

## **WAVE submission to Senate TAFE Inquiry**

Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) is an NGO, the only national organisation with a focus on women and post compulsory education and training. WAVE represents the interests of women and girls in the broad areas of adult, vocational and work-related education and training, and the links between these, employment outcomes and labour market positions.

We are a member of economicSecurity4women (eS4W). WAVE collaborates with Adult Learning Australia (ALA), and is a voting member of Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult education (ASPBAE).

WAVE's research and consultation for the last decade and a half highlights the need for updating, resourcing and implementation and evaluation of specific policies for women and girls in vocational and work related education and training, along with improved employment outcomes.

WAVE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate TAFE Inquiry. We refer to our earlier submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment 'Inquiry into the role of the Technical and Further Education system and its operation', and the issues we raised about the important work that TAFE has been able to undertake over the years in running programs that support women and girls.

### **a. The Role played by TAFE in:**

#### **i) educational linkages with secondary education and higher education**

'TAFE' is much more than an acronym – it is immediately recognised and valued nationally as an enduring part of Australia's education history and fabric- the longstanding provider of choice for vocational education and training, of skills development, of second chance education and training, as a pathway to personal development and to employment. As the major provider of vocationally oriented education and training in the public arena, TAFE plays a pivotal role in the linking of study and learning pathways to employment between compulsory education at secondary school level, and higher education.

Until recent times, TAFE was mostly active in the post compulsory education sector. TAFE provides links with industry and industry experts, expertise in content as well as appropriate teaching & learning methodologies for skills development. Nationally, on state/territory bases, as well as through local agreements, TAFE has invested much effort and intellectual knowhow over time into the negotiation of credit transfer

agreements linking TAFE awards including nationally accredited courses of various levels as recognised pathways into higher education institutions programs and awards. Moreover, TAFE has entered into formal agreements to co deliver programs with a number of Universities (city based and regional) along with co-location of campuses and shared awards at some sites. Research has also demonstrated that not only do students with TAFE awards enter higher education, but many students with university degrees return to TAFE for vocational qualifications to enhance their employment opportunities. With the current shift to increasing work integrated learning (WIL) both in higher education institutions and senior school programs, TAFE has much to offer.

TAFE continues to prove itself both highly flexible, an institution with the capacity to learn and change, while designing and delivering robust education & training programs in tune with policy requirements, market demands and education reforms, of which there have been many over the recent decades. One such relatively recent change is the development and rapid uptake of VET in Schools (VETiS), yet another arena of TAFE support, participation and ongoing activity in cities, regions and rural areas. A recent discussion paper highlights the centrality of VETiS:

Vocational Education and Training in Schools is a critical element of our education system. It is an important pathway to further vocational education and training and to employment in the trades and other skilled occupations. The purpose and success factors for VETiS should be clearly linked to further vocational training or employment outcomes for students.

In recent years, there has been steady growth in young people undertaking a VETiS programme. In 2012, over 240 000 school students enrolled in one or more VETiS subjects. Of these students, more than 22 000 were in an Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASbA) and 127 000 (52.6%) were male and 115 000 (47.3%) were female. (VETiS Roundtable 2014)

