

Letter to SMH Editor - TAFE Cuts

Published November 2012

Dear Editor,

David Williamson's condemnation of cuts to arts education rightly points to a funding squeeze which will eventually destroy the public training system. The comparison he draws with funding to improve the nation's sporting prowess, brawn over brain, should shame our nation's leaders.

The selling of TAFE Colleges is an inevitable outcome of a competitive training market. Our TAFE Colleges have been turned into retail outlets selling courses to customers. Our teachers have been transformed into business managers. The teaching workforce is casualised and the teacher training has been downgraded. All staff chase private dollars like desperate *carpet-beggars*! TAFE Colleges must compete against cheaper, low quality government subsidized "private" training providers.

The customer, who has the capacity to pay or benefits from government allowances, becomes the determiner of national and regional training priorities. In this market, big industry is a major beneficiary of taxpayer dollars as are fly by night training providers. Investment in TAFE has declined proportionate to the growth of the private training market. This allegedly ensures a more responsive public training system. In practice, it ensures its slow decline. Narrow skills for the workforce have become the dominant priority. Courses for personal and social development have been sacrificed because apparently they have no economic outcome. But, courses for people wishing to return to study, to upgrade or update their skills are also fast disappearing. Cheap, low quality alternatives are the substitutes. What price a clever and creative country?

Jozefa Sobski

Former TAFE Institute Director