Federal takeover of VET will destroy TAFE
—page 9

A lifetime of debt

VET FEE-HELP is an assault on low wage workers — page 21
National TAFE Day was celebrated around the country on 24 June this year. Teachers, students, unions, political groups, TAFE student associations and many other community members joined in on marking the day. BBQs, morning teas, concerts, leafletting outings and many more activities were organised and hosted by communities right across the country.

A group of AEU and AMWU members descended on Canberra on the day, and lobbying meetings were held with 24 Federal MPs and Senators. This was a great opportunity for TAFE teachers to speak directly to politicians about what is happening at their TAFE colleges.

A National TAFE Day reception was also held in Canberra on the evening of National TAFE Day, with more than 50 MPs and Senators in attendance. Speeches were given by Bill Shorten (Leader of the Opposition), Senator Lee Rhiannon (then spokeswoman for the Greens on Higher Education) and Senator Simon Birmingham (then Assistant Minister for Education and Training).

TAFE Day also saw an announcement by the ALP that it intends to “rebalance” the VET market by allocating guaranteed funding to TAFE. The ALP’s commitment to guaranteed funding for TAFE is an important first step back from the brink.

National TAFE Day is an important day on the calendar, not only to recognise the achievements of TAFE — but also to draw attention to the dire circumstances in the vocational education and training sector that are having a detrimental effect on TAFE colleges. Thanks to everyone who got involved in National TAFE Day — for celebrating the great things TAFE has to offer, and for lobbying for secured funding and support for TAFE.
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SUNSPRING 2015 • THE AUSTRALIAN TAFE TEACHER 3
...job seekers may not have a real choice between attending their TAFE course if it clashes with in-house job search training run by the Jobactive provider or other appointments.

Alongside this is the requirement for job seekers to participate in a Work for the Dole program or other approved activity for six months of each year. There has been a proliferation of Work for the Dole programs under this new regime and only time will tell how effective they are at upskilling and preparing participants for real jobs.

The Green Army is another half year program for 17-24 year olds who can sign on for environmental training and work. This program includes accredited training or nationally endorsed skill sets. Increased competition to engage job seekers in activities for significant periods of time is a reality. This is creating a shrinking pool of people in the community able to access vocational education through their local TAFE without fear of reducing their income. Whether it is due to the overt market agenda or the more indirect punitive changes for job seekers, providing high quality TAFE classes for unemployed Australians is an increasing challenge.

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This final edition of The Australian TAFE Teacher for 2015 is being published at a turbulent time for the TAFE sector, and the articles reflect this — and contribute to debate and discussion about the challenges ahead. One of the strongest messages to come out of the “Leaders’ Retreat” in July was a re-commitment by participants to ‘reform the vocational education and training sector’, mystifying at one level because the sector has been in the process of reform since its inception, and concerning because of the superficial and narrow way in which the sector is conceived in this current push for further change. Several of the articles in this edition of TAFE Teacher reflect directly on the messages to come out of the Retreat. In Federal takeover of VET a rare ‘success’ for the Abbott Government?, Gavin Moodie asks whether the proposition of a federal takeover of VET might represent a rare success for the coalition government, and then examines the different perspectives of the various stakeholders. In essence Moodie highlights the positive aspects of the way in which the debate has been approached — including the apparent willingness of the government to engage and consult — but he concludes that a federal takeover is not necessarily desirable.

Don Zoellner’s article — The Secrets of VET — interrogates the mantra of the contemporary Australian VET system — the seemingly endless quest for it to become “industry-driven”, which emerged again in the Communiqué from the recent Leaders Retreat — ‘greater engagement with industry’. He examines the multiplicity of ways in which industry actually does dominate the VET system, and the systematic denial of this across the decades which he refers to as a ‘public secret’. He concludes that by casting industry leadership as something to be achieved in the future, there is no ability to actually interrogate the possibility that industry has been in charge for a very long time and it may not be very good at this task.

Pat Forward argues that a federal takeover of the VET system would hasten the privatisation agenda to its logical conclusion, resulting in the privatisation of TAFE. In the weeks since the Leaders Retreat, and the announcement that Western Australia and Victoria would develop a paper around the proposal, several stakeholders have engaged in the debate. Current Skills Minister, Simon Birmingham, presumably speaking on behalf of the Federal Government, is a strong supporter of the push for a federal takeover, arguing in a recent speech that ‘A national system should lead to more clarity, enhanced certainty, greater consistency and better accountability, as well as increased efficiency and choice.’ Birmingham’s confidence about the positive outcomes of a federal takeover — and especially his reference to increased choice for students — lead us to John Mitchell’s article — New voices question the concept of student choice: Market designers want the VET sector opened up to anyone who can obtain registration as a training provider and their simplistic arguments normally include the reverential use of the word “choice”: that we can do nothing nobler for our fellow Australians than to give them choice about which training provider they can select; and the more training providers the better. Mitchell’s critique of the current state of both the debate, and the sector itself is sobering reading. He takes some heart from the “new voices” who are contributing to the debate, including sections of the print media, the Consumer Action Law Centre and reviewers in Victoria, but he says: Sadly, most of (the) … market design ideologues have not been silenced in the last ten-to eleven months by the election victories of Labor governments in Victoria and Queensland who have promised to rescue TAFE and better protect prospective VET students, so the public battle continues between the advocates of market design and those who are alarmed by the wreckage the market design idealisats have wrought on the VET system, including its students.

Sally Thompson has two articles in this edition of TAFE Teacher. Women, Work and Poor Pay looks at the debate around the impact of government funding cuts to courses that are more popular with women and the relative safety of funding for courses that are generally populated with men. She concludes that:

Women shouldn’t have to be Rosie the Riveter to gain access to training. But the training has to be real, it has to be broad, and it has to lead to something other than the same low paid, insecure and exploitative work that women have always been lumped with. And that means investment in TAFE!

Thompson’s article on VET FEE-HELP — A Lifetime of Debt: The Policy Elite’s New Gift to Working Class Women is the second article in the series that we are doing on the impact of VET FEE-HELP on the VET sector. In 2015, the government’s own estimates show VET FEE-HELP reaching $4b — up from $25m on its introduction in 2009. Annual recurrent funding for VET is around $6b. VET FEE-HELP will have transformed the structure of the VET sector by the end of 2015, shifting increasing proportions of the costs onto students, and all in the context of more than 75% of the loans going to private for-profit providers of uncertain reputation and quality. A Lifetime of Debt looks at the way in which women are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the massive growth in student debt, arguing that we should not tolerate public policy that pushes more financial hardship onto low paid women workers.

Kira Clarke’s article on VET in Schools is a timely reminder of the increasing challenges that young people face in entering the workforce. Clarke argues that VET in Schools is increasingly seen as the panacea to youth unemployment, and its effectiveness “hotly contested”. Clarke points out that the stakes are high: This unforgiving labour market context has the flow-on effect in other areas of young people’s lives, particularly in health and well-being.

She concludes that while VET in Schools can never fulfil such elevated expectations, and while there are problems with the narrowness of the curriculum and the lack student choice of subject areas, nonetheless VET in School is an important tool for building foundational skills for young people who would otherwise disengage.

Finally, we have included several articles which highlight the excellent work of TAFE and its students. Australian TAFE students shone in the recent 43rd WorldSkills Competition in São Paulo, Brazil. TAFE students also did well in a number of the state training awards, including Brendan Murray who was Aboriginal Student of the Year at the recent 2015 Tasmanian Training Awards in Hobart. We are pleased also to have another feature from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre featuring the fantastic work that they do in collaboration with TAFE assisting asylum seekers to access education and work.

Finally, we encourage our readers to contribute stories to the Australian TAFE Teacher, especially stories of the achievements of TAFE teachers and students. And of course, we encourage you to get involved in our Stop TAFE Cuts campaign by signing up if you haven’t already done so, and by friending us on Facebook and following us on Twitter! TAFE is too good to lose!
New voices question the concept of student choice

New voices are emerging in the national debate about the direction of VET and the future of TAFE, and these voices provide some hope for those people who have been concerned over the last four to five years about the simplistic arguments used by the supporters of “market design”.

DR JOHN MITCHELL

MARKET designers want the VET sector opened up to anyone who can obtain registration as a training provider and their simplistic arguments normally include the reverential use of the word “choice”: that we can do nothing nobler for our fellow Australians than to give them choice about which training provider they can select; and the more training providers the better.

Sadly, most of those market design ideologues have not been silenced in the last ten to eleven months by the election victories of Labor governments in Victoria and Queensland who have promised to rescue TAFE and better protect prospective VET students, so the public battle continues between the advocates of market design and those who are alarmed by the wreckage the market design idealists have wrought on the VET system, including its students.

To remove any doubt in readers’ minds about whether the emotive term wreckage is appropriate, that wreckage is best symbolized by the need for the Victorian government since late last year to send out letters to around 10,000 students notifying them that their qualifications need to be revoked, following the realisation that the relevant training providers had not provided adequate training and assessment. 10,000 is a massive number of people to exploit. Who left open to abuse these 10,000 Victorians? Have those responsible lost their jobs, like the 2,000 or more TAFE teachers in Victoria who have lost their jobs in the last few years?

The wreckage in VET caused by opening up the provider market to shonky operators...
is described in a set of four “strategic review” reports by the national regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), most recently with its report on training in the field of child care. As it did in late 2013 in its report on training in the aged care sector, ASQA’s 2015 child care report found that the Certificate III was being delivered in too short a time frame and that most training providers were not fully compliant with the national standards at the initial audit. The main reason for the non-compliance was inadequate assessment, the very foundation of the competency based system. Two related deficiencies identified by ASQA in both the aged care and child care investigations were the lack of industry currency of the trainers and the absence of any workplace training or simulated training. These findings add up to a crisis in VET and yet the market designers remain committed to opening up the sector to even more providers.

Conventional critiques

Several conventional but significant reports this year in Victoria, funded by the government, have dissected the mess in VET. The first report, “Review of Quality Assurance in Victoria’s VET System”, was prepared by Deloitte and provided further descriptions of the VET wreckage and listed twelve issues facing the Victorian VET system and made various recommendations for improvement.

The second report, “Vocational Education and Training Review Issues Paper”, was commissioned by the Victorian Minister for Training and Skills Mr Steve Herbert MP and prepared by Bruce Mackenzie (chair) and Neil Coulson, following their extensive consultations across the state. The issues paper described 27 changes proposed for the VET sector in Victoria, including three changes to make TAFE more sustainable, four changes to better support jobs and industry, five changes to support training for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, six changes to how funds are allocated to providers and nine changes to ensure students are better protected and supported. The release of the final report is much anticipated.