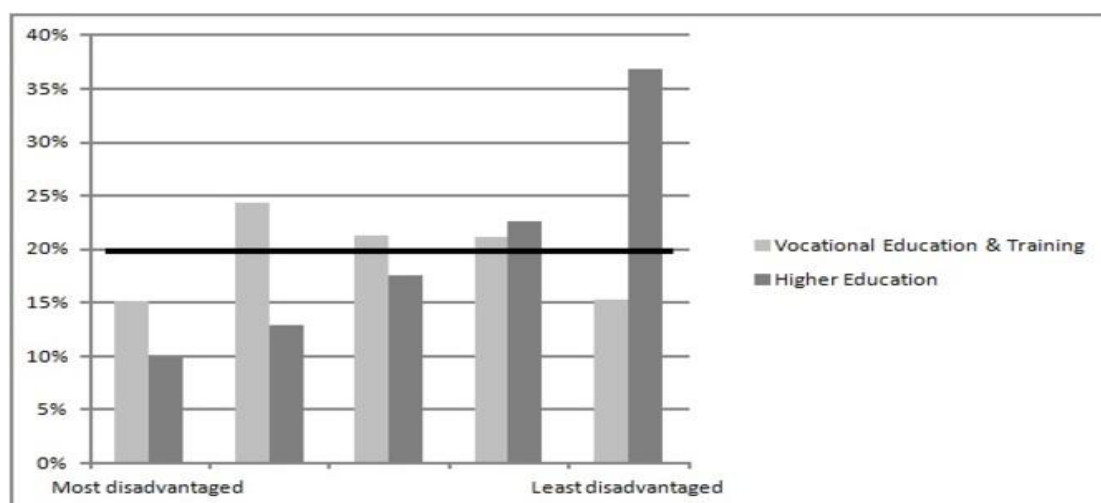
Through ongoing sharing of expertise and/or delivery and accreditation of VETiS programs, including school based apprenticeships and vocationally recognised trade related Certificates (e.g. at Levels 1,2) TAFE has much to offer.

When Professor Denise Bradley undertook a review of Higher Education for the Federal Government in 2009, an opportunity was missed to clarify the different roles of vocational education and training and higher education. There was some resulting initial discussion about the creation of a sector of tertiary education and bringing the quality and audit sectors of ASQA and TEQSA together, but this has not occurred. Rather the VET and university sectors have continued to develop in competition with each other.

TAFE across the country has developed an increasing range of higher education courses, some in niche markets relevant to the VET sector, but others in competition with universities. This diversity of offerings has not necessarily led to better or more accessible courses for students.

Whereas TAFE once offered tertiary education courses aimed at increasing second chances for those students who missed out on gaining a place at university from school, or for students from overseas wishing to progress onto a degree program, these courses are rapidly disappearing. They are being replaced by university or private RTO offered pre-degree courses which guarantee a place at the university/private RTO the following year, upon successful completion. These courses come at a significant cost to students, and many of the most disadvantaged students will miss out on opportunities once offered by TAFE. TAFE's role in second chance education is slowly being undermined and TAFE is expected to refocus on vocational courses required by the economy. This is evident through the focus on skills lists in the various states and lower fees at times being charged for courses on those skills list.

WAVE supports the concept of a tertiary sector that is built on the expertise of the VET and higher education sectors, rather than a free market which encourages competition and duplication, neither of advantage to students nor the economy. The graph below compares the enrolments in VET with those in higher education according to relative student disadvantage. Whilst the change in higher education funding to support enrolment of disadvantaged students may change the impact of these figures in the future, there continue to be many reasons why disadvantaged students do not enrol in higher education, and why a well funded TAFE system should continue to meet the needs of many of these students, including many women in rural and remote areas and mature-aged women.



Students by levels of disadvantage: Stone, 2012

The following story of one of TAFE's former female students outlines the power and possibilities that were given to students through TAFE's second chance courses, which in NSW included the Higher School Certificate and the Tertiary Preparation Certificate. There are few of these courses remaining, and WAVE is very concerned that many women will miss the opportunities that Jude Pearce had.

### **Remarkable Achievements through TAFE NSW**

*Story by Nick Franklin*

Down a narrow Katoomba back lane around the kitchen table of a modest bungalow three TAFE students raise their champagne glasses to celebrate a remarkable achievement. The hostess Jude Pearce has just got an ATAR 94.7 for her HSC - her legal studies mark of 100% topped the state for TAFE. Her friends and fellow students Megan scored ATARs of 95 with a very high mark in English and Kate 94.3 with her highest mark in history.

Jude's story provides a classic case study of how TAFE has the power to change lives and give people a second chance. Yet when she began her studies at Wentworth Falls TAFE in the Blue Mountains her prospects looked bleak. Aged 53 she'd had cancer and been on the wrong end of 28 years of domestic violence. Now a single parent surviving on a meagre Work Cover payment Jude was down and about to be made homeless. "I had absolutely no confidence.

