The failure of for-profit education
John Quiggin – page 8

Skilling Australians Fund
Doug Cameron – page 12

Public policy & the future of TAFE
– pages 11 & 14
Background

The Rohingya are a majority Muslim ethnic group who have lived in Myanmar for centuries. They have been denied citizenship rights since 1982 and are not considered one of the 135 official ethnic groups, which renders them stateless.

Current Crisis

Over 400,000 Rohingya from Rakhine State have been forcibly displaced and are currently surviving in dismal conditions in camps in Bangladesh as a result of ongoing persecution and violence in the region.

There is substantial evidence that the self-described “clearance operations” by the Myanmar military is the cause of this displacement while the violence against the Rohingya amounts to ethnic cleansing.

The ongoing hate, fuelled by some religious leaders and local media, is undermining the ability to uphold and protect basic human rights in Rakhine State.

The situation is dire. The ethnic cleansing taking place in Rakhine State must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Wai Wai Nu in Australia

At the end of September 2017, Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya woman and democracy, human rights and women’s rights activist, will visit Australia. Wai Wai Nu spent seven years in Yangon’s Insein Prison due to her father’s career as an elected Member of Parliament for the political opposition.

Released in 2012 under a presidential amnesty, Wai Wai Nu has graduated from a law degree and founded two NGOs and a youth centre.

Wai Wai Nu’s activism has led to numerous international accolades including being listed on BBC’s list of Top 100 women and being name one of the Next Generation Leaders in the World by Time Magazine earlier this year.

Follow us on Facebook to find out about upcoming events related to Wai Wai Nu’s visit in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and Perth.

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Get involved, visit www.stoptafecuts.com.au
TAFE: TOO GOOD TO LOSE

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SPRING 2017 • THE AUSTRALIAN TAFE TEACHER 3
IN the final issue of The Australian TAFE Teacher magazine for 2017 we outline our new campaign activity. We are encouraging members and supporters to make an appointment with their local MPs (state or federal) and ask them to sign our guaranteed funding poster. It’s a great way to make local representatives commit to 70% or two thirds guaranteed VET funding for TAFE. You can read about the campaign on page 5, and we have included the guaranteed funding poster on the back cover of the magazine, so you can get your local MP to sign! For more information on the Stop TAFE Cuts campaign, Pat Forward (Federal TAFE Secretary) outlines the broader context of the campaign on page 6.

We are also pleased to bring you information about our other major focus at present, the inaugural AEU TAFE Conference — The future of public TAFE institutions: new social policy. The conference will be held in Sydney on Friday 20 October, and this edition provides all the details about the conference (page 11), as well as the rationale behind the conference and the need for new public policy in the sector (page 14).

This edition also has a report from Senator Doug Cameron on the Skilling Australians Fund. Senator Cameron is the Shadow Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships, and shares with us his concerns about the Fund introduced by the Turnbull Government in the 2017 Federal Budget. Senator Cameron writes that the Fund “relies entirely on insecure funding generated by visa fees for foreign workers to fund training. If the number of visas goes down, the funding for vocational education and training will drop.” The Fund also makes no secure provision for our TAFEs. Read the whole story, and about Federal Labor’s commitment to TAFE on page 12.

We also hear from economist John Quiggin with his take on the failure of for-profit education and the implications for TAFE (page 8). Quiggin looks to both international and local examples, and concludes that “The disaster in vocational education and training encompassed all the worst features of for-profit education. The disaster was both predictable and predicted, given the exposure of massive rorts in Victoria, where the model originated.” His advice on alternatives, and steps to get there are well worth reading. We continue the coverage of for-profit education with a closer look at one of the giants of private, for-profit education — Careers Australia.

To bring our focus back to TAFE, we have included coverage from National TAFE Day celebrations. It’s great to hear about the different celebrations held — large and small — around the country. We’re thankful to our busy contributors who took the time to share their accounts with us. Theresa Millman shares her research about the transformative potential of education, and how TAFE can “act as a catalyst for a renewed self-appraisal of the development of an identity as a ‘student.’” We also hear from Holmesglen Chief Executive and TAFE Directors Australia Chair Mary Faraone as she reflects on the future for TAFE, concluding that “the trick is to be ready for opportunities and develop a vision that respects and is loyal to the past but looks to the future.” And finally, I share my experiences at Education International’s Indigenous Peoples’ Right to and Rights through Education Seminar and the World Indigenous People’s Conference on Education in Toronto.

We hope you enjoy this final issue of TATT for 2017. We look forward to bringing you the magazine again in 2018.
Does your local MP support guaranteed funding for TAFE?

The TAFE sector is the lowest funded education sector and funding has declined by more than 24% since 2008. As privatisation of the sector has increased, and as more and more government funding has gone to private for-profit providers, fees have escalated — by more than 245% (from $4060 in 2009 to $14,018 in 2015.)

The Australian Education Union through our Stop TAFE Cuts campaign has campaigned against government funding going to an untrustworthy private for-profit sector, and have argued that the only way we can rebuild TAFE and secure its future is to guarantee a minimum 70% government funding to TAFE colleges.

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

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

In a significant step forward for the campaign, the ALP federally has announced a guarantee of at least two thirds of public vocational education funding for TAFE, and an additional $637.6 million invested into TAFE and vocational education — reversing the government’s 2017 cuts in full.

We believe the Federal Government should match — and improve — Labor’s commitment. But the Turnbull Government offers little hope for TAFE. The 2017 Federal Budget cut spending on vocational education by 9.7% over the next year. Spending on vocational education will be $70 million lower in 2020/21 than it was in 2016/17.

We want all politicians who support TAFE to sign the guaranteed funding pledge. A minimum 70% or two thirds of VET funding will secure TAFE’s future.

We have launched a new campaign webpage at http://pledge.stoptafecuts.com.au. On this page, members and supporters are able to either download a poster, or request that we send one to them.

Then, all you need to do is organise a meeting with your local politician, take a copy of our funding guarantee poster and ask them to sign it. If they do, make sure to take a quick photo of them holding the poster so we can add it to the gallery of supportive politicians on our website.

Because TAFE funding is both a federal and state issue, we want politicians at all levels to sign the guarantee. So you can approach Federal or State politicians, from the upper or lower houses, and from any political party.

We have included a copy of the guaranteed funding poster on the back cover of this edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher magazine for your convenience.

You can download more posters, and find everything else you need on our website — http://pledge.stoptafecuts.com.au

At the time of writing we have 40 politicians who have signed the guarantee. There are hundreds more who need to make a commitment to our TAFEs! We need your help to get the commitment of your local representatives.

Guaranteed funding would give Australia’s TAFE institutions certainty into the future.

It is vital that AEU members get involved in this important campaign activity. ●

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PAT FORWARD

THE Australian Labor Party’s commitment to guarantee at least two thirds of government vocational education funding to TAFE is a significant achievement for the campaign. It is an acknowledgement that market reforms have failed — and it is a move to give TAFE colleges some security and certainty into the future. The guarantee, along with a commitment to increase funds to the sector, will form part of its platform going into the next Federal Election. This represents a significant shift in the political landscape.

The ALP commitment means that we go into the next stage of the campaign, and potentially into the next federal election with a clear choice. The Turnbull government must reverse the cuts to TAFE and vocational education, and match the ALP’s funding guarantee. Only this will reverse the damage to TAFE, and secure a future for the many hundreds of thousands of young people who rely on TAFE for their future.

There is still much work ahead. State ALP branches in three jurisdictions have committed to the 70% funding guarantee (NSW, ACT and Tasmania). Three state Labor governments are not committed to a funding guarantee — Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. We have to build and maintain pressure on all states and territories, and on the Federal Government.

Our campaign must continue to highlight the impact of marketisation, privatisation and contestability and the dodgy practices of private providers. As scandals and collapses of private for-profit providers continue to occur on an almost weekly basis, awareness of the behaviour of private for-profit providers is at an all-time high. TAFE, more than ever, remains a highly regarded Australian institution, and the campaign continues to focus on, and promote positive TAFE stories.

It is important to build relationships with stakeholders and allies. These relationships assist us in promoting the importance of public policy development in the sector.

It is important to recognise the extent of damage to the TAFE system. TAFE nationally, now only holds 50% market share (30% in Queensland and 35% in Victoria. See Figure 1). More than 44% of government funding nationally is allocated contestably (See Figure 2). Enrolments in TAFE (and private providers) have collapsed — a 16% decline in the last 12 months; and apprenticeships now represent less than 15% of vocational education nationally.