While Deloittes and Mackenzie and Coulson are well-known contributors to public debate, who are the new voices railing against the abuse of unsuspecting VET students? The first one is unexpected and the second is an even more surprising participant in the VET debate. The first voice is the mass media, including often ridiculed Sunday newspapers such as *The Sun Herald* in NSW and the second is the Consumer Action Law Centre based in Melbourne.

Contradicting the view that Sunday newspapers contain lightweight journalism, crucial points were made about the mess in VET — including the extent of low quality training and the sorting of government funding schemes by training providers — in the editorial in *The Sun Herald* on 27 June 2015, “TAFE cuts short-sighted and damaging”, and in an accompanying article by journalist Kirsty Needham, “NSW school leavers vote with their feet on NSW TAFE fee hikes”.

*The Sun Herald* had followed for some time the slow train wreck in VET, as noted in its editorial. “For months, *The Sun-Herald* has reported on the devastating effects of cuts to TAFE and growing alarm about the consequences of the state government’s ‘Smart and Skilled’ agenda for change, which has hiked fees and made TAFE compete with private providers for government funds. Courses have been abolished or shortened. Supports for the disabled have been stripped away. Those least able to pay have found once-free courses now cost thousands.”

“Insiders warned that school leavers were baulking at the fees and enrolments were down. This week, the budget papers confirmed their warnings. More than 30,000 students have been driven away this year and the number of Aboriginal students and students with a disability has dropped. Certificate III enrolments declined by 18,073.”

*The Sun Herald* editorial then turned the spotlight onto the Baird government. “The state government would no doubt be hoping some of these people found their way into government subsidised places in the private sector, which it is fostering with a generous share of the vocational training budget. But … new figures show training in the private sector has also fallen.”

“And there are serious questions to be asked about the quality of the education the private sector provides. In the pursuit of profit, why would course depth and duration not be sacrificed? In other states, which embraced the market more rapidly than NSW, TAFEs have been strangled and unscrupulous operators have run outrageous scams. There are reports of colleges signing up thousands of students who never complete their studies.”

In the same issue of *The Sun Herald*, journalist Needham extended that newspaper’s critique of the state government’s VET policies. She noted that “the Baird government’s overhaul of TAFE was supposed to make the venerable institution modernise by competing with private training colleges. Instead, school leavers have voted with their feet following fee hikes, dropping out of any vocational training in droves. TAFE [NSW] registered 22,000 fewer enrolments for the most useful, nationally recognised trade qualifications, or Certificate III courses, this year. The 10 TAFE colleges had to compete for student enrolments (and government funding) with 330 private training colleges by cutting teachers and classes.

“But the Budget papers show many of these missing TAFE students didn’t go private when the new training market ‘Smart and Skilled’ started on January 1. There are 30,000 fewer students enrolled in government-funded vocational training of any sort in NSW this year. It appears these teens are sitting at home instead. This is bad news for youth unemployment rates, and a NSW economy facing a shortage of tradespeople.”

The approach taken by Needham and *The Sun Herald* continued the insightful reporting by a range of other mass media channels over the last year, from ABC Radio hosts such as Jon Faine who profiled the exploitation of VET students leading up to the Victorian State election in November 2014, to journalists at *The Age* such as Timna Jacks, to producers on the ABC 7.30 Report who provided several powerful programs earlier this year on rogue training providers recruiting students from aged care facilities and queues outside Centrelink.
THE second new voice in the public debate about VET is that of the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALM) in Melbourne that is surprised to find itself needing to champion the cause of unsuspecting potential and enrolled students. At the TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) conference in Hobart in early September 2015, the Director of Policy and Campaigns at CALM Denise Boyd put the awkward question “Why is it being left to government funded legal centres such as ours to try and help people through an adversarial court system to get redress for courses they [unsuspecting students] should never have been signed up to?” (TDA 14 April 2015).

TDA’s Member Services newsletter reported further on Boyd’s address: “This is what happens when you deregulate a public sector and don’t have the appropriate consumer protections in place. We’re looking at people in the [vocational] education sector who are carrying debts of twenty to thirty thousand dollars that they didn’t even know they’d accrued. It is not appropriate that you have people on commission sales flogging courses that you don’t really know are appropriate to your needs. We need to have a remediation package for those people who have been left with that debt. We are all going to be carrying the cost of that because that money has gone.”

CALM’s submission on 7 August 2015 in response to the Victorian VET Funding Review Issues Paper discussed the notion of consumer choice, and recommended that “the Government undertake further research to determine whether students wishing to study a VET course currently have “too much” choice. While CALM could be expected to favour optimal levels of consumer choice, it noted that “behavioural economists have found that sometimes too much choice can lead to poor decisions, or no decision at all. As options multiply, there may be a point at which the effort required to obtain enough information to be able to distinguish sensibly between alternatives outweighs the benefit to the consumer of the extra choice. Too many options means too much effort to make a sensible decision: better to bury your head under a pillow, or have somebody else pick for you.”

CALM added that “consumers are not in a strong position to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different VET courses, making it difficult for consumers to determine whether they are selecting the course that is appropriate quality or best suits their needs.”

Readers who have experience in VET know that the concept of consumer choice has gone astray, in those governments under the influence of bureaucrats spouting simplistic versions of VET market design. Those bureaucrats do not understand that a vast proportion of VET potential students are not well equipped to make a decision about which training provider to select, given those potential students’ low levels of literacy, or low self esteem due to previous negative experiences of education or lack of confidence due to their length of time away from formal education.

While new voices in the debate about VET such as CALM and The Sun Herald are now exposing the exploitation of unsuspecting potential students by disreputable providers, their efforts are too late, for example, for the 10,000 or more Victorian students ripped off last year.

Dr John Mitchell is a VET researcher and analyst. See www.jma.com.au
A Commonwealth takeover of VET would destroy the public TAFE system

A Commonwealth takeover of vocational education in Australia would see the ultimate triumph of the privatization agenda, and the destruction of the public TAFE system.

PAT FORWARD

One of the headline announcements from the July “Leaders Retreat” was an agreement to consider a shift in responsibility for VET to the Commonwealth – with the proviso that States and territories could elect to remain TAFE providers within a national system. Western Australia and Queensland have been tasked with the responsibility of developing a paper on the proposal.

Until recently, the proposal was an orphan – although the Premier of South Australia, the state which has made a complete mess of its public TAFE system – was known to be an advocate. The Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham appeared to clarify the Commonwealth Government’s position in early September, referring to attempts to move to a national VET system in 1992 as a ‘missed opportunity’. At a recent conference, he argued that a national system should lead to more opportunity. At a recent conference, he argued that a national system should lead to more opportunity. At a recent conference, he argued that a national system should lead to more opportunity.

The starting point for the current debate about the future of the VET system must be the damage that governments, state and federal, have wreaked on the system in the last few years. The VET and TAFE system is the worst funded education sector. Recurrent VET funding has declined by 25% since 2004. As a result of the 2012 National Agreement between the states and the Commonwealth, the sector is well down the path to privatisation. In 2013, 42% of VET funding nationally had been opened to the private for-profit colleges. The total annual recurrent government funding for VET in 2013 was $5.8b. VET FEE-HELP is on track to be more than half of recurrent government VET funding, around $4b, by the end of 2015.

This shift in the funding and organisation of the sector is a fundamental change which has occurred during a period of increasing rorts by private VET companies, and growing uncertainty about the quality and usefulness of qualifications in the sector.

In Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, TAFEs are now minority providers of government funded VET. These state governments have shifted their funding to the private sector, thousands of jobs have been lost in TAFEs, campuses have been closed, and regional areas lost their TAFEs.

The activities of the private for-profit VET sector have undermined trust, confidence and damaged the reputation of the VET sector. Thousands of qualifications have been withdrawn and the quality and usefulness of thousands more called into question. The National VET Regulator has admitted that they can no longer be certain about the quality of VET qualifications, or even whether students hold the competencies that their qualifications attest to. The activities of brokers operating on behalf of the private VET sector continue unabated, with thousands of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people signing up for worthless qualifications, and for a lifetime of indebtedness.

In Victoria, the recent Mackenzie Review showed that 80% of private providers are 90% reliant on government funding. In stark contrast, on average, more than 30% of TAFE college funding is Fee For Service. A recent report from Sydney University showed that the largest private for profit VET colleges are making super profits in excess of 30% - whilst in some cases drawing more than 95% of their funding from the government.

The split in responsibility for the governance and resourcing of vocational education in Australia between the States and the Commonwealth has resulted in more than twenty years of policy incoherence and confusion, under-funding, and a lack of clear direction for the sector.

Peter Noonan, an advocate of markets and competition, says that a shift in responsibility for VET funding to the Commonwealth will achieve little under current policy settings and would entrench the current inadequate funding base. He claims that governments are defunding VET.

The VET sector in Australia is in deep crisis. Dodgy private providers are making daily headlines, demonstrating through their rorts that the regulatory system has failed, and making a mockery of claims by governments that they are cleaning the sector up. At the core of the crisis is the residualisation and ultimate destruction of the public TAFE system.

Shifting responsibility for VET to the Commonwealth will not solve these problems. It would instead be the triumph of privatisation, and the residualisation and ultimate destruction of the public TAFE system.

Pat Forward is the AEU Federal TAFE Secretary
Federal takeover of VET a rare ‘success’ for the Abbott Government?
The former Prime Minister and Premiers agreed to ‘consider’ for vocational education what the Whitlam Labor Government achieved for higher education in 1975; federal takeover of policy and financing with the States retaining ownership and operation of the institutions. The move was one of the options floated in the federation issues paper released in December 2014 and in the federation discussion paper released in July 2015.

The Abbott Government was remarkably inept at persuading the electorate of the merits of its proposals and thus had little success in legislating change. At least some of the reasons for this failure were the Abbott Government’s insistence on pursuing its ideological obsessions at the cost of good policy and implementation. It refused to take the public into its confidence by consulting it on proposals for big changes either before or after its election, it avoided standard processes if they risked delaying or qualifying its headstrong rush to change, and it resorted to tricky tactics to dodge difficult questions about its policy.

All of those flaws blighted the Abbott Government’s attempts to remove the caps on higher education fees and extend government higher education subsidies to private providers. But an indication of how ingrained were these bad practices was Abbott’s use of them against the moderates in his own party to defeat a proposal for marriage equality.