Doing the **Tertiary Preparation Certificate** has changed all that - it's a life changing course", says Jude who pays tribute to her TAFE teachers and fellow students for their support through often tough times. She's now planning to study teaching at Sydney Uni before getting a teaching job in the bush. It'll be a chance to teach Indigenous children in remote communities - something she feels strongly about, having only discovered late in life that she has Aboriginal and Torre Strait Island heritage. As Jude talks her young daughter is playing under a Christmas tree. "My daughter has epilepsy. It makes life difficult sometimes. When I broke my ankle working at Jenolan Caves, I couldn't pay my mortgage and lost our house. If you want to break the cycle of poverty, you have to give people proper access to education. TAFE is wonderful because it makes allowances for people including those with mental health problems".

Her celebration with her friends is tinged with concern for TAFE's future. The three women have read about the State Government's plans to cut courses in Greater Western Sydney, particularly to the TAFE system. To Jude it just doesn't make sense. As a woman of over 50 she knows how hard it is to get a job without having any qualifications. She'd been applying for 10 jobs a week with no takers. Then she had a chance of a job at the new Dan Murphy's in Katoomba - they just needed her to have an RSA certificate - but her insurer wouldn't pay for her to attend the short course, and she missed out again. Now Jude is keen for her local politicians to hear about the success of herself and her friends - and will be inviting Federal member Louise Markus and state member Roza Sage to her graduation in April. (TAFE Community Alliance website [www.tafecommunityalliance.org](http://www.tafecommunityalliance.org))

## **ii) the development of skills in the Australian economy**

In our previous submission, WAVE strongly pursued the argument being made by the Federal Government, the Grattan Institute and many others, that growth in productivity can be greatly assisted by supporting women into full employment and into a greater range of careers than has traditionally been the case. The figures below from the ABS clearly demonstrate the existing issues around female underemployment in Australia.

As demonstrated in the table, women had higher underemployment rates than men across all eight occupations, with the highest rates in labouring (18.7%) and sales workers (17.8%).

## Workforce participation

**Table 1: Workforce participation by gender, full-time/part-time status and occupation**

Occupation	Female			Male		
	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)	Total (%)	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)	Total (%)
clerical and administrative workers	42.6	31.4	<b>74.0</b>	22.0	4.0	<b>26.0</b>
community and personal service workers	26.7	42.0	<b>68.7</b>	20.7	10.6	<b>31.3</b>
sales workers	21.2	41.1	<b>62.3</b>	22.4	15.3	<b>37.7</b>
professionals	34.0	19.3	<b>53.3</b>	40.8	5.9	<b>46.7</b>
managers	26.7	8.4	<b>35.1</b>	60.1	4.8	<b>64.9</b>
labourers	11.5	21.8	<b>33.3</b>	43.2	23.5	<b>66.7</b>
technicians and trades workers	8.6	5.8	<b>14.4</b>	77.6	8.0	<b>85.6</b>
machinery operators and drivers	6.7	3.1	<b>9.8</b>	78.3	11.9	<b>90.2</b>
overall	24.6	21.1	<b>45.7</b>	45.0	9.3	<b>54.3</b>

**Figure 1: Comparison of underemployment rates between females and males by occupation**

Source: ABS (2013) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly*, cat no 6291.0.55.003, viewed 20 June 2013, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.003?OpenDocument>

Note: Occupations are ranked by the underemployment rate for women, from highest to lowest.

