We are inviting all The Australian TAFE Teacher readers to take part in a quick survey about the magazine. We want to know what you like about TATT, and what you would like to see more of in 2015. This short survey will help us to bring you the stories, information and updates you want to read in 2015 and beyond.

To complete the survey online please go to: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DS2FMVY or http://tinyurl.com/TATTSurvey

If you would prefer to receive a paper copy of the survey to complete, please email us at rscroggie@aeufederal.org.au
It’s hard to believe this is the final edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher for 2014. We hope you enjoy reading the feature articles, regular columns and updates. To help us plan for 2015, we are inviting all readers of The Australian TAFE Teacher to take part in a survey – we want to know what you like about the magazine, and what you would like to see more of in 2015. You can complete the survey online at [http://tinyurl.com/TATTsurvey](http://tinyurl.com/TATTsurvey) or email rsroggie@aeufederal.org.au to request a paper copy of the survey.

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**Federal TAFE office bearers**

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<td>President</td>
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‘It has been a mighty effort to rebuild our state’s TAFE and the brand in just over 14 months of operation.’

THOUGHOUT the month of September, Training Awards have been held in every state and territory around the country. These awards are always the highlight of our annual TAFE calendars as it gives us the opportunity to showcase the very best of our efforts in educating a diverse group of students to reach their potential. We also get to shine a light on our best practice working with industry and community partners.

The 2014 Tasmanian Training Awards held in Hobart on September 5 has reinforced how right the decision was to return to the TAFE brand in Tasmania. TasTAFE was one of nine finalists in the Training Provider of the Year award. When TasTAFE was announced as the winner of the Large Training Provider of the Year award it was recognition that we have demonstrated outstanding achievements in all aspects of the delivery of vocational education and training in the past year. It has been a mighty effort to rebuild our state’s TAFE and the brand in just over 14 months of operation.

With 21 finalists from TasTAFE in all bar one of the nine individual awards TasTAFE as the public training provider was well represented. Our other win on the night was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year award. At the national awards we will also have a finalist in the Excellence in Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) Practice Award.

State and Territory Training Awards as well as the National Training Awards are very public acknowledgements of best practice in the vocational education arena. While many more private RTOs are nominating for these awards it is an outstanding vehicle to drive home to our industry and the community how valued TAFE institutes, students, staff and qualifications are to developing the Australian people and our economy.

The culmination for all the individual and organisational winners is the opportunity to represent their state and territory in their award at the National Training Awards. This gala event will be held in Adelaide on the 21 November. Good luck to all of our 2014 TAFE finalists.

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In the week of 15-21 September, Stop TAFE Cuts supporters from around Australia did their blocks for TAFE. In this week, tens of thousands of leaflets and letters were distributed, as supporters let their neighbours know about what was happening to their TAFE college, and encouraged them to join the campaign to defend the TAFE system.

In the week that the Stop TAFE Cuts campaign encouraged supporters to get involved in spreading the message and building the campaign, the NSW government announced hundreds more job cuts, more cuts to funding were revealed in South Australia and figures released by the Victorian state government showed that TAFE market share had plummeted to 27 per cent. The “Do your block for TAFE” activity could not have come at a more crucial time in TAFE’s history.

It is very important that we spread the message about what is happening to TAFE colleges around the country. Leafleting and letterboxing, especially when the message comes from a neighbour, is a very effective way of building the campaign, and getting the story out into the community.

The message is very clear — TAFE really is too good to lose!

As Kristie a TAFE teacher and supporter reported back to us after doing her block, “Hopefully TAFE cuts made dinner table talk in my neck of the woods!”

If you missed out on doing your block, you can still download and print copies of the letter from our website at www.stoptafecuts.com.au/do-your-block-2014

A very big “thank you” to all of our supporters who got involved and letterboxed! ☺
CUTTING “RED TAPE”
IN THE VET MARKET –
the triumph of ideology over common sense

By Pat Forward

In response to a suite of changes to the VET sector announced by Minister Macfarlane in early September, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the national VET regulator, is set to invite more than 800 registered VET colleges — the majority of them private for-profit — to apply for the right to change their courses and introduce new ones, without permission from the regulator. More than 1000 colleges may be offered this opportunity, in a sector which has, according to The Australian “displayed no lack of imagination in exploiting money trails.”

In recent years, Victoria’s open training market has produced, again in the words of The Australian, “heroic rorts” — four-day diplomas with cash rewards for enrolling students and trips to Bali. The introduction of HECS-style loans — VET FEE HELP — has resulted in “entrepreneurial” private providers offering courses at four times the going rate, “zero upfront fees” and free iPads. And “earn or learn” welfare benefit rules have spawned a new class of agents lurking outside Centrelink offices, trying to sign up jobseekers.

The proposal to give hundreds of colleges the capacity to decide what courses they offer comes at a time when the opening up of government funding in VET to the private sector is almost complete. With NSW set to introduce its version of market reform, Smart and Skilled in January 2015, every state and territory will have embraced so-called competitive allocation of funds through the national entitlement mandated in the previous Labor government’s National Agreements. This has resulted in a massive expansion in the proportion of government VET funding allocated contestably, and therefore available to the private for-profit sector, especially in the two most advanced “reform” states. By the end of 2012, 71 per cent of Victorian VET funding, and close to 75 per cent of South Australian VET funding was contestably allocated, and therefore open to the private sector.

In a recent article in The Australian, ASQA was reported as saying that the move wouldn’t trigger a new round of rorts. ASQA believes that the requirement that RTOs be registered for at least five years, be re-registered without mishap and be the subject of no on-going regulatory concerns were sufficient to protect the sector.

But what is abundantly clear is that the move to make it easier, particularly for private RTOs to change their course offerings is based not on evidence but on ideology. The shift to so-called “light touch” regulation and the reduction of red tape is driven by a desire to make it easier for private for-profit colleges to operate profitably in the sector, not by any interest in students, or any desire to protect them from unscrupulous operators.

Gavin Moodie highlights this triumph of ideology over evidence in VET policy making, arguing that it increases not reduces the need for regulation of providers. He says:

ASQA’s own reviews find that there are pervasive failures of compliance amongst private registered training organisations. These aren’t problems with isolated “rotten apples” but extensive, perhaps systemic
problems with quality and standards. The Minister’s own advisers state that there is widespread lack of confidence in assessment standards and qualifications amongst employers, and this lack of confidence is shared by teachers and students.

The evidence-based response would have been to introduce measures to correct the noncompliance and inconsistent assessment, and review providers’ performance after three or so years to find whether their quality and standards had improved.

Instead, says Moodie, the Government has deregulated providers “in the face of evidence of substantial regulatory noncompliance, numerous quality failures and widespread inconsistencies in assessment.”

Moodie suggest that ASQA’s conditions for delegating regulatory responsibility to RTOs are too lax because “ASQA doesn’t have enough inspectors in the field investigating complaints and possibilities of regulatory and quality failure, and because there is no systematic mechanism for assuring the consistency of assessment standards.”

In the end, says Moodie, state governments will have to extend their own regulations and monitoring of providers’ eligibility for state government subsidies:

“...so rather than reducing regulation, the Federal Government’s relaxation of national regulation will extend the duplication of regulation: once at the national level for registration as a training organisation and a second time at the state level for eligibility for state subsidies.”

Leesa Wheelahan argues that the moves to create a friendlier more flexible regulatory regime come despite manifest market failure, scandals and corruption.

She says that ASQA has good reason to be concerned with Standard 15.

She highlights the fact that 72% of RTOs were non-compliant with RPL — “which is perhaps the highest risk because it is based on assessment without any accompanying process of teaching and learning and is wide open for corruption. About half were found to be non-compliant with the qualifications of their teaching staff, with the facilities and teaching and learning materials, and with the actual training package itself.”

“This isn’t one or two rotten apples — this requires root and branch rebuilding.”

But Wheelahan also points to what many are increasingly realising is the “rotten core” of Australia’s VET market:

“We have patently inadequate qualifications which don’t require big investments by RTOs to develop and implement and a regulatory system that has been shown to not work already.

“The structure of the system favours rent-seekers, argues Wheelahan. “There are millions to be made. The problem is there is no way into the government’s logic. The Federal and State governments’ believe that the market is the only way to distribute access to social goods. If there are problems, it must be in the settings of the market, so let’s tweak the settings until we get it right. There is no way into this logic — no way of saying that the problem is the market, it is always attributed to the settings. So we have zigzagging policy, funding levels and instability, and this leaves the door right open to unscrupulous providers.

“So where do these changes leave Australia’s vocational education system? On a daily basis, trust is being eroded and the reputation of the sector is being trashed. The public TAFE system, struggling under the weight of budget cuts and incoherent reform, will be damaged by the activities of the for-profit private sector.

“But by far the biggest risk is to students. As public funding of programmes is continuously reduced and made conditional on a range of factors outside young peoples’ control, this generation cannot afford to waste their once-only opportunity at a funded qualification at a dodgy college. As the regulatory system is weakened, and trust is eroded, how does a young person, or indeed any intending student know which college is good, or which unethical? In Queensland, where TAFE facilities are now opened for private providers, many students will not even know that they have enrolled at a private college, rather than a trusted TAFE college. And if their experience is bad, or they are ripped off, they will blame the whole system, including TAFE.

“More serious still, students are being required to pay much more of the costs of their qualifications, and in many cases, they are being charged full “market” rates. The era of $30,000 diplomas is upon us, and students are being enticed into these qualifications, with inducements, but also with the prospect of paying no upfront costs, but becoming indebted far into the future — and again for a qualification which could prove worthless. Currently, VET FEE HELP loans are disciplined at the extreme end by a lifetime borrowing limit for students. The package of reforms to the higher education sector currently being promoted by Minister Pyne proposes to remove the limit on all HELP loans, and so even that discipline would be removed, allowing VET providers to charge unlimited fees to put on the never-never of students’ debt.