Private provider rorts have damaged the reputation of the whole sector, and the Federal Government’s policy agenda as evidenced by the 2017 Budget (reported on in the last edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher) will see a continuation of cuts, and further expansion of the demand driven system in higher education to sub-degree programs. While the VET FEE-HELP scheme has been abolished, its impact is still felt throughout the sector. The sector’s funding arrangements have been fundamentally changed, and students are now required to pay the full costs of qualifications at Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels. The new VET Students Loans Scheme provides less funding for students to borrow ($5,000, $10,000, or $20,000) but it does not address the fundamental inequity between higher education and vocational education — there are almost no government subsidised qualifications at the higher vocational education level, vocational education students are required to pay the full costs of their qualifications and there is no fee regulation in vocational education.

The great change that VET FEE-HELP orchestrated — the introduction

**Figure 1**
TAFE market share by hours of delivery – 2015
of User Pays into the sector — remains, and it will change the nature of the sector forever. Students in TAFE have been locked forever into second class status as a result of this terrible public policy.

In this environment, securing guaranteed funding for TAFE is the only thing which can guarantee its future and address the inequitable way in which vocational education students are being treated by the Federal Government.

A minimum 70% or two thirds funding guarantee will:
- Secure TAFE’s share of government funding
- Acknowledge that privatisation has failed
- Allow TAFE to rebuild and plan for the future.

Infrastructure funding and a commitment to higher level vocational education courses are also critical to TAFEs future. To this end, the campaign must work towards:
- A reversal of the decision to allocate Commonwealth Supported Places to universities
- Abolition of the VET Student Loans scheme to reinstate government funding in the sub-degree area
- Commitment to infrastructure funding, especially for “new” industries and high level qualifications
- Overhaul of the VET in schools programmes — rebuild partnerships between TAFEs and schools, and redesign funding arrangements to eliminate private for-profit providers from our schools
- Increased funding to the sector.

As communities struggle with unemployment, including record rates of youth unemployment; the winding up of industry areas; insecure employment and uncertain futures it is vital that we build campaign capacity amongst our members and supporters.

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

Figure 2
Proportion of funds allocated contestably

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<td>22.81%</td>
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The Failure of For-Profit Education: IMPLICATIONS FOR TAFE

Among the many failures in the education ‘reform’ movement, the attempt to promote for-profit education has been the most complete. For-profit education has failed at every level.

JOHN QUIGGIN

A history of failure

For-profit school operators like Edison in the United States, launched with high expectations have failed miserably. The Swedish experiment, for quite a few years seen as the exemplar of success, has turned out very badly. For-profit universities have been similarly disastrous, most notably in the United States.

Australia has had its own share of failures. The most notable has been U21 Global, touted as a global online university, but there have been many others.

In terms of scale relative to a national system, the disaster of FEE-HELP and TAFE privatisation outweighs all of these failures. Before looking at TAFE privatisation, I’ll review some of the evidence.

Edison Schools

Edison Schools was founded in 1992 and was widely viewed as representing the future of school education. Its plans were drawn up by a committee headed by John Chubb, the co-author of, Politics, Markets and America’s Schools the most influential single critique of public sector education in the United States.

After a highly successful share-market launch, Edison’s decline was remorseless. It gradually lost its contracts, along with its stock-market listing and eventually rebranded itself as a provider of educational services, such as testing and the provision of course materials.

Even operating in a highly favorable political and financial climate, Edison was unable to deliver on its promise of transforming the school sector, and has now ceased to operate schools.

However, Edison and similar organisations have re-emerged in zombie form, as providers of management services to ‘charter’ schools, many of which are effectively non-profit fronts for for-profit corporations. Despite repeated failures, charter schools remain the great hope of US educational reformers.

The Swedish experiment

Sweden, until recently the poster child for the for-profit sector, is now in a state of crisis, with declining performance and growing inequality.

Sweden introduced voucher-style reforms in 1992, and opened the market to for-profit schools. Initially favorable assessments were replaced by disillusionment as the performance of the school system as a whole deteriorated. Scores on the international PISA test plummeted.

By 2015, the majority of the public favoured banning for-profit schools. The Minister for Education described the system as a ‘political failure’. Other critics described it in harsher terms.

Although a full analysis has not yet been undertaken, it seems likely that the for-profit
For-profit universities

Far worse are for-profit universities like Phoenix, which have prospered by recruiting poor students, eligible for Federal Pell Grants, and enrolling them in degree programs they never finish. Phoenix collects the US government cash, while the students are lumbered with debts they can never repay and can’t even discharge in bankruptcy.

Australian education reformers Alan Gilbert (then Vice-Chancellor at Melbourne) presented the University of Phoenix as the future of education, and its critics as Luddite equivalents of the 19th century handloom weavers.

The exposure of this group as scams based on extracting US government grants for students who will never graduate had little impact on the ideologues. As recently as 2014, Executive Director, Group of Eight claimed, in relation to the exposure of the University of Phoenix that “learning from failure is a step to success”.

Under the Obama Administration, many of these fraudulent operations were shut down. However, it seems likely that the Trump Administration, and education secretary Betsy de Vos, will be much more favorable.

The most prominent Australian venture into for-profit higher education was U21Global, a joint venture of the Universitas21 alliance of universities, of which the most prominent driver has been the University of Melbourne. Launched in 2001, it projected enrolments of 60,000 students, and annual revenue of $500 million by 2010. None of these targets were achieved and the whole venture was eventually sold in 2013 to a Mauritius-based company, now operating in Australia.

Similar processes took place in Chile, which banned for-profit education in 2015.

The role of public funding

For-profit education can only be understood in the context of public funding. The idea that publicly funded services should be supplied by for-profit firms is a cornerstone of ‘New public sector management’, sometimes described in more grandiose terms as the ‘Reinvention of Government’.

The relevant three word slogan here is ‘Steering not rowing’. That is, the role of the government should be to ensure that education is available, rather than to provide education.

The crucial vehicle for replacing public with private provision is ‘contestability’. The terms ‘contestability’ is drawn from microeconomic theory. The idea is that in an initially monopolistic market, the entry of competitors (or even the possibility of entry) will eliminate monopoly profits.

The other magic word is ‘choice’. The model is one in which consumers with well-defined preferences are assumed to face known prices. The relevant case here is that of markets for differentiated products. Choice ensures that the products supplied are those actually wanted by consumers, rather than those producers (in this case, schools, universities and TAFEs) might prefer to supply.

Why does the for-profit model fail

First, the idea that competition will enhance diversity and choice is wrong. Economic analysis...
shows that, in markets of this kind, for-profit providers will converge on a single model. We’ve seen examples in the university sector where, given freedom to compete on price, all universities choose the maximum price. Similarly, given the opportunity to pick a unique ‘flagship’ product, virtually all choose an MBA.

The second problem arises from the availability of public subsidies. It is much easier to find innovative ways to game a poorly monitored system than to improve on educational systems that have developed over centuries.

Finally a crucial feature of the for-profit model is that it rejects professionalism and an education ethos. These are seen as self-serving claims by educators, seeking to avoid competition and contestability.

The disaster of for-profit vocational education

The disaster in vocational education and training encompassed all the worst features of for-profit education. The disaster was both predictable and predicted, given the exposure of massive rorts in Victoria, where the model originated.

The problems were exacerbated by FEE-HELP, which took as its model the successful use of income contingent loans in the HECS scheme, but made crucial changes. First, fees were uncapped (this has also been done for full fee course in the university sector, with dubious results). Second, the target market consisted largely of financially unsophisticated people with limited earnings prospects. For this group, incurring a large debt that might never be called in, in return for a small initial benefit, such as a free laptop, could be made to sound appealing.

The outcome has been a disastrous rundown in vocational education at a time of increasing need. Vast amounts of public money has been spent on worthless courses, while the TAFE sector has suffered drastic cutbacks.

What is the alternative and how can we get there?

What is the alternative? It’s clear that the tweaks that have been made to the system so far haven’t been adequate. Even after the reforms, new scandals have emerged on a daily or weekly basis. So, we should consider what would be required for a fundamental reform?

First, we need a unified approach to post-school education in place of the current separation between ‘vocational’ and ‘higher’ education. This distinction ignores the fact that, for the vast majority of students, both universities and TAFEs are seen as vocational training institutions. In terms of financing, we should aim for a universal study right, sufficient to cover a university degree or technical qualification.

As regards provision, the ultimate goal should be to eliminate public subsidies to for-profit education businesses. The only role of for-profits should be to work as contract providers for public educational institutions.

How can we get there from here? Three steps would help:

First, we should cap, and progressively reduce, the share of funding going to private institutions and particularly for-profits.

Second, we should severely restrict marketing expenditure for both private and public institutions, to say, one per cent of total revenue. The worst offenders here have been for-profits, but the problem is not confined to the for-profit sector. There is no benefit in having TAFEs and Universities mounting slick,content-free marketing campaigns aimed at domestic students.

Finally, regulation based on formal compliance should be replaced by externally assessed measures of successful completion. Institutions giving substandard qualifications or with the low completion rates typical of for-profits should be shut down.