It is therefore ironic that the Abbott Government’s proposed takeover of vocational education seems likely to succeed, since it avoided most of the mistakes of its other big policy proposals. First, a federal takeover of vocational education was not driven by blind ideology. The first serious proposal for a federal takeover of vocational education was in 1989 by the then labor Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins. The proposal was made public in labor Prime Minister Keating’s economic statement One nation published in February 1992.

Secondly, the proposal arose from a series of well considered issues and discussion papers on reforming the federation which have actively sought to engage the public. Thirdly, the Abbott Government formally consulted the State and Territory Governments which are responsible for vocational education. And fourthly, the Government seemed willing to take the time to consider the implications of the proposal and develop a considered implementation plan.

Nonetheless, a federal takeover of vocational education would not necessarily be desirable.

Federation

Conservative Australian politicians have supported ‘States’ rights’ since the federation conventions of the 1890s. Although it was founded in 1891, the ALP had minimal input to federation and consequently has been a strong critic of the Constitution and an early advocate for substantial changes. In 1918 the ALP’s federal conference added to its platform ‘Unlimited legislative power in Australian affairs to be vested in the Commonwealth Parliament; devolution of adequate local powers upon subordinate legislatures and municipalities elected by adult suffrage’. This was the goal of ‘unification’, or the transfer of complete
legislative sovereignty to the Commonwealth Parliament, with or without abolishing State legislatures.

So the political positions remained until 2005 when the conservative Howard Government reversed 115 years of conservative policy and abolished States’ rights in industrial relations with its Work Choices Act. In upholding the constitutionality of the Work Choices Act, the High Court greatly extended the Commonwealth’s powers in every field, to no apparent consternation of conservatives who had previously criticised the High Court for ‘judicial activism’ and for its purposive rather than ‘black letter’ interpretation of the Constitution.

While it is gratifying that conservatives have finally adopted Labor’s policy of transferring all legislative powers to the Commonwealth, their wholehearted adoption of this position might provoke progressives to reflect on whether this is a good policy after all. Dividing responsibility between the Commonwealth and State governments causes many problems, but the solution in Australia seems always to transfer all responsibility to the national government. The state and federal governments seem much better at sharing responsibilities in Canada, Germany and the USA, and when overlap causes problems, full responsibility is often transferred to the states.

**Funding**

The States seem willing to contemplate a federal takeover of vocational education which they rejected in 1989 and 1992 because their budgets are under more pressure now. Much of this is due to their own decisions. The States have refused to adopt the recommendation of the Henry review of Australia’s future tax system in 2009 to implement a comprehensive land tax, despite this being economically efficient, in their constitutional power and potentially a source of considerable and increasing revenue. Neither have States contemplated reintroducing probate tax, leaving Australia one of the few OECD countries without probate and gift duties.

But the Commonwealth Government has also contributed to the States’ budget squeeze. Most recently the Abbott Government’s 2014 budget cut transfers to the States for education and health by $80 billion over 10 years. While the Commonwealth has its own budget problems, this is also mostly due to its failure to raise taxes to fund the services that Australians rightly expect. Australia is the fifth lowest taxing country in the OECD, taxing only 27% of gross domestic product. While this is above the USA’s 24%, Australia’s tax rate is much lower than that in Canada (30%), Aotearoa New Zealand (32%), the OECD average (34%), the UK (36%), Germany (37%) and France (44%).

Not only are the States suffering budget pressures, they also give higher priority to school education and health, which have much bigger budgets and are much more important politically than vocational education. The combination has resulted in funding for vocational education being cut by 25% per full year training equivalent from 1999 to 2011, while it was increased by 3% in higher education and by 20% in school education. It is hard to imagine that the States will reverse their practice over the last 15 years and stop cutting vocational education’s funding per student. The Commonwealth’s budget is much bigger and it has more budget flexibility even within current limited political thinking. So it is at least possible that vocational education’s finances would improve if full responsibility were transferred to the Commonwealth.

**Inconsistencies between states**

A common argument in favour of a Commonwealth takeover of vocational education and indeed everything else is that inconsistencies between the States are costly and less efficient. This argument is not important in Canada, Germany or the USA. In those federations differences between the states are understood to reflect the different circumstances, needs and preferences of each state. Even in Australia this argument is relevant only to vocational education providers and employers who operate in more than one state. Most of these are big organisations which can afford the additional overhead of complying with different States’ requirements.

Most providers and most employers are small or medium sized and operate only within one State. Transferring vocational education to the Commonwealth imposes on them the extra costs of relating to the more distant Canberra rather than their closer State capital. Furthermore, the big Commonwealth Government and its departments and agencies are less responsive to small and medium organisations than smaller State governments.

**For students**

The Commonwealth manages income contingent loans such as VET Fee-Help and has enthusiastically extended them to vocational education to shift costs from governments to students.
This has greatly increased costs for students of upper level vocational education programs, as it has greatly increased costs for undergraduate higher education students. But unlike higher education students, most vocational education students do not graduate and get high paying jobs. Although the Commonwealth does not routinely publish loan repayment rates for vocational education students, it seems that they are much lower than the repayment rates for higher education students, which are around 80%.

There seems to be increasing concern about the amount of unpaid loans, particularly by former vocational education students. The most likely response is to lower the income at which students have to repay their loans, which is currently $54,126 or 70% of average weekly earnings. Lowering the repayment threshold markedly would undermine the whole rationale for increased fees for vocational education, which is to increase students’ payment for a qualification which has gained them an above average income. It would effectively increase taxes for people on lower incomes who made the effort to gain another qualification, which would be perverse as well as regressive.

Many State Governments have complicated rules to determine eligibility for subsidised places, fees and concessions which reflect State priorities but are often hard for students to understand. A Commonwealth takeover is likely to result in one set of fees for vocational education, which is to increase students’ payment for a qualification which has gained them an above average income. It would effectively increase taxes for people on lower incomes who made the effort to gain another qualification, which would be perverse as well as regressive.

For privates
Private providers are likely to benefit from a full Commonwealth takeover. Both federal Labor and Coalition governments have promoted competition, marketisation and the extension of government subsidies to private providers. Over time the Commonwealth is likely to harmonise requirements and registration for Government subsidies and VET FEE-HELP, which would also benefit private providers.

However, the Commonwealth is used to dealing with big businesses and big governments, and most of its processes require computer systems to collect, validate and submit data and receive validation reports and statements of requirements. The Commonwealth Department of Education and Training is used to dealing with relatively modest numbers of providers: there are 262 providers approved for VET FEE-HELP, about 6% of all registered training organisations. Particularly smaller providers will find complying with Commonwealth requirements and bureaucracy onerous and daunting.

For TAFE
TAFE institutes are likely to be disadvantaged by a full Commonwealth takeover. TAFE institutes are and will remain State Government bodies towards which the Commonwealth owes no special allegiance, sympathy or support. This is likely to affect most the institutes in States which have not yet fully implemented a flat market. However, while the Commonwealth will not necessarily provide special support to TAFE institutes, State Governments may continue to fund TAFE institutes for special projects and provision, as some continue to fund their universities.

Most TAFEs are of reasonable size and all are well used to complying with government policy, process and administrative requirements. They are therefore likely to find complying with Commonwealth requirements less alien than smaller private providers.

For vocational education
Australian vocational education is rather different from vocational education in the USA and Canada in being in a different sector and responsible to a different level of government to higher education. This distances Australian vocational education from higher education in policy, funding and management, and introduces many obstacles to transfer and interaction between vocational and higher education. A Commonwealth takeover of vocational education is likely to integrate it more closely with higher education eventually, which would be better for students, providers, employers and society generally.

More consultation
A federal takeover of vocational education would be a big change for students, teachers, managers, employers and state and federal government officials. All these interest groups and the general public should be informed of progress frequently and consulted on the major steps. Presumably vocational education will be an important part of the forthcoming white paper on the federation, which would give everyone an opportunity to respond to the initial proposal.

Gavin Moodie is an adjunct professor of education at RMIT University.
Held on 11-16 August, the Skillaroos proved to be fierce competition for the other 62 countries in attendance. The excitement in the air at the Closing Ceremony was palpable as over 1,200 competitors came together at the Ibirapuera Gymnasium to celebrate their achievements after four days of competition.

Harlan Wilton from TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute, Jyothi Forman from Melbourne Polytechnic and Joseph Pauley from Polytechnic West each won a silver medal in Web Design, Jewellery and Industrial Mechanics Millwright respectively. Joseph also had the honour of being named Australia’s Best of Nation.

Dylan Di Martino from Victoria University and Sam Spong from TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute each secured a bronze medal in Plumbing & Heating and Bricklaying respectively.

The team’s fantastic effort boosted Australia’s ranking to 12th in the world.

Competitors, Experts and spectators alike were amazed by the scale of the competition, the largest WorldSkills Competition to date. The competition utilised over 213,000m² of competition space — roughly equivalent to the size of 17 Olympic-sized swimming pools. There was a lot to see and do for spectators including leaders in industry, education and government, with a host of educational activities to try in addition to viewing competitions across 50 skill categories.

"It’s really exciting that I can make everyone proud that has helped me along the way," said Jyothi Forman after the Closing Ceremony. "There are so many people that have been helping me and supporting me, and I am so happy that I pulled through and got the silver medal."

"Jyothi is a great example of someone who has a dream and is prepared to work hard to realise that dream," said Rob Wood, CEO of Melbourne Polytechnic.

“We are pleased that we were able to support her initially through our Certificate III in Jewellery apprenticeship program, then through mentoring by our staff and financial support for the competition. That type of ongoing relationship with our graduates is something that we would like to support more in future.”

The Skillaroos’ strong performance was the culmination of two years of intensive competition and one-on-one training. Their journey started with their medal-winning performance at the regional level in 2013, advancing them to the National Competition held in Perth last year. After being named the best in the country in their respective trades and skills, these talented individuals were selected to be part of the Skills Squad — a new concept first introduced in 2014 involving the ongoing training and evaluation of each member with the overarching goal of sending the best team possible to the international competition.

“The Skillaroos are living proof that Australia is at the forefront of vocational education and training excellence,” said WorldSkills Australia CEO, Mark Callaghan.

"We are very proud of the hard work that these amazing young Australians have dedicated to their professional development over the last two years. They are excellent ambassadors for their respective industries, and we hope that their achievements serve to show other young people that vocational education and training pathways are viable first choice career options.”

More than a competition

The WorldSkills Competition is more than a chance at glory for the talented young apprentices, trainees and students that have the opportunity to compete at the international level. In addition to enhanced technical abilities, the years of dedication to training and competition that the Skillaroos have undertaken in preparation for the event has provided each with valuable practical experience that will forever change the course of their lives.

