



**AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION**  
**NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION BRANCH**

SUBMISSION TO

**NSW Vocational Education and Training (VET) Review**

Authorised by

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The Australian Education Union NSW Teachers Federation Branch (Federation) represents over 60,000 teachers in the NSW teaching service in public schools, in TAFE NSW and in Corrective Services as well as education officers in separate public service agencies such as the NSW Education Standards Authority.

Federation welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the NSW Government's NSW Vocational and Training (VET) Review.

Federation asserts that the NSW Government's jobs and skills strategy must have students at its heart, with TAFE NSW the pre-eminent high quality Vocational Education and Training Institution as the public education jewel in the crown. A National Skills Agreement in 2023 provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity for a high status, well-funded and coordinated system for Technical and Further Education credentials, as was envisaged by the *Kangan Report* (Kangan, 1974), and must now be renewed by the NSW Government.

This opportunity is best encapsulated by the following excerpt from Federation's Annual Conference Decision in 2023: *The Future of Vocational Education and Training (VET): Public Schools and TAFE*:

*"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 (NSW) will determine the future role of TAFE in the vocational 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 be 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.'*

The NSW government's publicly stated commitments include, but are not limited to the following:

- It will provide TAFE with the financial 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.

Federation welcomes the VET Review panel's process of consulting with rural, regional, and metropolitan TAFE and high school teachers and attending the TAFE Teachers Association (TAFE TA) in September. This submission includes evidence from Federation members in attendance at that meeting.

Throughout this submission, Federation will address a number of the Review's Terms of Reference and provide recommendations for the consideration of the panel as they relate to their scope. The information provided in this submission draws from across the Federation's membership in schools and TAFE as it pertains to VET teaching, learning and leading of their students. This membership spans the four industrial agreements of TAFE teachers, TAFE Managers, TAFE Childrens Centres and high school VET teachers and includes those in permanent, temporary and part-time casual classifications of employment. This submission is a culmination of these members' experiences, expertise and professional judgement exercised through the provision of VET in their local schools, TAFEs and the communities they know and serve. It reflects their ongoing dedication and commitment to the public provision of Vocational Education and Training in NSW.

## **Terms of Reference**

In this submission, Federation directly addresses the Terms of Reference as outlined in this Review.

Namely, that this Review will consider the current state of the vocational education system and insights from other jurisdictions and propose interventions that will:

***Rebuild a strong and sustainable TAFE at the centre of the NSW vocational education system***

***Improve equity access of vocational education and training and support all learners to succeed.***

TAFE NSW must be the pre-eminent high-quality provider of vocational education. The Federation supports rebuilding TAFE by increasing students', employers', schools' and local communities' trust in Vocational Education and Training. Federation has for many years advocated for guaranteed public funding to TAFE and to stop low quality, private for-profit training providers accessing public funds.

Federation members are deeply concerned by the erosion of high-quality post school education since the introduction of the Smart and Skilled policy in 2015. Smart and Skilled has seen our students' teaching and learning hours cut, course fees increased to often inaccessible levels, student enrolment systems fail, and teachers' administration and compliance workload increase.

The impact of the Smart and Skilled policy on the provision of public education in TAFE is widespread and highlighted below by our members.

Sally, a Head Teacher Early Childhood Education and Care at Dubbo, is concerned about the inefficiency of the systems created, increasing administration burden for teachers and impact on students:

*"And so my suggestion is that we remove the layers of admin and bureaucracy - that we are trusted for our expertise in actually creating training for these people that come to us and want particular training. We need systems that actually allow us to enrol students really, really quickly. And that these enrolment systems are actually easy to navigate."*

Paul, a Head Teacher in South region outlines the implications of the funding mechanism of Smart and Skilled:

*" Smart and Skilled funding requires a whole team of people at State Training Services, and at TAFE who are putting forward tenders, and who are managing the day-to-day operations. It requires the purchase of EBS technological systems that have failed, it comes at a cost, to*

*manage Smart and Skilled overly complex funding. TAFE can't afford to pay for teachers, we can't afford to pay for specialist equipment, we can't afford to pay for counsellors because we're too busy paying for the people who are managing the Smart and Skilled contract. That is where the funding is going."*

Pat, a bricklaying teacher with over 30 years' experience, describes the systemic failures impacting on students and teachers from Smart and Skilled:

*"A major issue over the past 2 weeks has been the enrolment process, for apprentices particularly. They get signed up, the employment contract goes to State Training Services, then to TAFE to prepare a training plan and then to the section to be signed by the HT. Then the apprentice can enrol. When it goes to TAFE from state training services the delay starts - sometimes 2 months and more. We have a midyear intake where apprentices only found out they were enrolled by calling TAFE the day before attending. Others still haven't turned up and we have no contact details. Today Roof Tiling expected 25 but 35 turned up - no paperwork for them. All of this is happening with the threat of being under programmed hanging over us. They constantly chase us for missing marks that often don't exist, change the system by shifting more administration onto us but then completely stuff up the enrolment process. A process we - the teachers - used to manage really well and do it easily and it meant we had contact details, met parents and employers and generally did what we do best and that is to communicate and inform. Online enrolment is useful, but the administration of enrolments is causing teachers a lot of grief the way it's set up especially now all apprenticeships are free. All we need is a copy of their employment contract and then they should be able to choose their RTO, walk in and sign up and start their course while we wait for TAFE administration to catch up. They have made the start of each semester a nightmare for their front-line workers."*

TAFE teacher and parent of high school students, Adam, from the North Coast, articulates the concerns raised by many of our teachers and community members, passionately and accurately described as 'missed opportunities' for students.

*"We cannot let students continue to miss out on the skills that they need, our economy needs and our communities need."*

Smart and Skilled Community Services Obligation loadings have been detrimental for Access and Equity teachers, programs and students. Funding mechanisms must be restored to TAFE Access and Equity programs in order to enable students of disadvantaged backgrounds to access additional support and meet their full potential. This secure and reimagined funding will boost outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students needing specialist language, literacy, and numeracy (LLN) support.

Ben, Head Teacher of Career Pathways Aboriginal Languages and Employability Skills (CPLAES), highlights the current barriers to enabling such critical support;

*"Access and Equity sections like mine cannot adequately meet the needs of disadvantaged rural students on trades courses, mostly due to lack of funding, broken systems, and endless, endless layers of red tape. To support a struggling student on a trade course, or one of our own courses,*

*is to go through a difficult co-enrolment process, sometimes, two, three or four co-enrolments. And often must put in several submissions for Aboriginal students, Students with a Disability or other kind of disadvantage funding, and it ends up just becoming too much and people just give up. It takes hours and hours of time and students receive barely any support.”*

The NSW Government must address the problems the Smart and Skilled policy has created for TAFE students and teachers, and by proxy, the communities they serve.

### **Recommendations**

- Funding must again be returned to the focus of teaching and learning, not administration costs associated with failed Smart and Skilled funding and compliance.
- The Smart and Skilled policy is abandoned and TAFE receives increased recurrent guaranteed funding to rebuild strong and sustainable vocational teaching and learning for our students, teachers, public schools, employers and local communities.
- Specific targeted funding must be allocated to Access and Equity programs on a needs basis, not the current Smart and Skilled loadings.
- Reintroduction of equity programs including Outreach community programs, Aboriginal education, support for students with a disability and students needing LLN in a secure, sustainable and ongoing way.
- Embed and secure TAFE’s Access and Equity wraparound services, attracting, recruiting, and retaining permanently employed Outreach Coordinators, Teacher Consultants for students with a disability, Multicultural Education Coordinator teacher experts and highly qualified Careers Counsellors.

