

A comparative analysis
of
NSW TAFE fees

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Key points

Access and affordability have underpinned the TAFE system from its inception. Yet the continued and deliberate under-resourcing of TAFE systems by government has led to increased reliance on both fee for service activity and increased fees and charges imposed on students.

In 2004, NSW introduced a new fee structure which increased the cost to students by up to 226.9%. Between 2002 and 2006, student fees and charges in NSW grew at a faster rate than any other system, an increase of 51% compared to a national average of 25.2%. With a 9% increase in 2008, it seems likely that student fees as a proportion of NSW revenue will meet or exceed the national average. This is despite the fact that NSW has offered more generous fee exemptions and concessions to disadvantaged students than other states.

Across Australia, TAFE students in all systems pay tuition fees, although an estimated 20%-30% of students are offered an exemption or concession. The focus of this initial report is on the structure and levels of tuition fees, but it must be recognised that additional charges for resources and materials and other costs on average add something like a further 40% to the total cost for students.

All states other than NSW cap the total student tuition fee payable in a year, irrespective of whether the student enrolls in one or more courses. The qualification-based fee structure of NSW creates an upper level fee, for Advanced Diplomas, but a student enrolling in more than one course would pay above this amount. Providers in the territories do not have a fee cap.

Most systems continue to charge an hourly rate for tuition, although in South Australia this varies also by field of study. In NSW, tuition fees are determined by the level of qualification being undertaken, irrespective of the hours of study involved or whether the student is fulltime or part time.

NSW higher level courses are more expensive than courses in almost every other system for students undertaking a fulltime load of 540 - 720 hours a year. Yet lower level, Certificate courses are cheaper for fulltime students in NSW than they are in most other systems.

However, 89% of vocational education and training students are part time. Across AQF courses, 51% of students are studying for up to 199 hours in a year, including 30% of students undertaking courses at Diploma level and above. Two thirds of students studying Certificate I and II courses are studying for less than 200 hours in a year.

This means that the majority of fee-paying students in NSW are paying significantly higher costs than they would in other systems. NSW students studying 200 hours over a year are paying often two and three times what they would pay in other states. The exception would be Certificate I and II courses completed in one semester. A lower level course with even fewer hours is considerably more expensive in NSW and would be more costly even if undertaken over one semester.

The fundamental flaw in the NSW fee structure, which effectively favours fulltime study, is the failure to assist and support students to undertake studies at the pace which suits their circumstances. There are really two options for NSW to consider here: the introduction of proportional fees for students studying part time or the introduction of a fee structure based on nominal hours.

The cost of higher level courses, Diploma and Advanced Diploma, is too high in NSW relative to other states. While this affects around 10% of students, system policies should be encouraging, rather than discouraging, students to undertake higher level qualifications which will be critical for Australia's future economic development.

While NSW continues to offer a wide range of fee concessions, the introduction of a \$50 fee for every course in which benefit recipients enrol would pose a significant barrier to continued study. If this fee is to be required, it should be the maximum payable in a year, in order to provide greater encouragement to students to continue their studies beyond the initial entry point.

Fee structures must ensure that students are encouraged and supported in their efforts to undertake or upgrade qualifications. Consideration should also be given to the provision of exemptions or concessions for courses in areas of defined skill shortages.

The vast majority of fee-paying students in NSW currently face a fee structure which is inequitable relative to other states, and which fails to facilitate flexible study that meets each student's circumstances. This is a situation which must be reviewed.

Recommendations

1. That NSW review the current TAFE fee structure to provide greater equity relative to other systems' costs and to support students need for flexibility.
2. That the revised fee structure incorporate a cap on maximum course fees chargeable for a year of around \$900 and no more than \$1000. Current fees for Advanced Diploma, Diploma and Certificate IV courses would need to be reduced.
3. That the revised fee structure incorporate recognition of the dominance in TAFE of part time study by the introduction of proportional fees for students studying part time or the introduction of a fee structure based on nominal hours.
4. That if the concessional fee of \$50 for benefit recipients is maintained, it be the maximum fee chargeable in a year to any such student for study undertaken in a year, and apply also to students with disabilities who enrol in a second course.
5. That consideration be given in the review to a policy of providing fee exemptions or concessions in defined areas of skills shortage.
6. That the review of NSW fee structures be undertaken in consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, student associations and other stakeholders.
7. That the TAFE system in NSW and across the country be provided with increased government funding to reduce the reliance on student fees and charges and the commercialization of courses provided to individual students.