“It isn’t just about determining medallists,” said International Chief Expert in Bricklaying, Troy Everett, who trained bronze medalist Sam Spong over the last year. “It’s also about learning about yourself, how you handle pressure and producing the quality work that you didn’t think you were capable of. These are all skills and attributes that help shape you as a good tradesperson.”

The days after the competition were filled with a myriad of emotions as all involved finally had a chance to breathe and let the significance of the experience sink in. Troy said that it was a very proud and emotional moment when the competition ended and Sam Spong was greeted by his mother and a team of Aussie supporters.

Many of the Skillaroos reflected upon the entire journey they have undertaken over the last two years.

“I feel like I’ve come a long way and that I’ve learned a lot about my industry,” said Dale Fisher, who won a Medallion of Excellence in Graphic Design Technology. “There are so many things I didn’t know a year ago that I now feel like I could work in pretty easily.”

“Dale showed a huge increase in skills from his time of being a regional and national World-
Skills Australia competitor, to his performance at the International Competition,” said International Deputy Chief Expert in Graphic Design technology, Sarah Jones.

“Through our intensive training through both face-to-face and distance via Skype and email, he showed constant and significant progress in all facets of design as well as his technical skills. There are very few young people who have such broad skills that cover both complex technical output as well as creativity, and he is an extremely valuable asset to the industry.”

Sarah was impressed with Dale’s performance at the competition, particularly in editorial, corporate and information design and advertising tasks. “I am extremely proud of his commitment and effort to his professional development.”

The next generation of talent

On 26 August at the Victorian launch of National Skills Week, the Victorian Minister for Training and Skills, the Hon. Steven Herbert officially announced that Melbourne will host the 2016 WorldSkills Australia National Competition.

The competition is expected to see over 500 competitors from around the country compete in 60 skill categories across three intense days of competition. Winners from Regional Competitions held throughout 2015 will demonstrate individual and collective technical skills to be used to perform a series of tasks simulating real work challenges that must be completed in accordance with industry standards.

Three days of intensive competition will reveal Australia’s most skilled young people under the age of 23, who may have the opportunity to represent Australia as a Skillaroo at the 44th WorldSkills Competition in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in October 2017.

“Only a short time ago, the 2015 Skillaroos were standing in the same shoes as this year’s regional competitors,” says Mark Callaghan. “Two years of hard work and dedication paid off as these amazing young Australians returned home from the international competition helping us achieve a ranking of 12th in the world.”

“Now, Australia’s next generation of trades and skills talent is hoping to follow in the 2015 Skillaroos footsteps. We look forward to seeing what they will bring to the 2016 WorldSkills Australia National Competition and, if successful taking them through to Abu Dhabi in 2017.”

To find out more about the 2015 Skillaroos and how you can get involved in the 2016 WorldSkills Australia National Competition, visit: worldsills.org.au

RESULTS FROM THE 43RD WORLDSKILLS COMPETITION

SILVER MEDALLISTS

* Harlan Wilton (Web Design), TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute
* Joseph Pauley (Industrial Mechanics Millwright), Polytechnic West
* Jyothi Forman (Jewellery), Melbourne Polytechnic

BRONZE MEDALLISTS

* Dylan Di Martino (Plumbing & Heating), Victoria University
* Sam Spong (Bricklaying), TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute

MEDALLION OF EXCELLENCE

* Adele Di Bella (Pâtisserie & Confectionery), TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute
* Beau Kupris (Refrigeration & Air Conditioning), TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute
* Blair Watters (Car Painting), TAFE NSW Hunter Institute
* Dale Fisher (Graphic Design Technology), RMIT University
* Emma Hillier (Fashion Technology), TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute
* Hayley Parker (Hairdressing), Gordon TAFE
* John Reminis (Bakery), TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute
* Kallon McVicar (Welding), TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute
* Karl Davies (Automobile Technology), Federation University
* Nicholas Roman (Joinery), TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute
* Samantha Johnson (Restaurant Service), TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute
The secrets of VET

Australian vocational education and training (VET) is built upon a foundation of secrets. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but these confidences must be identified in order to improve our understanding of how the national training system operates.
SECRETS help mediate society’s operations and can serve a range of roles. For example, the current conceptions of participatory democracy rely upon citizens casting a secret ballot. Capitalism requires trade secrets to provide advantages in a free market, hence ACET’s concern about releasing commercially sensitive training data as part of the VET transparency agenda. Federal, state and territory cabinets of our parliamentary governments conduct their business in secret. Recently those who have violated cabinet secrecy have been labelled as ‘gutless’ by one minister and ‘deplorable and disappointing’ by another.

Our industry-led training system is focused upon what Leslie Roman calls a ‘moral panic’ about skills shortages that dominates the official discourse and makes challenging the existing relationship between industry and the public purse all but impossible. One example of the influence of industry’s secret, masked by this moral panic, came from the former Managing Director of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Tom Karmel. His research findings challenged the core belief that training is an automatic benefit by statistically demonstrating that for workers in some age groups and industry areas, such as sales or community and personal services, increased formal training did not improve incomes and career options. Speaking at the 2012 Australian VET Research Association Conference, he called for greater scrutiny of the allocation of public training funds by shifting resources to areas that produced outcomes more in line with human capital development (as measured by increased income post-training). This would represent better economic and social policy. He prefaced these remarks with commentary about the political sensitivities associated with even discussing the matter and lightly linked his raising the issue with his own pre-retirement planning. The audience reaction was one of nervous, knowing laughter when industry’s secret was even mentioned, let alone challenged.

Michael Taussig proposes that these types of secrets have a purposeful place in society, based upon how members deal with “that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated”. In order to facilitate collective interaction, citizens must learn that the most important social knowledge is mediated by “knowing what not to know”. This has been described as holding a ‘public secret’. Transparency agendas always establish unstated, but nevertheless very powerful, rules about what to turn a blind eye to and what to know without declaring it publicly. Public secrets serve a quite important and precise purpose in the operation of the VET system by maintaining the furtive reality of industry control.

It is perfectly economically rational and financially desirable for industry to problematise skills shortages especially if they don’t have to pay to resolve the matter. As long as governments use public funds to finance training, keeping the story of scarcity alive not only comes at no cost to industry, but also maintains pressure on governments not to redirect these funds elsewhere. Former senior VET administrator Kaye Schofield concurs: “governments have not been able to stem the massive shift to the addiction of publicly funded training”.

It is not the simple lack of information that gives rise to public secrets. Advanced market democracies are swamped with information that continually recites society’s stories and Michel de Certeau believes “these narrations have the twofold and strange power of transforming seeing into believing and fabricating realities out of appearances”. The constant repetition of the need for industry leadership and control of VET, framed in such a manner to suggest that it has not been achieved in the face of perverse resistance by training providers, exemplifies this odd capacity. The casting of industry’s role in VET policy as an aspirational target implies that the long-stated goal of supplying industry-determined outcomes has not yet been achieved. By framing the discourse as aspirational, a deception leading to a public secret, is being performed on the public.

This focus upon industry’s place in VET is not new. In its first annual report in 1995, the Australian National Training Authority stated: “ANTA has a five person board drawn from industry to ensure that that Authority remains focused upon the needs of industry”. But the story goes back much further. In order to achieve the Commonwealth Government’s goal of full employment, Prime Minister Curtin’s 1945 White Paper also noted the pivotal role of industry: “The solution of this problem of the distribution of resources lies mainly with businessmen”. The course content in vocational and technical education has been influenced by industry for over four decades, commencing with the 1969 landmark Tregillis Report and the consequent establishment of 14 government-funded Industry Training Councils. The VET landscape is littered with the remains of literally hundreds of government-sanctioned bodies which have variously provided policy advice, determined the content of training programs and frequently prioritised funding allocations.

Almost without exception, the Kangan Review being a rare example, the membership of these various state, territory and federal authorities, commissions, training advisory councils, industry training advisory boards, industry skills councils, review committees, quality councils, research centres, foundations, training advisory boards, overseas study groups and agencies has been...
dominated by industry appointments. The current National Vocational Education and Training Board’s focus “on ensuring industry has a stronger voice in VET” is only the latest incarnation of such industry-led bodies dedicated to ‘fabricating realities out of appearances’ by using the power of public secrets.

Erving Goffman provides a complementary perspective by classifying secrets according to their social function. Dark secrets are likely to never be disclosed and some commercially-sensitive cabinet decisions fit here. ACET’s rejection of total VET activity reporting is a strategic secret as it can be used to limit public information in order to protect market share. There are also entrusted secrets exemplified by the Unique Student Identifier being built upon a promise to keep individual information confidential as a demonstration of the system’s trustworthiness. Finally, there are inside secrets, frequently found in professions and trades, serving to increase group solidarity through the sharing of information only known to the membership.

Goffman exposes the power of insider secrets that are used to reinforce industry’s leadership in the Australian VET sector. The management of public risk that is promulgated through a “rhetoric of training” allows licensing and registration bodies to specify and guard the amounts and levels of training in a variety of occupations “to foster the impressions that the licensed practitioner is someone who has been trained for the vocation. In Australia, some 63 industry areas have been identified that have government legislated licensing or registration requirements. With the exception of one publication, A Licence to Skill, my research has found virtually no detailed examination of these bodies. The power/knowledge exercised through licensing and registration is such a mundane and common sense practice that its operations have never received serious policy consideration with one significant exception — Licensing Line News. This project was established to support the Council of Australian Governments occupational licensing reform agenda and was overseen by a national advisory committee comprised of training bureaucrats and providers. After eight years of existence, the project was closed in 2011. It is conceivable that the existence of such a body could disturb industry’s public secret and be the reason for its demise.

The systematic denial of industry actually being in control of the National Training System is enforced in three major ways. There is a continuous recital of an aspiration to achieve an industry-led system as if that was not already the case. Its reputed absence is seared into VET’s psyche and is seldom challenged and then only with severe trepidation, as demonstrated by Karmel’s ironic reference to his retirement planning. Karmel was well-aware that he was expressing thoughts that everyone knew not to know. In addition, unambiguously, industry controls the licensing and regulation schemes which, in turn, manipulate and influence the labour market in most significantly-sized or economically important occupations. This often includes dictating the content and levels of training required to enter and remain in the occupation, thus holding the power to potentially create or eliminate skills shortages. They also support a self-serving rhetoric of skills shortages. Lastly, industry peak bodies are relentless and highly effective lobbyists of government, seeking the most lucrative and attractive financial arrangements for their members. Industry’s capacity to frustrate several decades of public policy intention seeking increased employer funding of training, speaks volumes as to who is in charge of the system. In addition, industry has always been and remains well-represented on each of the state, territory and national bodies that most directly influence public policy in VET.

