

## **14. THE FUTURE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET): PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TAFE**

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Vocational education in schools is at a crossroad. Burdensome administration and workload, new curriculum frameworks, multilayered regulatory compliance, unreasonable and unnecessary training requirements, industry and employer demands and teacher shortages has created the perfect storm, contributing to the unattractiveness for teachers of VET courses and schools to commit to ongoing curriculum in these areas. One third of the more than 4000 dual qualified and accredited VET teachers in schools were not teaching VET in their area of training in 2022.

Adding insult to injury, the former government's introduction of a Secondary Pathway target, rolled out through its discredited Local Schools, Local Decisions, requires high schools to track and measure students' transitions to post-school destinations. Their stated aims are to ensure curriculum offerings, performance measures and targets are aligned, vocational education courses are matched up with employer needs, employers and schools would work more closely to address skills shortages, and facilitate students entering the workforce earlier.

This so called "reform" has heaped additional pressures onto schools when they are least able to accommodate them, failing to increase student attendance in vocational education and training courses or support schools and their teachers in the implementation.

### **Review of the Vocational Education System**

The recently announced Labor Government's Review of the Vocational Education Training system in NSW provides opportunities to redress the scourge of contestable funding, marketisation and privatisation of the VET sector. A renewed focus on expanded delivery through fee-free public education provision, community obligations, equity and excellence in education and teacher qualifications and career pathways are all central tenets of a reimagined public vocational education and training system for NSW.

This review of vocational education could effectively halt the dramatic erosion of the TAFE system in NSW, rebuild trust and the participation of young people in it, and provide leadership in the national conversation about the problems in vocational education.

### **TAFE Funding**

This week's announcement of a \$200 million shortfall in TAFE funding comes as no surprise to TAFE teachers, students, and their employers. Little more than privatisation by stealth, the Perrottet government's Smart and Skilled funding model put TAFE NSW in competition with private training colleges for public vocational education funding that effectively flatlined over the 12-year life of the NSW Coalition government.

Despite multiple announcements of record budgets by former Coalition ministers, including John Barilaro and Alister Henskens, the reality is that TAFE NSW has been slowly starved of funding and now only receives the same \$1.8 billion in funding it received under the last Labor government in 2011.

VET funding must be redirected away from private providers and into skilled employment opportunities. Significant restoration and further investment in TAFE will be paramount. This will go some way to providing valuable and ongoing career pathways for young people, address growing disadvantage and inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, provide flexibility to target local job demands and local TAFE courses, provide the next generation with employment that is stable, fair, skilled and responsive to need.

Microcredentialing however is not the answer.

Commodifying the curriculum through competency-based curriculum neither advances the profession nor provides for a rich, broad and inclusive public education for our students.

Federation notes the Albanese Government's announcement late last year to pilot the development of microcredential courses, culminating in a commitment in June to support the design and delivery of up to 28 microcredential courses from 18 universities "to help meet skills needs in priority industries".

Federal Minister for Education Jason Clare stated: "Microcredentials can help Australians upskill and reskill to prepare for the jobs of the future. This pilot means more Australians can get the skills in areas we need, such as teaching, nursing, and engineering."

### **Teacher Qualifications**

Federation has, and will continue to, campaign against the undermining of university qualifications in teacher education. Any attempts to damage the professionalism and status of teachers will be vehemently opposed by Federation.

Federation will continue to work with the NSW Government's ministers Car and Crakanthorp, and through the Department of Education and TAFE NSW, to achieve our aims for the betterment of public education, its teachers, schools, TAFEs and the communities they serve.

### **Federation will:**

- prepare a comprehensive submission to the state government's VET Review outlining its vision for the future of a high-quality, publicly funded and supported vocational education system in NSW;
- demand the only Registered Training Organisation (RTO) working with public schools in VET will be TAFE, including for students completing school-based apprenticeships and traineeships as part of their HSC;
- support enhanced collaboration between TAFE and school teachers in the expanded public provision of vocational education in schools and TAFE;
- vehemently oppose and campaign against any introduction of microcredentialing in schools through VET courses;
- pursue an amplification of the role of qualified teacher qualifications, curriculum and pedagogy in public education provision of VET;
- continue to oppose competency-based curriculum in vocational education;
- abolish VET Student Loan system and cancel all TAFE student debt;
- expand the Free TAFE Scheme to all TAFE students, not just current skill shortage areas;
- ensure that the shared enrolment of high school students with TAFE does not reduce the aggregate staffing entitlement of the student's substantive school;
- support the permanent exemption of any reduction in a school's staffing entitlement as a result of students participating in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships;
- pursue an increase of the minimum qualification required by TAFE to be no less than diploma level in adult education, or another recognised education field. That teachers who do not hold a qualification at this level be supported by TAFE to obtain it;
- pursue TAFE and the State Government to establish new, recurrent funding models and financial viability criteria that reduce minimum viable class sizes, increase course, viability, and allow courses in critical skills areas in the regions to rebuild these campuses and meet community needs;
- support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment as a priority in meeting Closing the Gap targets 7,8 and 9 by being able to access TAFE and VET courses without the barriers for students, parents or carers in access to courses, by removing complexities

of fees, unnecessary admin and paperwork and complexities in enrolment (e.g. outreach students at both Distance Education and substantive schools) to provide the much-needed access and opportunities for these students.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is a federally funded program for adult migrants and refugees. The AEU NSW Teachers Federation calls for the guaranteed public provision of, and guaranteed ongoing funding for, the AMEP, with an end to contestable funding.

With the defeat of the NSW Perrottet government in March of this year and the removal of the federal Morrison government in 2022, a once in a lifetime opportunity now presents itself to undo decades of reckless, ideologically driven vandalism of the public provision of vocational education.

Vocational education is a critical part of Australia's public education system and restoring TAFE is essential to realising the full potential of the system. The forthcoming National Skills Agreement (NSA) will determine the future role of TAFE in the vocational education sector, setting the stage for the future of TAFE over the next five years and beyond. TAFE must be restored to its rightful place as the centrepiece of vocational education, and not relegated to the status of just another provider in the training market.

In welcoming the election of the Minns Government in NSW, 2023 Annual Conference maintains its resolve to campaign to ensure the new government delivers on its promises, and to prioritise the realisation of Labor's pre-election commitments for TAFE and vocational education.

Publicly stated commitments include:

- *It will provide TAFE with the financing stability it needs to flourish, starting with a guarantee of at least 70 per cent of vocational education and training funding to TAFE each year.*
- *It will address the handbrake on productivity caused by 12 years of a Liberal and National government by abolishing the wage cap and replacing it with a system that delivers fair wages, starting with genuine negotiations to reduce workloads and make salaries more competitive.*
- *It will tackle the conditions of hard-working TAFE teachers, starting with open dialogue with the sector, and a truly fair bargaining system that reflects the value of their contribution to the education system.*
- *It will reverse the plague of insecure work, starting with giving TAFE teachers job security again.*

Annual Conference endorses the development of a detailed targeted strategy to continue and expand campaign efforts. This will include concerted efforts to abolish student loans, wipe student debt and ensure that all TAFE provision is free and not just contained to skill shortage areas.

Council, Executive and Senior Officers will work to formulate the campaign, in conjunction with other unions, AEU branches and peak groups where appropriate, including the establishment of a working party for vocational education in schools which comprises TAFE and school teacher members to draw together the widest possible base of support to achieve Federation's policy objectives.