Institute Directors will become five Regional Managers, Institutes will be “decommissioned” and TAFENSW will have a single brand. TAFE has strongly marketed the TAFE NSW “brand” in the early enrolment period, with what appears to be a significant advertising campaign. Early indication is that enrolment across the state is positive. Federation is hopeful this will see a steady increase in teacher numbers.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for teachers in NSW Correction Centres. All but 20 teachers employed by Corrective Services either took redundancies just prior to Christmas or accepted a non-teaching role within their gaol. To date, the Coalition state government has not announced the outcome of the tender to provide ongoing education to prisoners within the states adult correctional system. Federation will continue to fight for these most disadvantaged students to receive quality education provided by permanent, highly qualified publicly employed teachers.

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

QUEENSLAND
DAVID TERAUDS

The year started very quickly in Queensland with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission ratifying the 2016 TAFE Educators Certified Agreement on January 5. With this act the new modern award was also enlivened. With reasonable pay increases backdated to 1 July 2016, the new agreement preserves the best of TAFE educator’s conditions while providing opportunities to be responsive to industry and students.

The Queensland Government have appointed a new board to TAFE Queensland replacing all but two members with fresh faces. Annabel Dolphin is the new board Chair and brings a high level of board experience as well as a keen interest in training and regional matters.

In the meantime TAFE Queensland is moving to a single RTO registration after having operated with regional RTO registrations for many years. With this move comes a restructuring of responsibilities for its on-line and higher education units.

In Central Queensland enterprise bargaining has recommenced at the dual sector university after a festive season hiatus. Reports of the progress of the bargaining depend on who you speak to about it. The QTU/AEUQ is less than impressed with the universities position which they maintain is to be taken seriously.

The position of the union is that all educational employees of public providers should have parity of pay and conditions whether working at a campus in a TAFE or a merged dual sector entity. The union continues to pursue a separate agreement for VET educators at the university and is supported in this aim by colleagues at Togeter Union of Employees. The university seeks a single agreement for all employees.

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

VICTORIA
GREG BARCLAY

Negotiations for a new Multi Enterprise Agreement have recommenced in 2017 with the employers (predictably) pushing for increased productivity from teachers in the form of increased teaching loads with a push for 1000 teaching hours per year. AEU TAFE members across the state have (for many years now) identified workloads as the key issue that must be addressed through this round of negotiations.

The Victorian government has recently launched a series of television advertisements promoting the public TAFE system in another move that shows a continuing support for the public TAFE system. The advertising campaign comes on the back of a Skills First policy launched late last year.

Skills First promises to place TAFE at the “heart” of the Vocational Education and Training system and has seen a range of changes to push for a return to a quality VET system, some of the other goals of the policy include —

• Bench mark for quality
• Centres of excellence
• Providing more than training
• Pivotal in regional communities
• Leaders in International education

Despite these welcome policy commitments from the government and increases in funding to the public TAFE sector, the single biggest issue that will undermine all attempts to restore the capacity and capability of the public TAFE in Victoria is the ongoing use of “contestability” as the platform for vocational education and training in Victoria (and beyond).

The government has offered contracts to over 300 organisations to deliver vocational education and training programs and services in 2017.

Greg Barclay is the Victorian member of the National TAFE Council Executive

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
TONY SUTHERLAND

The start of 2017 is a repeat of past years with the viability of programs again in question resulting in a review of Educational Business Units to reduce costs at the exclusion of business growth. The reduction of costs is centred on reducing staff numbers by not renewing...
contracts and declaring ongoing employees excess. Regional areas are the hardest hit with face to face classes being replaced with online delivery with the occasional face-to-face class with a fly-in-fly-out teacher. TAFESA continues to reduce its footprint with the closures of sites in Gawler, Renmark, Morphettville, Cleve, and Tea Tree Gully and the scaling down at other sites of program offerings. In an endeavour to increase course enquiries into actual enrolments TAFESA has expanded the successful Student Experience Redesign Project (SERP) pilot into 2017. This has resulted in a disaster with many students who had preferred TAFE as their provider of choice through the SATAC process, but were not contacted by the SERP team until late January and have now enrolled with other providers.

The Enterprise Agreement was signed off in the Industrial Commission in October and has entered an implementation stage with work groups trying to deal with changes to benchmarks in Instruction and Assessment hours. The AEU is running workshops for members to empower them to negotiate with management on the implementation of their new employment conditions.