“This government is driven by the ideology of the market, and it is devising policy in the VET sector with the guiding principle that the market rules, and the capacity of the private sector to make profit should be uppermost in the minds of governments. This is no way to organise an education sector, and it is no basis for sound public policy. Young people will be damaged by their experience in the VET sector in Australia at the moment. Many will be cheated, a large number will be left with long term debt, trust in the qualifications they acquire is already being undermined, and they will be discouraged from engaging in education again. Their employment prospects will be jeopardised — and while that other great god of market philosophy, the economy, will suffer — it is our society which will be much the poorer for this ill-conceived approach to vocational education. ❧

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary.
TAFE AND MARKETISATION:
Level playing field or devil’s playing field?

This article is an abridged version of a speech by Virginia Simmons, given at the Australian College of Educators conference, in Adelaide on 12 September 2014.

In 1990 the Commonwealth and all States and Territories signed up to national competitive neutrality principles, through the Competition Principles Agreement or CPA, which has since been updated and re-affirmed.

The CPA states that the objective of competitive neutrality policy is: ‘the elimination of resource allocation distortions arising out of public ownership of entities engaged in significant business activities’. (Competition Principles Agreement – 11 April 1995 (as amended to 13 April 2007), p 3)

Here, ‘business’ is the operative word.

But it also goes on to state that the competitive neutrality principles: … only apply to business activities of publicly-owned entities, not to the non-business, non-profit activities of these entities.

Governments have chosen to regard TAFE as a business enterprise within the Competition Principles Agreement. Since the 1990’s they have been progressively applying competitive neutrality principles to TAFE — increasingly treating TAFE solely as a business rather than, for example, also a service (impacting education/training/skills). The CPA marked the advent of the ‘Training Market’ and the application of market principles to both public and private sector VET.

Even though it does not appear anywhere on the lists of public trading enterprises under the Competition Principles Agreement, it is being treated in the same way as government intended to treat entities like Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank or Telstra at the time that the Agreement was signed.

TAFE is the only education sector to have been singled out in this way although the Competition Principles Agreement does not require that it be so treated.

There are now over 4,600 RTOs in VET compared with less than 200 private Higher Education Providers and the cost and effort of trying to regulate all these RTOs for quality — so often unsuccessfully — is not seriously regarded as an issue. The sad fact is that an open market was introduced before the regulation of quality was introduced. There was even a misguided view that introduction of a market system would itself deliver quality. Recent statements by the Federal Minister that there is a need to ‘cut red tape’ in the VET sector, do not auger well for improvement in this regard.

Only two or three years ago rorting by unscrupulous providers ruined the VET system’s reputation in the international market. It is only just now beginning to recover. More recently the rorting has been at the domestic level. We see the provision of training being manipulated by the market for purely income generation motives. There was much publicity in the media about the massive oversupply of people qualified as personal trainers and security guards in Victoria in 2012. This was stamped out but only to be replaced by other fields of study where opportunistic providers could see a market.

Here are some of the more stark examples from the Victorian Training Market Report for 2013.

• There were 18,800 enrolments in Aged or Disabled Carers in 2013. This is equivalent to around half the total number of workers in the industry and nine times the average annual requirement for new employees in the field.

• There were 15,000 enrolments for Storepersons in 2013 — equivalent to about 40% of the total number of
workers in this field and ten times the average annual requirement for new employees.

- There were 13,600 enrolments for Engineering Production Systems Workers. This is a staggering two and a half times the total number of workers in the field and 34 times the average annual requirement for new workers.

These figures represent a scandalous waste of government money, at the same time as the Government is making radical cuts to the TAFE system in the name of ‘the market’.

TAFE is being increasingly pushed into the high-cost, resource-intensive areas such as Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, where it has 93% of the market, Electricit, Gas & Water (85%), Information, Media & Telecommunications (81%), Mining (73%) and Construction (69%).

By contrast the private RTOs dominate in the low-cost areas such as Financial & Insurance Services, where it has 88% of the market, Wholesale Trade (87%), Transport, Postal & Warehousing (78%), Retail Trade (74%) and Administrative & Support Services (72%). These are all areas vulnerable to ‘tick and flick’ approaches to assessment.

The Victorian Government has been leading the competitive neutrality agenda. It has reduced funding to TAFE in a range of areas. It requires TAFE institutes to deliver a return on investment and it has ceased to fund capital improvements. It has also removed funding for community service obligations and so has stripped the TAFE institutes of their capacity to provide a rich learning experience.

The Victorian Government has also issued strategic planning guidelines that TAFEs must adhere to. In this 19-page document¹, the following words do not appear at all:

- student;
- learner/learning;
- pathways;
- industry;
- employer/employment;
- access/participation/attainment;
- regions/communities;
- disadvantaged.

It is instructive to consider the words that appear in these guidelines with the most frequency. They are headed by financial (50 times), performance (22 times), corporate intent (14 times), asset, (14 times) and monitoring (11 times).

These are the matters that count for government in VET.

It is not suggested that these latter terms are not important, just that the balance between VET as a service and VET as a business has been completely skewed. Nor is it suggested that there are not many reputable and high quality RTOs, because there clearly are. Their reputation is equally damaged by those that rot the system and by the fact that they continue to find ways to do so.

What is particularly troubling is that students enrol under an entitlement system and only have access to government funding at a given qualification once. If they enrol with a provider offering training and a qualification of low quality, they will generally not get a second chance at the same level.

The most recent Victorian Government training market reports for the first half of 2014 show that the market share of the public providers is down to 27%, a steady decline from 40% in 2012 and 66% in 2008.

The pattern in Victoria is being repeated nationally.

Against this background, there is a deep fear among many TAFE professionals nationally that TAFE is headed for full privatisation; that the die is cast and it is too late to undo the damage that has been done.

There is also a fear that many young and older people who have benefited in the past from the broad-based, industry and community-focused and supportive environment that TAFE offers will no longer have access to it — initially financially but ultimately as a system as well.

In case the above comments are seen as cynical or alarmist, consider the report of the recent Senate Inquiry into TAFE²:

Recommendation 3 is an implicit recognition that the regulatory body, now in existence for three years and about to be reviewed, is not adequately resourced to undertake its role and that quality is slipping through the cracks:

The committee recommends that the resources and funding for the Australian Skills Quality Authority be proportionally increased relative to the number of private providers entering the training market.

Recommendation 4.2.2 acknowledges that the current standards are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure quality:

The committee recommends the development of improved government standards for registration of training organisations, as the current regulatory environment provides no guarantee of quality for students.

Recommendation 4.5.1 acknowledges that the funding cuts to TAFE have damaged its capacity to provide a quality service.

The committee recommends full and immediate reinstatement of TAFE funding cuts by state governments.

Although the committee’s report contains a dissenting view from Coalition Senators they did not dissent from these recommendations.

In a recent speech to the national conference of TAFE Directors Australia Jennifer Westacott, Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia challenged the marketisation of VET in Australia. ‘Fad-driven market reforms have left vocational education and training more disjointed than ever’, she said. ‘We can’t just say let the market work, because it doesn’t always work for everybody and I say that as the queen of capitalism.’

Jenny Lambert, Education and Training Director of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, agreed, describing the open market policies in VET as ‘an abomination’.

So if VET is an industry-driven system, it has been marketised and industry doesn’t think it has been a good idea, how long will it be before something is done?

Recently the Assistant Minister for Education Hon. Sussan Ley MP bemoaned the fact that some providers were offering the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education — a qualification of 15 core and three elective units — in 8 weeks and that this would not serve young children well. But there was no recognition that this is the result of a bi-partisan policy of the Australian Government. The ideology of the market appears unshakeable. Its application to VET is never questioned.

If the Abbott Government’s reforms to Higher Education go through, TAFE institutes will have access to Commonwealth supported places and funding will be extended to Associate Degrees and HE Diplomas. Minister Pyne has emphasised that implementation of these policies will be tightly controlled to ensure quality is maintained. State-based cuts to TAFE run counter to this intention.

A valuable asset to the Australian community is at risk. Much damage has already been done to TAFE and the best parts of VET are also at risk. The devil is not only in the detail. The devil has control of the agenda.

It is time to restore the balance between TAFE as a quality service and TAFE as a business in a flawed training market.

Virginia Simmons A.O. Director, Virsis Consulting

2 The Senate Education and Employment References Committee, Technical and Further Education, May 2014
KIMBERLEY Smyth is currently in the second year of her plumbing apprenticeship. She is co-owner of plumbing business Hey Sista Plumbing which is run with the help of her plumber husband Mark and is based in Melbourne’s northern suburbs and services Brunswick, St Kilda and the inner city suburbs.

The mother of four says she was always interested in the trade as her husband has been in the industry for eighteen years. “When I said I wanted to be plumber I had a lot of people laugh at me and question me, but it made me more determined,” she said.

The promotion of trades to women in their early years is rarely heard of. A Fanelle survey of 84 female students at a local high school aged 14 –18 years found that 29% of young women had considered a career in trades but only 11% had been given information or suggestions from a careers teacher regarding trades. It is important to note that this survey also included hair-dressing.

As Kim’s business continues to grow she hopes that in the future she can hire more women. “I am hoping to provide a pathway for other women into plumbing, especially mums.” Kimberley and her husband are hoping to become a major industry employer for women. They are currently looking for pathways into larger government jobs to expand their workforce.

Kimberley would like to offer mothers the opportunity to work flexible hours, to allow for the school drop offs and gain a qualification that women can fall back on for life. “Many people told me I couldn’t do it because I have kids, why should I be held back because I have a family?”

A 2013 Ernst and Young study titled Untapped opportunity, the role of women in unlocking Australia’s productivity potential states that “Women in flexible roles waste only 11.1% productivity in a typical day, compared to an average of 14.5% for the rest of the working population. Given 43.2% of women in the workforce work part-time, compared to 13.5% of men, this translates into an important productivity bonus that few employers recognise.” This study has found that collectively “Australian and New Zealand workers could save at least $1.4 billion on wasted wages by employing more productive female employees in flexible roles.”

Kimberley’s business is one of many we hope to see pop up in the near future with 18 of Fanelle’s female apprentices becoming fully qualified in the next two years.