Due to the power of this particular public secret and casting industry leadership as something to be achieved in the future, there is no ability to actually interrogate the possibility that industry has been in charge for a very long time and it may not be very good at this task. Individual government officials and lobbyists, in fact anyone who wishes to influence public policy in VET, continue to demonstrate the ‘most important social knowledge — knowing what not to know’.

Dr Don Zoellner is a Research Associate at Charles Darwin University

This article is an edited version of a chapter from Dr Zoellner’s Doctor of Philosophy thesis If vocational education and training is the answer, what was the question?: theorising public policy and the behaviour of citizens. Readers seeking full references of those cited can visit http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/289868
Vocational education and training for secondary school students: IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT JOBS

BY KIRA CLARKE

A USTRALIA, like many Western education systems, places a strong emphasis on completing school and gaining skills for the workplace. We are all by now familiar with the mantra of the changing employment landscape accompanied by a general decline in full-time employment and a demand for higher levels of formalized skills and knowledge. High skilled and sub-professional jobs have experienced most growth in the last decade and are predicted to represent almost half of employment in the coming years. This context has brought with it intensifying demand for a more diverse range of curricula for young people in the senior years of school. Beyond the demand for higher skills, we know that the transitions from school to work and towards adulthood are transforming; becoming increasingly prolonged and uncertain. Gone are the days when an employer would pick up a plucky young school dropout to do manual labour, start an apprenticeship or work the front desk. Now one in five unemployed Australians is a teenager. In the past, high school completion or qualifications at Certificate levels I and II had some currency for accessing entry-level jobs. Today, there are a few chances of young people entering sustainable employment directly from school.

Despite targets and a range of strategies to retain and engage students, and provide access to a range of applied and vocational learning, a significant minority of Australian students still leave school without gaining the foundational skills and knowledges to be successful and secure in work.

VET in Schools as the panacea

VET in Schools is increasingly relied upon to be the panacea to the challenge of youth unemployment. Last year, more than 250,000 Australian young people participated in VET in Schools. This includes more than 20,000 School Based Apprentices and Trainees (SBATs). Demand for VET in Schools programs is growing, with the overall number of VET in Schools students rising 41% since 2006.

Significant numbers of VET in Schools students go on to take up post-school education and training. This includes 68.9% in Victoria, 62.2% in New South Wales and 55.8% in Queensland, moving from VET in Schools programs into post-school further study.

While the patterns of transition from VET in Schools to post-school training are pleasing, the efficacy of VET in...
Schools in enabling and enhancing transitions directly to the labour market is hotly contested. What we know from those states that conduct post-school tracking surveys (e.g. Victoria, Queensland and more recently New South Wales), is that there are declining opportunities for full-time, secure employment for young people who attempt to move from school directly to work without any post-school training. The most common labour market activities of VET in Schools students are part-time work or looking for work (e.g. unemployed).

What about those who don’t finish school?

While school completion and qualification attainment in Australia are considered high by world standards, secondary school retention rates have been sluggish if not stagnant for the last two decades. A significant minority of Australian young people (approximately 1 in 4 of all secondary students) leaves the schooling system without attaining a school completion certificate. Dropping out before completing school is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon, with current evidence suggesting that slightly more than 16 per cent of young people within OECD countries do not complete upper secondary education.

The implications of moving into the labour market without completing school are illustrated in the data from the Victorian On Track survey which highlights the risky outcomes for early school leavers, with almost half (46.2) of those leaving school in 2013 not continuing in education or training, and only one in five of those successfully accessing full-time employment.

This unforgiving labour market context has the flow-on effect in other areas of young people’s lives, particularly in health and well-being. In addition to lower earnings over a lifetime, early school leavers and those with low educational attainment have an increased likelihood of welfare dependency and engagement in criminal activity. Research has shown that early school leavers may also experience higher rates of drug and alcohol use, greater levels of depression and social isolation, and greater likelihood of teenage parenthood.

How do we make VET in Schools stronger?

So, we have the evidence that clearly demonstrates the vulnerability of both those who slip the cracks and leave school early and for those who complete school with limited achievement and skills.

Within many of the models and approaches to VET in Schools established and operated by the various state and territory based schooling systems, there is a reliance on predominantly foundational certificates (e.g. Certificates I and II) and the use of narrowly defined occupations as the structural basis for school-based vocational curriculum. This reliance becomes problematic when young people and their families view VET in Schools as a ticket to support entry to the labour market and access to sustainable employment.

A recent three-year program of VET in Schools research funded by NOFVER, found that vocational education programs in schools should be promoted as a pathway to higher-level post-school VET study, rather than as a pathway directly to jobs without further training. Within the VET in Schools context, our marketised training landscape reinforces problematic assumptions that learners choose their qualifications and providers based on an informed understanding. In many VET in Schools programs, learners exercise very limited agency in choice or provider and even more problematically, there are instances of limited choice in qualification or industry area. I will never forget one particularly confronting research trip to the outer suburbs of a capital city, where a group of VET in Schools students explained to me why they were participating in a particular manufacturing certificate in Year 11. Pointing out the window across to the adjacent industrial area they said: “We didn’t get a say. Can’t you see the factories? They are training us to work there”.

Partnerships and coherent pathways

A key element to the complex task of promoting VET in Schools as only the first foundational steps on the way to a technical or vocational career, is cross-sectoral collaboration. This collaboration is needed to strengthen the ways in which school-aged young people explore, taste and engage with both the world of work and applied learning environments. This involves not only closer school-employer partnerships, that have been so fervently promoted in recent policy, but a closer look at the nature, resourcing and development of school-TAFE partnerships.

There are numerous examples of effective TAFE taster and trade exploration programs across Australia. These types of experiences are crucial to enabling learner agency in choosing and deciding their vocational path. Unfortunately, we still have a very long way to go in providing access to authentic taster and exploration experiences as a common core across our schools.

Any re-development or strengthening of VET in Schools needs to consider how to enable, within foundational or entry-level qualifications, the exploration of a broader range of related occupations within an industry. This exploration needs to integrate meaningful ‘learning about’ a chosen industry, including understanding issues of mobility, growth and local labour market issues. Underlying all this is a need for system level leadership in creating and promoting clear, coherent and transparent pathways from these foundational or ‘career start’ qualifications to the intermediate and higher-level qualifications that young people will need to access and retain sustainable and meaningful employment.

Kira Clarke, Lecturer in Education Policy, Centre for Vocational & Education Policy, University of Melbourne
A lifetime of DEBT

The policy elite’s new gift to working class women

The VET policy establishment is currently dealing with the emerging challenge of what economists call “doubtful debtors” that is, people who never earn enough money to pay back a debt.

BY SALLY THOMPSON

It’s a topic of much discussion because privatisation of VET and the introduction of VET FEE-HELP has created a new and rapidly expanding cohort of them. And, as with most disadvantaged groups, women, with their pesky habit of taking time out of paid work to carry the burden of supporting children and old people in our society, make up a disproportionate amount of these so-called “doubtful debtors”.

There are a range of ways that governments could stop the growing debt burden on these low income, economically vulnerable women. One way would be to stop giving money to dodgy private training companies to hand out tick and flick online qualifications that employers are increasingly wary of recognising with a job. Governments could consistently regulate the amount that can be charged for a course that attracts VET FEE-HELP or fund programs to encourage women into courses in higher paid non-traditional industries (an area that has barely progressed in decades). or provide full fee relief for courses such as childcare and aged care where research shows the private financial return on investment is either low or non-existent and the public benefit enormous.

Before revealing some of the suggestions from VET policy analysts, it’s worth briefly revisiting the public policy car crash that is VET FEE-HELP. Those of you who frequent shopping malls in impoverished neighbourhoods will be aware that VET FEE-HELP debt usually comes with an iPad and a Coles Myer voucher, but what you might not know, is that unlike the systems used to fund a university education for Australian undergraduate students, policies supporting Diploma level VET qualifications have very few of the same protections that stop students spiralling into debt.

To outline the differences, let’s follow the journey of Vicki the VET student and Helen the Higher Ed student.

Vicki wants to complete a Diploma in Beauty Therapy; a wise choice given that the government’s My Skills website tells her that employment prospects are much higher than the Australian average in this growth industry. Helen wants to study law. Vicki meets the entry requirements for her Diploma but she lives in Queensland, one of a number of states that saw an opportunity to withdraw all subsidies for this course when VET FEE-HELP was introduced, and instead moved the entire financial burden onto the learner. Helen meets the entry requirements for a Bachelor of Law, and under the Bradley Review reforms is guaranteed a Commonwealth subsidised place. According to the My Skills website, the average cost of the Diploma in Beauty Therapy is $21,750 full fee for one year of study. With the 20% loan fee, Vicki will finish her first year of study with a debt of over $26,000 while Helen, finishes first year law with a debt of just over $10,000.

Helen’s university is not more efficient or more committed to social justice than Vicki’s VET provider. The difference in debt exists because under the HECS legislation, Helen’s HECS debts are capped at $10,266 per year, while Vicki can be charged whatever the provider can get away with up to an upper limit of $97,728. The middle class squealed with horror when Christopher Pyne tried to introduce legislation that would have allowed for $100,000 degrees last year, but when the former Labor government brought in an upper limit of $97,728 debt for VET Diplomas and State governments withdrew their funding share? Not so much!

Vicki moves to Victoria, one of the few states that still offers a “government subsidised place” for the Diploma in Beauty Therapy. Instead of being saddled with a $26,000 debt, Vicki’s government supported place now leaves her with...
$13,000 debt, still $3,000 more than Helen’s.

When HECS was developed, it was based on the principle of public/private benefit. Graduates, we were told, earn significantly more than the average citizen, so it is only fair that they contribute something towards their education from this largesse. The Wran Committee, the architects of HECS, suggested 20%. Over time this increased to closer to 50%, but the basic principle of private benefit forming the basis of the individual’s contribution, continues to underpin the HECS scheme. For VET, however, in a state like Victoria, no such principle exists. VET providers are free to decide their own fees up to the $97,728 limit and to entice learners into debt to pay for them.

Vicki is already on a bigger debt trajectory compared to Helen, but it is once they both graduate, that the real disparity begins. Unlike HECS, there is no relationship between future earnings and debts accrued via VET FEE-HELP. HECS is based around three different cost bands for graduates of universities, partly to take into account the different wage returns on medicine, for example, relative to performing arts. None of these protections exist for VET. Debts have absolutely no relationship to future earnings. Indeed, in a state like Queensland, often the reverse of public/private benefit operates. Qualifications like the Advanced Diploma in Engineering, that provides a considerable return on investment are subsidised, while courses, where graduates have a limited future capacity to pay, (like the Diploma in Aged Care) are not. While Helen’s debt has been calibrated to reflect her above average future earnings, Vicki’s is just piled on regardless.