The certainty of such funding and its provision is the only way to commence the reversal of the damage done to TAFE. This will ensure that TAFE NSW can again meet the vocational education and training needs now, and into the future, that the community of NSW rightly expects of post-school public education provision and the restoration of this critical asset and public good for the people of NSW.

### **Help address the skills shortages and skills needs across NSW**

The NSW Smart and Skilled insecurity of funding has driven short-term management decisions. Funding insecurity for TAFE has undermined the ability to make long-term strategic investment in the workforce, professional development, capital equipment and training package teaching and learning programs and assessments.

The skills education programs required to deal with massive skill shortage problems require long term, secure, guaranteed funding for TAFE.

The TAFE NSW budget was reduced in real terms under the NSW Liberal and National’s Government . Despite multiple announcements of record budgets by Coalition Ministers including John Barilaro (2018) and Alister Henskens (2022), TAFE NSW was granted only the same level of annual funding in 2023-24 by the Coalition Government, \$1.8 billion, which had been granted under the previous Labor Government in 2010-11. This was achieved by the former Coalition Government locking in a \$196 million cut from the \$1.996 billion granted in 2022-23 in the forward estimates. Given the tradition of TAFE NSW in providing high quality vocational education in NSW, the deliberate underfunding of TAFE NSW by the former Coalition Government has exacerbated the skill shortage problems.

*“The VET sector in general, and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in particular, have been significantly challenged relative to the higher education sector in the attention paid to their resourcing in recent decades. The negotiation of new National Skills Agreement aims to start a process of addressing that problem, to strengthen the sector and initiate a reform process, so that VET can progressively improve in its ability to meet Australia’s skills needs of the future (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023, p.20).”*

Funding high quality vocational education is a key component to addressing the skills shortages facing the NSW economy. Given the stagnation of funding to TAFE NSW, increases are fundamental to achieving this objective.

Skills development education is also an important component to address the skills crisis. TAFE teachers’ ability to teach and assess students’ skills has been undermined by Smart and Skilled funding and the increased compliance requirements. TAFE competency-based student assessments are currently not fit for purpose and are hindering student education, skill development and course completions. The mandatory 100% pass mark for assessments is creating anxiety for students and unmanageable workloads for teachers.

An experienced TAFE teacher describes the complexities of these inhibitors:

*“we need to review the delivery of our training based assessments. (These are) based on training packages that had been captured by industry and they no longer have relevance for our industry. Instead, they’re of greater relevance for these organisations which are both private Registered Training Organisations, that are representing industry, and they’re group training companies. So, they’re for them, not for the people that we’re training through TAFE.”*

## **Recommendations**

- TAFE recurrent funding must be increased to at least \$2.4 billion per annum to meet current and future need.
- TAFE must abandon the current student assessments that are not fit for purpose and cease the competency based 100% pass mark.
- Relevant, teacher led and expert high quality curriculum centre or centres must be established. Locally designed and developed validated assessments must be used in the interim period until the establishment of such is realised.

## **Restore confidence in VET, TAFE, VET in schools quality teaching and learning**

Rebuilding students, teachers, schools, employers, and community confidence requires a focus on delivering high-quality education, not cost cutting. Improved TAFE systems of enrolment, teaching, and assessment will improve student outcomes.

The Smart and Skilled student voucher funding model has failed to deliver high quality vocational education. Students, teachers, schools, employers and local communities have lost faith in the current systems for funding, enrolling, teaching and assessing.

Peter, an Electrical Trade teacher in Mudgee, explains the importance of consistency and permanent teachers to rebuild student and employer confidence.

*“But what I did see over that time, was that the local contractors when I first got to Mudgee, the electrical contractors, were sending their apprentices somewhere else. They sent them to Dubbo, or they sent them to Lithgow because of that inconsistency of the teaching prior to that. The TVET program died a death due to teacher unavailability, they couldn't do it.*

*They couldn't support the trade and TVET, so the schools pulled back. TAFE didn't say we can't do it, the schools pulled back. So, what I've seen as a benefit from that continued permanent employment, I've seen the local contractors rebuild their confidence in TAFE, they've come back, We've been approached by the schools, we now run the TVET program.”*

Funding certainty with long-term horizons will enable TAFE NSW to rebuild its teaching workforce and 'wraparound' services to students. It will restore confidence in the sector.

Bricklaying teacher, Pat, talks of the problems in the construction industry due to Government policy:

*“After 25 years of implementation of training packages in the construction area, we've now got a building commission where we've seen loss of basic skills in construction resulting in the failure of major building projects. Thousands and thousands of home units – we're seeing it all the time. The New South Wales State Government has let down our students, it's let down teachers. Students and teachers are the two main focuses that we should have always stayed with in TAFE, and we've let it go. And the previous state government has had a major role in that.”*

Local TAFE colleges must rebuild the partnerships with local public schools to ensure the high-quality vocational education for school-based apprentices and trainees, plus other vocational courses, for all school students in rural, regional, and metropolitan areas.

Melissa, the only fulltime Language, Literacy, Numeracy TAFE teacher in the Southern Highlands, discusses TAFE, school partnerships:

*“In terms of transitioning students to high school equivalency programs at TAFE, I'd like to share the story of one of my students. She'd been at TAFE for nine months and the process of transfer had not taken place. Unfortunately, this is not a new story. And even today I still don't understand why on earth it was such a difficult process for her to transfer. At the end of it, she finished all the year 10 work at TAFE, was still not enrolled so went back to high school. Complete waste of the unit. The impact that on the learner psyche I haven't got time to go into, but you're all teachers, you get it.*

*What is the solution? Education is inherently a social activity. The solution is TAFE teachers and high school teachers have a cooperative space where we collaborate Lifelong learners are created through lifelong planning. So, we need teachers - and I'm not saying Corporate, I don't want a desk jockey in there. It needs to be teachers talking to teachers. Cherry picking pedagogy and anthropological practice that's going to make a difference for these kids, and impact communities in the long term”.*

Locally driven solutions to address these challenges will be fundamental to rebuilding confidence in TAFE as the public provider and providing the 'face of TAFE and VET' in the local community. Capitalising

on structures which facilitate the community's access to TAFE and high school VET teachers in spaces outside of institutions like high schools and TAFEs will directly target community members and restore the relevance and reach of VET provision.

Providing up to date information on what courses are available, whether in local public high schools or TAFEs, transitions from schools to TAFE and work, advice on enrolment processes, local jobs, further education pathways, wraparound support services provided to maximise success etc. will facilitate the aim of rebuilding TAFE, confidence and addressing skills shortages.

**Recommendations**

- The NSW Government must implement a coordinated TAFE delivery model which ensures that students, both current and prospective, have access to up to date information on skills needs, advice from high school and TAFE VET teachers and streamline enrolment and course requirements, including triaging issues as they arise. Resourcing, including time for release of these teachers, would be central to its success.
- A locally coordinated structure must be implemented, such as a committee and/or networks which can tap into industry and employer needs, drive smoother enrolment processes and support for learner needs, focused on, and in, the local community area. This will drive the required liaison needed for greater confidence in the public education VET system and provision and refocus VET provision on teaching and learning through expert teacher involvement and enhanced and streamlined engagement.
- TAFE NSW should develop schedules and plans of local community activities and events where the promotion and provision of information on TAFE VET courses is available through stalls or pops ups, for example. This will facilitate the building of relationships with community and TAFE and also provide information and advice for students and community who are more comfortable with a face to face experience rather than solely online interactions or who don't have skills or access to online platforms to engage.