Concluding comments

Changing policy on an issue like this is like turning a supertanker. Support for microeconomic reform and neoliberalism remains strong in elite circles long after the general public has soured on the idea.

Faced with demonstrated failure, the response is to seek minor adjustments rather than fundamental reassessment. But public hostility is increasing, and reflected in the collapse of faith in the political system.

The challenge is to be ready with realistic alternatives.

This piece is based on a presentation delivered to the AEU National TAFE Council AGM on 7 April 2017. John Quiggin is an Australian economist, commentator, Professor and Australian Laureate Fellow in Economics at the University of Queensland.
The current social settlement in vocational education in Australia is broken, and a new social policy is needed to reimagine the role of TAFE.

This national conference will begin the process of reimaging TAFE’s future as anchor institutions in their communities that support individuals to realise their aspirations; communities to be resilient, strong and socially inclusive, and, industries to be sustainable and innovative and ensure people have access to decent jobs.

This conference will contribute to the development of new social policy in vocational education as the basis for a new social settlement. In particular, it will begin the process of developing TAFE’s mission. It will consider what TAFEs should look like and what they should do, including the qualifications that they deliver, and the curriculum and pedagogy that underpin them.

It will bring together academics, researchers, policy makers, teachers and unions, and will be important for the professional development of TAFE teachers.

TAFE, more than any other sector of education, provides opportunities for a range of students, no matter what their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. It is vital to the economy and the community, assisting in the development of skilled workers across many employment sectors. It can and must contribute to innovation and sustainability and the development of decent jobs. A commitment to this public provision is vital to sustain memory and capacity), campus closures, ever diminishing range of courses, funding, thousands of retrenchments of teachers (and loss of institutional dynamic environment.

A vibrant TAFE sector must be based on a highly qualified and experienced workforce of teachers and educational leaders who have the security of resources to plan and provide vocational education in an uncertain and dynamic environment.

The last few years have seen TAFE systems decimated through cuts to funding, thousands of retrenchments of teachers (and loss of institutional memory and capacity), campus closures, ever diminishing range of courses, and fee increases for students that exclude those most in need.

The conference will be held at the NSW Teachers Federation on Friday 20 October from 10am – 5pm. Tickets will cost $50 for AEU members, and $200 for general admission.

Following the conference a reception will be held from 5pm – 7pm at the NSW Teachers Federation to launch Global Trends in TVET – A Framework for Social Justice. The report, written by Leesa Wheelahan and Gavin Moodie, provides a conceptual framework to understand the different ways in which vocational education is positioned internationally, the unequal access to vocational education in many different countries, and the variable outcomes that graduates achieves as a result.

The report was commissioned by Education International, and the reception will have both Susan Hopgood (President) and Angelo Gavrielatos (Project Director) from EI speaking, joined of course with Leesa Wheelahan.

In the report, Australia was referred to as a country which offered a particularly salutary and sobering example of how fast policies which foster privatisation can lead to the deinstitutionalisation of public vocational education institutions. The launch of this work provides an excellent opportunity to outline the work that EI is doing in the EI Global Response Campaign across all sectors of education, including vocational education.

The focus in this study on elaborating the importance of public institutions is extremely helpful for our Stop TAFE Cuts campaign, and the focus which we have developed on new public policy in the sector. Wheelahan and Moodie argue:

Teachers and strong publicly funded vocational education institutions are the key building blocks of strong vocational education systems that can contribute to social inclusion, and sustainable, fair and socially just economic prosperity. Publicly funded vocational education institutions are the key anchor institutions in their communities and local industries. Vocational education teachers and institutional leaders are deeply involved with their communities, understand their needs, and how to support them. If they are to do their jobs effectively, two conditions are necessary. First, there must be an acknowledgement of the role that they play in supporting and sustaining strong, resilient and productive communities. Unlike schools and universities where there is a broadly shared understanding about the role they play in society, there is no shared understandings about the role of vocational education institutions and teachers, and this is a serious problem for our sector.

We hope to see many AEU members at both the conference, and the reception. For those who are unable to attend, we will provide a full report in the next edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher magazine.

For further details about this conference head to www.aefederal.org.au/fUTUREOFTAFE and to read Global Trends in TVET – a framework for social justice you can download the full paper at https://www.ei-ie.org/media_gallery/GlobalTrendsinTVET.pdf
The Australian economy is changing and the skills people need to get well-paid and secure jobs are changing as well. Working people and job seekers are faced with fundamental questions. Which industries will provide good, secure jobs? What jobs will be available in the future? Will there be quality apprenticeships and traineeships available for them? Will there be sufficient funding to train them for a lifetime of skills acquisition?

Since the Coalition took office the number of government-funded hours of vocational education and training delivery dropped 20 per cent. The number of apprentices and trainees in training has fallen by 138,000 — including 41,200 fewer trade and technical trainees and apprentices.

The government’s Trade Support Loans have accumulated to 382 million dollars of debt for 44,000 Australian Apprentices — including 8,000 young people under the age of 18 that are carrying between them 31 million dollars of debt.

The trend to increasingly shift the cost of skills formation is essential to our national economic and social wellbeing. It will be the difference between whether as a nation we prosper or decline.
development onto individuals, particularly young people before even fully entering the labour market, is troubling – particularly as it coincides with a withdrawal of investment in skills by employers.

At the same time, more than one in three employers report difficulty in filling jobs. Where job vacancies exist we need to ensure that local communities have the skills to fill them.

These are urgent and serious challenges. Underemployment is at record highs and unemployment is far too common – particularly among younger Australians, in the regions and for retrenched workers. The labour share of national income has fallen to historic lows. The majority of the proceeds of the anaemic economic growth we have experienced under the Liberals has gone to business profits, and not to workers.

It is in this context that the Turnbull government announced the creation of a Skilling Australians Fund as part of its 2017 Budget. The government claims that it will provide $1.5 billion over four years from 2017-18 and will prioritise apprenticeships and traineeships.

From 2018-19, funding for the measure will be determined by the ‘training fund contribution levy’.

It is a proposal that relies entirely on insecure funding generated by visa fees for foreign workers to fund training. If the number of visas goes down, the funding for vocational education and training will drop.

Research released in August by the Australian Population Research Institute predicts that due to the government’s immigration policy changes, there will be a dramatic drop in the number of skilled migration visas.

Not surprisingly then, independent analysts have identified that the Skilling Australians funding model is inherently flawed.

The government has designed a system of funding for skill formation — a matter of fundamental importance for ensuring the prosperity of our nation — that relies entirely on uncertain revenue.

The government insists the Fund will support 300,000 more apprentices, trainee and higher-level skilled Australians over the next four years. According to the government’s employment projections, achieving that target would require 30 per cent of all new jobs, up to the year 2020, going to apprentices and trainees — even though they currently occupy just 2.2 per cent of jobs.

If the government pursues that target within that timeframe, with this absurd funding regime, there is a great risk that quality will suffer.

The last thing we need is a return to ‘burger flipper’ traineeships propped up by incentives to employers that are simply wage subsidies for low paid jobs.

The Turnbull government is seeking an agreement so that the Skilling Australians Fund will operate with matched funding from the states and territories. Eligibility for the fund will be defined by the Commonwealth. It will fund projects focused on the government’s priorities. States’ access to the Fund will be conditional on their agreement to meet yet to be determined measures.

So far the government has failed to reach an agreement with the states and territories.

We are two months into the financial year in which the Skilling Australians Fund should be operating, and we’ve been told next to nothing about it by the government. To date the Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham, has failed to answer the most basic questions about the nature of the Fund and the associated national partnership agreement.

Australia needs to invest in education, skills and training more than ever. Yet, since coming to office, the government has cut money from schools and universities, and more than $2.8 billion from TAFE, skills and training. A further $637 million cut from the skills budget compared to existing arrangements was hidden in the 2017 Budget.

Most egregiously, the government is allowing our TAFE system to decline. The future of TAFE is a matter of great national importance — yet there is no secure provision for TAFE in the Skilling Australian Fund.

The TAFE Network is the backbone of trades training in this country. It supports students who thrive in an adult learning environment and it delivers critical education and training services to metropolitan, regional and rural Australia. It plays a vital role in our evolving skill formation system — sitting at the forefront of 21st century challenges.

Minister Birmingham is on the record as saying the TAFE system is not his business, that the responsibility lies with the states. When he and his Assistant Minister Karen Andrews sit down with the state governments to negotiate, it is clear they will not be ensuring the TAFE system is properly funded.

Labor’s commitment to TAFE is unequivocal. If we are to be a nation with well-paid secure jobs in the future, we need to be investing in TAFE and skills. Nationally there was a 30 percent drop in government funded training at TAFE between 2013 and 2016. We are in serious danger of losing the institutional capacity to deliver skills if we don’t sustain our TAFE network.