At an estimated starting income of $55k per year, and a bright prospect of income growth, Helen will soon be debt free. Vicki, according to the MySkills website, can expect an income of $42k, if she gets a salon manager job, and little wage growth over her lifetime. So she can expect to carry her much larger debt for a much longer time, and if she takes time out or works part time to raise a family she will probably join the ranks of “doubtful debtors”, going to her grave still carrying a debt for her Diploma.

What to do about this mess? The Mitchell Institute’s Peter Noonan and Sarah Pilcher, recently released an Issues paper suggesting that a consistent, national “entitlement” to government support based on agreed principles including public and private benefits be re-introduced to the VET sector. Actually, they say “introduced” because they conveniently forget that up until very recently, most TAFE learners accessed a government supported place including at Diploma level and paid modest fees. They also suggest expanding the Income Contin-
The apprenticeship system leads to some well-paid jobs, but for a great many women, it leads to low-paid work. The second reason is that “Other Certificate III qualifications form entry to important occupations”. Which conveniently ignores the many Certificate IIs that do not form entry to important occupations and will have to be followed up by a Cert IV and possibly a Diploma, all the while adding to students’ debt. It suggests that Cert IVs are tertiary because they “build on entry level qualifications”. So? Certificate III in General Education for Adults, builds on Certificate II? Does that make it tertiary? What about Certificate I in General Education based on that logic. If Vicki was in danger of being a “doubtful debtor” before, her chances will substantially increase under Noonan and Pilcher’s suggested “reforms”.

Enter Bruce Chapman, architect of HECS and former advisor to Labour Minister John Dawkins. Chapman and colleague Timothy Higgins were commissioned by the Mitchell Institute to model Noonan and Pilcher’s new Income Contingent Loans system for VET. Clearly neither Chapman nor Higgins walk past Centrelink offices or suburban shopping malls in their travels, because on the first page of their report they say, “The fact that the HELP system has worked well in Australia for over 25 years is an important institutional and policy consideration.” The thousands of students with a dodgy VET qual that no employer will touch and thousands of dollars of VET FEE-HELP debt, might ask: ‘worked well’ for whom?

Chapman and Higgins then go on to outline one of the biggest problems with an Income Contingent Loan system for Noonan and Pilcher’s newly defined “tertiary” education system; the sheer volume of women, like Vicki, who will go to their grave saddled with an unpaid debt, aka, “doubtful debtors”. Stating the bleeding obvious, they point out that “when compared to university graduates, Certificate III and IV completers have low incomes, and, for women, low employment outcomes” which means that “ICL subsidy ratios may reach perhaps as high as 60 per cent for female Certificate III debtors.”

Chapman and Higgins solution? Reduce the threshold at which VET students like Vicki have to pay back their loans compared to Higher Ed students like Helen. That’s right. The removal of the one policy protection that Vicki shares with Helen. The Wran committee when it developed HECS, recommended that graduates not have to begin repaying their debts until they earn above the average wage and start reaping the private benefits that formed the rationale for their contribution, currently $53K. A reason cited, was that many women may not reach the threshold if they work part time in order to raise a family and if they work in a low-paid highly feminised industry.

But hey, that was for university students. Chapman and Higgins suggest a $40K repayment threshold for Vicki, because her repayment threshold shouldn’t be based on the average Australian wage, it should be based on the average income of the social class from which she has emerged, those with a secondary school education only.

Most people would think it inequitable that Helen is debt free for her education, while the women who cut her hair, care for her kids, and help her mother into the shower continue to carry a debt for their education. But apparently not Chapman and Higgins. Their version of equity is making sure these working class women don’t get away with not paying back their new debts. In an article for The Conversation, July 29, they even go so far as to say:

“there is a question of equity within the pool of all students: if university graduates are repaying most of their loans, is it fair if Certificate III debtors repay much smaller proportions of their loan debt?”

To be fair, Noonan and Pilcher’s paper makes all the usual recommendations to clean up the system, drive out the dodgy providers, and be more attentive to quality that we’ve all heard since the beginning of the privatisation debacle. Chapman and Higgins say “Methods to reduce exploitation of students and the system are needed” including “stricter regulatory and accreditation requirements for RTOs”. Both papers suggest some government intervention in setting student contribution levels. However, based on recent history, cleaning up the privatised VET system has proved elusive for governments, while imposing a new debt regime on vulnerable working class women has been much easier to achieve.

Outraged? You should be. Australian women in this country earn 18% less than their male counterparts, carry the burden of care for our children and elderly and retire with around half the superannuation as men. For working class women, add to that mix, high levels of casualisation and insecure work and a growing disparity between Australians with the highest and the lowest wages.

Deregulation of VET with its transfer of public funding into private hands, blow outs in costs and massive debt imposts on learners, represents one of the greatest assaults on low wage workers in Australian public policy history. And women are bearing the brunt. It’s time to tell the policy elite: go back and sharpen your pencils. We will not tolerate public policy that pushes more financial hardship onto low paid women workers.

Sally Thompson is the AEU Federal Women’s Officer

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The question was in response to concerns about the impact of various government funding cuts to courses that are more popular with women and the relative safety of funding for courses that are generally populated with men.

A good example is the Victorian VET system, in which analysis by the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) revealed that the $290 million cuts to the 2012 Victorian TAFE budget disadvantaged women students in TAFE on average twice as much, and up to five times more, than it did males. The tables that were publicly released by VTA at the time, showed that the biggest cuts by far were to training for industries that were mainly staffed by women, namely Retail, Hospitality and Business Administration, while training in male dominated industries such as Engineering and Carpentry remained relatively untouched.

Another example cited by Professor Smith was the Commonwealth changes to employer subsidies for apprentices and trainees in 2011 and 2013, which disproportionately affected female dominated industries. The effects of these changes are still being felt through the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

**Training or employer subsidy?**

If we look at training policy in isolation, there would appear to be a clear cut and ongoing process of gender based discrimination in the way that resources are distributed. However, it is the point at which training policy intersects with employment policy and wages that things begin to become murky.

When Apprenticeships became “New Apprenticeships” in the early 90s, one of the aims was to expand the system beyond traditional trades to offer training to women and to existing workers. With the exception of hairdressing, apprenticeships up until that point had been confined to ‘boys in boots’, that is, new employees in trade industries that were heavily dominated by men. The early 90s reforms sought to provide new opportunities to women through the introduction of “traineeships” in traditionally female dominated industries.

There are three major areas of low paid, female dominated industries. The first group are the social and community services industries; aged care, child care, youth work and community development. The low wages in these industries reflect the broader disregard in societies underpinned by neo-liberal policies for the type of ‘caring’ work that has traditionally fallen to women.

The next group is business and administration. These areas of study can play an important role in facilitating pathways for women from the entry level low wage admin (i.e. secretarial) roles that featured in the old economy, to
the technology and communication rich roles of the emerging economy. Before the cuts in Victoria, they were enormously popular for older women returning to work after raising children. Finally, one of the last areas of growth in both jobs for women and traineeships was the services industries; retail and hospitality.

The introduction of traineeships was accompanied by new ‘User Choice’ funding arrangements for VET and it’s hard to separate the fate of a policy ostensibly designed to support working women, with its use as a privatisation “Trojan horse”. The ‘training provider of choice’ for the rapidly growing traineeship market was overwhelmingly the private sector, often the training arm of an already subsidised employer. It was not long before concerns began to arise about the rapid growth and the poor quality of training involved in traineeships. Rather than ushering in new opportunities for women and other groups who had been disadvantaged in the labour market, commentators began to suspect that the new training regime had really become just an expensive and poorly targeted labour market program, effectively subsidising the employment of existing workers in low paid, low skilled jobs, most of whom just happened to be women.

The fact that some of the biggest financial beneficiaries of the new “equity initiative” were multi-national fast food and retail companies, added to the outrage. Rather than training women and other disadvantaged groups to pathway out of poverty, it appeared that traineeships were effectively farming them for scarce government training dollars.

**McTraining: Would you like a pathway with that?**

The Schofield reports in the late 1990’s on the Queensland, Tasmania and Victorian systems raised the alarm. The Queensland report found that 19% of trainees received no training and 20% in Victoria believed that they were not learning new skills. Schofield’s report criticised the lack of individual student supports, number of inappropriate sign ups, and poor assessment in traineeships. The era of “tick and flick” had arrived and tax payers were paying big bucks for it. Schofield went so far as to recommend in the Victorian report that no Victorian training funds should be applied to fully on the job training in traineeships.

Professor Barbara Pocock uses the term “shallow career ladders” to describe the lack of a pathway out of low paid work for many Australian women with or without VET qualifications. Her research into the low paid workforce showed that for many poor working women, qualifications provided no return on investment at all and even negative return on investment.
because low paid workers were undertaking training just to keep their current job, not for career progression or higher pay. Her research suggested that intensive government investment in literacy and numeracy training was needed to shift the entrenched disadvantage of these (mostly women) workers and that simply putting women through tick and flick VET qualifications was of no value.

Readjustment but not clean up
The Gillard government had a go at refocussing Apprenticeships by firstly removing employer subsidies for Certificate ii traineeships in the May 2011 budget and later on for existing workers in “non-priority qualifications”. The “priority qualification” list was made up of skills shortage industries on the National Skills Needs List (almost all in male dominated trades) as well as the female dominated community services fields including aged care, child care, disability care and enrolled nursing. The big losers were the other two female dominated industry areas; business and administration and retail and hospitality.

The adjustments followed on from the work of an expert panel on Apprenticeships and Traineeships entitled Apprenticeships for the 21st Century. The panel suggested that the Apprenticeship system was getting very poor return on the sheer volume of funding being thrown in its direction; completion rates were low and the system lacked a focus on skill shortage areas. The panel suggested that Commonwealth employer subsidies should be based on fewer qualifications that answered yes to two basic questions: 1) does it address a skills shortage? and 2) does it provide the individual with “a valued career (that) can be traded in the marketplace between employers.” The panel’s list of occupations that should cease being financially supported included hospitality, clerical and administrative workers, sales workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers. The panel recognised that this would disproportionately remove training opportunities for women, but that “this can be mitigated by implementing strategies to assist females to enter non-traditional apprenticeships and traineeships”.