**Strengthen the VET system in terms of health, performance, geography, development opportunities and position within the broader tertiary education system.**

**Better meet VET and TAFE workforce needs – including addressing teachers shortages, teacher qualifications and teacher career progression**

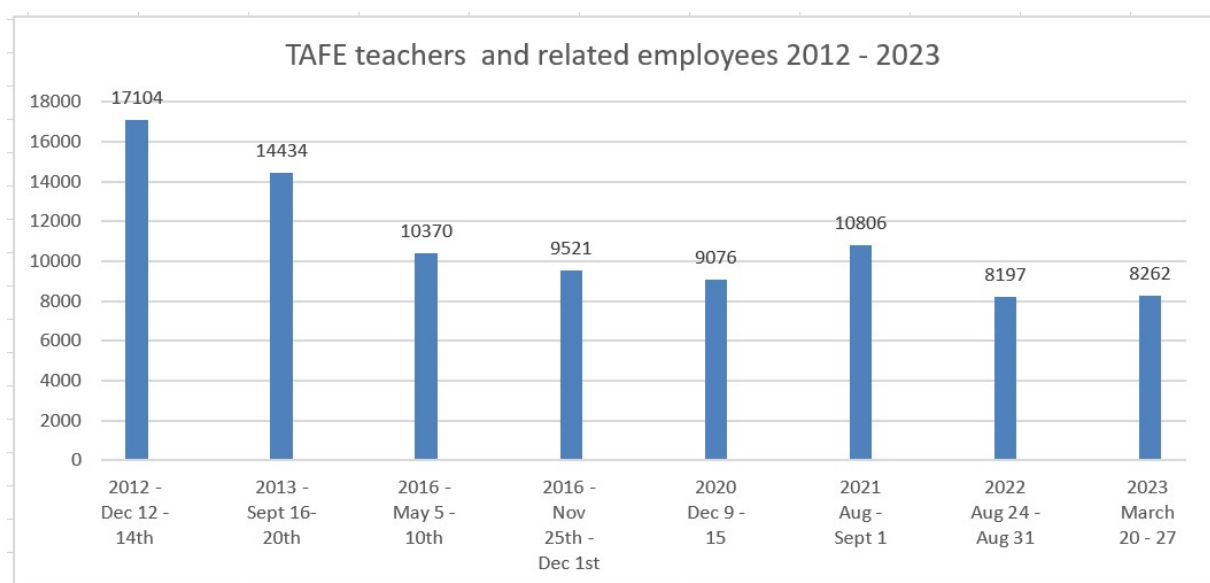
Since 2012, 8262 TAFE teachers and education related employees have been made redundant or have not been re-employed due to the loss of certainty in recurrent funding to TAFE NSW. This has resulted in a significant loss of teacher knowledge and expertise from TAFE NSW and a drift towards increased rates of casualisation and insecure employment since the introduction of Smart and Skilled funding in 2015. Since then, a short-term fee-free exemption period for students until June 2021 by the NSW Government, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a short-term increase in teacher employment, that had the effect of embedding further casualisation in TAFE.

The figures below are stark.

<b>Date of employee ballot</b>	<b>Employees covered by the <i>TAFE Commission of NSW Teachers and Related Employees Enterprise Agreement</i> *</b>
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	Total	Casual	Female
12-14 December 2012	17104		
16-20 September 2013	14,434	8,804 (60.1%)	8,003 (55.5%)
25 November-1 December 2016	9,521	5,794 (60.9%)	5,613 (59.0%)
9-16 December 2020	9,076		
26 August – 1 September 2021	10,806	7,796 (72.1%)	6,409 (59.3%)
20-27 March 2023	8,262	4,590 (55.6%)	5,686 (68.8%)



\*Figures derived from Forms F17 *Employer's Declaration in Support of Application for Approval of Enterprise Agreement* filed in the Fair Work Commission by TAFE NSW.

Such workforce destruction in TAFE has left an untenable situation for those remaining and a devastating loss of skilled, experienced and qualified teachers and industry experts to service the needs of students, skills requirements and the NSW economy.

The effect on the ground was simultaneously unprecedented and heartbreaking for teachers, staff, students and TAFE NSW.

Gabi, the Head Teacher of agribusiness in region South highlights the reality of this situation;

*"I oversee eight campuses ranging from the Highlands down to Cooma across, to Bega and up to Ulladulla - a vast area. And I have only one full-time permanent teacher. The rest are casual, many of those working on a full-time equivalent load yet still casual."*

Key education support staff in administration, class support and security in their thousands have also been removed. This has increased teacher and support service personnel workload beyond manageable and resulted in poor outcomes for students.

Funding cuts and reductions to the teaching workforce have also had a detrimental impact on Professional Development (PD). Increasing PD opportunities for teachers requires specific PD funding, including teaching release time, replacement teachers and the deletion of the Individual Delivery Profile (IDP) system. The IDP system has become an administrative burden to teachers and has limited meaningful PD outcomes.

Peter, TAFE teacher from Mudgee, highlights the failure of the IDP system and its impact on attraction of new teachers:

*“And now onto Professional development. It's a barrier to getting teachers to come and work with TAFE because of that IDP. There's no consistency with the IDP. IDPs are approved by the head teacher. So, if you've got a teacher that struggles to get a IDP across the line where they have an electrical license and should be current because they hold that license. You need professional development for teaching sections. It needs to be funded, and it's a great opportunity for TAFE to get a hold of that and become what we were - the industry leaders. The leaders in VET. That is what we need to be, that's what we were and that's what we need to go back to.”*

Adult education teaching qualifications for TAFE teachers have been eroded since the introduction of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as the minimum standard. The Certificate IV Training and Assessment has caused reputational damage to the adult teaching profession, as well as the reputation of TAFE NSW in the broader community.

The loss of the university teacher qualifications for TAFE teachers has facilitated a downward spiral, alongside the plagued funding model, and inevitably also led to the loss of confidence of TAFE NSW as a high quality public education institution.

John, a former Head teacher in TAFE, articulates the concern that the teaching qualification is of poor quality and a barrier to recruiting teachers with specific skill expertise.

*“And before you can put him on as a teacher, he has to go and get a Cert IV. Okay. Off he went and he comes back in a couple of weeks with a Cert IV and I said, how did that go? And he said “I didn't understand a word of it. But I've got it.”*

Creating a pipeline of teachers has been impossible in the context, as described above, over the last decade in TAFE NSW and the impact on students outcomes, and their teachers, an inevitable result.

TAFE Head teaching (HT) positions have become hard to fill due to the excessive workload, unmanageable geographic responsibility, and unattractive and uncompetitive salaries.

Paul, a Head Teacher, highlights the challenges in his comments:

*“I'm a head Teacher for Sport and Fitness down in Shellharbour, the only HT in Sport and Fitness in Region South. So, that extends from Loftus down to the Victorian Border, and as far as West Wyalong.”*

Sally, another Head Teacher, explains her geographic responsibility;

*"I'm based at Dubbo campus. I look after 10 campuses, and I sometimes visit other campuses that are within a four-hour drive. You know, as a head teacher I actually want to go out there and spend time in my communities, but with ten communities or more to look after, I'm not getting out there because the administration tasks are keeping me at my desk. We need administration support so that I can actually do my job."*

Janie, a Nursing teacher in South region, explains the geographical problems;

*"I'm a permanent full-time teacher in Nursing Studies at Batemans Bay. The area I cover is from Nowra, I go all the way down to Bega and I also go across to Queanbeyan and Goulburn. I'm supported by one casual teacher and my Head Teacher sits up at Shellharbour. So the distance, also the distance for the students, it's quite an issue in the South."*

Federation's analysis of the employer's provided data over this period, highlights the correlation of section job losses in TAFE across the state, with current skills shortages in NSW, and underscores the willful neglect and calculated undermining of TAFE by the former NSW Government.