We have seen profiteering and exploitation in the training market leave students with unserviceable debts and unfinished courses. It has diminished the professionalism of VET teaching. It has undermined quality and trust in our vocational and education system.

The government has wasted four years with cuts to skills and wilful neglect of TAFE. The Skilling Australians Fund offers no hope of realising a sustainable skill development system.

Under Labor the days of the training market gravy train will end. Labor has announced that we will secure funding for vocational education and training in the Budget and ensure that at least two thirds of it will go to the most trusted VET provider in the country — and that is TAFE.

Senator Doug Cameron is the Shadow Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships and a qualified fitter and machinist.
Why do we need a rethink of the public policy that underpins the vocational education sector in Australia?

The rationale behind the TAFE conference is that the current social settlement underpinning the vocational education sector is broken, and that a new approach is needed. The AEU believes that it is time to start the process of developing new social policy, by engaging supporters, teachers, academics and the broader community in discussion and debate about the role and purpose of public vocational education in TAFE. The conference is one stage in the process of considering new social policy.

The dominance of neo-liberal market reform has driven government policy and initiatives in vocational education for 30 years, and this has resulted in:

- The decimation of TAFE and the deinstitutionalisation of the sector. This has led to thousands of retrenchments (and loss of institutional memory and capacity), campus closures, and diminution of programs and services;
- A shift in funding and resources from public to private for-profit providers, and from governments onto individual students;
- Under-resourcing of the sector broadly, but public providers particularly;
- An elevation of the role of peak employer bodies, whose interests the sector has increasingly been forced to serve. A notable outcome of the privileging of employer voices is the focus on competencies and skill sets and the associated fragmentation of decent jobs. Teachers and teacher unions have long been excluded from governance of the system, resulting in an absence of educational input into the design of qualifications and curriculum;
- A collapse of trust in qualifications because of the scandals and rorts associated with the VET market. Thousands of students have worthless qualifications that have not provided them with the knowledge and skills they need to get decent jobs;
- An increase in regulations in response to scandals and rorts as private providers game the for-profit market, reinforcing a low trust system that needs escalating levels of regulation and surveillance;
- An undermining of the role of education generally, and of teachers particularly, and an elevation of the much narrower concept of “training”, and “trainers”. Teachers have systematically been deskillled through the imposition of low level, inadequate teacher qualifications. The collapse of vocational education teacher education programs in universities has resulted in the collapse of independent research capacity into the nature of vocational education. The only research that is possible is government-funded consultancies, which while important, nonetheless restrict the scope of research and the questions that can be asked.

Current policy addresses these four issues through privileging the voices of employer peak bodies and through markets, which has led to the development of a low-trust, highly regulated fragmented system, with fragmented qualifications. The principle of markets has also led to fragmentation of policy. Institutions are interchangeable agents in a market; qualifications, curriculum and pedagogy are considered independently of quality assurance; financing is considered independently of all the other factors (including independently of the market); and governance is trivialised which ensures that within the limited governance arrangements that do exist, that the dominant voice is employer peak bodies.
Responses to the current, and unarguable crisis in vocational education needs to move from a critique of the failed market experiment, to a serious attempt to engage in considered research and discussion around new social policy. The discussion and research needs to engage with a range of social partners, including employers, governments, communities and academics, but also students, and teachers and other workers in the TAFE sector.

We need to reimagine the future of TAFE. We want to begin the process of developing a positive mission for TAFE that articulates how it can support individuals to realise their aspirations; assist communities to be resilient, strong and socially inclusive; and, industries to be sustainable and innovative and ensure people have access to decent jobs.

Our premise is that vocational education should be fully funded by governments, because it is a public good, and that it should be provided through well-resourced public institutions – TAFEs. This requires a holistic understanding of what TAFE does, in particular, the model of qualifications and curriculum that is needed to achieve its mission. Qualifications and curriculum are directly tied to the ‘mission problem’.

We recognise that achieving these goals requires holistic policies that include the nature of the labour market and how relationships are mediated between TAFE and the labour market. However, a first step is to reimagine what TAFE should be like, and to develop and articulate a positive mission for TAFE that articulates what it does that schools and universities cannot do. This first step is fundamental in overcoming residual definitions of TAFE as doing what schools and universities don’t do. This residual definition has helped facilitate the reductionist notion that TAFE is but one provider in a market that provides specific skills needed for specific workplace practices.

We have invited the conference speakers who are experts in their field to write up their presentations to the conference with a view to building conversations and debates around new social policy, and driving a new agenda for the future.

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary.
Toni from Mount Gambier

As well as sending through some great photos, Toni was also generous enough to share her thoughts about TAFE with us.

"I teach hospitality at Mt Gambier in South Australia. This semester I have had in excess of 40 students from Certificate I and III in Hospitality. There are a wide range of courses on offer in Mount Gambier – it’s quite a big campus. Mount Gambier is the largest city outside of Adelaide with a population of 26,317. There is an amazing hospitality scene here with so many innovative and new operators, and particularly with the Coonawarra wine region nearby, and at least three boutique coffee roasters. Other key industries in the Limestone Coast are Dairy and Forestry.

We are a five hour drive away from Melbourne or Adelaide, so locally based training for apprentices is imperative to keep our young people at home. Much of the work I do is in rural schools dotted all over the Limestone coast – in that sense I bring the training to them. I know for sure that what we do in Hospitality here makes a difference to the flourishing of our industries, and we definitely make a difference in people’s lives.

There are many small RTOs that come and go in our region. There are students who come to me after doing a 30 minute coffee course asking for a credit transfer – I find this very questionable. I would take a guess that we..."
have lost two thirds of our staff, and the loss of
three program areas – visual arts, multimedia
and tourism. We now only have two regional
managers on site with potentially less on the near
horizon. I myself nearly became excess last year
with TAFE wanting to attempt to deliver Hospitality
in blocks rather than retain a full time employee.
Luckily for me, I was able to prove that this model
would not be embraced by our communities and
have never been busier since proving this! I work
closely within school flexible systems and there
are many young people who fit more comfortably
in an adult and industry based learning environ-
ment. I would be very concerned for the effect of
cuts to our training on this demographic.

I heard about National TAFE Day via
Facebook and the AEU. Another member sent me
a YouTube link to the celebrations in Adelaide in
2016 – it blew me away. So I became part of the
campaign committee in Adelaide.

To celebrate National TAFE Day this year,
in the cookery and hospitality classes, I spoke
with the groups about what alternatives they
and future colleagues would need to use if
potential cuts occurred in our programs. Issues
like fee increases, and students being forced to
tavel to block training in the city. Many people
are not aware of these potential realities, but
are now passionate about getting the message
out to others. We worked together to come up
with some creative photos to mark the day, and
people signed up to the Stop TAFE Cuts Facebook
page and website.

I love the innovation, the focus on quality and
integrity in our delivery that TAFE prides itself
on. I love the exciting industry practices that I
have the privilege to share with others. Watching
young people come into our class and then
seeing them at work in the community — seeing
them grow up and flourish, I love that.

A student some years back, came in for a
short coffee making course, her school teacher
told me she probably wouldn’t get far. This young
lady actually joined and completed Certificate III in
Hospitality after the short course, met her future
husband in the class and became one of the
first nursing graduates in the new University
of SA Bachelor of Early Childhood degree.

Another similar

story is of a young man who is quite spirited.
He came into my class after teachers were quite
exasperated with him. He has gone on to a very
successful career and has now won an award
for apprentice of the year. There are so many
stories across the limestone coast and in many
industries — I’m really very proud to tell people
that I work at TAFE.

Lectors at TAFE regionally have long been
the conduit to link metropolitan and international
industry practice. We support, align and celebrate
our regional roots and our roles are very diverse.

I have a ‘collection of treasures’, this is a
group of people that I have met via my role at
TAFE that have then become a special part of
my life for always. In our smaller classes we have
the opportunity of really noticing the potential in
an individual and therefore we can see a person
integrating their skills into their life long term. It
makes our job immensely satisfying.

TAFE really is too good to lose. Please
support us before it is too late.”

David & Marney from
Taroona High School

We were also delighted to hear
from some high school AEU
members and their staff room
celebrations for National TAFE
Day. David and Marney both
teach at Taroona High School
and shared their perspectives on
TAFE with us:

“My name is David and I am a Wellness teacher at
Taroona High School. I am one of the Australian
Education Union reps. At our recent Reps
Conference we heard about what is happening in
regards to cuts to the TAFE system. Pat Forward,
the AEU Federal TAFE secretary addressed the
conference and the statistics were alarming. We
were also informed about National TAFE Day and
the reps from my school agreed that we should
do something to make more teachers aware of
this plight.