It’s easy to see Kimberley loves her job and her teachers at NMIT are very happy with Kim’s progress. Geoff Dixon is one of Kim’s teachers and nominated her for the 2014 Master Plumbers’ Rose Curtis Award which she received earlier this year. “She is very focused and committed to her study, she has a clear career objective in mind.”
Fanelle – Apprentice & Tradeswomen Network

Fanelle brings industry and tradespeople together to create awareness and support for women working in the male dominated trade industry.

Fanelle’s mission is to ensure society and the trade industry adapts to social change by supporting, encouraging and empowering women working in male dominated trades. At Fanelle we want to encourage women to take a chance at a career that will change their lives, and offer them support along the way.

Fanelle is always looking to get in touch with more women working in the trade industries and expanding its network. Fanelle offers support, social networking, job assistance and sponsorship opportunities. Fanelle is dedicated to supporting women working in trades and working together to change the perception of Tradey Ladies.

If you want to become more involved, or teach female apprentices, send an e-mail to info@fanelle.com.au; or find Fanelle online at www.fanelle.com.au and www.facebook.com.au/supportfanelle

The support Kimberley has received from her teachers at NMIT has helped her grow in confidence. “Whenever I find myself frustrated with a prac my teachers remind me that I am no different from any other apprentice and that even a plumber with years of experience is continuously learning.” she said.

It can be difficult for women entering the industry, with the common perception that trades are only a career option for men. Kimberley says “I recently went to my eldest daughters Year 11 subject selection information night and was dismayed at the career teacher’s comment that our daughters that did not continue with their education were likely to be unemployed because unlike their male peers, they could not fall back on a trade.” The continuous support and publicity for tradeswomen will help Fanelle break down these barriers.

For all the women considering a trade in plumbing, or wishing to start their own business Kim says “Go for it, an apprenticeship can lead to many career opportunities and although tradeswomen are a minority we are becoming more in demand. Starting my own business was nerve racking but I’ve found that a lot of elderly women have contacted me to complete work because they feel more comfortable and less vulnerable letting a female into their home.”

By sharing stories like Kim’s we hope to encourage other women to consider careers in our industry. If you teach a female apprentice or know a tradeswoman encourage her to get in touch with our organisation.

Fiona Lawrie is the founder of Fanelle, a mechanic and former Box Hill Institute student.

If you live in inner-city Melbourne, and need a plumber, you can get in contact with Kimberley via her Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/hi/staplumbing or on Twitter @Sistaplumbing

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HE most recent annual reports for Victorian TAFEs make for grim reading. In 2013 the State Government reduced recurrent funding to TAFEs (standalone and dual sector providers) by around 20 per cent. The operating positions of Victoria’s standalone TAFEs took a $74.8m hit leaving half with operating deficits. In that one year hundreds of staff positions disappeared although it’s difficult to give a precise number due to inconsistencies in reporting — a rough and conservative estimate might be 700 to 800. The Victorian Auditor General was forced to increase the financial sustainability risk ratings of eight TAFEs. In 2009 all TAFEs were assessed as having low risk ratings; in 2013 only half had low risk ratings and more than one-third had high ratings. How did things go so wrong? The Auditor General provides part of the answer:

• From 1 January 2013 the full impact of the previously announced changes to the funding model came into effect and most TAFEs took action to alleviate expected revenue shortfalls. As a result, the cost to students undertaking some vocational education and training courses increased, contributing to a decline in student participation. New student commencements were down in 2013 compared to 2012, while total student numbers also declined. TAFEs also reacted by reducing or changing course offerings.

• The sector also focused on reducing costs through staff redundancies. The full impact of action taken to reduce employee numbers should be realised over the next two years.

• Four TAFEs closed campuses between 2012 and 2013.

• Government capital funding declined by 36 per cent, and most TAFEs reduced “non-essential” capital expenditure, resulting in substantially reduced capital expenditure across the sector in 2013. This is only part of the story. The trouble began in 2008 when the Brumby Government released its Securing Jobs for Your Future (SJYF) policy for TAFE. Despite admitting that Victoria ‘had the nation’s best skills system’ at the time, delivering ‘unprecedented prosperity’ over the previous decade, the document was a blueprint for the dismantling of the public TAFE system as we knew it.

The object of the policy was to increase training by offering every Victorian a “Training Guarantee” — effectively a voucher — that would entitle them to subsidised training at a provider of their choice, public or private. To restrain costs, subsidised training would be limited to those who were training for a higher qualification (subject to some exemptions) and maximum student fees were increased. It was hoped that the capacity to adjust fees downwards and competition between providers would alleviate some of the fee increases. Income-contingent loans were made available for students at the Diploma level and above whose subsidised fees had increased by thousands of dollars.

Although SJYF had the effect of increasing the volume of training, costs escalated rapidly from 2011 when the floodgates of private provision opened. It soon became apparent that the market model was not providing Victorian taxpayers good value for money. By 2012 government funding for private training had increased by nearly 600 per cent. At the same time the quality of much of that training came into question. Many providers would stop at nothing to get more enrolments on their books. Tactics included the provision of financial or other inducements, the provision of qualifications in ridiculously short time periods and false ‘guarantees’ of employment after course completion.

In 2013 the National VET regulator found that 54 per cent of the 480 training provider websites they sampled were ‘marketing qualifications that they claimed could be achieved in unrealistically short time frames or time frames that fell short of the volume of learning requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework’. This is a tragedy for the students who paid for these courses and sacrificed their one opportunity for quality subsidised training at that AQF level. It is often TAFEs who have to pick up the pieces when these students try to use the qualifications gained from poor quality providers to access training at higher levels.

Still the students and government funding poured into the private providers; the most recent data shows that their market share of subsidised training has exceeded 50 per cent whilst TAFE’s has fallen to one-third.

Despite the fact that the training cost blowouts were happening in the private sector, the Coalition government, elected in 2010, took the knife to TAFE funding, announcing cuts estimated to be worth $300 million dollars annually. These cuts removed TAFE funding that supported TAFEs in meeting their community service obligations and costs as public providers. On top of these cuts have been spasmodic but frequent readjustments of course subsidy rates as the Government tries to manage the market. Planning in such an environment becomes difficult to say the least.

At a TAFE Directors Australia Conference, the Business Council’s CEO, Jennifer Westacott, agreed that training systems ‘can’t go flopping and flicking about for the next decade. We have to set a course and start mapping out the pathways to get stuff done’. She raised doubts about the effectiveness of open markets in training provision (The Australian, Free market ‘doesn’t always work for everybody’, 3/9/14).

The AEU Victorian Branch is calling for a review of the VET system in Victoria and a reversal of the TAFE funding cuts mentioned above. As a matter of urgency, we need minimum enforceable standards (regulation) for quality teaching and learning, the delivery of government subsidised training and VET teaching qualifications. To find out more or to support our campaign go to www.tafe4all.org.au.

Meredith Peace is the President of the AEU Victorian Branch
The battle to save TAFE from free-fall collapse in NSW

The week of National TAFE Day was a significant time for the Stop TAFE Cuts Campaign in NSW with much activity in both houses of the state Parliament. The Greens’ Save TAFE Moratorium Bill was debated and passed in the Legislative Council, while at the same time, Opposition Leader John Robertson included TAFE as a centrepiece for his budget reply speech in the Legislative Assembly.

The Upper House of the NSW Parliament carried the Save TAFE Bill initiated by the NSW Greens to stop the Smart and Skilled training market, restore TAFE funding, freeze TAFE fees. Greens MPs were joined by Labor and the Shooters and Fishers Party to pass the bill. Greens MLC, Dr John Kaye, said: “The battle to save TAFE from the free-fall collapse it experienced in other states has taken an important step forward. Stripping TAFE of funding for its core courses and handing over to students to choose between providers is recipe for falling standards, shorter course offerings and the triumph of cheap marketing tricks over quality outcomes for the state.”

Opposition Leader John Robertson’s budget reply speech included a much needed, timely and significant change in policy direction for TAFE.

Mr Robertson acknowledged that the role of Government should be “to gold-plate our education system into a world leader and ensure that everyone in our society has a chance to learn.” He also made the following pledges:

“If elected to government, Labor will abolish the Baird Government’s massive fee hikes to TAFE courses ... Labor will cap TAFE fees at current 2014 levels, and increases will not go beyond CPI. Labor will always treat TAFE as a central part of our public education system and we will never try to run it as a business.”

NSW ALP policy now states that:

“Everyone deserves an education — the chance to learn, to fulfill their potential in life, and contribute to society. Education is also a key to economic prosperity, and equipping our workforce with the right skills is an urgent concern for NSW. In this time of technological change, with new jobs quickly emerging and replacing others, investment in quality education is more important than ever. TAFE is a key pillar of our public education system that ensures our young people can acquire the skills they need for jobs for the future through high quality, affordable vocational education and training”.

Labor’s pledge to cap student fees at current levels and abolish the NSW Government’s Smart and Skilled changes acknowledges that a high quality TAFE system is crucial to meeting the current skills shortage and ensuring all citizens can access the vocational education and training that enables them to gain employment and contribute positively to the nation’s future.

In light of the persistent high rates of youth unemployment and the Abbott Government’s decision to punish young people who cannot find work by denying them a Newstart allowance for six months, the Labor call for a review of education and training beyond Year 10 is timely. It is important to develop better ways of aligning the provision of VET with the needs of students, employers and industries.

Teachers who have been calling for increased resourcing and support for the delivery of VET in both schools and TAFE would hope such a review would confirm the need for greater investment and coordination in this area.

At the end of the day, the citizens of NSW rightly expect governments to provide high quality public education for all students, rather than turn this responsibility over to a private education marketplace where making a profit takes priority over providing quality education for students.

Maxine Sharkey is the Assistant General Secretary (Post School Education) of the NSW Teachers’ Federation.
Thousands of Australians get their start at TAFE every year. TAFE is the start of a myriad of careers, jobs, lives and experiences. Here are four TAFE graduates whose TAFE education has been a wonderful foundation for their lives. To read about more amazing TAFE graduates, and to suggest who else should be included, you can check out the full ‘I Got My Start at TAFE’ gallery at www.stoptafecuts.com.au/i-got-my-start-tafe.