Attracting and retaining a permanent qualified teaching workforce with industry expertise is the first and most significant step the Minns Government must undertake. This must include addressing the workload issues brought about by TAFE NSW systems which are not fit for purpose, geographical responsibilities which are unsustainable, providing upskilling and retraining for teachers and attracting industry experts in the midst of a skills crisis, as the fundamental tenets to the reimagined TAFE VET public provider.

The requirement for industry experts who transition into public high schools as VET teachers, once gaining their teacher qualifications and requirements for accreditation and approvals to teach, is starkly juxtaposed to their TAFE colleagues teaching the same courses, with often the same learners.

Ultimately, without university qualified teachers in TAFE and VET, the status, reputation and confidence in and of our TAFEs as the public education provider, is destined to sustain its current trajectory.

**TAFE NSW cannot function, rebuild or grow without a qualified teaching profession at its heart. Without teachers, nothing else matters in a public education system.**

### **Recommendations**

- TAFE must, as a matter of urgency, recruit permanent teachers to replace the 8262 teachers that have left TAFE teaching over the last decade.
- TAFE must reduce the workload of TAFE Teachers and Head Teachers by reducing the number of geographic locations they are responsible for in rural and regional areas.
- Permanent TAFE teachers must be recruited to every TAFE campus to meet student and community educational needs and ensure visibility locally for TAFE.
- Salaries must be substantially increased to attract and retain a skilled workforce in TAFE NSW and ensure they remain competitive with both their high school VET teacher counterparts and attractive in a tight industry labour market.
- The IDP systems must be replaced with meaningful, supported PD to grow professional expertise.
- To aid the attraction and retention of teachers, all teachers, after their permanent appointment, are funded to study for an Adult Education Tertiary Degree qualification.

- NSW Government and TAFE NSW should utilise and expand structures currently in place to create closer partnerships with local universities to facilitate teaching degree qualifications for TAFE teachers.

### **Improve equity, access, literacy, numeracy and language pathways and support**

The Smart and Skilled policy has had detrimental impacts on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. After the introduction of Smart and Skilled in 2015, TAFE closed all Outreach units and made all Outreach teacher coordinator positions redundant. There is now an urgent need for TAFE Outreach Units to form partnerships with local community groups, government departments and industry to improve access and identify barriers to learning for disadvantaged people. The restoration of Outreach Coordinators, established in 1976 in response to the Kangan Report into developing an efficient national TAFE system, will also facilitate the re-engagement of students who have disengaged due to trauma.

Particularly in rural and regional areas, there must be a revival in TAFE NSW's commitment to "warp-around services" for vulnerable students. Consultants for students with a Disability, Multicultural Education Coordinators and Aboriginal designated education positions on the ground need to be increased. Reinvestment in these services will promote access and equity in vocational education for students entering TAFE.

Melissa, a CPALES teacher, stated:

*"We have complex and compounding trauma in our classrooms. And we simply don't have the support to cope with it. The solution to this is a bit of a rewind. We need a return, a restoration of Outreach to our campus in remote and regional Australia, in NSW. We need Teacher Consultants for students with a Disability on the ground."*

Ben, a Head Teacher in Armidale, offers pathways to improve access and equity support for students:

*"My solution is just remove all the red tape and give us funding for this. I should just have a bucket of funding - I can deploy our teacher to a classroom, it's that easy. We need to remove the E Checklist, enrolment forms, product viability tools - all these funding requests we've got to go through, just to answer a head teacher saying, "I've got students in the classroom, they need support". So, I've also relieved as a head teacher all around the state - I've relieved in Orange, Bathurst, Forbes, Parkes, Lake Cargelligo. When I got there, how much LLN support was happening in a classroom? Zero. The head teacher just didn't do it. The trades teachers were like, this is too difficult, we don't want it. Yeah. So, they didn't want to give the head teacher a ring and get the support. So, it's that easy: just remove the red tape, that's the solution".*

### **Recommendations**

- Replace the Smart and Skilled 15% loading for Community Service Obligation with guaranteed funding on a needs basis for Outreach, Students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Multicultural programs including support for LLN programs.
- Reengage and reinstate permanent Outreach Coordinators, Consultants for students with a Disability, Multicultural Education Coordinators and Aboriginal designated education positions to enhance community engagement and in situ support for students.

- Cut administrative burden for Head Teachers for Access and Equity program support including, multiple enrolments, product viability forms, E Checklists, EBS missing marks, start and end dates.

### **Deliver a more standardised approach to VET in Schools – combining a statewide provision with local variation to match the needs of a school community and industry requirements**

Vocational education and training 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 have created the perfect storm, contributing to the unattractiveness for VET teachers and schools to commit to ongoing curriculum delivery in these areas. One third of the over 4000 dual qualified and accredited VET teachers in schools were not teaching VET in their area of training in 2022, according to the NSW Department of Education.

VET in schools has also been negatively impacted since the introduction of EVET (replacing the TVET funding on a commercial basis) and increased compliance for high school teachers teaching VET.

Both schools and TAFEs are plagued by teacher shortages which is impacting on VET delivery for high school aged students, denying those students rich post-school pathways and future opportunities for themselves, to address the skills shortages and ultimately serve the NSW economy.

Models must be developed to harness the expertise of these professionals to expand VET for school aged students which meet their needs, see high school teachers supported and give students access to the best infrastructure, facilities, industry expertise and connections of TAFE teachers.

Joint monitoring and coordination of potential high school VET students with their TAFE counterparts would see a strengthening of provision of VET for these students. Central to such proposals would see a 'committee' of local VET teachers who would come together to discuss the needs of students, industry needs and streamlining of early enrolments, aligning with school's subject selection. One teacher from each high school and TAFE college, with appropriate time allocation, could map current and future student need, including additional supports where needed, in a genuine and authentic situation which held students and their education as the centre of VET courses and enrolments.

To build a long term sustainable model of teaching across high schools and TAFEs, team teaching opportunities should be explored, alongside leveraging of situations where high school and TAFE teachers come together to work across both sites, in VET and outside of VET in other TAFE areas. This will begin to strengthen the relationships between students, schools and TAFEs in a local area and draw on situations where the broader community can be involved.

This will not only enhance teaching and learning and broaden public education provision but will lift community engagement in both areas, assist student transition, ensure that high school VET teachers feel better supported, make the teaching of VET more attractive and begin to grow the confidence and reputation of TAFE in a local/network area.

Andrew, a recent high school VET teacher, commented on the problems with VET in schools. The position outlined below reflects the sentiments and situations of hundreds of high school VET teachers reported to Federation.