Unsurprisingly, governments were quick off the mark to cut subsidies to “non-priority” areas. We still wait in hope for the “strategies to assist females to enter non-traditional apprenticeships and traineeships”. Feminists should not mourn the loss of tick and flick traineeships in low pay, low pathway industries, just because those industries are employers of women. However, defunding training in these industry areas, also threw out with the bathwater, a range of high quality, TAFE based programs, with strong literacy, numeracy and general education that allowed women to return to the workforce after raising children, rebuild confidence and make connections.

If this tale had a happy ending, it would include mentoring and business incubation to support women into environments that are not just “non-traditional” but which are often openly hostile to women’s participation. It would end with not one more tax dollar spent propping up entry level jobs for multi-national corporations who yield massive profits and pay minimal tax. It would include significant investment in English language, literacy, numeracy and general vocational education for women who missed out on school and find themselves in low paid jobs with “shallow career ladders”. In short, if this story had a happy ending, it would be a TAFE story.

Lessons learnt
It is becoming increasingly common for public policy that exploits and undermines disadvantaged groups to be badged in social justice terms for sale to the public. That’s why policy makers give names that denote fairness and equity (like “Skills for All” and “Training Guarantee”) to policies that result in the exact opposite. Sadly, the promise of new opportunities for women through the traineeship system appears to have fed a lot of public money into private hands, put a lot of women through low quality (or non-existent) training, had almost no impact at all on the gender segregation of the industries served by the VET system and done nothing to change the growing pay gap between men and women workers in Australia. Women shouldn’t have to be Rosie the Riveter to gain access to training. But the training has to be real, it has to be broad, and it has to lead to something other than the same low paid, insecure and exploitative work that women have always been lumped with. And that means investment in TAFE!

We don’t all have to be Rosie the Riveter, but we do need to emulate her fighting spirit!

Sally Thompson is the AEU Federal Women’s Officer
TAFE SUCCESS Story

Growing up in the foster care system led Brendan Murray down a rocky education and employment path for many years. He knows first-hand the value of being a second chance learner and strongly advocates TAFE as a place of opportunity for all ages.

BY MICHELE PURDY

BRENDAN often tells his story to the young people he works with. “When I was a young man I was doing manual work landscape gardening and injured my back so needed to find a job that was less physical. My reading and writing wasn’t very good back then so I did a TAFE course through Aboriginal Training Programs that helped me on my way. I didn’t just want to do manual work for the rest of my life but wanted more than that. While I have had many other jobs since it wasn’t until my employment as a Youth Worker with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in Burnie, starting almost ten years ago, that I feel I achieved anything academically or had a career.”

“What I love about my job is the rewards I get from working with young Aboriginal people in my community. Seeing them smile and be happy. In the sessions with the kids I love hearing their stories about the good things that have been happening to them. They say ‘Brendo this happened today….’ ‘Youth Work is the most rewarding and the most challenging work I have ever done. There is nothing better than putting a smile a child’s face when you know what is going on at home. I have had young children attending my groups telling me that they are going to be a Youth Worker like me when they grow up and that just melted me. “

Brendan tells how completing the Certificate IV in Youth Work through TasiTAFE has increased his professionalism as a Youth Worker and filled gaps in his knowledge and skills. It wasn’t easy overcoming the challenges of studying, working full-time and keeping up family and community obligations but it was all made worthwhile when he received his certificate and graduated.

Named Aboriginal Student of the Year at the recent 2015 Tasmanian Training Awards in Hobart has set Brendan on the path to the Australian Training Awards being held in Hobart on November 19. This is journey Brendan never dreamed of when he enrolled in his first literacy class as a young man. ☮

Michelle Purdy is the Aboriginal VET Officer at TASTAFE in Burnie. She is also Federal TAFE President of the Australian Education Union.
Around Australia

**VICTORIA**

GREG BARCLAY

UNDER the previous government in Victoria the employers and the government joined forces to destroy the state-wide Multi Business Agreement (MBA) for TAFE teachers and to replace it with 18 separate single employer agreements with different terms and conditions for each of the 14 TAFEs and four dual sector universities.

The AEU has been involved in negotiations at separate TAFEs and dual sector universities to maintain all existing terms and conditions and to secure a salary increase for TAFE teachers.

These negotiations were being held in an environment where the coalition government was ripping $1.2 billion out of the TAFE system resulting in up to 3,000 TAFE teachers losing their jobs.

With the election of the Labor government in 2014, the public TAFE system saw the injection of $320 million rescue package and a wide ranging review of the VET sector, and government support for the negotiation of a Multi Employer Agreement (MEA) to cover TAFE teachers at all stand-alone TAFEs in Victoria.

The AEU has reached agreement with the Victorian TAFE Association for a short term MEA to expire 2/7/2016. The MEA will maintain all existing terms and conditions and will deliver TAFE teachers with a $2000 sign on bonus; a 2.5% salary increase on certification and a further 2.5% salary increase on 1/7/2016.

The dual sector universities will not be part of the MEA and will be covered by separate agreements. The AEU has negotiated with RMIT and Victoria University for agreements that will match the salary outcomes for the MEA and is hopeful that discussions with Swinburne will also achieve the same outcomes. Discussions with Federation University may very well see better salary outcomes for TAFE teachers.

Victorian TAFE teachers have been placed under intolerable pressure and subjected to ideological attacks over the last four years and these negotiation outcomes are signs that things are starting to change. The strength and resilience of AEU members is to be commended. Without their commitment we would not have been able to achieve salary increases and the maintenance of all existing terms and conditions.

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

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

MAXINE SHARKEY

TAFE NSW is currently engaged in bargaining four new Enterprise Agreements, three of which involve AEU NSWTF members. In what could be considered an incredible waste of public funds, TAFE NSW has established a set of “teams” to undertake this bargaining. TAFE managers from around the state are flown in to Sydney to participate in day long bargaining, with the lead bargaining agent being accommodated in a Sydney apartment for the duration.

To date, no formal log of claims has been put to the Union regarding the teachers and related employees; however TAFE has provided more detail around their offer to managers. That offer includes moving all managers onto specified term contracts, stripping them of allowances and removing time in lieu provisions. All for a 2.5% salary increase.

Formal bargaining commenced with TAFE outlining the current political and economic context including a presentation comparing NSW TAFE teacher’s wages and conditions to that of TAFE teachers in other states and teachers in private RTOs. In an insult to all TAFE teachers, this presentation formed the basis of a newspaper article captioned “TAFE teachers are taking home bloated salaries substantially higher than police, fire and ambulance officers and nurses...”.

Considering TAFE has only just started to sort out the flawed electronic enrolment and classroom management system it foisted onto teachers and students at the beginning of this year, it seems incredible to belittle the significant work that TAFE teachers have undertaken to keep the system viable. Members have reported significantly long working weeks and have worked through vacation periods, in order to sort through the myriad problems encountered with the LMBR Electronic Business System. TAFE denies teachers the ability to log their actual working hours and so this time is unaccounted and unpaid.

While TAFE has placed barriers in front of student enrolments in the form of costs and unworkable electronic systems, they are once again engaging in significant redundancy rounds. 2,600 TAFE teachers and administration staff have been made redundant in the last 3 years and those numbers appear set to increase.

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

**QUEENSLAND**

DAVID TERAUDS

THE Palaszczuk Labor government has realised one of its key election promises with regards to TAFE having now completed the dismantling of the Queensland Training Asset Management Authority. The states training assets are now once again the property of the Department of Education and Training. A ten year asset plan is being developed prior to a final decision regarding management of the assets.

Within the Queensland State Budget 2015 the position of TAFE Queensland is improved beyond the future envisioned by the previous LNP government. It includes the election commitment to the $34 million “Rescuing TAFE” policy but also continues funding TAFE and CQU through the VET Purchaser’s Grant, as the public providers of VET. This money for public provision was not accounted for in the forward estimates of the LNP 14/15 FY budget. The Labor government has retained and increased the funding by $6 million with TAFE benefiting from $139 million and CQU by $13.9 million.

Looking at the overall level of dedicated funding for public provision the position of TAFE is not massively increased by the current government. However the move to disband QTAMA has positively positioned TAFE, unexpectedly by over $50 million, having removed the requirement for commercial rent payments. Coupled with the VET Purchasers Grant this means that things don’t get worse. TAFE Queensland was previously contemplating having to find nearly $200 million in the 2015/16 budget while dealing with the vagaries of full competition and the associated drop in market share (particularly in the lower level certificates).

TAFE Queensland has signed off on an administrative pay increase of 2.5% for educational staff to be back dated to 1 July 2015. This increase acknowledges the delays in achieving a negotiated Certified Agreement due to the changing industrial landscape.

Bargaining for a Certified Agreement for TAFE educational staff employed by Central Queensland University is due to commence shortly.

David Terauds is the Queensland member of the National TAFE Council Executive
**SOUTH AUSTRALIA**  
**TONY SUTHERLAND**

WorkReady, the South Australian Government’s rebadged contestable market funding program introduced from 1 July 2015 has created a major uproar from private RTOs and TAFESA alike.

With the introduction of the WorkReady scheme, the Government has greatly reduced funding contestability by directing 90% of government funding to TAFESA for the first year of the revised funding regime. This has resulted in outcry from the private RTO market who have hit the airwaves saying that decisions need to be reversed or employees in their hundreds will lose their jobs and many current and potential students will not be able to access training. Many of the private providers have seized the opportunity within the media to take a swipe at TAFE condemning their flexibility to meet specific industry needs. The TAFE Board’s silence in not standing up condemning their flexibility to meet specific industry needs.

Many of the private providers have seized the opportunity within the media to take a swipe at TAFE condemning their flexibility to meet specific industry needs. The TAFE Board’s silence in not standing up condemning their flexibility to meet specific industry needs.

In an endeavour to forward their case private RTOs have lobbied Federal Assistant Minister for Education and Training Simon Birmingham, who has responded by threatening to withhold $65 million in federal funding under the national partnership agreement unless the SA government agrees to revisit the WorkReady implementation plan.

The impact of WorkReady will see TAFESA receive less funding than the previous year under Skills for All and further forecasted budget savings has resulted in speculation that another 500 hundred jobs will be lost from TAFESA over the next three years. TAFESA has indicated that these figures are a result of a forecasted loss of Government revenue and do not take into account building funding from other sources which will lessen the impact on staff reductions. Educational Business reviews as a result of funding decline have seen a further 70 positions declared excess and another round of separation packages offered.

The South Australian VET training market continues to be in turmoil with little chance of resolution in the foreseeable future.