### Troy Cassar-Daley: musician

Troy is best known as a musician and songwriter, but before he became a star he studied commercial cookery at TAFE! “I went to TAFE and really appreciated all the help they gave me. I never ended up as a chef, but I always had another choice!”

### Sian Prior: writer, musician and broadcaster

Sian has both studied and taught at TAFE. Sian has released a new book this year — *Shy: A Memoir*. “TAFE courses are not a luxury to be trimmed out of existence when you’re in belt-tightening mode. TAFE courses are a vital part of our education system, our economy and our culture.”

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VET funding in Australia and the role of TAFE

The national VET system in Australia is very much at the crossroads.

By Peter Noonan

While workforce skills and capabilities are recognised as central to Australia’s future economic prosperity and to individuals’ life chances and wellbeing, the VET sector which arguably is of greatest relevance to most Australians and to most Australian firms — is facing a diminishing future.

Almost all of the public commentary in relation to education funding in Australia over the past year has been in relation to funding for schools and higher education. However, the real funding crisis is in the VET sector.

If we look at funding trends across the different sectors of education an alarming picture emerges, a picture that reflects the actual experience of many in the room.

Graph 1 demonstrates that while investment in schools and universities in Australia has risen significantly in recent years, there has been a much lower rate of growth in VET, with an even bleaker funding outlook in years to come. The exception to this picture is Victoria, where there has been a major increase in investment in VET in recent years.

This growing gap will be magnified in the next few years, with massive increases in funding for schools and ongoing growth in investment in higher education (albeit with a different mix of public and private funding). The graph understates the real level of investment in schools as it doesn’t include the significant private spending in the non-government school sector.

Graph 2 shows that spending per student has fallen significantly in VET in recent years, while it has grown substantially in government schools (and most likely even more in non-government schools) and to a lesser extent in higher education.

Graph 3 again using ABS data illustrates the growing gaps in investment levels in VET between the states, with Queensland and NSW showing no growth or declines in funding and very little growth in South Australia. Ongoing growth at reduced funding rates is a recipe for poor student experiences and poor outcomes.

These worrying trends have been ignored by most public and press commentators and decision makers, who appear only to be able to deal with issues in the sectors in which they have any direct experience.

This is a major concern, as the challenges of Australia’s workforce retraining and entry level training requirements, as well as addressing the growing scourge of youth unemployment will fall — as they traditionally have — to the VET sector, but against a diminishing investment base.

There are also significant and growing differences between the states, and in their approach to funding students and VET courses. These differences between the states are greater now than they have ever been since the development of the national VET system two decades ago.

There are also significant and growing differences between the states, and in their approach to funding students and VET courses. These differences between the

Graph 1 – Expenditure: 2003‐04 to 2012‐13

Public University expenditure has grown fastest... Steady growth in government expenditure on schools — slowest for VET

Graph 2 – Government expenditure per student

Commonwealth and state government recurrent expenditure, funding per fulltime equivalent student (schools and higher education) and per annual hour (VET) indexed to 1999
states are greater now than they have ever been since the development of the national VET system two decades ago.

In some course areas public subsidy rates have been slashed or removed altogether, leaving students facing the prospect of significant fee increases or programs not being conducted at all.

Most VET students are not able to access income contingent loans as their counterparts in higher education are able to even though VET students generally come from much lower socio-economic backgrounds than higher education students.

The states and territories are implementing a national agreement to introduce a student entitlement model in VET but the funding outlook in most states and territories is resulting in so many constraints and distortions of the entitlement that, for many students, it will have little or no meaning.

With the funding trend and funding outlook I have outlined, we are in danger of perpetuating a hoax on many students about their likely access to a reasonably funded entitlement or indeed an entitlement at all.

As one senior state department officer observed in relation to the defunding of an important VET Diploma: "of course students will have an entitlement — they will be entitled to a full fee place at a provider of their choice".

As a consequence of cuts in subsidy levels and removal of funding for some courses, many VET students from lower socio-economic backgrounds will receive less public funding for their 'entitlement' than other students in VET and in higher education. This is a complete distortion of the usual principles applying to the use of public subsidies.

These growth disparities in funding between the sectors may see VET as a sector progressively eroded:

- At the lower certificate levels by schools — if VET in schools programs flourish as funding to schools is significantly increased over the next four years;
- By ongoing declines in its strongest offering — the apprenticeship system — and the final demise of traineeships; and
- At Diploma and Advanced Diploma
levels by higher education as Commonwealth funding is extended to sub-degree programs. Major VET providers — particularly TAFE institutes — will move out of VET and into the higher education market.

Perhaps this is the outcome as a country we want. But if so, it should be a conscious, evidence-based decision and not driven by dysfunctional funding arrangements, a broken national governance model and sole policy preoccupation with schools and universities.

The risk here is not just to VET as a sector of education — but to ensuring that Australia’s future workforce skills are met. We need an effective tertiary system which is responsive to individual student and industry needs across a diverse range of qualifications and offerings as the labour market changes and evolves.

What is emerging instead is a system in which demand and provision is driven by the availability of funding and the pursuit of prestige.

The separation of VET and higher education into the education and industry portfolios nationally, and between the Commonwealth and states in relation to VET means that there is no coherent approach to investment in tertiary education in Australia.

The same holds true for the broader policy settings across the VET and higher education sectors. This is not just a criticism of the current Federal Government. The previous Labor Government dropped the ball on important recommendations of the Bradley Review to give effect to a broader tertiary education sector and it is the states — with the exception of Victoria — who have run down VET funding, a core area of their responsibility.

While maintaining the distinctive role and contribution of both sectors, the Bradley Review argued for more coherence in the structure of qualifications, national regulation and consistent approaches to funding a tertiary student entitlement by the Commonwealth Government.

The review panel warned that:— moving to a demand-based approach to funding higher education cannot be done in isolation from VET. Changing higher education funding but leaving VET funding untouched would compound existing distortions.

The Panel’s concerns were in fact not realised in the period of growth in higher education post the Bradley Review. Enrolments grew in both sectors, but with a significant amount of the growth in VET through lower spending per student.

Enrolments in VET actually held up until 2012, but fell by 3.4 per cent in 2013 with a significant drop off in higher level qualification enrolments. The overall decline would be much greater had it not been for an 8 per cent increase in Certificate I enrolments.

However the Bradley Review’s concerns may now be being realised.

A new independent assessment of funding trends and funding needs across the tertiary education system is therefore now urgently required.

Let me turn quickly to the role of TAFE as the public provider, not only in VET but in the tertiary education system generally. Increasing the types and diversity of providers in both VET and higher education is an important objective, but again one which would best be tackled on a consistent and coherent basis across the tertiary education system. This will increasingly be the case given the number of providers who operate in both VET and higher education.

Within this tertiary education system governments must recognise the role of TAFE as the public provider in terms of its broader social and economic contributions and the critical infrastructure and capability it provides for many industries and in many communities.

In the design of competitive funding systems we must build in, in a transparent and efficiently priced manner, the costs of TAFE as a public provider, and we must be prepared to value TAFE as a public institution — just as it appears we are prepared recognise the intrinsic value of public universities.

A key part of TAFE’s future role should be a focus on future skills requirements and investment in the new infrastructure and capability to meet these requirements.

These requirements will not be met by relying purely on market mechanisms, which are largely responsive to immediate skills needs. We must be prepared to innovate, to take risks and get ahead of the curve of skills needs.

In turn this requires new governance models in TAFE and renewal of leadership skills and employment models that are fit for purpose for modern professional learning and development, rather than dated systemic models which are a hangover from technical education and schools systems designed for different eras and purposes.

Peter Noonan is a Mitchell Professorial Fellow at Victoria University and has played a major role in shaping policy in Australia’s education and training system. He has experience working as a policy adviser, senior executive and consultant to federal and state governments, universities, higher education providers, and TAFE institutes, and has been instrumental to several major policy changes and reviews. This is an edited version of a speech he presented at the 2014 TDA conference in Sydney.
TAFE NSW: final battle or new beginning?

Across Australia TAFE is being driven to the brink by competitive markets for public funding. Written into the origins of this disaster is the clue to a way forward for public provision of vocational education and training.

If TAFE NSW succumbs, the notion that every Australian, regardless of class background or level of academic interest or abilities, deserves a quality education will have been dealt a savage blow.

The Baird government’s Smart and Skilled market is a slow motion version of Victoria’s bi-partisan Training Guarantee, that has seen non-TAFE providers grab 73 percent of students.

The only substantive difference is that politicians and bureaucrats in NSW watched the public relations disaster that followed the Victorian free-for-all and decided to put an initial limit on the number of entitlements each training organisation could cash in.

Inevitably, if Smart and Skilled survives without hard-wired constraints, pressure from the private sector, cheered on by Treasury, will open the entire VET budget to competition and NSW TAFE will follow the same path as Victoria.

The Baird government’s Smart and Skilled competitive market for skills training is the next existential battleground for the future of public education in Australia.

The script for this battle was written long before the National Partnership Agreement for Skills Reform was stitched up between then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and state premiers and chief ministers in April 2012.

Between 1983 and 2006, the union movement and the Hawke and Keating governments struck a series of deals to suppress wages and support so-called workplace reforms. In return Labor promised greater public spending on social wages including education and welfare.

The manufacturing union argued that a lack of national skills standards meant that on-the-job training of their members at one workplace was not transferable to another.

The Accord to contain a national system of Competency-Based Training (CBT) that, they asserted, would facilitate mobility, multi-skilling and career development.

It may have been an unintended consequence but at that point the union movement, collaborating with a Labor government, set in train a process that would inevitably threaten the rights of working Australians to a quality post-school education.

When Competency-Based Training was implemented as Training Packages, skills became a commodity.

Working Australians were to receive quanta of abilities that were rigorously defined and easily measured.

The slogan ‘skills for work’ effectively stripped out education from training.