A comparative analysis of NSW TAFE fees

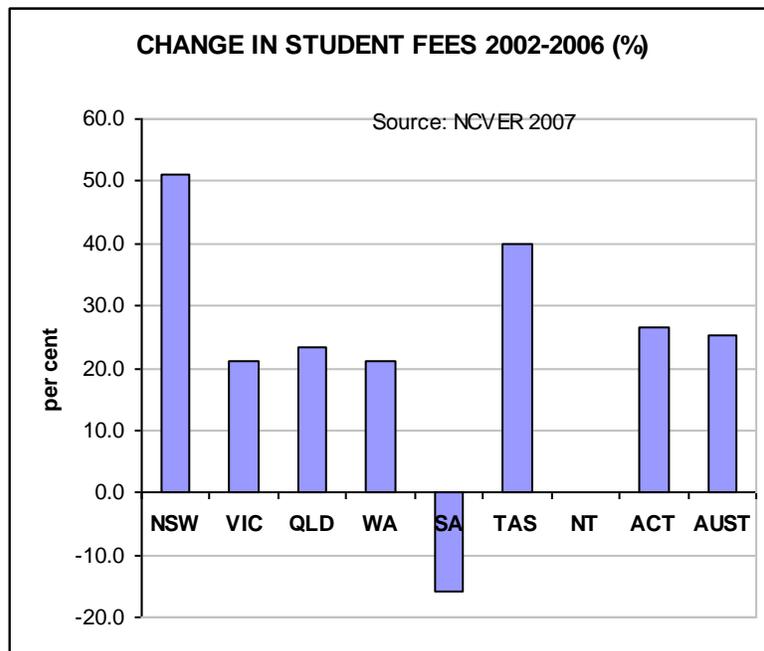
Introduction

Access and affordability have always been underlying principles for TAFE. In recent years, the continued and deliberate under-resourcing of TAFE systems by governments has increased the pressure to develop alternative revenue sources.

This has meant increased reliance on two alternative funding sources: fee for service activity, and increased fees and charges imposed on students. The 2006 TAFE Futures Inquiry noted that these fees and charges ‘present an enormous challenge to many people experiencing and battling financial hardship...’ (Kell 2006) Fee for service activity is also increasingly affecting individual students who pay full costs of their course, outside the government funded profile.

Between 2002 and 2006, the overall operating revenue of the national vocational education and training system (VET) grew by 21.7%. Fee for service activity grew by 52.2% and student fees and charges grew by 25.2%. (NCVER 2007)

Within this overall national picture there are considerable state variations which reflect differing fee structures and government policies about increases in fees.



In 2004, NSW replaced the former administrative charge with new and increased tuition charges which increased the cost to TAFE students by up to 226.9%¹. Subsequent years saw further CPI - based increases in NSW fees. Between 2002 and 2006, overall student fees and charges in NSW

¹ See Appendix 1 for an outline of the increases in NSW fees.

have grown at a faster rate than those of any other system, an increase of 51% compared to a national average of 25.2%. (NCVER 2007)

Since 2006, the latest national data available, fees have continued to increase in a number of systems, most notably in NSW and the ACT. This report is written in the context of a further 9% increase in NSW TAFE student fees for 2008. ACT fees have also risen by a further 10% as part of a planned 30% increase.

On a national level, student fees have grown from 4.4% of total operating revenue in 2002 to 4.6% in 2006. In NSW, student fees and charges have grown from 3.4% to 4.2% over that time. The Director General of DET NSW has indicated that, with the further increases in NSW TAFE fees in 2008, 'these course fees will meet less than five per cent of our costs'. It seems likely then that the proportion of NSW revenue garnered from student fees and charges will in 2008 meet or indeed exceed the national average.