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

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**  
**GARY HEDGER**

Since the last report from WA the unrelenting attack on TAFE by the governments both federal and state, have placed the system in stress. The Union has been gathering information from its lecturing staff and has found a number of major issues are now surface in relation to these sustained attacks on the public system which are;

- Contract and casual lecturers losing employment
- Permanent lecturers offered redundancies
- Higher class sizes • Cuts to student contract hours • Multi-level / multi-unit classes • Non-payment of overtime • Constant changes to timetabling and last minute class changes
- Changes to choice of units offered to make courses cheaper • Increased pressure and inappropriate behaviour from managers as they struggle to balance budget and squeeze more out of staff
- Increased issues around stress and work overload.

The Union’s monitoring of the budget and request for documents from the department have unearthed that funding has been cut by $110 million dollars, over 24% of the permanent and contract lecturing workforce has been lost over the last 3 years, casual lecturing numbers have been cut by 50% and student course enrolments are down by 8800. It would appear that the government is trying to hide facts and figures on pulling apart the data, 2014 numbers show that the only area to grow was private for profit providers with an increase 2.4% against the TAFE data having only been released recently, with subtle changes to the way that the data has been presented.

On pulling apart the data, 2014 numbers show that the only area to grow was private for profit providers with an increase 2.4% against the TAFE sector showing a decrease of 7%. The data for 2015 will show that this decrease for TAFE has increased when the government releases it.

The Training Minister Liza Harvey’s response to these findings: “This indicates the policy is achieving its objectives”.

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

**ACT**  
**KAREN NOBLE**

Over the winter months we have seen small growth in membership with increased participation in Branch and Council meetings. Concerns of specific campuses are being discussed as we move through a process of one campus closure, which is not opposed, but getting the process and result right is the focus. Another concern is the presence of a commercial provider on one of our campuses. Being clear with students about who is their RTO, but also the possibility of becoming a VT in the future is an important message.

A Friday night dinner started the conversation about priority setting for 2015/16. Members mainly want more connection and support around their campus issues. We have been active on a working group reviewing a number of workload issues, clarifying the teacher’s role and those responsibilities that belong elsewhere. We are seeking more input into the process of phasing out our previous advanced and senior teacher roles, being replaced by a Teacher Level 2. The process will be finalised by the end of the year, so we are moving into the busy period. We are also providing comment on a number of CIT policies and codes around a client service charter. We are yet to engage with our new Board and are keen to get a sense of their priorities and how they will work with CIT, teachers and students especially.

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

**TASMANIA**  
**REX CALVERT**

It is with mixed feelings that I write my final report as it is my intention to retire at the end of this term as President (31 January 2016). The last five years have seen many changes for TAFE in Tasmania. With the final demise of Tasmania Tomorrow, the Skills Institute and the Polytechnic were re-united as TasTAFE. TasTAFE then bore the brunt of the Liberal Government’s attack on public servants including teachers and TAFE staff with the final traumatic blow being delivered by TasTAFE redesigning its management structure.

Over this period there have been two EBA negotiations that have resulted in a salary rise of over $10,000 without any loss in conditions. It also saw the ability of TAFE teachers to be registered with the Teacher’s Registration Board as teachers. This has been a vital step in ensuring that TAFE teachers retain all the advantages of leave and pay that are available to all those who teach face to face in a classroom.

During the same period TAFEs across Australia have been, and still are, victims of successive governments, both State and Federal, orchestrating the demise of TAFEs in favour of private for profit RTOs who deliver inferior outcomes ultimately leading to the questioning, by industry, of the worth of VET qualifications. Should the states agree, as indicated in the Australian Leader’s Retreat Communiqué’, to shifting the responsibility for VET to the Commonwealth it will ultimately lead to the destruction of the TAFE system as we know it. I urge all TAFE Division members of the AEU in Tasmania, to become active in our union and to nominate for TAFE Executive and Council positions. It is essential that we maintain an active membership to protect the conditions we have as we look towards the next round of Enterprise Bargaining.

Rex Calvert is the AEU Tasmanian TAFE Division President
TAFE training transforming lives for people seeking asylum

FOR TANYA, who was a lawyer in Colombia, training at TAFE for an aged care qualification has made a huge difference to finding her feet in Australia. “The most important thing in my life is that I’m free,” she said. Back in “rough and dangerous” Colombia, Tanya explained that “every day you are thinking ‘maybe today, this could be my last day’.” For Tanya’s brother that fateful day did arrive. He was killed in Colombia more than two years ago.

“But my problem (in Australia) is that my speciality in law is different. I can’t work here. So I try to change my profession,” she said.

Tanya turned to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), which she called her “family in Australia”.

“The ASRC approved (me) for study here in aged care. You need tools. Tools for good work. Tools for a good job,” she said.

Tanya is referring to a Victorian government initiative that is administered by the Melbourne-based Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, which itself started as a TAFE project in 2001 (see Australian TAFE Teacher, Autumn 2015).

Before people seeking asylum begin their TAFE journey, the ASRC undertakes a rigorous process that includes screening applicants to confirm they are genuine asylum seekers, determining their suitability for training and discussing course options and requirements at length with them. Asylum Seekers also have their fees paid by the ASRC. By removing these barriers, the ASRC has made TAFE study possible for a group who might otherwise miss out.

ASRC members are given access to Certificate I to Certificate IV courses, particularly training for sectors in Victoria that are experiencing skills shortages such as aged care. The ASRC is the only asylum-seeker organisation that provides this type of service.

The courses have enabled ASRC members to find work, support themselves financially and contribute to the community. Importantly, they are also filling occupational shortfalls in much-needed areas of health, security, warehousing and construction.

For Tanya, gaining residency and re-training in Australia “changed my life completely”. “I have a job; I have a good education here,” she said.

Yochum* who is studying a Cert IV Diploma of Aged Care has been fortunate to extend the skills already learned in his home country.

“I have qualifications from my home country so this course is relevant to my background. I chose this course because I enjoy helping people and caring for others. Helping people makes me happy.” While preparing to finish his studies, Yochum* is getting hands-on experience in a role which he enjoys as it as a volunteer at a hospital in Footscray because “it is a job where you can help others”.

“I work as a visitor guide and help guests find their way around the hospital. It’s good because I get to work as a part of a team and it has given me the opportunity to meet lots of new people from different cultures and backgrounds.”

Yochum* is due to start a work placement at an aged care facility over the next few weeks which he is very excited for, as aged care is a job he’d like to do in the future.

In the past financial year alone, 159 ASRC members were enrolled in 202 courses across Victoria. The most popular courses are the Certificate III in Warehousing/Construction; Aged Care/Home and Community Care dual delivery Certificate III course and the Certificate II/III Security pathway.

Most of the students are aged between 20 and 40. Almost two-thirds of the students are male and the main countries of origin are Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Iran.

The TAFE access service is one of 13 programs in the ASRC Innovation Hub, which seeks to empower people seeking asylum and whose mission is to support people to reach financial and social independence. People seeking asylum come with a wealth of skills and talents. In essence, it is the role of the Hub to enable people to THRIVE.

You can help protect, support and empower people seeking asylum by becoming a regular giver to the ASRC.

$20 a month can provide English classes for 80 people. Fifty dollars a month can provide emergency legal assistance in order to lodge their appeal for protection. See details in this magazine or visit the ASRC website www.asrc.org.au.

*An alias has been used to protect the identity of this person.
YOU CAN GIVE HOPE TO PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

"Being an asylum seeker cannot prevent me from doing anything when there are organisations like the ASRC that advocates for us...being an asylum seeker can’t stop my dreams, it’s not a barrier now."

ASRC Member

STAND WITH US. DONATE TODAY.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) are preparing for a challenging year ahead as we face the impact of a recent Bill that subjects over 27,000 people to an unjust refugee determination process. This law dramatically increases the likelihood that people will be sent back to danger.

Unbelievably, the Government’s severe budget cuts also means thousands of people seeking asylum must navigate through this process without any right to legal assistance.

Only with your support can the ASRC continue to be one of the few organisations in Australia to offer free emergency legal assistance to people seeking asylum, which is critical to ensure they are not returned to harm.

Hope thrives when people thrive, but we need your help.

Your donation can make an important difference to the lives of people seeking asylum by contributing to ASRC’s vital programs that protect, support and empower them at this critical time.

Invest in us to make a difference.

Donate now at www.asrc.org.au or by post it to
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre,
214-218 Nicholson St, Footscray VIC 3011.

#WhereHopeThrives
Workers and the poor have been the most affected by the earthquake, losing jobs, houses, and personal belongings. With no social welfare to fall back on, no surplus cash to rebuild their houses or treat injured family members it has been very difficult for many to restart life. In addition to the direct impact on human beings countless animals were killed or severely injured, thereby affecting the subsistence economy which relies on the produce of these animals.

Generous donations from Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA members and Australian unions to the Nepal Earthquake Appeal has raised over $200,000, providing immediate support for free medical treatment, temporary tent and housing, and clean water and food supplies.

Food relief
A total of 1,011 families were provided with immediate food relief packages containing rice, lentil, salt and sugar sufficient to provide for 5 people for at least 2 weeks.

Medical assistance
A total of 9 medical camps have been organized in the worst earthquake hit villages. These medical camps were not only vital to treat the injured but also to provide moral support to the affected community.

Temporary shelter
A total of 250 households were supplied with tents and 38 families with zinc roof housing. The zinc roof housing was put up in collaboration with the engineers union in Nepal. In addition, 3 community water supply tanks, 2 public toilets, 1 community centre and solar power station was also built.

Lobbying and advocacy
The trade unions have also lobbied on behalf of, and assisted the village committees and district offices for better relief distribution.

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, in partnership with the General Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and the Union Network International Nepal Liaison Council (UNI NLC), has not only provided relief support to earthquake survivors, we are also committed in making sure that the earthquake rebuilding process will help to create jobs and that those jobs are fairly paid and unionised.

We ask you TO JOIN US TODAY in supporting our humanitarian and international solidarity work. You can join for $10 per month or more (tax deductible). Over 80% of your contribution goes directly to our project partners in-country – a higher ratio than most other Australian aid agencies.

I want to do more.
I want to join Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA

I PLEDGE THE FOLLOWING EACH MONTH:
☐ $10  ☐ $25  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  Other $____ (min $10)
☐ YES, I would like free membership of Union Aid Abroad (for the life of my donation) and agree to be bound by the rules of the Association.

Title  Ms  Mr  Mrs  Miss  Dr  (please circle)  Other
First name
Last name
Address
Phone: (w)  (h/m)
Email
Your Union  D.O.B