Students in the VET system were to be denied the transformative values of critical understanding of the social, economic and cultural forces that determine the nature of their workplace and the society they lived in and how those forces would shape their future.

Instead, they were to be trained to task for easy slotting into a workplace.

Governments and their Treasury officials, obsessed with cutting taxes and balancing budgets, were then free to view TAFE as unnecessary and expensive. In the world of generic, measurable and tradeable skills training, the public sector’s commitment to developing its students as cultural, social and political participants became a cost rather than an investment.

Competency Based Training created measurable quanta of skills that could be supplied by private providers. Professional teachers could be replaced by lower-waged trainers.

Once skills became commodities, the inevitable logic of neoliberalism kicked in and training markets emerged, with TAFE struggling to survive.

Competency Based Training created the excuse to strangle TAFE that the neoliberal elite had been waiting for. For all working Australians, students with a disability and those from a non-English speaking or Indigenous background or who are seeking a second chance, it has been a slow but inexorable trip to educational marginalisation.

In NSW, the TAFE teachers and staff, their unions, students and the Greens have been running a committed campaign to stop Smart and Skilled. The media is beginning to pay attention and the community is increasingly aware that the future of TAFE is up for grabs.

In June Labor was finally corralled into supporting the Greens’ TAFE Changes Moratorium (Secure Future for Public Provision of Vocational Education and Training) Bill 2014 that would stop the competitive market and restore the funding that has been cut from TAFE. Passage through the Upper House was an important symbolic victory but without the support of the government it will not become law.

The Bill however has begun debate on the future of TAFE in NSW in the lead up to the March 2015 election. The one-off opportunity now exists to turn back the neoliberal agenda and enshrine a secure place for the public provider.

This will only happen if the union movement and the supporters of TAFE move beyond the ‘skills for work’ rhetoric and understand that as important as training is, education is a fundamental right that can only be delivered by public provision.

John Kaye, Greens NSW MP
By Theresa Millman

Executive Summary

The mapping of TAFE outcomes to higher education equivalencies results in the granting of Advanced Standing in some degree courses. In exploring the development of increasingly diverse pathways to higher education, this paper reports on a small study conducted in 2013 (Millman, 2013). The central theme is an examination of levels of reciprocal knowledge educators from both TAFE and higher education have about the pathways course they are involved with and impressions of levels of ‘readiness’ of students for higher education.

This paper specifically focuses on the Diploma of Community Welfare Work and the Bachelor of Science (Psychology) between a regional TAFE and university campus. Findings highlight the fact that while cross-sectoral understandings of reciprocal courses could be improved, overall TAFE is, for many students, a portal for positive change. The central recommendation is for increases in dual sectoral dialogue, with the objective of a positive and successful learning experience for students.

The Research Project

One of the key aims of the study was to identify levels of reciprocal course knowledge of TAFE and university educators. The research involved structured interviews with specific questions for key educators in both pathways programs.

Key Findings and Discussion

Pathways equivalency

Of particular interest in determining equivalencies of learning was the ways in which educators define and operationalise the term ‘knowledge’. In the rhetoric of transition literature, Cantwell and Scevak (2004) suggest that transitioning students are assumed to have levels of knowledge extant with other students who have advanced in their course through university study. Therefore, how developed these aspects of knowledge are prior to university may go some way towards determining students’ abilities to adapt to the demands of university study. Lindberg (2003) argues that ‘vocational knowing’ is contextualised learning based on outcomes which are measurable or observable through demonstrations of competence (in Smith & Blake, 2009). However, Gabb and Glaisher (2006) suggest that while vocational education emphasises the procedural and higher education emphasises the declarative, there is to some extent, a cross-sectoral overlap of these kinds of knowledge. Carr (2009:7) suggests that it is a ‘false dichotomy’ to continue to emphasise a so-called ‘gap’ between the practical skills-based curriculum of vocational education and the knowledge required and acquired through university study. Diagram 1 highlights the key descriptors of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ according to educators from both TAFE and higher education in this study.
Cross sectoral dialogue

Educators also reported that students need other skills sets as well, however in order to ensure equivalent skills sets, more conversations need to occur between sectors (see Diagram 2). Abbott-Chapman (2006) and Cram and Watson (2008) argue that in order for collaboration to be most successful, it is important to instigate dialogue at delivery level and it is preferable that pathways are run jointly and cooperatively to the greater benefit of the students. The study concludes that mapping of courses and identifying perceived ‘gaps’ in learning is the key to this ongoing problem (2008:9).

Milne, Glaisher and Keating (2006) also urge closer collaboration between TAFE and higher education in order to effect a smoother transition process for students. They suggest including cross sectoral teacher meetings, clear identification of knowledge gaps and transparency of information, as some of the means by which students may be assisted in moving from one sector to another (2006: iii). McLaughlin and Mills (2010) note the need for complementarity of curricula as one means of achieving agreement and unity of purpose across the TAFE and higher education sectors. They suggest that perhaps both sectors may adopt ‘an accepted definition of learning and scholarship’ (236).

‘Readiness’

Part of the discussion also centred on how prepared TAFE students are for university. Interestingly, being prepared meant two levels of ‘readiness’, having academic skills and the self-developed skills of ‘confidence’ and ‘self-esteem’. Both TAFE and university respondents felt that TAFE works from a ‘strengths-based approach’, which can further lead to transformation and growth in confidence (see Diagram 3). Walls and Pardy (2010) found that in an effort to help their students, some TAFE practitioners were attempting to include elements of preparation for university in classroom practice. Some higher education respondents in this study also felt that despite the ‘struggle’ some TAFE students’ experience initially at university, they also have ‘fantastic achievements’.

A final and not insignificant finding was that there is evidence of transformation at both TAFE and university levels (see Diagram 4). This is especially apparent in responses from TAFE educators who describe the ways in which TAFE is a portal for ‘personal growth’, and an experience which often builds ‘self-esteem’. Primarily, it was felt that transformation comes about through enabling students to ‘self-reflect’ and ‘critically reflect’. TAFE respondents further felt that students became ‘different people’, who find that by going to TAFE they ‘suddenly grow as a person, and develop … as a person’. As one TAFE respondent said ‘it’s about aspiration’.

Conclusion

This study was based on interviews with a small sample of respondents from specific locations, and was limited to comparing one bridging pathway. Overall, this study has found evidence of common understandings of ‘knowledge’; however, specific applications of these understandings are defined according to sectoral requirements and there are gaps in the knowledge TAFE and higher education practitioners have about reciprocal courses, with less information known about TAFE from the higher education perspective. The need for increased cross-sectoral dialogue is therefore recommended as a means to enhance the student experience and to enable student success.

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We need to secure the future of TAFE

By Tracey Escreet

TAFE has been so important to me throughout my life- and my career. In 1983, at the age of 14, I commenced my apprenticeship with the State Rail Authority and studied ‘Painting and Decorating Trade Course’ at Granville TAFE until 1985. TAFE provided hands on practical experience in classes, as well as theory. I received an award for the Highest Pass for ‘Painting and Decorating Trade Course’ in 1984.

In 1992, at the age of 25, I studied and did practical experience at Ultimo TAFE for ‘Signwriting Refresher’; which I needed for my employment with the Rozelle Hospital. I qualified for the award of ‘Statement of Attainment’ on completion.

In 1996, at the age of 29, I studied and did practical experience at Ultimo TAFE (Sydney Institute of Technology) to learn ‘Graining and Marbling’; which I needed as I was self-employed after being made redundant with the closure of the Rozelle Hospital. I fulfilled the requirements for the Certificate in Graining and Marbling.

In 1997, at the age of 30, I was a casual TAFE teacher with Liverpool TAFE Outreach for 18 weeks. I tutored 18 women in an ‘Introduction to Painting and Decorating’ as part of Work Opportunities for Women at the Liverpool Women’s Resource Centre. The response to this course was overwhelming as all 18 places available were filled almost immediately. The course was VETAB approved and allowed women to pursue further education and gain credits towards a Certificate in Painting and Decorating.

Currently, at the age of 47 and after 33 years of manual labour, I have decided to make use of my learned and lived experiences to pursue a career in Community Services to assist people with barriers in life to achieve their full potential.

I am currently studying ‘Community Services Cert IV’ and ‘Skills for Work & Vocational Pathways’ at Bega TAFE. It has been essential for me to have the assistance of the TAFE teachers with the foundation skills of reading, writing and computer skills to achieve my full potential and this has been proven with my marks in class.

I am a single, low income earner and TAFE is now affordable with concessions. However, I will no longer be able to afford this course next year with the NSW Government’s Smart and Skilled program proposal — due to be rolled out in early 2015, as I will have a Vocational Education and Training debt of $9,470 to pay off.

We need to stop the significant TAFE course fees increases in the NSW Government’s Smart and Skilled program, TAFE course student fees will be unaffordable or courses unavailable for people:

• With low incomes
• Living in rural areas
• From disadvantaged backgrounds
• With learning barriers
• From migrant backgrounds
• With disabilities
• Women returning to the workforce
• Single parents and their children
• In rehabilitation programs in prisons.

We all should be entitled to an affordable quality education whether we have just left school, need assistance to return to the workforce, to upgrade our education and skills to change careers (like myself), to have a second chance to learn and ultimately earn a decent income and be included in our society.

At the moment we are all struggling to pay mortgages, rent, bills for essential services and now the NSW government is going to add to our anxiety of another huge bill for essential education. How are we able to be positive, productive citizens and to help ourselves and the country to move forward?

I believe we will go backwards with HUGE government budget blowouts, as the other states who have made similar reforms prove. We all need TAFE throughout our careers, especially if we have to continuously upgrade our skills to enable us to work until we are 70 years of age.

We all need to ask if private providers are going to support students with learning difficulties or disabilities with their studies to help complete their courses and arrange the hours of workplace hands on learning which is essential for quality training.

Using private providers will push up costs, deliver short courses for profit and not quality training. Therefore we need to secure the future of TAFE as the leading provider of vocational education and training!
Questions about Jobs and Art

This article is in response to the News from NCVER article “Will that qualification result in a job?” published in the 2014 Winter Edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher.