*"I want to talk about the impact of delivering VET from a high school perspective, and what it looks like to a teacher who does so. The first thing I'll say is that the workload is exceedingly onerous, for the high school teachers delivering VET. It's onerous because aside from the never-ending compliance requirements around their own training certification and upgrading, you throw in, for example the hospitality teachers where they had a new hospitality syllabus, they were having to upgrade their qualifications at the same time that they had to access and get trained on a new data management system. All at the same time with, no consideration to their workload, with no provisions provided whatsoever by the Department, otherwise in terms of the implementation and they were at their wits end. In terms of the actual workload impact as a high school teacher when you are delivering VET, you're delivering your regular teaching load - and your senior load may well be a VET load.*

*And if you're the person who - and I'll put it this way and I hope it's not received poorly - made the mistake of putting your hand up to be a VET teacher high school at that time, you're stuck doing that the rest of your career because it's so unattractive that nobody around you wants to put their hand up to do that work. And why is it unattractive? Because you are spending exceeding hours implementing the course and the material. You are spending exceeding hours outside of teaching time helping kids with their cluster assessments to getting their certification off the ground. Getting you know, kids to pick up the box over and over again, after hours to get them across the line when the year is ending and they've done such a good job, and you know how important this qualification will be to those kids in South Western Sydney. So I think it's correct that teachers are putting the students first but that unfortunately means that it's putting yourself last.*

*The impact is even more grave when we look at the fact that teachers feel so stuck. They can't take leave because if they take leave, there's no one in the school who's actually qualified to be able to take those classes. And so then there becomes issues around the quality and certification around children in their absence.*

*The fact that I left at the end of 2021 saw an exodus at the time - for a variety of reasons - of teachers who actually have VET qualifications. That meant, that one teacher, the head teacher in that faculty had to absorb three separate courses all at the same time, that was their entire load. And God forbid that an audit then happens that year as well, and then all of a sudden it's a nightmare scenario. But that teacher has got a transfer in and that transfer has now been accepted - they're leaving that school. Who's going to teach those classes and look after those kids. And with what's happened to TAFE locally in the area, with TAFE campuses being closed local to that school, those kids have no alternative. Something's got to change with the way VET is delivered, particularly amongst high school kids and I'm of the view that TAFE is the best place for VET to be delivered because that's where the infrastructure, the knowledge, the skills and the history are. But clearly you know the TAFE has been gutted by contestable funding, and essentially a push towards privatisation."*

TAFE, too, has been impacted by teacher shortage problems in some trades and professions restricting delivery of TVET and EVET for school students.

Janie, a teacher of nursing, explains the teacher shortage problem in her nursing section:

*'I haven't been able to provide any TVET on the Far South Coast for a second year because I just don't have any staff.'*

### **Recommendations**

- Reduce regulatory layers and compliance for school VET teachers to address administrative pressures and make teaching of VET more attractive
- Abandon the requirement for school teachers to undergo the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment given the current qualifications levels required for high school teachers
- Ensure that the shared enrolment of high school students with TAFE does not reduce the aggregate staffing entitlement of the student's substantive school
- Implement the permanent exemption of any reduction in a school's staffing entitlement as a result of student VET enrolment
- Restore the TVET funding to simplify the transfer of funds from public schools to TAFE to facilitate streamlined enrolment for students across the sites
- Establish joint partnerships between TAFE colleges and local public schools that will have TAFE teachers and school teachers working together with student groups
- Increase delivery of VET courses for Year 10, 11, 12 students delivered by local TAFE colleges by permanent TAFE teachers.
- Maximise opportunities for schools and TAFEs to work together across all areas to build relationships which strengthen partnerships and co-teaching models
- Undertake a teacher qualifications and scoping exercise to map where VET courses in local areas can be offered and undertaken by students across public high schools and TAFE
- Course offerings to high school students must be needs driven and coordinated through a joint teacher position allocated to schools and TAFEs, to maximise student engagement, wraparound support and successful transitions
- Provide timetable flexibility for high school students and teachers, where appropriate, to teach VET in local TAFEs and vice versa to ensure a sustainable model
- Embed team teaching models between high school and TAFE teachers to grow expertise and the VET provision across networks and statewide, in schools and TAFEs

### **Improve completion rates or other successful outcomes for learners**

Local TAFE colleges must be strengthened to ensure all rural regional and metropolitan students have equitable access to vocational education and training. Smart and Skilled has created extra bureaucracy that has been detrimental to students, schools, small communities, niche trades and the other courses.

Adam, a North Coast teacher, explains:

*"to highlight the importance of local provision of courses and also the kind of supports that students need to succeed in their studies. TAFE's capacities to meet the educational needs of our students in community have been eroded by a decade of contestable funding particularly, but not exclusively in regional and rural areas like where I live and work. I've just got one stark recent*

*example for you:*

*Bricklaying, tiling and concreting were cut throughout northern New South Wales in 2021. I know a 19-year-old apprentice from Coffs Harbour that leaves home at 3 am in the morning to make his class in Newcastle at 9 o'clock. Then having had three days of study, he jumps back in his car, drives a very busy dangerous highway back home at night time to start work the next day. It's really inappropriate. Businesses North of Coffs Harbour, I might add, have stopped putting on apprentices because there is no provision between Newcastle and the border with Queensland. We need to restore these courses across New South Wales regional areas."*

Sally outlines the funding and administrative problems Smart and Skilled has caused for responding to specific education needs:

*"Student success and completion need the systems to work. I want to talk about getting our systems right. Just in the last couple of weeks, I have been contacted by a private early childhood service. They would like us to do non-nationally recognised commercial course with them. I have gone and done the product viability tool. I've got the section ready to actually write the contract. I've found that there's a course number I can run that under. And now I'm being told that I can't do that, because I need to make sure that I create something that could be delivered across New, South Wales by anyone that picks up that course number. I have the content that I could pull together quickly, that I can customise for that particular customer, but I am restricted by administration and bureaucracy. And so, my suggestion is that we remove the layers of admin and bureaucracy - that we are trusted for our expertise in actually creating niche training for these people that come to us and want particular training."*

Course completions are not the only measurement for success of a student. Smart and Skilled funding is based on enrolment, progression, and course completion. This funding policy is detrimental to supporting students into alternative vocational courses, higher education, employment, or other successful outcomes.

It is often the case that courses are not completed because TAFE learners get a job in the industry they are studying in and have already acquired skills sufficient for that. This is not measured as a success currently and it should be.

Other measures of success could include exit surveys, student satisfaction information and other intrinsic measures which don't always relate to hard and fast data, such as increases in confidence, community engagement and other social measures which are integral to betterment of the individual, their family and broader community.

### **Recommendations**

- Local TAFE Colleges must be strengthened with more permanent teachers and HTs to allow student equitable access to courses based on need rather than solely financial viability
- Funding must be on block funding basis, rather than on the individual enrolment, progression and completion rates, to allow for individual student need and success

**Examine and recommend adjustments to TAFE recurrent funding and community obligation funding, including other funding sources, pricing and student loans models to ensure different learners and locations are best supported**



TAFE must have a guaranteed minimum 70 per cent of all government funding to the public education system. Private for-profit providers must not have access to taxpayers' money intended to benefit students of vocational education in the public's interest.

The situation in school funding is a case in point. The provision of public funds to non-government schools operating for profit is prohibited in NSW, under section 83C of the *Education Act 1990 NSW*. The rationale for this was explained by the then Minister for Education in a second reading speech to the Legislative Assembly on 15 October 2014:

*"The amendments enable the Government to meet the legitimate public expectation that funding provided to educate school students is used for that purpose rather than improving an investor's bottom line...The community expects that public funding going to non-government schools be used only for the purpose of enhancing student outcomes...This Government will not countenance individuals enriching themselves at the expense of students. If school funds are siphoned off for other purposes, it means fewer dollars are available for resources to support student learning. This is unacceptable and prohibited under State legislation (Piccoli, 2014)."*

The provision of public funding for students to complete vocational education and training should be subject to the same principles that apply for students to complete school education. TAFE NSW provides both vocational training and higher education. The *TAFE NSW Strategic Plan 2022-25* attributes deep industry connections, 171 learning locations and its rich history as an explanation for TAFE NSW being "a highly recognised and trusted brand" above its competitors (TAFE NSW, 2022, p. 4).