Women in general leave and re-enter the workforce more often than men, related to family and care reasons. This can often lead to deskilling and a need to gain new qualifications in order to re-enter the workforce in fulfilling jobs with full employment or with flexible working conditions as required. TAFE has played a significant role in running courses specifically aimed at women and in supporting them to re-enter the workforce. Outreach in NSW runs courses in communities meeting the cultural and social needs of many women. Yet increasingly, the economic returns from such courses are not recognised, but rather these courses which can often initially be at Certificate 1 or 11 level, are treated as hobby courses. WAVE strongly supports TAFE continuing this role in delivering courses to women and girls in a range of community and industry locations, and being funded by

governments to do so. A recent article in *The Conversation* by Veronica Sheen from Monash University, *Eviction from the middle class: how tenuous jobs penalise women* (March 7, 2014), discusses how loss of jobs due to family care issues can lead women to financial challenges later in life. This is surely a serious economic and social issue that governments need to address. The education and training implications of this trend must be taken up by governments.

One of the other aspects of the important role that TAFE has taken in providing educational programs to women and girls, is in providing the skills for women and girls to enter a wide range of careers including male dominated industries. The Social Inclusion and Vocational Access Skills Unit with TAFE NSW, has set up a mentoring program in conjunction with Women NSW. This has been set up to support women studying in non-traditional areas, to improve apprenticeship retention and completions and increase the number of women working in male-dominated industries. TAFE is able to provide this additional support leading to girls successfully completing these courses and commencing careers that may help to challenge gender stereotypes in the workplace as well as making a significant contribution to the economic productivity of Australia.

In her speech that launched the Australian Human Rights Commission's program 'Women in male-dominated industries: A toolkit of strategies' on 21 May 2013, Elizabeth Broderick the Sex Discrimination Commissioner said: "On the whole, in 2013 we have not fully harnessed the invaluable contribution women can make – particularly in industries such as mining, construction and utilities. These industries represent a thriving part of Australia's economy, and as they continue to grow, both men and women can make an increasing contribution to their expansion and success."

Over the last few years a number of industry associations have developed which provide networking and at times mentoring for women and girls in non-traditional occupations. Connecting these associations with the VET providers, particularly TAFE which has a social equity role, is an important further step for these programs.

The idea that it is possible to increase the proportion of adults with higher-level vocational qualifications, but at the same time remove the social capital, general education and lower level access and pathways steps provided by public TAFE institutions is a nonsense.

Now is the time we should be strengthening not weakening TAFE, and should be looking for more comprehensive and sophisticated indicators of educational quality rather than investing precious training dollars cracking down on roting that has been allowed to flourish through poor public policy.

The greatest "skills shortages" in Australian industries are generic skills. According to the 2006/7 ABS Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey around 46% of the adult



population lack the literacy skills required to function effectively in a modern society and economy.

A further 53% have insufficient numeracy skills. (ABS 2007) This is not including the many Indigenous adults living in remote communities who were not included in the ABS research but who we know are in desperate need of English language, literacy and numeracy support to engage with the Australian economy and break out of poverty.

The overwhelming body of research into adult literacy and numeracy suggests that these are social practices largely developed through purposeful engagement with other literate adults. The type of high quality VET education practiced in public TAFE institutions and in the not for profit ACE sector, by its very nature, is likely to build these essential generic skills.

So-called “soft skills,” (reading, writing, communication, team work etc.) assessed and taught independently or embedded into a vocational context are the hallmark of public TAFE institutions. However the development of these skills is notoriously hard to measure, and as a result, can’t be easily quantified, cut up, quality controlled and sold on an open market in a drive for efficiency. It is these skills that employers continue to assert as being most important and it is these skills that TAFE as an educational provider, not focused primarily on profits, but rather educational and vocational outcomes for students, must be able to continue to teach. Early efforts at entitlement based funding in Victoria have lead unfortunately to education and training that has been gutted of underpinning literacy, numeracy and other generic skills. It is important that this Inquiry prevents this happening elsewhere.

### **iii) the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects**

Australia has an increasingly diverse population, with a widening gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. A significant omission from this Inquiry is a focus on equity – that is active policies and accessible, affordable, quality programs that both cater for and at times specifically target groups of Australians for whom either different ways of learning and/or second chance education and training is critical, both for self esteem reasons and/or for gaining the capacity to start on a learning pathway to gain confidence, competence and relevant skills that lead to paid employment and so a more fulfilling life. TAFE has always been and remains the public provider best known for expertise and the responsibility for undertaking much of this work.