However, this must be seen within the context of NSW having a more generous system of fee exemptions and concessions than other states – at least until now. While it has been estimated that 20-30% of VET students nationally received exemptions and concessions in the payment of student fees, this was true for over 50% of students in NSW in 2003. (Watson 2003). Logically then the contribution of student fees and charges to overall revenue should be lower in NSW than it is in other states where lower rates of fee concession apply. That this is no longer likely to be true suggests that the critical issue from an equity perspective is the extent to which NSW fee structures within this overall picture impose an unfair burden on some students.

A brief profile of TAFE students

An assessment of different fee structures requires information about the profile of TAFE students.

The critical issues in assessing the impact of fee structures are:

- hours of study
- level of qualification
- student access to fee exemptions or concessions.

Field of study is also relevant in some fee structures but will be addressed by the course examples outlined later in this paper.

There were 1.68 million students enrolled in the public vocational education and training system in 2006, or around 11.5% of Australians aged 15-64 years. (NCVER 2007) TAFE students largely reflect the diversity of the Australian population in terms of their age, gender, location, ethnic and cultural diversity and socio-economic background.

The other very important issue is that 89% of TAFE students are enrolled on a part time basis.

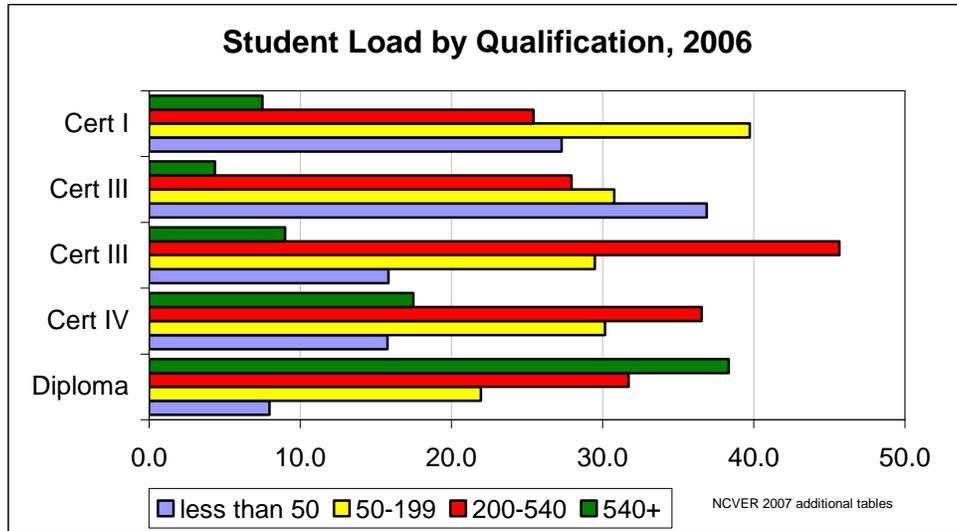
Students studying on a full time basis were more likely to be studying higher level courses. However, it is still the case that only just over one third of students enrolled at Diploma level or above were enrolled on a full time basis. (NCVER 2007) In addition, as Table 1 indicates, some 30% of students enrolled at this level undertook less than 200 hours per annum. Some 45% of students enrolled at Certificates III and IV levels also undertook less than 200 hours study, while this was true for two thirds of students enrolled at Certificate II and II levels. This issue becomes very relevant when considering a fee structure which does not take hours into account, as is the case in NSW.

Table 1 Student load

STUDENT LOAD BY QUALIFICATION LEVEL, 2006		
	FULLTIME (%)	0-199 HOURS (%)
Diploma & above	37.0	29.9
Certificate IV	19.4	45.9
Certificate III	25.9	45.3
Certificate II	7.5	67.7
Certificate I	4.2	67.0
Non AQF qualifications	6.1	

Source: NCVER 2007, NCVER additional tables at www.ncver.org.au

Both Table 1 in the 0-199 hours category and the following graph exclude RPL activity.