TAFE NSW is Australia's largest vocational education and training provider. In the 12 months to 2022, TAFE NSW has provided more training to disadvantaged students than any other training provider. This includes 150,000 people from regional and remote communities to 36,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver on national Closing the Gap targets in education, and 46,000 people living with disabilities (TAFE NSW, 2022).

To overcome recent disruptions to the VET sector, the McKell Institute (Superina, 2018) recommended, among other things:

- Returning governance over TAFE NSW to the Department of Education (Recommendation 4); and
- Ensuring TAFE NSW, a minimum of 70 percent VET funding (Recommendation 6).

A minimum guarantee of 70 percent funding as a floor will, in turn, position TAFE NSW:

- To disincentivise the casualisation of its teacher workforce and employ permanent teachers (Recommendation 12);
- To enhance its teachers' education standards and qualifications through professional development opportunities to restore adult learning education Bachelors and Diplomas, as before (Recommendation 14); and
- To improve its information technology systems for efficiency and operability (Recommendation 15).

The NSW Government should abandon the failed student loans experiment. The cost of education has shifted from governments to students through loan schemes. This has become a disincentive for course uptake precisely at a time when we need incentives to grow our skilled workforce.

Currently, “Australia faces a skills challenge not seen since the 1960s (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023a, p.10)”. Over the next ten years to 2033, the Australian economy will require 2 million more people to be employed. The demand for growth is expected across all industries. Industries projected to experience the greatest rates of increase are Health Care and Social Assistance and, after having suffered recent decline, Manufacturing. The States with the largest projected growth in skills needs will include New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023a, pp.17-18).

However, the *Skills Priority List 2023* (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023b) currently identifies skills shortages, both nationally and in NSW, to be:

- significant in occupations with a strong gender imbalance in its workforce. For male dominated occupations, this includes machinery operators and drivers, labourers and technicians and trades workers. For female dominated occupations, this includes those in the community and personal service worker occupation group (such as aged care and disability support, and childcare workers) and in Health (such as enrolled nurses).
- more acute in regional areas. Job location was identified by more than 80% of employers in very remote areas as the reason for few applicants for vacancies, and by more than 40% of employers as the reason why a job offer was declined (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023a, p.14).
- compounded by the significant time lag in the training process to become a successful job applicant. This is especially the case for completion of a bachelor degree, certificate IV, diploma or apprenticeship (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023a, p.15).

A lever which governments can pull to address the current skills shortages is to increase its financial contribution to the cost of acquisition of skills by students. This would incentivise student uptake and build confidence in TAFE vocational education.

Before the Fee Free TAFE policy came into effect, the Smart and Skilled funding model sets both the prices for qualifications for vocational education courses and provides its subsidy for those prices directly to the course provider. Where there is a difference, students are obligated, depending on the course, to pay up-front course fees to course providers including to TAFE NSW (Department of Education NSW, 2023). For students with limited savings, payment of an up-front fee can deter enrolment (Gonski and Shergold, 2021, p. 38).

Additionally, the Commonwealth VET Student Loans Scheme requires students to repay a capped course loan for approved Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas obtained through course providers. Loan repayment is through the Australian taxation system upon reaching an income threshold.

Student debt to achieve workforce readiness is not only burdensome but unfair, and disproportionately affects those who are the most disadvantaged and marginalised across our communities.

Federation rejects the recommendation of the Gonski and Shergold Review, *In the Same Sentence; Bringing Higher and Vocational Education Together 2021*, that income-contingent loan repayment scheme should include Certificates III and IV courses.

The predecessor to the Commonwealth VET Student Loan scheme, the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme, enabled unconscionable conduct by many for-profit course providers. David Gonski and Peter Shergold (2021, p.40) concur that the 2012 VET FEE-HELP scheme was a disaster. Through the offer of a free laptop, computer or some other lure to pursue a qualification which they had little prospect of completing, the scheme enabled rogue providers to ensnare vulnerable people in debt which they had little prospect of repaying (SBS, 2017). Loan schemes have damaged confidence in the vocational education and training sector in which TAFE NSW operates.

Fee exemptions already exist for some groups of students attending TAFE NSW. Fee-free education is already provided by the Federal government. This includes exemption for some 170,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places and disadvantaged groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with a disability (Gonski and Shergold, 2021, p.39). In addition, Smart and Skilled fee-free courses are also offered to people who have experienced family and domestic violence or who are mature age workers.

Our members at the chalk face have suffered under Smart and Skilled for eight years.

Gabi, Head Teacher from the South region, explains:

*“So the funding issues are at the core of my discussion today and I'd like to put forward some suggestions. So, the contestable funding is a slow burn kill, It's a slow train wreck. The idea of Smart and Skilled, which is managing that, has created a layer of government bureaucracy called Training Services New South Wales, that sucks money -in my view- directly out of the system. This could go directly to teaching, to TAFE, to the fundamental things we need on the ground and I see that as a waste of money. I personally have a budget that is supposed to have a contribution margin of 40%. I don't ever hit that, I can't hit that but that contribution margin is supposed to manage the day-to-day things that TAFE provide: and TAFE is an organisation of massive infrastructure. I understand that. But I figure that if we were not chasing the money required to hit audit targets, hit census dates within a contestable funding model - that we are required to do - Perhaps we wouldn't be spending a huge amount of money on administrative costs.*

*We've got a tiger team out right now. I saw them, met with them last week. EBS rejection reporting, tiger team, frankly looking for money under the cushions because our systems aren't reporting properly. It's just a waste of money - that money could come back. We could claw back, scrape it back and we desperately need this money in our student focused areas, our students' needs. So, wasted money.”*

Gabi continues discussing the funding of transferring through the funding of the Apprentice Network providers to the skills education of the apprentices and trainees:

*“And my final idea, is around apprentices and trainees. I’m in a trades area and I’d like to lament on the idea of what’s called an Apprenticeship Network Provider. My goodness, they paid tens of thousands of dollars up front. On sign up.*

*And then do nothing. Who manages it? Yeah me. I used to sign them up. I used to sign up apprentices and I knew who was coming. I sat with them, looked at them, got to know them before they were coming into my section. Can't we sign them up again and manage them? Again, this is a huge amount of money just getting sucked straight out of my system. If I could please ask that we have a deep think about how these layers, these things that are happening around us are taking money directly out of what I consider my bucket for my students education and needs.”*

Paul, a Head Teacher at Shellharbour, has been a Head Teacher prior to Smart and Skilled and understands the problems:

*“Whenever I think of Smart & Skilled, I think of that image of the snake consuming its own tail, because that's what's I feel Smart and Skilled funding is about. We need money going directly to TAFE, money going directly to TAFE managers, to TAFE teachers and to TAFE students. At the moment we are cutting down what the TAFE student gets to pay for the TAFE hierarchy. And that's got to stop. Change that and we change a lot of the other problems that people have spoken about today.”*

## **Recommendations**

- Guarantee a minimum 70 per cent of all government funding to the public TAFE system.
- Replace Smart and Skilled with increased recurrent needs-based funding that measures students contact and success. These changes will stop the failure of the Smart and Skilled course completion funding.
- Income-contingent loan repayment schemes for vocational education and training should be set aside. Students should instead be required to pay only low-cost course administration fees.
- Recommend TAFE charges only a yearly small Administration Fee according to the qualification level, with appropriate fee exemptions for disadvantaged people on a Commonwealth welfare payment.
- The NSW Government and TAFE must immediately establish new, recurrent funding models and financial viability criteria that reduce minimum viable class sizes, increase course viability, and allow teachers to run courses in critical skills areas in the regions to rebuild these campuses and meet community needs

**Examine best practice of specific TAFE education and training in areas, including supporting students with disability, personal and career counselling, outreach, multicultural and CALD students, corrective services and other equity education provision.**

TAFE has a long history of ensuring disadvantaged students get equitable access to the vocational skills education they need. The last decade of the Smart and Skilled era has dramatically impacted on that education provision.