It was pioneering in its establishment of child care centres to assist women to return to study at their local TAFE sites, in its gender policies, appropriate inclusive teaching methodologies and ongoing support for outreach programs. Such work has become

increasingly difficult in what is now a highly competitive ‘training market’, but TAFE continues to offer best practice in its endeavours to cater for equity groups. Despite the shift to competency based training packages, TAFE has endeavoured to retain the ‘education’ aspect in education and training – vital for learners from equity groups – in its delivery of vocational programs whether face to face or through flexible online delivery, in urban, rural or remote Australia.

The social determinants of health are well known internationally. There is copious evidence that education connects people of all ages to others in the community and keeps them healthy and resilient, quite apart from providing increased options for paid work. International research as part of the UK Foresight project has recently highlighted the close link at all ages between mental capital and wellbeing. Having the opportunity to learn at any age is critically important as part of adapting to increasingly rapid change with age. It provides the soft skills like emotional intelligence and creativity, design, capability and self-management that employers crave. Evidence shows that it saves money on depression, crime, substance abuse and acute health interventions.

The ACTU has recently highlighted the growing stresses and risks carried by Australian workers who work in increasingly flexible and casual arrangements. We would argue that a publically funded TAFE system is essential to support Australians to develop the skills and wellbeing to cope with such a volatile industrial environment and ICT environments at work and home.

WAVE is also concerned that the work of the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) has been put on hold, and seeks assurance that this organisation, critical to ensuring equity remains a highly visible priority in VET, is funded to continue its work. NVEAC recognises women as one of equity groups, some of whom may suffer multiple disadvantages, requiring specific attention and funding in VET. The NVEAC Equity blueprint 2011-2016 states that: “a more equitable VET system will enable and encourage those who currently experience disadvantage to access and participate in education and training and achieve outcomes in the same way as people who have more fortunate life circumstances and who are not disadvantaged.” (NVEAC 2011) WAVE does not believe that current government approaches that promote a competitive training market will result in “a more equitable VET system”. The opposite is far more likely with less funding and support services being directed to the students who need them, and crippling costs deterring students from undertaking a VET qualification.



**iv) the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individual pathway to employment**

The challenge here is that the fundamental role of private providers is to make a profit. This does not augur well for students who have high level needs and a limited capacity to pay. These students are either excluded from participating as meeting their socio economic needs is too expensive or worse; participate in a program that is not designed to meet their particular educational/developmental needs due to costs. WAVE makes the following points:

- \* There has been an explosion in non-TAFE for-profit companies offering cheap to establish and operate courses, over much shorter timeframes than is recommended in order to maximise profits.
- \* Community and public organisations have 'Public Service or Community Service Obligations' because of the recognised limitations of markets with regard to the needs of many student. Public providers also exist because it has long been recognised that the sum of individual market choices of students and providers do not necessarily equate to the public good.
- \* It is important at this point in time that all levels of government articulate a policy about the role of TAFE, and that this includes TAFE's role in engaging and retaining students from equity groups.
- \* The teaching pedagogy in TAFE has led to high retention rates and successful pathways for equity groups. Individuals from equity groups, seen holistically, have social and emotional needs that require attention as well as their educational and training needs. Unless funding is made available to meet these needs then the success of education and training for these groups will be less than optimal.
- \* Non-TAFE for-profit companies must be weaned off government subsidies to provide their services. Every dollar of profit that is taken in the form of a government subsidy is one dollar less that is available to be spent on education and training.
- \* Industry should not be permitted to continue to push for the narrow contextualising of training to their specific enterprise needs. The long term effect of this approach means that students do not get the breadth of a qualification; instead they receive a narrow 'skill set' that is often not transferable.