While students at higher course levels are more likely than other students to be studying fulltime, they are a small percentage of the overall student population. Only 10% of VET students are studying at Diploma or above levels, with over 50% of all students studying Certificates I, II and III.

Table 2 Students by qualification (%)

STUDENTS BY QUALIFICATION (%)	
Diploma and above	10.0
Certificate IV	10.6
Certificate III	27.7
Certificate II	17.5
Certificate I	5.9
Other recognised courses	16.7
non award courses	5.4
subject only	6.3

Source: NCVER 2007

Commercial activity

It is now five years since research was undertaken on the structure of TAFE fees across the country. (see Watson 2003, Kronemann 2002) At that time, Watson (2003) argued that, given the proportion of students offered fee exemptions or concessions, ‘In effect there are two distinctive fee regimes in the public VET system, depending on the characteristics of the student.’(p. 7)

If that were still arguably true at the time, there is now certainly now a stronger need to acknowledge a third category – full fee paying students. Fee for service (commercial) activity has grown by 52.2% between 2002 and 2006, with an increase of 116.2% in NSW. Only CIT in the ACT has shown a similar (and slightly higher) growth in commercial activity.

While fee for service activity includes revenues received from government agencies and overseas students, it also includes revenues from non-government clients. This component has grown by 42.9% across Australia in the years 2002-2006, but by 128.9% in NSW. In 2006, there were 403,800 students enrolled in 1,825,700 subjects on a fee for service basis, or 24.1% of all students and 12.2% of all subject enrolments. Of these subject enrolments, 392,600 were in NSW. (NCVER 2007, NCVER 2007a)

Under the pressure of inadequate government funding, TAFE systems are providing particular courses on a fee for service basis, such as Graduate Diplomas and Certificates in NSW, which are now only available on a commercial (full fee paying) basis. In addition, they are in some cases reported to be providing places within existing courses on a full fee paying basis. This means that some students are paying considerably more than their class mates for the same course.

Commercial activities are outside the scope of this report but for many students, commercial provision of courses adds to the inequities found in the current fee regimes.

The structure of fees

Each state and territory system determines its own fee arrangements and the level of cost recovery that tuition fees provide. Fee policies apply to centrally funded/profile courses. Commercial courses operate outside the centrally determined fee policy.

Students are required to pay a range of other charges in addition to their tuition fees. The most common charge is for materials and resources required in particular courses. Generally these charges must reflect the additional costs incurred for materials, equipment, special certificates and the like. Only South Australia has built these materials costs into the tuition fee for each course. Many courses also require students to purchase the tools of their trade.

Both Victoria and Queensland continue to allow charges for student amenities and services. In Queensland, a student services fee is charged at a rate of \$0.28 per nominal hour, up to a maximum of \$200 while in Victoria application of such a fee is the decision of the provider. In NSW and at CIT, students may be charged for Student Association membership.

Charges can also be levied in a number of systems for other specific items, such as student identity cards and late enrolment charges.

The focus of this initial report is primarily on the structure and levels of tuition fees across the systems. It must be recognized, however, that the additional charges both vary significantly between courses and on average add something in the order of 40% to the total cost for students. (Watson 2003)

Tuition fees

Most TAFE systems cap the total student fee payable in a year. The maximum fee generally applies irrespective of whether the student enrolls in one or a number of courses. There is no cap in the Northern Territory, where there is no central policy on fees and charges levied at Charles Darwin University and Batchelor College. There is also no cap at Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). While there is an upper fee level set in NSW, this is not a cap since a student enrolling in more than one course would be required to pay more than this amount.

Studying full time in Queensland and Victoria is significantly cheaper than is the case in other states. While the South Australian cap seems high, South Australian fees include all charges for materials and resources, which are charged separately in other systems. On the basis of research undertaken into materials charges in Western Australia, Watson (2007) discounted the South Australian fees by 40%. This method has been adopted here in analysis of comparative costs, although the listed fee data is also provided. Fee capping does not apply to courses for new apprenticeships and traineeships in South Australia. In Tasmania, courses defined as Government Industry Priority programs have a cap of \$495 per year.