As a staff we are aware of the importance
of TAFE and the pathway that it provides to our
students. It’s a trusted brand where students
know they can get a good grounding for what
they studying. I’m not sure of what percentage
of our students would take that pathway but to
me the numbers are irrelevant. If it means that
one, two, five, twenty, whatever the number is,
they need an option to be successful in life and
their career. Then going forward we should be
ensuring TAFE is there for future generations. It’s
because of this that it is important to high school
teachers, and in fact all teachers. We want what is
best for our students and we know that for some
of our students, this is the perfect fit for them.

Our Grade 10 students are currently
deciding what to do in Year 11/12 and the VET
Nadine Schoen, TAFESA Lecturer and AEU member

Adelaide hosted a large event for National TAFE Day with members, students, politicians and unions in attendance.

Nadine Schoen has filled us in on proceedings:

This year we celebrated National TAFE Day 2017 inside the heart of Adelaide TAFE city campus. The atrium became a place of celebration echoing the sounds of excitement as more than 400 staff and students gather to lift the roof off the building with chanting and cheering. Those in attendance were there to support their wonderful TAFE experiences and commit to ensure that TAFE will remain a viable quality public training provider in the future.

Students packed the Atrium from the ground to the balcony to join in the celebrations. We had TAFE Too Good To Lose cupcakes, made by our very own TAFESA Cordon Bleu lecturers. We had buttons of all sorts made by the AEU with messages such as: TAFE Too Good To Lose or I am a TAFE champion; cakes, chips, and finger licking nibbles were spread out across the tables for all to enjoy and bright red, AEU hand clappers that were strategically planted around the entire area for people to make a ruckus. The chants and cheers resonated from the atrium floor to the rafters, echoing around the entire campus. We could be heard in every classroom, corridor and floor. Bright red and blue AEU balloons waved on the corners of every table, people chatted and laughed, and students and teachers watched and joined in with every chant and cheer. It was an electric atmosphere. I said ‘TAFESA’ they chanted ‘Too Good To Lose’; I said ‘TAFE’ they said ‘Rocks!’

The program began with the Minister of Education, Susan Close committing her position on TAFE by passionately saying ‘…as long as I have breath in my body, there will be a strong public provider in the State, TAFE will stay’. Two former Diploma of English Proficiency students, were also invited to speak. Jagdeep Kaur, now studying in children’s services, rose in stature as...
National TAFE Day in the nation’s capital

On National TAFE Day, the AEU, AMWU and ETU hosted a reception at Parliament House in Canberra. Unions and other stakeholders joined over 60 MPs and Senators to mark the event. Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, addressed the reception. Following the ALP’s budget reply in May, Mr Shorten highlighted Federal Labor’s commitment to two thirds guaranteed funding for TAFE, as well as the importance of TAFE to the community. The reception also heard from Cath Fisher, a Stop TAFE Cuts supporter and mother of two TAFE graduates; and Cassie-ann Egan, a young apprentice and member of the AMWU’s National Skilled Trades Committee. The reception was the best attended to date, and a great opportunity to remind politicians of the importance of TAFE teachers.

She told of her own experiences of private providers. They weren’t good. She made comparisons with TAFE and needless to say, TAFE came out on top. She spoke of the strong reliability that TAFE brings to student education. The commitment of the teachers, the quality of the programs and the employability skills and positive outcomes, were all in her speech and it won all the hearts in the room. The Hon. Mark Parnell, MLC, Leader of the Greens Party, SA, and the Hon. Kelly Vincent, MLC, Representative of the Dignity Party also added their voices of appreciation for TAFE. All the speakers were strong and clear that TAFE really is too good to lose.

Rounding off the speaker’s list was Howard Spreadbury, AEU SA Branch President and Leah York, AEU SA Branch Secretary. Leah spoke of the political issues facing TAFESA, the commitment of Federal, Canberra and NSW Labor parties to 70% guaranteed funding for TAFE and the undeniably urgent action for the South Australian state government to follow suit. Never has there been such urgency for SA State government to make the only right choice. Stand up for TAFE and stand up to private providers. The 80,000 plus students who enter and exit TAFE doors every year, can’t all be wrong. So let’s keep singing the praises of TAFE and look forward to the next National TAFE Day in 2018. This year we shook the walls of Adelaide Campus, next year we will shake the walls of the city.

So on a final note, in the words of one TAFE graduate, Sareh Dareshoori, the message of the positive impact that TAFE has had on her, is shared here with you: “Teachers who love teaching teach love, and we’ve been taught by two of those teachers. They are incredible, reliable, frank and delightfully different. We’ve been seeing each other for 4 days a week over the last 6 months, but it feels like we’ve all known each other for ages and that is definitely because it was not a typical connection…Dynamic generations come from bright minds, therefore, a country without TAFE, and TAFE without such bright teachers is virtually meaningless. We all learnt that the taste of ‘End of Story’ (an article written by Fiona Scott-Norman in The Big Issue) is not always necessarily bitter so there is no need to say goodbye. And finally to anyone from Certificate IV who would like to have an unforgettable learning experience in your life, if you are thinking of starting this journey, don’t hesitate. I can imagine you will be standing here proudly and sharing your lovely experiences with others, as I am doing now.”
A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC TAFE INSTITUTIONS

NEW SOCIAL POLICY

SPEAKERS

PROF. LEESA WHEELAHAN (UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO)
DR. JIM STANFORD (CENTRE FOR FUTURE WORK)
PROF. JOHN BUCHANAN (UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY)
PROF. VALERIE BRAITHWAITE (AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY)
PROF. ANNE JONES (VICTORIA UNIVERSITY)
JOHN PARDY (MONASH UNIVERSITY)

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FRI 20 OCTOBER
10AM – 5PM

AEUFEDERAL.ORG.AU/FUTUREOFTAFE
NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION CONFERENCE CENTRE – 33 RESERVOIR STREET, SURRY HILLS NSW
Mary Faraone

We recently held a celebration of staff at the Institute who have been with us for 20 and 30 years. As part of the ceremony the staff provided a short bio which included their personal achievements and what they were most proud of at the Institute. I was impressed yet again by the dedication and commitment staff have to the mission of TAFE and our role in the community to support social inclusion and social cohesion. It was a positive and reaffirming celebration of our role as a public provider. However the event made me think about whether the community and our stakeholders see TAFE in the same way.

Certainly there is considerable support for and acknowledgement of TAFE as the public provider in Victoria thanks to the Andrews’ government. However the lack of a clear policy at the national level in relation to technical, vocational and tertiary education leaves us at TAFE in the familiar position whereby the perception of TAFE is as a provider of technical and trade qualifications only, in particular apprenticeships. I acknowledge that apprenticeships are an important barometer of the health of the economy and that TAFE is the dominant provider of trade training in Australia, however it is not synonymous with TAFE and there is a great deal more breadth and depth of program delivery at TAFEs around the country.

What we see around the country are sophisticated technical, vocational and tertiary providers that offer a suite of programs, skill sets and qualifications to a broad range of learners, in a variety of delivery models. In addition TAFEs are undertaking genuine applied research in collaboration with industry and collaborating with industry in a range of projects and workplace skill development. The fact is the tertiary sector now and in the future is not the tertiary sector I first joined in 1990. We work in interesting and changing times and the changes we have seen in the vocational sector and the proposed changes to the higher education sector are significant reforms which have and will change the tertiary landscape of the future. The challenge for us all, especially in public education, is how to maintain the integrity of our services for our students, the community and industry in an increasingly competitive environment.

At a function a retiring university Vice Chancellor spoke about the drivers affecting the education sector, in particular technological disruption and the decreasing level of government funding to support education and training, which not only affects Australia but many countries in the world. No surprises here, however it is how we as providers respond that is important. One suggestion was that providers should play to their strengths and specialisations. I have thought about this and wonder whether TAFEs have played to their strengths and specialisations to date and whether they can continue to do so in the future.
From Holmesglen’s perspective the journey from a small trade college established in 1982 to a multi discipline tertiary provider has taken over 35 years. The most significant change since 2003 has been the ability for TAFEs to offer undergraduate programs and post graduate programs. In offering higher education programs is Holmesglen playing to its strengths or has it, as some commentators have suggested not specifically about Holmesglen but TAFEs generally, displaying mission drift. It is an interesting question.

Our mission is to provide access to education and training to a broad range of students, and as such does it matter that the education and training is across the secondary school, technical and vocational training and higher education sectors. The answer is no. However how does this argument stack up against the view that the vocational sector could become residual as its qualifications are being colonised by schools, universities and industry organisations and associations.

There is real concern in the sector that training package diplomas and advanced diplomas will become redundant, except for those which are linked to licencing or registration and have specific employment prospects. I think we will see the development of more higher education diplomas which can be packaged with a pathway to a bachelor program for both domestic and international students. So back to the question of mission drift, the answer is a resounding no.