WAVE again asserts that government funding needs to support disadvantaged groups, and this is best offered through the public provider, TAFE. WAVE does not support

vouchers, and is aware of circumstances where students, often those with disadvantages, are enticed to undertake inappropriate training and qualifications in order that an RTO can access the funding such a student brings with them. A voucher system exacerbates such behaviours.

**b. The effect of a competitive training market on TAFE**

WAVE again makes the case that governments should primarily fund TAFE the public provider, and that it is not the responsibility of government to create or nurture an artificial training market. WAVE also does not support government funding being allocated to for-profit private providers.

TAFE needs adequate, secure and sustainable funding to continue to deliver the range of courses required by industry, the community and individuals. The competitive training market has to-date led to the rapid increase in private providers in the market, not all focused on students and quality delivery. Considerable amounts of government funds have consequently been spent in dealing with unscrupulous providers ‘after a quick buck’, and in creating a complex audit and compliance regime. As a consequence providers are now complaining about the requirements that they have to meet, and the Federal Government is considering further de-regulation of the market. One has to wonder if the cycle then just starts again!

As an organisation representing women and girls, WAVE is concerned with the impact of these changes, unscrupulous providers and increased costs on students. We call on all governments to stabilise the sector and to continue to fund and support TAFE.

**c. What public funding is adequate to ensure TAFEs remain in a strong and sustainable position to carry out their aims**

WAVE supports the view that governments should properly fund TAFE in order that it can continue to offer sustainable programs that meet the educational and vocational needs of a diverse range of students, including targeted women’s programs at a range of qualification levels.

**d) What factors affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business**

The main threat to TAFE is the continual change in the VET sector, cuts to funding and the competitive training market. Governments need to ensure they demonstrate confidence in the public provider rather than undermine it.

It is important that Australia continues to have TAFE colleges across the country, including in rural areas, so that students are able to access the education and training

they need within reasonable distances. The continued cutting of TAFE budgets has led to less courses offered at less locations, and this has at times resulted in ‘fly-by-night’ providers operating out of the back of vans on an assessment-only basis.

TAFE has continued to develop its expertise and reach in distance and online education, and should be funded so that such programs can continue. These programs can be critical for women and girls living in rural and isolated areas.

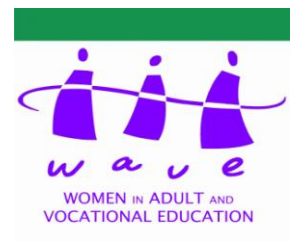
Changes to the professional recognition of VET teachers need to occur. A Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is not enough for teachers to undertake the incredibly complex jobs they are faced with. If Australia wants a quality VET system, it must be willing to pay for it, and the first thing it should pay for is ensuring that its teachers have professional qualifications at a tertiary level and that they participate in regular professional development creating a vibrant and resourceful education industry.

#### **f) The application and effect of additional charges to TAFE students**

WAVE does not support the increases in TAFE fees that have been evident across the country. WAVE is aware that student fees in NSW increased by the CPI for a number of years, a reasonable scenario. However, the proposal from IPART with the introduction of ‘Smart and Skilled NSW’ is that fees will rise from \$750 to more than \$1500 for a qualification. The proposal in Western Australia is that fees will rise by up to 390% in 2015. The answer from many groups appears to be that shortfalls in government funding should be made up for by student fees, and that if these fees are too high then a VET FEE-Help loan should be applied. WAVE does not support forcing students to go into debt to pay for their VET courses, and cites the experience of university HECs fees which have continued to increase over the years since their introduction.

TAFE does cater for many disadvantaged students, including many women and girls, and past evidence has demonstrated that high fees will deter many from undertaking the qualifications they need. TAFE should be accessible, and this means that upfront fees and continuing costs should not prohibit students from being able to undertake a VET course. The training market mentality seems to assume that an RTO can charge what the market can afford. Education should not be treated in the same way as a supermarket. If Australia wants a skilled and educated populace, if it wants greater numbers of people employed, and if it wants people in general to hold higher qualifications than they currently do, then it should value and fund education and not treat it as a commodity.

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