Adam, an ex Outreach teacher, understands the challenges facing TAFE in this area:

*'it's vital that we also restore appropriate support services, TAFE outreach, for example, meets the needs of students traditionally excluded from mainstream education by developing tailor-made courses to address barriers to learning. Outreach coordinators liaise with community and employ teachers with specialist knowledge about the specific areas and needs of marginalised groups. Classes, often run in community settings in partnership with other TAFE sections, and also local community groups. Outreach services can provide a less intimidating stepping stone into mainstream TAFE for these students. As a former TAFE outreach teacher, I can attest to this personally. These students are often disengaged from education employment, and/or community.*

*And these things can be addressed in these tailor-made courses. There are other really important services as well. Actually, some of the groups that can really benefit from outreach services: Aboriginal students, students with a history of mental health or trauma, and the growing number of high school students who are what we call "high school refusers" since Covid, they can really benefit from outreach services. '*

Melissa describes the advantages of supporting Aboriginal education with courses such as IPROWD (Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery):

*"I'm also the teacher Coordinator on a program we delivery – it's called IPROWD<sup>1</sup>. For those of you that don't know, IPROWD is Indigenous police recruiting program that is designed to address the access, diversity and inclusion issues for the NSW Police Force well as the Australian Federal Police. It also goes toward addressing the contentious history between Indigenous people and police in Australia. Those students travelled to Queanbeyan from all over the state for one week every month. And some of them travelled as long as two days to get there. They are as remote as Cabbage Tree Island, the devastation that they've faced, the whole island has been completely wiped out and were recently told in the last week that they can't rebuild on the island."*

Adam highlights how TAFE can again embed best practice for supporting students with disability:

*"One other area, I'd like to highlight are Consultants for Students with Disability. I was also a former acting, Consultant. These Consultants provide expert knowledge to teachers working with students with disability, They meet students throughout their courses and assist with reasonable adjustment, with disability aids and equipment, to aid students to ensure they reach their potential.*

*I want to reiterate this. Disability is no barrier to education. It absolutely is not. Inadequate support is..*

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<sup>1</sup> IPROWD - The IPROWD program is an initiative designed to assist Indigenous participants throughout NSW to attain academic requirements to join the NSW Police Force or the Australian Federal Police or to gain other ongoing sustainable employment.

*I'd just like to finish by saying that TAFE can meet the needs of all students in New South Wales. But only if these vital services are re-established. It's vital that they're re-established and restored to the capacity that they have been in the past."*

NSW is proudly one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) states across Australia. Harnessing and facilitating the strength of our CALD communities has been hamstrung under current funding and operating models currently operating in TAFE and VET public provision.

Adequately understanding and addressing the needs of these diverse learner populations will require a specific focus of future TAFE models. The diversity of current and future CALD learners incorporates those who are recent arrival of refugee background students with torture and trauma histories and interrupted education, to new migrant background learners who need upgrading of skills, new skills and foundational skills – and everything in between.

TAFE must be able to target these communities, identify and support their educational needs, assist with enrolment processes and course information and transition into formal education or from local high schools. The role of community engagement in this space is vital. Undertaking this work both **in and within the community** will be the only successful way to ensure that many of these marginalised populations can have the benefit of access to public education and fulfill both personal and economic goals in their new country.

Vocational education in NSW Correctional Services must be urgently reviewed and the privatisation of LLN be reversed. The previous NSW Government made 130 of 150 teachers teaching in NSW Prisons redundant in 2016 and education provision has deteriorated since that time, leading to higher rates of recidivism. The NSW Government must consider reinstating LLN teachers as permanent employees in Correctional Centres as was previously the case.

## **Recommendations**

- TAFE must urgently recruit Outreach coordinators in all regions plus TAFE Digital.
- Increase the number of specialist permanent Teacher consultants for students with a disability.
- Appoint permanent part time and permanent full time careers counsellors in all TAFE colleges.
- Create new permanent positions in specialist multicultural teacher consultants.
- NSW Government urgently reviews the provision of vocational education in NSW Correctional Centres, with specific attention to the LLN
- NSW government must provide free TAFE VET access to those learners and families currently seeking asylum in Australia, as is the case in public schools, given lengthy Commonwealth delays in visa processing

**Meet the expectations of delivery from the perspectives of government, industry, the public and students, and the roles of TAFE and other providers by:**

**Defining the role and expectations of TAFE (and other providers) clearly within the system, and across the state**

There is an expectation that our TAFE students must be the centre of Vocational Education.

Federation members are proud TAFE teachers that have high expectations of the NSW Government to ensure guaranteed recurrent funding to provide high quality education for all our students. The NSW community has expectations that disadvantaged students get equitable access to the vocational skills education each student needs. Students, teachers and employers have expectations that TAFE buildings and infrastructure, including resourcing in technology, are fit for purpose to deliver training to industry and sector standards. It is expected that TAFE colleges can provide resourcing that is industry and sector current.

Students have expectations that IT systems are supportive and simple to use. This includes enrolment procedures. Many students and teachers are disillusioned with the VET system, its complexity and the quality of some private for-profit training organisations.

Sally, in Dubbo, gives an example of how the community has expectations of TAFE to fix problems when other private training providers fail students:

*“This year has seen that we've had a number of trainees that have come to TAFE after 12 months in their traineeship. They're changed employers, changed RTOs and come to us. These students have actually come to us after 12 months with no completed units. So if they're in an 18-month traineeship, technically they've got six months to try and get 17 units of competency completed. So we're there negotiating with the new employer and Training Services New South Wales to get that extended and try and support these students that have had 12 months already - and are feeling quite disillusioned - to actually reengage them in their study and get them through the qualification.*

*We're really passionate, we want these people to succeed, but we need funding to support us to actually be able to meet the needs of trainees when they come to through us. Especially if they're trainees that come through in a failed system already. We need trainees. We need the systems that allow trainees to be completing units at a regular time through their traineeships.*

*At TAFE we have it set up. Some units will take a longer period of time, depending on the hours and the age groups in Early Childhood that they need to be in. But some units can be finished within a month. And those students have been getting that sense of achievement of going “Oh, I've already finished, you know, a third of my course”. Just yesterday. I was tutoring a fellow and he's about to finish another five units. And he said, “Oh wow!”. And so, for ages he's felt like he has gotten nowhere and we've put tutoring now in place for him and so by the end of the next two weeks he will probably have eight units completed of his 17 units. So, that's a really positive story. We need to have permanent staff to be able to cater for them...’*

### **Exploring opportunities for course design, delivery and assessment development to meet learner, community and industry needs**

Federation has identified these priority opportunities for improvements to teaching and learning for our students. Smart and Skilled funding has seen a reduction of teaching delivery hours and forced many students to online delivery even when the students don't want online courses. These cuts to teaching

and learning delivery has impacts on student outcomes and stakeholders' opinion of TAFE as the leading vocational education provider.

Teachers and students are angered by the dysfunctional and poor student assessment design, including the competency-based assessments with 100% student pass grade. These poor assessments also have impacts on student outcomes and stakeholders' opinion of TAFE as the leading vocational education provider.

### **Examining the best provision and support for different types of learners**

TAFE NSW previously held high expectations of providing support services for all students. The NSW Government must ensure the demise of wraparound support services is reversed. This includes Outreach programs, support for students with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse students, LLN courses and support.