The market has changed so significantly that the boundaries between the sectors is so blurred that TAFEs should be considered to be contemporary tertiary education providers offering access to education and training at the technical, vocational and tertiary education to a wide range of students.

What it means however is that what we thought of as TAFE has turned itself inside out - its roots are in technical and further education however its future is in a broad range of technical, vocational and tertiary provision. The future for us is in new models of partnership and innovation, such as the partnership we have with Healthscope and the Holmesglen Hospital on the Moorabbin Campus.

The trick is to be ready for opportunities and develop a vision that respects and is loyal to the past but looks to the future. We need to be able to ensure the culture and tradition of TAFE is maintained. This culture and tradition is encapsulated by two students who spoke at our awards function. These 2 students could be at any TAFE in the country. One was a nursing graduate who completed her degree with distinctions. She was clever and articulate with all the hope and promise of youth at the start of her journey into the world of work and her chosen career of nursing. The other student was a man in his 60s who had completed a Certificate II in General Education for Adults.

In accepting his award he spoke about his life as a young man in Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime, his journey to Australia and his pride and passion in his studies at Holmesglen. I have worked in education for many years and the impact education has on people’s lives still excites and motivates me, and it is this intangible outcome that we have to continue to promote and incorporate into the new world of the future.

Mary Faraone is the Chief Executive of Holmesglen. She is also Chair of TAFE Directors Australia.
From EI to WIPCE
A Canadian Experience

Indigenous peoples from all over the world came together in Toronto Canada for one brief week in July to share stories of heartache and triumph. This was an opportunity to learn from the success of others, take away ideas to trial back home and to forge links to educators from around the globe.

MICHELLE PURDY

EDUCATION International took the opportunity to hold an Indigenous Peoples’ Right to and Rights through Education Seminar on the 21-22 July. About a third of the delegates were from the AEU with others representing Mexico, Norway, Canada, USA, Kenya and Peru. Of interest was the Canadian First Nations term Two-Spirited, meaning people who are both Indigenous and LGBTIQ.

News to most seminar delegates was that EI has an online Indigenous newsletter. Encouraging people to sign up to the newsletter in the future is one area our union may be able to assist when EI is ready to trial a new sign up form.

The highlight was Maggie MacDonnell’s (Global Teacher Prize Award winner 2017) presentation of her work as a Physical Education teacher with a small Inuit community in the farthest reaches of the tundra. Temperatures drop to around -30°C with only two months each year where they are without snow and ice. There is an alarming rate of youth suicide and violence but a progressive school board looking for ways to break the cycle had faith in Maggie’s program of project based learning.

The World Indigenous People’s Conference on Education 2017 (WIPCE) followed and was a soul building experience. The opening ceremonies were held outdoors at Chiefwood Park Six Nations and started with formal greetings from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs, an Anishnabe Pipe ceremony, Metis Welcome prayer and the powerful voices of the Taminik Throat Singers and the Six Nations Women’s Singers. Delegates were then invited to take the stage in a Parade of Nations to give thanks, tell their story or perform. From simple to high energy many took this opportunity to share their culture.

Day 2 was a day of community tours to visit and learn about First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultural and education experiences. Tours included visiting the Six Nations Polytechnic Programs, the Ogwehoweh Skills and Trade Training Centre, Youth Mental Health and Addiction, a sweat lodge experience and even a trip to the iconic Niagara Falls.

Days 3-5 moved to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and provided delegates with hundreds of presentations to choose from. Each day began with the three thousand delegates coming together for commentary where some of the most amazing speakers were the Canadian Chiefs. The quiet wisdom and deep discussion of their respective communities and the struggle to keep their young people connected to traditional life and learnings was one we could all connect with. Living in two worlds; remembering and honouring culture while exploring contemporary education, employment and life is one many Indigenous communities face.

Of the workshops I attended Flinders University’s (Adelaide) ‘Having the Hard Conversations’ was all about cultural safety and training in race relations. Cultural safety is a chance look at yourself, address your own bias and ask the hard questions that you’ve been too afraid to ask.

Another was Ontario’s Indigenous Education Strategy focusing on partnerships in post-secondary education. With 9,000 Indigenous post-secondary learners across 24 colleges and 20 universities, colleges are closer to Australian TAFEs and many are for Indigenous students which boast a 70% retention rate. This is a much higher rate than mainstream.

Reconcili-Action Through the Arts with presenter Ruby Medicine-Crane was different again. A Blackfoot teacher who shared her experiences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse while growing up in a Residential School after being removed from her family at 6 years of age. Government policy was to ‘remove the Indian from the child’. We heard how relearning her Blackfoot culture and language and sharing that as teacher, gives her purpose and motivation.

Some of the most memorable presentations involved practical activities such as the Anishnaabe Diversity Circles from the British Columbia Institute of Technology focusing on Emotion, Mind, Spirit and Body. Their mapping exercise identifying diversity and using the imagery of forming an Indigenous outer circle and a smaller non-Indigenous group in the centre demonstrated the level of trust and the value and strength of allowing our allies to join our circle.

We left WIPCE with a sense of solidarity and a positive sense of purpose that will keep each of us buoyant when times get tough, as they always do. The good news is that it all happens again in Adelaide in 2020. This will be an opportunity to present vocational education learnings and projects. If you work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education put this in your calendar – you won’t regret it!

Michelle Purdy is the Aboriginal VET Officer at TASTAFE’s Burnie campus and the AEU Federal TAFE President
The rise and fall of Careers Australia

Over the past year, there have been numerous reports of private for-profit providers closing their doors or entering into administration. While Federal Government reforms, and the stripping of federal funding from some providers has felled some giants in the sector, the new income contingent loan scheme, VET Student Loans, and the government’s increased regulation and compliance regime do not go far enough to protect the reputation of the sector, or ensure quality education for students.

ROSI SCROGGIE

ONE of the most high profile private for-profit providers to collapse since the introduction of VET Student Loans, is Careers Australia.

Careers Australia opened its doors in 2006, and became one of the largest private for-profit providers in the country. At its peak it had 15 campuses around Australia, and a workforce of 1208 employees. An indicator of the “sales” focus of the college is that nearly half of its workforce at its peak was based in the Philippines.

The first hint of future trouble for Careers Australia was reported in the media in February 2016. As the Federal Government put together its reform strategy for VET FEE-HELP, The Australian reported that Careers Australia admitted in reports filed with ASIC that it relied on public funding for a staggering 85 per cent of its revenue. The same report noted that the continuation of government funding was “critical” for Careers Australia to stay in business, but noted that contracts were “ongoing” and “unlikely to be discontinued in the foreseeable future.” Careers Australia made a $34.7 million profit after tax in 2014-2015.

When this report was submitted to ASIC it did seem like the gravy train of VET FEE-HELP was unstoppable, but between 2014 and 2016, scandal after scandal in the private for-profit VET sector would finally force the government into “reforming” VET FEE-HELP. Some of these scandals were attributed to Careers Australia. In May 2016, the ACCC announced the outcomes of its court proceedings against Careers Australia. Careers Australia was found to have “made false or misleading representations and engaged in unconscionable conduct, in breach of the Australian Consumer Law.” This included misrepresenting that courses were free, or would lead to employment as well as offering inducements such as iPads and laptops. Proceedings also uncovered Careers Australia targeted vulnerable and disadvantaged communities including remote Aboriginal communities in Queensland.

Careers Australia undertook to inform students that there was the potential of having their enrolment and debt cancelled; to implement a compliance program and to not engage in the “conduct of concern” in the future. Throughout the ACCC investigation, Careers Australia cancelled at least 12,130 student enrolments and repaid or partially repaid the Commonwealth “amounts totalling at least $44.3 million.”

Only two months later, in July 2016, more allegations came to light in the media of Careers Australia cold calling potential students who had signed up to a job website. At this stage, cold calling had been banned by the Federal Government. Careers Australia alleged that it wasn’t cold calling as people who signed up to Jobify had allowed their details to be passed onto Careers Australia. However, a former employee said he doubted most potential students gave informed consent for their details to be passed on, and that excessive pressure was placed onto potential students to sign up for often unsuitable courses.
One 18 year old told the media he was pressured into signing up for $17,000 online course in leadership despite not having finished high school and actively looking for outdoors work.

Careers Australia was now under intense media scrutiny with several outlets consistently raising concerns about their sales tactics and “leads generation”. By August 2016, ASQA was investigating.

It is also worth noting that during this time period, Careers Australia was making strategic political donations. In 2014-15 they donated $43,400 to various Liberal party branches, and $13,750 to various Labor party branches. In 2015-16 their donations to the Liberal party had decreased to $27,900 and their donations to Labor party branches had more than doubled to $41,650.