AEUSA wish to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of retiring Branch Secretary Jack Major. Jack has been a stalwart of the AEU and a strong advocate for TAFE. Jack commenced as the TAFE organiser in 1984 after working in TAFE for several years. In 1994 Jack became AEU Branch Secretary a position he held until his retirement. We wish Jack a long and satisfying retirement and congratulate him on a stellar Union career.

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

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

GARY HEDGER

The beginning of the New Year has been highlighted by chaos around the new amalgamated TAFE system. Whilst staff were taking a well-earned break over the Christmas New Year period, the IT systems were being amalgamated so that systems could share information.

Lecturers returned to find that they had no timetables or rolls at the start of the new term. They were also faced with large classes and decreased admin support which caused lots of confusion for students and lecturers.

During February the Union will be developing a draft log of claims to be sent out to branches for feedback as our current agreement expires in December 2017.

Whilst all of this is happening the state election is occurring in March and the Union is in preparation for staffing 4 polling booths that will be in TAFE colleges. At this point in time no party has released any policy in relation to TAFE.

During a very busy start to 2017, the Union will be engaging in a permanency campaign across TAFE as after the merger the Union has found staff members that have been on continuous full time short term contracts for over 10 years. The Union will also be continuing its campaigning against cuts to SCH.

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

ACT

KAREN NOBLE

For CIT teachers 2016 focussed heavily on the reregistration workload in preparation for the 2017 audit, details of which are not yet known. In the ACT AEU survey 87% of CIT members stated that the workload impacted on their life outside work and 92% stated it impacted negatively on their attitude, morale and health. Discussions with CIT Executive demonstrated the enormous disconnect between the day to day experiences of teachers and the impression held by Executive that, apart from a few rough patches, the work was done and things were in hand for reregistration. As we were told many times, it was teachers’ work and it just had to be done. At this time of budget cuts there was no teaching release so teachers (and potentially students) suffered under the pressure of unreasonable workload and expectations. Once the focus of the reregistration audit is known the AEU will work to ensure teachers are supported to finalise preparations and not be unreasonably pressured or singled out.

2017 commenced with an Institute gathering to focus on challenges and opportunities. Our CEO presented clear details about the trend of declining CIT enrolments. Unfortunately, the national trend of declining TAFE and VET enrolments was not offered as context or explanation. You could think it was just a local trend that CIT staff, alone, needed to address with more innovative educational offerings and improved customer focus.

CIT is embracing a number of innovation and cultural change projects to boost our future outlook. These sit alongside increasingly insecure employment, highly restricted budgets, the minefield of training package and compliance requirements, the commencement of EA discussions and the imminent pressures of the reregistration audit. We are set for another tough year and look forward to membership growth and involvement.

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

TASMANIA

PAUL LENNARD

As TasTAFE launches into 2017 it has many challenges. It will be the first year of the introduction of its new Learning Management System, and the trials that this brings for both the organisation and its staff. The new system relies on teachers imputing their own results, along with other information, a system with which many teachers will struggle initially. The organisation will also move into the implementation phases of “Moving from Good to Great”, and “Education Architecture” hoping these initiatives will bring enhanced service to the Tasmanian public, and a more effective and efficient organisation, conveying required skills and training to all regions of the state. These initiatives should also enhance all Tasmanians abilities and opportunities, by working together, and partnering with other Registered Training Organisations, Government and Non-Government Schools, Colleges, and the University of Tasmania to achieve the highest possible training outcomes within the skills and professions required for the state to continue growth.

The AEU Tasmanian TAFE Division and TasTAFE have commenced negotiations on a new Enterprise Bargaining agreement, heavily focussed on the results of a survey the AEU Tasmania TAFE division undertook with all members. AEU TAS is working hard to maintain and strengthen the initiatives in our current agreement, looking after the rights of all its TAFE membership, and building on the wages, conditions, and career structure we currently have.

Strong areas of negotiation, include salaries, AST1 roles and responsibilities, meaningful professional development, and a flexible workforce capable of taking TasTAFE securely into the future.

Sadly we lost a number of AEU members at the conclusion of 2016, whether through retirement, career change, or yet another round of targeted redundancies. Our best wishes are with all those former members.

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

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