TAFE and schools must 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 administration 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.

### **Recommendations**

- TAFE students must be returned to the centre of public education provision in Vocational Education.
- The NSW Government must rebuild TAFE teaching and learning capacity to meet the expectations of our students, teachers, schools, employers, and local communities.
- TAFE must rebuild its capacity to develop teaching and learning delivery and assessments packages for teachers.
- The current TAFE assessments are not fit for purpose, the use of 100% pass grade for competency-based assessments must be halted
- TAFE must now invest in curriculum centres using TAFE teachers' expertise given the use of third-party outsourced assessment packages has failed.

### **Meet the needs of a changing landscape of jobs, skills needs, education, intersections and different models of delivery to**

#### **Research best practice approaches for vocational delivery, including for digital/online delivery**

Federation is deeply concerned by the Training and Assessment Certificate IV qualification as the ongoing standard teaching qualification for TAFE teachers as referenced earlier in more detail in this submission. Research is required into the best practice approaches for delivery of Adult Education teaching qualifications. Retaining teachers in the TAFE system will require support and professional development in the teacher education for the TAFE teaching workforce.

Frequently reported, however, by both high school and TAFE teachers, is the inadequacy of digital and online provision to many of our students.



Accessibility remains a significant barrier for many of our learners, in terms of access to equipment, bandwidth and financial capability of many to be able to learn this way. Further, engagement levels for many of our learners are not facilitated by online teaching and in fact, will have the opposite effect of disengaging learners further by denying hands on experiences that best meets their style of learning.

**Meet the apprenticeship and trainee needs of NSW and explore options for innovation with specific reference to teaching and learning strategies beyond the traditional focus on simple wage subsidy provision**

Federation supports the Federal Government's new procurement requirements for Federal infrastructure projects.

*The Australian Government's Secure Australian Jobs Plan includes the Australian Skills Guarantee, which will ensure that one in 10 workers on major, federally funded government projects is an apprentice, trainee or paid cadet. The Australian Skills Guarantee will use the Australian Government's investments in major projects to secure a pipeline of skilled workers into the future (Government Procurement: A sovereign security imperative June 2023)*

The NSW Government also has established infrastructure projects skills development objectives, by embedding an apprenticeship target of 20% of the trades workforce. The skills procurement also enforces the relevant Aboriginal Procurement Policy, and reports on the number of women in trade roles. (PBD 2023-01 Skills, Training, and diversity in construction)

These procurement policies in Government construction infrastructure must be encouraged in all industries, specifically targeting skill shortage areas.

**Recommend opportunities to optimise and collaborate on VET infrastructure, equipment and delivery, and explore improved models for capital investment for TAFE.**

Between 2012 and 2022, the NSW Coalition Government closed, sold or leased 16 TAFE NSW campuses. This includes campuses at Seaforth, Nelson Bay Annexe, Crows Nest, NAS East Sydney Annexe and campus, Petersham, Katoomba, Granville, Bombala, Goulburn, Tuncurry, Epping, Scone, Mudgee, Dapto, Bega Barrack St and Grenfell, all of which were facilitated by the loss of 110,000 student enrolments under the Coalition Government's contestable funding model (Crakanthorp, 2022).

These TAFE closures were contrary to the public interest. For example, the sale of Scone TAFE campus, 2 Flemington Drive Scone, was without community consultation to Racing NSW. The sale was for \$4 million, which was "below replacement cost" according to its advertisement for sale (Patty, 2021).

To rebuild TAFE NSW, a capital investment strategy must be developed. Increased classes must be accommodated with corresponding increases to TAFE NSW's physical facilities. Infrastructure must be planned for and delivered.

TAFE NSW's Information Technology (IT) systems have not been fit-for-purpose. This includes its platforms for enrolment and record keeping systems.

The EBS system, which was part of the Coalition Government's Learning Management and Business Reform (LMBR) program rolled out across TAFE NSW, hindered rather than facilitated student enrolments in 2015 and 2016. This, in turn, prevented students from accessing on-campus facilities such as computers, printers and library books (Bagshaw, 2016). Notwithstanding the Coalition Government's

\$500 million investment, the EBS debacle seriously compromised TAFE NSW's enrolments and reputation. These were only saved by teachers entering student data onto the failing system during their vacation time and after their working hours until the then Minister Barilaro abandoned the IT system experiment (Cox, 2016).

The Coalition Government's capital investment strategy was to open 22 Connected Learning Centers in rural and regional regions. This forced many students to online learning, even if this wasn't the preferred learning style for the student.

Adrian, a carpentry teacher in Wagga, is concerned about the infrastructure investment without consultation with teachers;

*"I think that consultation with teachers is needed to be done with infrastructure, capital infrastructure for TAFE, and planning and delivery. I think what's happening at the moment is that the middle layer of management is blocking what the Managing Director and some other people on the top and through to the Minister are saying. So, I read the Managing Director's information in the middle of last year that said "TAFE Digital is the way we want to go, to be able to deliver more flexibly with our training." So I set up our team onto that and as a result of that we've been able to save thousands - possibly tens of thousands - of dollars in what it used to be costing us to deliver to our carpentry students down in the Wagga area, as a result of making that decision.*

*I had a lot of obstacles, and we still have, and we've been able to do that with really limited infrastructure and computer support and things like that. We've experienced a lot of roadblocks between the middle layers of management, and I know that I've spoken to people higher up in management who have said "This is really good, we really need to roll this out, I'll just have a talk to the middle layers of management and we'll see if we can support you", and I'll never hear any more back from it and I'm sure that goes across a lot of different areas. So, I recommended your approach of going down to the ground level and taking information from us and then going back and making decisions and putting forward proposals, this is a really good strategy.*

## **Recommendations**

- Collate and undertake research into the best practice Adult Education qualification for TAFE teachers, in line with current high school VET teachers
- Expand the Skill development procurement policies of Federal and State Governments to all skill shortage areas.
- Ensure extensive consultation with teachers in Digital learning policy development.
- Undertake a full scoping of VET infrastructure across both local high schools and TAFEs to maximise facilities and ensure highest quality of facilities for students in VET delivery

This VET Review provides a once in a generation opportunity to set up NSW, through TAFE, as the leading quality public education vocational education provider in the nation.

Such an opportunity must not be squandered.

VET funding must be redirected away from private providers and into skilled employment opportunities through TAFE. Significant restoration and further investment in TAFE will be paramount to achieving this aim and capitalise on both state and federal government commitments to funding, operations and advancement of skills now and into the future.

This will facilitate the provision of 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 provide the next generation with employment that is stable, fair and responsive to need.

A renewed focus on expanded delivery through public education provision, community obligations, equity of educational outcomes and teacher qualifications and career pathways, all central tenets of a reimagined public vocational education system for NSW, are now before the government to enshrine.

Ensuring access and equity remains a critical component to future funding and operating models of TAFE, a public education consortium is a pathway and model to achieving these aims. Public high schools, TAFE colleges and not for profit providers such as Adult Community Education (ACE) and local AECG organisations have long histories of operating in and with identified communities together, which ensures that the student or learner remains the prioritised focus of education and student need.

This submission is a culmination of Federation members' experiences, expertise and professional judgement of the provision of VET in their local schools, TAFEs and the communities they know and serve. It reflects their ongoing dedication and commitment to the public provision of Vocational Education and Training in NSW.

It embeds Federation's core values of the provision of public education to all in our society, underpinned by the tenets of social justice and equality.

It is time for TAFE to be funded and supported to return to its rightful place as the public education institution of which we can all be proud, a government asset for the public, serving for the public good of our students, learner, state and nation.

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