In April this year, it was reported that federal funding for Careers Australia had been stripped, and that they had been informed that they would lose accreditation under the federal government’s new VET Student Loans scheme. Only weeks later in late May, Careers Australia had moved into voluntary administration leaving staff and students in limbo. Many staff and students were informed via a brief text message. Up to 1,000 staff members were stood down immediately without pay, and classes were cancelled for around 15,000 students at 14 campuses. Some students were just days, weeks or months away from completing their qualifications.

Careers Australia has not died quietly. After moving into voluntary administration, the media has reported that the company may have been insolvent as early as December 2016, which would put Directors at risk of legal action. It was also reported that 6 weeks before going into administration, Careers Australia wrote to the Federal Education Minister asking for immediate access to funding to prevent its collapse.

The collapse of a giant like Careers Australia demonstrates just how dangerous for-profit providers in the education sector can be. Over the period of 2013-2015 Careers Australia received $264,359,551 in government funding. In the same period, only 14.7% of their students graduated.

Australia students have been left with debts for uncompleted diplomas of untested quality; while shareholders were paid out $40 million in dividends less than 18 months before it went bust.

In 2015 the Workplace Research Centre produced a report for the AEU, The capture of public wealth by the for-profit VET sector. The report warned of “sustained profitability and poor quality educational outcomes in the for-profit sector (even with regulatory changes,) and few of the public benefits that theoretically accrue from a competitive market.” The report put forward several recommendations which would restore confidence in the whole VET sector, and ensure a future for TAFE. These recommendations included minimum hours of delivery for courses, capping funding to private RTOs at 30% of government vocational education funding to ensure TAFEs remain able to provide quality education, ban the subcontracting of delivery, better regulation of RTOs and an end to government manipulating subsidies for private RTOs.

While the Federal Government’s reforms to the sector may have assisted in ending the reign of training giants like Careers Australia by stripping them of federal funding, it is clear that the new income contingent loan scheme, VET Student Loans, and associated increased regulation does not go far enough, and will neither root-proof the sector, nor improve quality.

Setting caps on the amount of money students can borrow, in the absence of genuine delivery, will not stop rorting — it will simply restrict how much profit can be made; setting completion rates will encourage an even laxer approach to quality in an environment where enforcement appears to have become almost non-existent for private for-profit providers; and linking the courses which are eligible for loans to areas of industry need to alleged skills shortages is a largely discredited process. The “science” behind it is imprecise, and at best, it leaves students and the sector playing catch up, with course offerings lagging behind real-time demand. It also encourages a “just in time” approach to vocational education.

When we look at the rise and fall of private for-profit providers like Careers Australia it is clear to see their only motive was profit. While the Federal Government’s latest round of “reforms” may have felled Careers Australia, the other lesson we have learnt from private for-profit providers over the past decade is that where there is public money available, someone, somewhere will find a way to turn that money into profit regardless of caps, regulations and completion rates. It isn’t good enough for reforms to bring down individual providers. We need a sector where the primary purpose of a provider’s existence is education, not profit.

The real purpose of opening access to government funding to for-profit private providers through income contingent loans - facilitating a transfer of funding the vocational education sector from governments onto individual students – has been achieved, and the new VET Student Loans scheme will continue this process.

Rosie Scroggie is an Administrative Officer in the AEU Federal Office
My doctoral research has considered the transformative potential of education to change lives. The study has looked specifically at two groups of students transitioning from TAFE to higher education.

Introduction

The literature on transition notes the value of TAFE as a place where students can develop their potential in an environment which offers a structured and guided approach to learning, in which teachers have a dominant and important role to play in the process. For example, the value of ‘scaffolding, guidance and nurturing … as a vital role’ for TAFE teachers is described by Weadon and Baker (2014, p. 7) who assert that pedagogies which incorporate these roles allow students to feel safe in the teaching environment.

For the students in my study, TAFE represented not just a place to learn, but also a place in which to grow and to develop skills without overwhelming pressure. It further provided a space for them to find their own strengths and to successfully complete their course through development of competencies. For these students, participation in TAFE led to renewed validations of academic capabilities and influenced the decision by all seven to enrol in higher education; a decision of some import for all of them. This discussion looks briefly at the ways in which participation in TAFE brought about initial changes to perspectives, identity and aspirations for these students.

Transforming perspectives

In his Theory of Transformative Learning, Mezirow (1990) states that meaning perspectives ‘involve ways of understanding and using knowledge and ways of dealing with feelings about oneself…[one’s] personal identity, self-concept, and values’. One of the key elements of transformation experienced by the participants while at TAFE was change to beliefs they had about themselves. For example, two of the students (Cooper and Toni) had never considered university as a realistic option for themselves. Principally this may be attributed to the fact that...
discourses around higher education played no part in their upbringing, and therefore, held no real significance for them as an attainable goal. However, changes to this belief occurred in line with gains to their self-confidence which TAFE enabled. Similar outcomes experienced by the other five students developed a sense of having been nurtured by their teachers while at TAFE, and the subsequent growth in self-assurance was incorporated into changing constructs of the self and future career possibilities.

**Transforming identity**

My study further shows that TAFE can act as a catalyst for a renewed self-appraisal of the development of an identity as a ‘student’. Jensen and Jetten (2016) note the positive influences that educators can exact upon their students in both their identity formation and in the development of their professional imaginings. As Stedman (2002, p.564) asserts, building on the identity of self as a student is fundamentally tied to the places of learning students find themselves in, and can be ‘crucial to… self-definition’. In my study, TAFE provided a space for the participants to find their own strengths and to be nurtured towards successful completion of their courses. TAFE allowed them to develop their skills and settle into an identity of an adult learner, capable of achieving good student outcomes. Also, as noted, TAFE further provided them with the foundations of confidence and academic skills needed to establish their student identities.

**Transforming aspirations**

The importance of increased levels of self-esteem which TAFE encouraged, can be found in the positive attitudinal changes towards the value of education reported by the participants. Without exception, all seven chose to go to university on completion of their TAFE qualification. In large part, this decision may be attributed to the confidence they gained at TAFE, accompanied by a growing sense of optimism, as witnessed by changes to the ways in which they later further reviewed their aspirations.

However, the students’ own sense of agency must also be acknowledged. It was clearly through their willingness and ability to adapt and change perspectives as situations demanded, that the participants could embrace the belief that they had the capacity to succeed and to potentially reconstruct their future pathways. This developing awareness opened the door to new aspirational possibilities, which O’Shea (2016, p. 71) refers to as the ‘culture of possibility’, when determining the aspirational choices that can be available for individuals.

In my study, these aspirational changes were actualised in the following ways: TAFE teachers who recognised his intellectual abilities, encouraged Cooper to continue on to a Science degree at university. Ambrose, who initially went to TAFE as a pathway to a university nursing degree, later aspired to work in Midwifery overseas. Bella found renewed self-confidence at TAFE and later went on to a teaching degree at university. Toni, Suzanne, Molly and Allyson all articulated from the Enrolled Nursing program at TAFE to the Registered nursing degree at university. Toni and Allyson later aspired to postgraduate qualifications, while Suzanne wanted to join Careflight.

**Conclusion**

For the participants in my study, TAFE represented a place to learn, to grow and to develop skills with encouragement from teachers. In many ways, it presented a less onerous introduction to a return to learning than direct entry to university may have done. TAFE provided a space for the participants to find their own strengths and to be nurtured towards successful completion of their courses, and it gave them the encouragement and confidence to believe in their academic aptitude. Further, by building confidence and a sense of achievement, the learning environment of TAFE helped to develop their aspirations by encouraging their academic endeavours and enabling their academic successes. TAFE played the very important role of providing a nurturing and stable learning base from which these students could reimagine their futures.

Theresa Millman is a Learning Skills Advisor at the University of Sydney

**References**


NEW SOUTH WALES  
MAXINE SHARKEY

NSW is currently undertaking a serious and significant holistic reorganisation, which alters the structure of TAFENSW, dissolving the current 10 semi-autonomous Institutes to create a single state-wide entity with centralised administrative and educational functions. It is envisaged that any funding saved from efficiencies achieved through streamlining the administration and reducing duplication will go back in to teaching and learning, to benefit all students.

At the same time, TAFE NSW is extracting the final administrative areas in separating from the Department of Education. Federation is working closely with TAFE management to ensure the focus on teaching and learning is not lost and to maintain high quality educational outcomes. This restructure, known as One TAFE will align teaching sections to SkillsPoints and will allow for more collaboration within teaching discipline areas across the state to create high quality teaching and assessing resources.

Educational delivery teams will have administrative and teaching support allocations which should ultimately mean that teachers are freed up from compliance and auditing tasks to concentrate on high quality innovative teaching delivery. Such substantial change can have the capacity to overwhelm individuals within it and the Union is consistently reminding TAFE management of the health and safety obligations of both the employer and employees. Federation has increased our own resources to provide considered feedback to TAFE throughout this process and will continue to ensure we have the capacity to provide meaningful industrial support to our TAFE members.