By JN Blank

The article by Farrell & Wibrow (Will that qualification result in a job?) was of interest in its presentation of data. What is of concern is the statement relating to direct employment from Visual Art courses translated to immediate earnings in that disciplinary area. While it is understood that the function of TAFE education is training for jobs it has been widely and previously understood that graduates from the arts are more flexible in seeking work, as their practice (that which they have studied) will inevitably continue as they work in craft related or administrative areas of work upon their graduation. Graduates from my direct area have moved to commercial areas of study (film & video, graphic design, art administration, web design, photography) and made their living within the commercial and government funded art sectors. Their visual art training sets them apart from those solely from commercial (industry) focused training.

While few graduates manage to survive purely from their artistic production their contribution to the cultural variety and richness of Australian identity is beyond value. The data provided by Farrell and Wibrow is informative, but may equally be used as another stick to beat the already diminished, arts disciplines through another round of justifications for their existence within the embattled Australian VET sector. It is too easy and simplistic to simply state that upon graduation students from the arts do not get a job. One could say that it is because of that that it shows the sector is poorly supported, misunderstood and underrepresented educationally (across all sectors).

The current National Training Packages are appalling in their descriptions where, for example, any parent or student may access the Unit Outline for a Certificate III unit in Video Art and learn that their children who may be about to study this contemporary mode of art practice have been described where, ‘Assessment methods should closely reflect workplace demands (e.g. literacy) and the needs of particular groups (e.g. people with disabilities, and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, such as speakers of languages other than English, remote communities and those with interrupted schooling).’

To have such a crucial introductory technological / creative unit described as specifically relating to a currently understood description of ‘AT RISK’ student / clients would probably make any parent shudder if they had taken the time to check what their teenage children may be studying at school. The issue is not necessarily with the TAFE system or those staff attempting to deliver introductory level professional understandings of cultural production. The situation is clearly, in black and white, written by people with no understanding of the very disciplines they have, unfortunately, had the opportunity to meddle with at profound levels of educational influence. There is a clear need for those select few who are ‘invited’ to contribute to the drafting of national curricula to have current professional and teaching expertise at and above the levels they administer. Also that the curricula generated are not then watered down or required to be ‘transferable’ across a range of disciplinary areas for the sake of linguistic parity. Each discrete discipline in the Visual Arts has an equally rich lineage and contextual history which should be recognized, promoted and inform our contemporary understandings of Australian Art.

The example of Video Art has a significant (global) history, where much of the work has addressed issues of gender, identity, sexuality, politics. At Certificate III level there is no requirement for contextual teaching and learning or even post-production (such as editing) which is a significant aspect of contemporary video in many cases. Students ‘may’ present outcomes where they explore ‘prop making’ or ‘costume’ or animation and have no understanding of the work of such influential (Australian) artists as Shaun Gladwell, Tracey Moffat, REA, John Gillies, Josephine Starrs or learn of the Australian Video Art Archive (AVAA) (Monash, 2003). With no contextual elements expected or included it is unsurprising when in Aland 2004 Australia, cited (Davis, 2008) one of the most significant findings from the field research was that neither the students nor their teachers knew about the work of those artists, either national or international, that have been using computers in their artistic practice over the past forty years (i.e. since the 1960s) (Aland, 2004:10)

With the closure of the Australia Council’s dedicated New Media Arts Board in 2007 which had previously supported dedicated development of Media Arts across Australia the situation for the teaching of technological aspects within Visual Arts has significantly diminished in line with the increasing evidence of basic computer literacy from those students who have benefitted from access to computers throughout their education!

Throughout my career in education I have struggled against archaic attitudes towards the teaching of Art, even within Art Schools, where it is accepted that Visual Art is to be taught with little or no equipment, in ill equipped areas, by under or non-qualified staff who are more interested in their own practice than the development of those they are entrusted to teach. In every institution I have worked in across the UK and Australia...
most (permanent) staff have had significant practical experience, maintain their practice and are deeply committed to the development and continuance of Visual Art education as an independent discipline.

Adding another element from the transferable & job related skills present in National Training Packages sees technological (creative) units assisting students in basic aspects of file management, networked production, team work, collaboration and computer skills; all of which are contemporary transferable job related skills. Many students entering Visual Arts have had very poor educational experiences prior to entering the TAFE sector, which is why they often wind up studying Visual Art where their making and visualizing skills are able to be accepted and developed beyond pure language and math oriented emphasis. Visual art teaching and learning significantly addresses many aspects of contemporary work related practice where students learn to research, develop, structure and craft ideas to quality outcomes and deadlines. Those students who move through Visual Arts evidence significant and clear development in line with their immersion and growth of confidence with technologies. The experiences students bring to the general workforce from undertaking Visual Art related studies are beyond a singular occupational pathway and are more related to vocational understandings of development than a simplistic number crunching of immediate (training to job role) data.

In Western Australia the provision of community arts and tertiary level Visual Art teaching and learning across the VET sector has been significantly cut and centralized over the last fifteen years (Hutchins, 2014), while the population grew by 12.5% between the 2006 to 2011 census (Australia, 2011). Localized community Adult Education provision which existed across WA in the 1990s was closed and relocated to a single purpose built facility where ongoing cuts to funding have continued. The land and estate where existing TAFE delivery had been was sold for private residential projects or high yielding developmental sales. Links between availability and access to community level Visual Arts and the general health of a community have been established in US studies (Stuckey, 2010). The associated loss of a previously established commercial art gallery system has equally seen the closure of significant professional level Visual Art galleries in WA. It is not that the Visual Arts do not work so why invest in them? It is rather that where the investment is missing or removed there is no Visual Culture being supported or developed. In a state where huge and ongoing immigration is the norm, where migrants bring their existing cultural experience and may perceive that as more relevant, where there is little evidence of an Australian model to contemplate. It is a significant concern where the visibility and presence of Australian Visual Art production (or education) is effectively absent from easy access within community or professional local art galleries or studies where there is no discernable evidence or promotion of local cultural practice. The question is not ‘Will that qualification lead to a job?’ That question clearly indicates the short sighted and blinkered attitudes of a society purely focused upon a constrained understanding of the quality of human life, where it is simply equated to employability!

The question is how and whether there are any people concerned enough and qualified to ensure that Australian (Visual Art) culture is celebrated, understood and communicated educationally and aesthetically for the twenty first century.

JN Blank is the co-ordinator of Media Arts at the Central Institute of Technology in Perth. He is an ASL1 teaching Media Arts & general Visual Art units across Cert III to Advanced Diploma and currently completing a PhD on the integration of Media Arts within core Visual Art curricula.

http://curtin.academia.edu/jeremyblank

References


Image Credit; JN Blank, (After Bruegal; ‘The Blind Leading the Blind’ Glitch edit; 2014) (Bruegal, 1568)
Since TAFE in Queensland transferred from the Department of Education and Training on 1 July 2014, activity in the new TAFE and the merged Central Queensland University has been “steady as she goes”. However there are some key issues facing the public providers, primarily, declining enrolments and the uncertainty arising from the poorly planned and badly executed Queensland Training Asset Management Authority (QTAMA) experiment.

Anecdotally the QTU understands that enrolments in Certificate III and below qualifications are declining. In the 2013/14 FY just over 50% of the funding available in the transitional Certificate III Guarantee funding scheme went to private providers with only 19 qualifications on offer. Given that figure and that all Certificate III and below qualifications are now available on a contestable basis, the impact in the 2014/15 budget can be anticipated to be as bad, if not worse. Given the reported 27% market share of Victorian TAFEs, it is hard to see that the short term impact of the Newman Governments policies will deliver a better outcome for the public providers in Queensland. Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma enrolments are also problematic. Certificate IV qualifications are largely unsubsidised with most not eligible for VET FEE HELP. Therefore TAFE and CQU are redesigning offerings to exclude this level of qualification. This can seriously affect the pathways to continued on page 28

The recent resignation of TAFE SA CEO Jeff Cunningham was a blow to the organization as the strong advocate for educational principles in an environment with a Board guided by members with business backgrounds. In a forum after his resignation Jeff expressed concern that the State Government, by its action, had placed TAFE at risk and was critical of the nine changes to ‘Skills for All’ funding in just 2 years.

TAFE SA is seeking a new CEO and in the interim they have appointed ex Board Member Miriam Silva to an acting CEO role.

A news report based on a leaked ministerial briefing paper, which appeared in The Advertiser on September 3, has foreshadowed a loss of 800 jobs in TAFE SA over the next three years.

This latest report does nothing to alleviate AEU members’ concerns about the devastating impact of the state government’s market-based ‘Skills for All’ funding regime and reinforces suspicions that a full privatisation of VET is on the cards in South Australia.

The AEU has raised its concerns with the Minister and TAFE SA Board over a potential 800 job losses and their roles, especially in light of the recent 19% of staff (400 jobs) lost through TVSP’s in the last financial year. The majority of these jobs were lecturers of training programs and any further reduction in these numbers will affect TAFE’s viability to survive.

AEU SA Branch President David Smith commented that “The government either needs to come clean and admit it’s moving to kill off TAFE and fully privatise VET, or shelve its plans to cut more jobs and start putting taxpayer dollars back into TAFE where quality takes priority over profit.”

The AEU is waiting for a response to questions raised with the Minister and the TAFE SA Board to this report.

Tony Sutherland is the SA member of the NTCE

continued on page 28
AFTER a lengthy period of negotiation the Enterprise Agreement for Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is now with the Fair Work Commission. Its approval will trigger significant work in the areas of:

- Managing overtime — strengthening workload management processes so that overtime is contained, teacher work/life balance restored and additional staff engaged as needed
- Teacher workload — determining tasks that appropriately sit in a teacher’s workload and those that should be completed by others; also tasks that a teacher may complete but with appropriate resourcing
- Introduction of a new teacher classification, Teacher Level 2 — developing a new position which may focus on education leadership and/or education management. A process will phase out some existing classifications and introduce this new one.