The upper fees charged in NSW for Advanced Diplomas are clearly considerably higher than the maximum payable in other states where a maximum fee is in place.²

² Sources for information about fee structures and levels are provided in References and Sources below.

Table 3 Maximum annual fees

MAXIMUM ANNUAL TAFE STUDENT TUITION FEE, 2008								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Maximum	(\$1420) ^a	\$877	\$830 (\$ 1030) ^b	\$1980 (\$1188) ^c	\$1100	\$990	-	-

- a. Listed cost is for the Advanced Diploma; there is no actual maximum fee.
- b. Queensland charges a centrally determined student services fee of \$0.28 per hour to a maximum of \$200; this is included in parenthesis.
- c. SA fees include all materials charges and the figure in parenthesis discounts the maximum by 40%, consistent with the calculations by Watson (2003).

Most systems continue to charge a centrally determined hourly rate for tuition. A simple hourly rate is charged in Victoria, Queensland and at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory. This hourly rate ranges from \$1.05 in Queensland to \$1.37 in Victoria and \$1.90 at Charles Darwin University. Queensland, as Table 3 indicates, also charges a student services fee which raises the actual maximum charge to \$1030. While such a charge may be levied in some other states it is not centrally determined as a compulsory levy elsewhere.

The TAFE Tasmania *Annual Report* indicates that fees are quoted for each unit of competency chosen. The effective hourly rate is \$1.75, but it is charged out per unit.

Western Australia also applies what is effectively an hourly rate but it is charged on the basis of unit length, in four bands of fee levels. The minimum charge is \$14 for units between 1 and 14 hours. Beyond that, effective hourly rates vary from around \$1.16 to \$2.35 per hour, with a unit of more than 51 hours costing \$120.

Canberra Institute of Technology also charges out at an hourly rate but it is calculated through 'billing points', determined by dividing the 'billing hours' (nominal hours) by 5, rounding up and then multiplying by \$7.26. Fees are being increased by 30% over three years. An Advanced Diploma at CIT will cost from \$1,100-\$1,980 over two semesters, while fees for Certificates I and II range from \$770-\$1210 over a year, depending on the number of billing hours in the course.

South Australia continues to charge an hourly rate which differs by field of study. While fees may differ for different qualification levels there is no apparent overall policy to charge more for higher level qualifications. In some cases, lower level qualifications have a higher hourly charge

than higher level ones. The South Australian fee levels appear high relative to other systems but they incorporate the full cost of materials and resources which are separately charged elsewhere. Rates vary from \$0.65 to \$4 per hour.

In 2004, the NSW fee structure was changed and levels were increased. Until that year, NSW charged a set amount for courses at Diploma level and above, and a lower charge on all courses below Diploma level. This structure made no provision for different course lengths although the fee was halved for courses of less than one semester in length.

In 2004, NSW introduced new, graded tuition charges based on the specific qualification level of the courses. The effect was to increase student costs significantly, more so at some qualification levels. This fee structure has been maintained but there have been further CPI increases across the board since that time, exceeded by a 9% rise for the 2008 year. The new fee structure takes no account of hours of study or whether a student is full time or part time.

In 2008, NSW students in receipt of government benefits will for the first time also pay a fee of \$50 per course. Students on benefits and students with a disability will pay \$50 for undertaking a second course, for which they previously would have paid the full fee. (DG-DET, 2007) In addition, Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses are now offered only on a commercial basis. Fees for AQF courses in 2008 vary from \$418 for Certificates I and II to \$1420 for an Advanced Diploma. Students enrolled for one semester will pay half these fees.