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

VICTORIA  
GREG BARCLAY

FEATURE almost 12 months of negotiations for a new Multi Enterprise Agreement (MEA) for TAFE teachers in Victoria, the AEU Vic Branch TAFE Committee, at the State-wide Committee meeting on 8 September 2017 has approved the formal withdrawal from the MEA negotiations and to immediately commence campaigning against the Andrews government’s demands for changes to TAFE teachers’ conditions in any new agreement.

Despite always arguing that the government has neither any position nor involvement in any negotiations between the AEU and the employers represented by the Victorian TAFE Association, the AEU is now aware that the government is demanding that TAFE teachers increase their annual teaching loads.

Following years of attacks from the Coalition government from 2000 – 2004 which resulted in 3,000+ teachers being sacked, the Labor government is now demanding a 20% increase in the annual teaching load per EFT TAFE teacher, a 20% increase in teaching loads will see even more TAFE teachers sacked due to the increased annual teaching loads.

With around 6,000 TAFE teachers employed at the last MEA ballot at the end of 2015 this could mean that another 1,200 TAFE teachers will lose their jobs.

This time under a Labor government.

Having been elected in 2014 on a promise to SAVE TAFE it is difficult to see how the Andrews Labor government will do anything but continue to undermine TAFE teachers and the public TAFE system with these demands.

Campaign we can and Campaign we will!

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

QUEENSLAND  
DAVID TERAUDS

AFTER nearly 12 months of negotiations the Central Queensland University EB negotiations have come to a head. The AEU(Q)/QUT and the University are unable to achieve consensus regarding two threshold matters.

CQU wants an increase in minimum hours of contact and the AEU(Q)/QUT wants a separate agreement for VET educators. Despite constructive and collegial negotiations the matters are unresolved. The employer intends putting the EB (as a single agreement with increased VET hours) to a ballot of all Academic, Professional and VET Educator employees. The AEU(Q)/QUT recommends a NO vote.

TAFE Queensland successfully tendered for Commonwealth contracts for AMEP and SEE language programs. However the quantum of funding and constantly shifting contract requirements are creating a headache for implementation. Restructuring of staffing is underway across the regions with some negatively affected. Conversely other regions have received a windfall given that the previous (private) providers have missed out on this round of the contracts.

The Queensland VET Investment Plan was released end of August with the budget just over $40 million less for training than FY16/17. This must be considered in light of the Federal Government lacking leadership and failing to replace the National Partnership Agreement causing a drop of over $100 million in federal funding for Queensland training. Certificate III Guarantee and User Choice have both been reduced to compensate. The state has however bolstered funding for the public providers, TAFE Queensland and Central Queensland University, regardless.

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

SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
PAUL PETIT

AU members are concerned about the future as TAFE SA continues to plan for the fully-contestable funding environment which could be with us in 2019. Since 2012, under the State Labor Government, members in TAFE have been living with the impacts of an increasingly contestable market which has significantly reduced staff numbers and course delivery.

TAFE has now invited all staff to submit expressions of interest in separation packages. We don’t yet know how many will actually be offered. The AEU fears that TAFE is planning more staff cuts and a future with more casual and contract employment. If this proceeds, we will have to fight to maintain permanent positions and the appropriate mode of employment for teaching staff. We expect more cuts to courses along with campus closures.

In our efforts to stop the cuts, TAFE AEU-SA members are campaigning in the lead up to the March 2018 State Election. This is a critical time for us because if the new government proceeds to a fully contestable market then TAFESA’s future will be very uncertain. Members are being organised to meet with prospective state MPs,
communities, industries, and students to see if they are willing to sign up to help guarantee a solid future for TAFE SA.

The AEU is still working to implement the new Enterprise Agreement outcomes including the new lecturer classification structure, the education managers’ review, and ensuring the appropriate modes of employment are used. TAFE was slow to respond with a proposal for progression through the lecturer classifications and were forced to agree to a retrospective implementation date. Negotiations continue.

While some workgroups are still negotiating, a number have successfully reached agreement on their workload which will provide better outcomes and allow the lecturers to complete all their necessary tasks without working excessive hours.

Paul Petit is the Temporary Organiser (TAFE focus) at the AEU SA Branch

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

GARY HEDGER

The handing down of the new state Labor government’s first budget has broken pre-election promises. At this stage the previous government’s efficiency dividends are to remain (doing more with less) and the announcement of an extra 3000 redundancies across the public sector as part of the machinery of government review. For TAFE the only good news is that there will be no increases in student fees for the next four years.

While awaiting for the budget to come out the Union has been very busy with the beginnings of bargaining for a replacement General Agreement (which ends in Dec 2017). Preliminary meeting have occurred with the Union asking for information in regards to staffing numbers and how they are employed, permanent, contract or casual along with a gender breakdown.

The government has also released new State Training Board documents for consultation, the first entitled TAFE industry skills centres. “The McGowan Government’s Plan for Jobs aims to transform TAFE colleges into one-stop-shop Industry Skill Centres”. Increased workload with no extra funding.

The second paper is growing apprenticeships and traineeships in which it talks about structured path ways with steps. “Each ‘step’ represents both an entry and exit point providing greater flexibility for both the employer and the trainee. The trainee would receive a certificate at the end of each ‘step’ as a formal recognition of the training that has been completed. Each step progresses towards a higher level traineeship or apprenticeship. It would be expected that a structured pathway would help with non-completions. It may also be beneficial during periods of economic uncertainty where a four-year apprenticeship might be too much of a risk for the business. Each ‘step’ would be 6-12 months in duration.”

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

ACT

KAREN NOBLE

CIT completed the ASQA audit and achieved a seven year re-registration. The success has been well celebrated and the ongoing work for continuing compliance is rolling out. For teachers the ongoing issues relate to being expected to update documents required for compliance, for example competency mapping, on ever changing templates, redesigning assessments, developing online training, validation, moderation and on it goes, mostly without release from teaching duties. Surveys conducted by both the AEU ACT Branch and CIT gathered consistent feedback about the prevalence of workload pressure and frustration with endless administration.

CIT Enterprise Bargaining has stalled, before it started. The AEU ACT Branch is working with other ACT Unions on the ACT Government common core conditions. There is contention around the payment of back pay and CIT has indicated it will seek a short agreement and to vary the core conditions. If CIT is successful, CIT employees will not enjoy the same core conditions as other ACT Government employees. The troublesome tone of the bargaining is clear from the start.

To engage CIT members and increase membership a series of workshops is rolling out, with teachers claiming industrial leave. The workshops include an overview of the National TAFE scene highlighting the long term campaigning of the AEU Stop TAFE Cuts and TAFE too good to loose. The AEU ACT Branch Industrial Officer is providing a bargaining update, explanation of the Fair Work ACT and the industrial Officer’s role. Our CIT Organiser is building the membership network and momentum for the bargaining campaign.

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

TASMANIA

DAMIAN VON SAMORZEWSKI

The past few months have been very interesting, down here in Tasmania. A 12 month investigation into TasTAFE’s CEO Stephen Conway by the Tasmanian Integrity Commission, has found him to be in breach of the State Service Act and in particular nepotism and providing incentives he was not authorised to provide. He was found to have provided a colleague, Lori Hocking, a position within TasTAFE (from SA) and then a $58,000 promotion within 12 months. Incentives also included rent paid for by TasTAFE and frequent flights home to South Australia. Lori was also found to have used her credit card for personal use, amongst other things. As you could imagine, with continual cutbacks, this type of behaviour was gut wrenching to members and soon turned to anger. To minimise fall out, the Tasmanian Education & Skills Minister immediately announced a half million dollar audit into TasTAFE, something the TAFE Division welcomes.

We have heard the audit will uncover questionable management practices. Time will tell.

On a positive note, we have starting consulting with members for our 2018 EBA negotiations. We will seek clarification of teaching and other duties, as staff tell us of the focus has moved from effective teaching to compliance. The tail is wagging the dog it seems these days. We are also trying to work with TasTAFE management, discussing member observations, issues and concerns so that molehills don’t become mountains. This is a very slow process that impacts on members and their conditions. We are continually losing teaching contact time and pushing learning back on the individual. This inevitably impacts on the teachers’ ability to provide quality and rich learning experiences, rather than delivering information.

Finally, support staff have done an outstanding job implementing a new student management systems this year at TasTAFE and in general, supporting students achieve their dreams!

Damian von Samorzewski is President of the AEU Tasmanian TAFE Division President

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Recognising and rewarding

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Find out more
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2016 winner Cara-Jane Shipp (left) with Correna Haythorpe, federal president AEU.
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