Many members expressed concerns about aspects of the new agreement, in particular the new Teacher Level 2. Involvement in the implementation processes will be essential so that teachers’ views and experiences are considered and influence the resulting arrangements.

CIT is embarking on significant projects to secure its future in relation to Governance and Campus modernisation. Both projects focus on CIT being stronger and more sustainable for the future and are supported by ACT Government with clear statements of support for CIT’s ongoing role in the public provision of VET in the ACT. Once again, input from both teachers and students is essential and vigilance will be needed to ensure their views are included in relation to these matters.

In the 2014 ACT Training Excellence Awards CIT was awarded Large Training Organisation of the Year and a number of students and teachers were amongst the finalists and award winners. This is a great celebration of CIT’s achievements and the importance of VET for all communities.

TAFE is about life changing opportunities for individuals and developing world class workforces for the Nation and beyond. Current challenges in the areas of access, as course fees increase; quality of training as the pressure increases for completions in shorter timeframes and workload for all will be the future focus.

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

STATE budget cuts are having a severe impact on TAFE teachers and students in NSW. While each of the ten Institutes is undergoing some form of “review”, certain Institutes appear to be cutting courses and shedding teachers in drastic numbers. Metropolitan based Institutes are “rationalising” delivery of courses, so that only one or two colleges offer certain courses. This also sees a proliferation of “centres of excellence”, where trades courses previously delivered from a variety of suburban colleges, are now offered at only one central location. While this impacts on teachers, the ongoing impact is felt by students, who have the added burden of the cost and time of travel.

Students will also notice the drastic reduction of support services from next year, as redundancies start hitting hard in these areas. It appears that special program coordinators in disability services, multicultural, Aboriginal and outreach areas as well as counsellors will be removed from educational delivery while also having their numbers drastically reduced. Senior Counsellors, those who support TAFE counsellors in the important and difficult role they fulfil, will be deleted in some Institutes. Needless to say, with virtually every faculty in every college being under “review” and facing continuous redundancies, teacher morale is at an all-time low. Confusingly, those left in the teaching ranks are having leave entitlements such as extended leave denied, with the justification being a lack of teachers to cover the section.

As we move closer to the January 1 implementation of the Smart and Skilled contestable funding model, teachers are being pressured to set up rosters to cover vacation periods and non-teaching weeks. Colleges argue a need to have teachers available 50 weeks per year in the quest to compete for funds. This must be a slap in the face for the non-teaching staff who have also faced redundancies in unprecedented numbers. The union questions the need for teachers to be programmed to undertake non-teaching duties and advises members to familiarise themselves with the restrictions the enterprise agreement places on working outside the standard educational year. On top of this, teachers are most recently facing line managers making demands that are outside, or even in breach of, the current enterprise agreement. Union officers are being inundated with enquiries around working conditions and being contacted increasingly by distressed teachers who allege bullying from some head teachers and managers.

It would seem that TAFE teachers and support staff in NSW are experiencing some of the worst effects of the slashing of funding to TAFE. It is feared that next year, if this government doesn’t stop the TAFE cuts, it will be the students.

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

TASMANIA

TIME has inevitably moved on since my last report and the Liberal party has swept into power in Tasmania. The Treasurer, Peter Gutwein, has now handed down his first budget that will see at least 700 public servants under threat of being made redundant. To save an estimated further loss of up to 500-700 jobs the Treasurer has introduced a bill to freeze the wages and increments of all public servants for one year.

What is most disturbing for AEU members, and in fact all Tasmanian public servants, is that the bill will override legitimate Awards and Agreements recently ratified in the Industrial Commission - an unprecedented move by any government in Australia. Under the proposed legislation (The Crown Employees (Salary) Bill 2014) ultimate power to regulate the pay and conditions of Tasmanian public servants will rest with the Treasurer. For TasTAFE members this could see recreational leave, instructional load and salaries come under serious threat.

Coupled with the salaries bill is the draconian anti-protest bill, passed by the lower house that could see legitimate protestors being mandatorily sent to prison.

The budget also details savings all agencies must achieve. For TasTAFE that is $2.25 million for 2014-2015 and $4.5 million for 2015-2016. Preliminary discussions between TasTAFE and key stakeholders indicate that the $2.25 million may well be saved as a result of the wage freeze and other cost reductions. However the savings for 2015-2016 will see job losses. Discussions so far indicate that TasTAFE will look at its current structure and make changes to carry it forward into the future and that managers and some teachers may well be deemed surplus to requirements.

At the time of writing it is becoming apparent that TasTAFE will embark on a (quote from a recent management forum)

--- Redesigning of TasTAFE ---

“Restructures come and go, but a good design will set us up for the future”

This is from the same managers who wholeheartedly embraced the dismantling of the previous TAFE, that won awards, and set up the Skills Institute and the Polytechnic which were eventually seen as a failure and so TasTAFE was born.

All TasTAFE AEU members will need to be strong, united and vigilant to ensure this savage attack on their rights and conditions is defeated.

Rex Calvert is the AEU Tasmanian TAFE Division President
higher qualifications for students. Members report increased difficulty being experienced by students who do not have access to training to fill the knowledge gap between Certificate III and Diploma expectations. The increased budgetary constraints being placed on institutes is also limiting teacher contact with students, further impacting student outcomes.

Diploma course costs are increasing dramatically and in places enrolments are suffering as potential students decline the offer to incur large debts. Recent reports into apprenticeship and trainee numbers nationally indicate that there are declines in these areas of enrolment as well.

The impact of the establishment of QTAMA, a commercially oriented Statutory Authority meant to manage the physical assets of TAFE, is being felt across TAFE Queensland. With TAFE being required to pay rental for access to these State owned assets, Institute management is contracting the footprint of the public provider in the majority of locations. This is driven by the requirement that to retain sole use of a site TAFE must demonstrate 75% occupancy 75% of the time. If not, then other providers may lease and co-locate with TAFE.

The largest impact will be in the Brisbane metropolitan region. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the newly established TAFE Queensland Brisbane will operate from only three major campuses.

It is believed that additionally, where required by federal contracts, TQ Brisbane will maintain shopfront campuses to service language and literacy and job skills programs. There may be a small presence in other locations if viable for other vocational areas. The list of Brisbane campuses threatened by the state’s myopic rental policy includes six currently utilised premises.

Currently there are a number of campuses that have been disposed of or are in the process of being disposed of such as the Yeronga, Ithaca and West End (Cordelia St) campuses.

This pattern of consolidation of the footprint of TAFE Queensland is repeating throughout the regions. Institutes are withdrawing or contracting to the smallest possible space in communities such as Cairns, Maryborough and Hervey Bay, Nambour, Townsville, Burdekin and Warwick.

Central Queensland University TAFE campuses are not affected by QTAMA with the university having taken possession of the physical assets of Central Queensland Institute of TAFE in the merger.

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

Writing your plan for small business success

Author: Ian Birt

DIVIDED into two parts with two appendices, this book thoroughly analyses how to prepare a business plan. Three 22-page sample plans in Appendix 1 refer to Carla’s Café, Kate’s Bush Tours and Mike’s Building Co Pty Ltd. Each of the eight chapters has useful written exercises relevant to the chapter objective together with a quiz at the end with answers in the back. A glossary and index are included at the end, both detailed, well expressed and well thought out. Photos of four individuals are given on the front cover, two male and two female, and they recur throughout the book.

Fully self contained, there are no references to websites, other books or articles, or training packages. It would have been useful to map the Australian Training Package Unit, BSB5MB404A Undertake small business planning, to the content of the text. The training package unit appears to have been covered, with the possible exception of performance criterion 2.7, ‘Identify specialist services and sources of advice, where required, and cost in accordance with resources available’.

Appendix 1 contains three assessment activities for teachers: a completed written business plan, verbal presentation of the plan, both compulsory, and operational review schedule (optional). Assessment criteria are given for each activity, a marking guide for the first activity, and verbal presentation guidelines for the second. Appendix 2 lists features of an informative report, IVIDED into two parts with two appendices.

The text is clearly written, the content well laid out, the structure clear and there are many tables and figures throughout. The training package unit above suggests holistic assessment with other units, but given the nature of this text, the assessment has been well thought out. This would be a useful text for classroom use, and a good basis for someone preparing their own small business plan.

Work health + safety

A complete course for Certificate IV and Diploma courses BSB41412 and BSB51312

Authors Mike Stoll, Caroline McGill, James Ritchie

Publisher McGraw Hill Education

THIS text is a modest size and has a colourfully designed cover and when you open the book the design and layout invites you in. The authors’ breadth and diversity of experience give confidence that these people know this subject very well.

The book introduces the subject with some worldwide and Australian statistics on work health and safety incidents and costs to industry, the worker and their families. The work health and safety concept is defined with the future challenges in the workplace briefly touched on. This sets the scene for exploring the subject with the relevance to everyone clearly outlined.

The book is divided into five overarching parts that creates a logical flow and assists in understanding the concepts and information. Within these parts are embedded chapters that focus on specific aspects. The density of the information has been broken up with the use of sub sections. Pictures, text boxes, tables, examples of checklists and plans helps bring to life information that summarises and emphasises important points to give the reader every opportunity to access the knowledge and how it relates to industry.

The layout of the book is clear, consistent and logical and easy to follow. At the end of each chapter there is a summary, case study, tasks, assessments and group activities. The information is supported by a reference list and endnotes that complement the simple but comprehensive nature of the material.

I have found this a well researched and presented text on this subject and would be happy to recommend it. It is a good text to have whether studying the course or teaching this subject.
The early childhood educator for Certificate III
Lorraine Walker & Shelagh Miller
Publisher: McGraw Hill Education

DIVIDED into four parts, this 18-chapter book is aligned to 18 units from CHC30113-Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (Release 3), mapped to each chapter at the beginning of the book. The three elective units are all drawn from those in Certificate III. The authors are experienced in the work of early years educators, and it shows in the case studies at the end of each of the four parts, and the activities in the chapters. Each part is introduced in clear and comprehensible language.

Chapters are structured around the elements of the training package unit, illustrated profusely with professional colour photos of children and educators of differing ages, ethnic groups and genders, involved in a range of interesting activities. Each chapter has many activities, tips and sections labelled ‘at work’, relating the theory to workplace practice.

Diagrams are plentiful and accessible, written simply yet professionally. Each chapter finishes with a summary, key terms, an end-of-chapter review, review questions and a mapping grid that shows how each element is related to the chapter activities. The review questions and references the National Quality Framework documents. A full page of references includes books, websites and a YouTube video clip related to the activities in that chapter.

McGraw Hill provides support for the text on their Connect website, described in two pages at the beginning of the text. This includes opportunities to apply concepts, gain immediate feedback on performance and access quizzes, interactive practice materials and more. An ebook version of the text is provided, as well as support for lecturers in the form of assignment management tools, autograded assignments, quizzes and tests.

This book is very engaging in the way it is structured and written, and well suited to the student group.

So you want to be a journalist? unplugged 2nd edition
Bruce Grundy, Martin Hirst, Janine Little, Mark Hayes and Greg Treadwell.
Publisher: Cambridge, $84.95

SO you want to be a journalist? unplugged is a carefully researched, well written text book, suitable both for the journalism student and the person considering journalism as another career path. The topics covered include: the future of journalism, the fundamentals of reporting, information literacy, on-line research, writing news, making contacts — particularly ones with expertise in the topic you are investigating, subediting, defamation, ethical dilemmas, spelling, grammar and punctuation and why number crunching is a necessary skill. The book would also be helpful for teachers of Media Studies modules; some of the exercises at the end of the chapters could be easily expanded into class exercises.

It is well laid out with plenty of white space, dot points and extra information in different fonts or against different coloured backgrounds, such as quotations or stories from eminent journalists. Mind you, I think the colour choice for the headings is a little too loud. The stories, which are laid among the theory, are fascinating and often emphasise journalists’ persistence in tracking down a story, photo or a source who has moved to a different country. I particularly enjoyed Bruce Grundy’s electoral role story:

“One of the most famous cases of electoral concern involves The Esplanade on Bribie Island, Queensland. It appears that at one election in recent memory, voters living on both sides of that road were sent electioneering material by a candidate. The mailout was based on the addresses of voters contained on the local electoral roll. The problem was, when the matter came to light, the only things living on the western side of The Esplanade were fish and crabs. The western side of the Esplanade was — and is — Pumicestone Passage, the narrow strait that separates Bribie from the mainland. It appears that several kilometres of The Esplanade were inhabited by people who did not exist. Whether they voted, or who they voted for, is unknown, but if they did vote, there may have been enough of them to make a difference to the count.” (2012, p 97)

Real stories are always the most interesting.

Make Decisions in a Legal Context (2nd Edition)
Authors: Ainslie Baird, Costa Avgoustinos

HAVING read Make Decisions in a Legal Context 2nd edition (note that the third edition was published in July of this year) by Baird, Avgoustinos and McCann my immediate impression of their accessible style was quite positive as I have often found the legal discipline to be obtuse and arcane. With over 500 pages and using a small font they have crammed an enormous amount of up-to-date information into the 20 chapters. Focused on the financial services sector, this textbook covers areas of law such as contracts, business structures, negligence, consumer law, trade practices and industrial relations. Each chapter follows a clear and logical structure with learning objectives, case studies, self testing exercises, chapter review questions, and even a crossword. This is complemented by online teacher resources that include PowerPoint presentations and student worksheets. In short, this is a comprehensive glossary of legal terminology with a liberal supply of review and testing exercises to aid in student retention.

However, upon recognizing that this book is essentially just a glossary my heart sank, as this for me is the symbolic outcome of the degradation of pedagogy under a competency-based system. There is no room for critical thinking, ethical analysis or self reflection in the behaviourist world of competency elements and performance criteria. Over 40 years ago Paulo Friere decried the Western tendency to oppressive modes of ‘banking education’ that assumes that predetermined knowledge is to be deposited into the heads of the ignorant. There is mention in this book of the key social justice dimensions of gender, class or race within Australia’s legal system as it is not a requirement of the competency. Is our role as teachers to create workplace automatons or active citizens? Or as Henry David Thoreau once asked “Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavour to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?”
Quality assessments: practice and perspectives

The quality and rigour of assessments are key concerns in vocational education and training (VET). The issue of quality in assessments has implications for both the credibility of qualifications and the competence of graduates who hold them. So how do VET practitioners fare in their knowledge and practical application of assessment and recognition of prior learning?

We investigated this by speaking with practitioners and students in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland from both the public and private sectors. Our key areas of interest were RTOs delivering certificate III qualifications for the Aged Care and Electrical industries, and certificates III and IV in Business Administration.

Key elements of quality assessments
What we found was that trainers and assessors know the widely accepted criteria for effective and quality assessments. They identify the need for validity, fairness, and consistency in making judgements about performance. They also understand they need to gather sufficient evidence of practical skill and underpinning knowledge to establish competency against established performance criteria in Training Packages.

The terms validation and moderation, however provide some confusion. Some identify as validation, practices that are clearly accepted approaches to moderation, and vice versa. Practitioners seem more concerned with validation processes to ensure the relevance, clarity and user-friendliness of assessment instruments, than about moderating the results. The general view is the need for rigorous up-front validation minimises the need for moderation.

It is not always easy to involve employers
Employers should be involved in the validation of assessments as ultimately they’re aimed at determining whether the student is competent to perform the work. Involving employers in validation of assessments or as external assessors is not always easy though. Some providers have more success, especially those with good networks, and those that deliver qualifications requiring workplace assignments. Employer time constraints, and inadequate experience or expertise in specific areas works against close employer involve-ment. However employers are involved in assessing theoretical practical performance on work-placements.

Uptake of RPL assessments is low
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an important assessment pathway because it recognises the skills students already have. National data on RPL shows around 90% of students studying aged care and business qualifications don’t undertake RPL. In contrast, the figure for Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment is 75%. This may be because students have more experience and they feel more confident that they can present for RPL.

Few are implementing government suggestions to streamline RPL
Few providers have implemented government suggestions for a more streamlined approach to RPL. In these cases trainers and assessors either visit students in the workplace to observe practical performance; have students who are not employed perform a specific task; or use question and answers to assess a student’s understanding.

Most providers have opted to stay with more comprehensive approaches to the collection of evidence. These providers seem wary about using streamlined approaches, often because they are keen to avoid compromising their reputations by what might be considered to be less than rigorous approaches.

The time taken for RPL also varies greatly, ranging from 10 to 15 minutes for assessments where the candidate does not have enough evidence, to many weeks. Low risk units are reported to take less time. Other than accelerating the progress of existing workers with considerable experience, there is little support for condensing the durations of entry-level courses.

Teachers are challenged by practical implementation
For teachers the more difficult challenges are ensuring judgments are reliable and valid, especially in the case of non-competent performance. Other issues included: customising and pitching assessment items to the right level achieving consistency among assessors keeping up with Training Packages addressing regulatory changes.

Teachers report difficulties assessing students who were not motivated; had insufficient content knowledge; inadequate language; limited literacy and numeracy skills, or did not submit assignments on time. In isolated cases cheating was identified as an issue. Theoretical concepts are seen as key difficulties for students across the board, but especially for electrical apprentices.

They perceive students to struggle in assessments when they: are returning to studies after long absences have poor language and literacy skills don’t apply themselves to learn the content knowledge have difficulties applying the practical skills.

Students are satisfied with their assessment experiences
Although some students identify difficulties getting assignments done on time, or their lack of written English language skills, the majority of students report being generally quite satisfied with their experiences.

These students are not alone. The Student Outcomes Survey (2013) shows that 90% of students are satisfied with their assessment experiences. Aged care, business and electrical graduates report similar levels of satisfaction. Students believe their assessment is a fair test of skills, and a good test of what has been taught. They also report being assessed regularly and receiving useful feedback. These elements are considered essential to quality assessments.

Trainers and assessors require more professional development
So what does this mean for vocational education and training? In short, VET practitioners require more professional development in improving practical understanding and implementation of moderation and validation practice, and applying more streamlined approaches to RPL.

For more information:
Recognising and Rewarding

Nominations are now open for the Arthur Hamilton Award for Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

The Arthur Hamilton Award for Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is named in honour of Arthur Hamilton, a proud Palawa man, educator and union activist. Arthur passed away in 2004 leaving a legacy of equity and social justice, cross-cultural awareness, recognition of Indigenous peoples and the elimination of racism within Australian schools.

This Award is in recognition of AEU members who are committed to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to high quality public education throughout their lives. The AEU is dedicated to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have local access to a free, publicly funded education system, which affirms cultural identity, and enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to contribute to, and participate in, their own, and broader society.

Nominations

Nominations forms can be obtained from SueLowndes at the AEU by phoning (03) 9693 1800, faxing (03) 9693 1805, or emailing slowndes@aeufederal.org.au or can be downloaded from www.aeufederal.org.au/AEU/2014AHNomination.pdf

The closing date for nominations is Friday, 5 December 2014.

The winner will receive a $1000 prize and will be flown to Melbourne to accept the Award at the Annual Federal Conference of the AEU in February 2015. All nominees will receive a certificate from the AEU.

Further Information

If you would like to know more, please contact Nicole Major, Federal Aboriginal Education Officer nmajor@aeufederal.org.au, or visit www.aeufederal.org.au

Winner of the 2013 Arthur Hamilton Award, Ricki Coeliff for Fair Game WA. The Award was presented by Angelo Gavrielatos, Federal President AEU to Ricki Coeliff, Game On Coordinator at the 2014 AEU Federal Conference.
TIMOR-LESTE: A trainer assists a woman during a literacy workshop in the Neran community. Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA supported literacy programs have helped more than 3,000 rural Timorese women to become literate and numerate since 2001.

CAMBODIA: Beer promotion workers picket the Cambrew brewery. The workers and their union, the Cambodian Food and Service Workers’ Federation, are fighting multinational companies for unpaid entitlements and a living wage.

30 years of Australian workers reaching out to the world
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