NSW has maintained a separate fee level for apprentices and trainees. Apprentices eligible for a Commonwealth rebate will pay \$480, while those not eligible for a rebate, together with trainees, will pay \$394 in 2008. The only other system to indicate a different rate for apprentices is Tasmania, which has a cap of \$300 in fees for apprentices aged 16-19 years, as well as a 50% exemption for students enrolled in Government Priority Programs. In Western Australia, the fee schedule specifies that trainees will be required to pay course fees including for training that is 100% on the job. In Queensland, fees are discounted by 75% for the nominal vocational placement hours in a subject.

Table 4 Tuition fees, 2008

2008 TUITION FEES FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDED TAFE COURSES								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
COST PER COURSE LEVEL (full year)								
Advanced Diploma	\$1,420							(\$1100-\$1980) ^b
Diploma	\$1,184							(\$990-\$1540)
Cert IV	\$890							(\$990-\$1540)
Cert III	\$654							(\$770-\$1210)
Cert II	\$418							(\$770-\$1210)
Cert I	\$418							(\$770-\$1210)
COST PER HOUR		\$1.37	\$1.05 (+\$0.28) ^a	\$0.65- \$4.00		1.75	\$1.90	(n/5)*\$7.26 = c\$1.45
COST PER UNIT								
1-14 hrs					\$14			
15-24 hrs					\$30			
25-50 hrs					\$58			
51+ hrs					\$120			

- a. Queensland charges a centrally determined student services fee.
b. Published cost range.

Exemptions and concessions

Borthwick (1999, cited in Kronemann 2002), reported that in many states at least 20% - 30% of students in government funded programs receive financial exemptions or concessions on the basis of financial need. Watson (2003) indicated that this may be an underestimate, and that in 2002, 45% of Tasmanian TAFE students received concessions while 50% of NSW students received exemptions. The reality is that this provides considerable relief to a large proportion of students enrolled in TAFE. The concession policies do not apply to full fee paying students.

The level of fee relief differs greatly between systems. NSW has apparently provided the greatest level of exemptions to a wide range of students of any of the states, although published data is a partial account across systems. Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory also continues to provide a wide range of exemptions for all disadvantaged groups. In 2008, NSW has introduced a \$50 fee for benefit recipients. Victoria also charges a fee of \$55, but this is the maximum amount for all the study undertaken during the year irrespective of the number of courses undertaken. NSW now charges \$50 for each course to benefit recipients but may still be providing access to a wider range of students. Under the new fee structure in 2008, NSW students with disabilities will now pay \$50 for any second course they undertake, when they would

previously have paid the full fee. However the number of students who undertake more than one course in a year is unknown.

The concessions and exemptions generally apply to tuition fees and may apply to some other charges such as student services fees, but they do not generally cover resource and materials costs.

All systems continue to provide concessions to recipients of a range of Commonwealth benefits and allowances, including AUSTUDY and other student allowances, Carer payments, Sickness allowances, Newstart allowance, Disability Support Pension and other similar benefits.

Certain targeted equity groups also receive exemptions or concessions in at least some systems. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with a disability and prisoners.

There are also a range of special access courses which are eligible for fee concessions or exemptions, such as literacy and numeracy courses and courses for particular equity target groups.

Secondary students studying at TAFE in some jurisdictions are also exempt from fees or, in NSW, eligible for a refund. In Victoria this applies where the other education institution (eg school) has provided for payment to the Institute.

A number of systems also provide specific forms of assistance such as travel support, or assistance towards the cost of books and materials for benefit holders.

Generally across all systems, TAFE Directors continue to have the power to waive fees in case of severe financial hardship. Sometimes the promotion of this provision to students is not encouraged.

In addition, there are specific benefits that apply to particular programs targeted by governments. The Commonwealth Government provides Work Skills Vouchers for unskilled adults and Business Skills Vouchers for apprentices. Australians aged at least 25 years and who do not have a Year 12 or equivalent or Certificate II qualifications are eligible for Work Skills Vouchers

worth up to \$3000 in order to undertake a Year 12 or a Certificate II qualification. Business Skills Vouchers provide up to \$500 towards the cost of accredited business skills training for apprentices in traditional trades or people who have recently completed their apprenticeship.

The Tasmanian Government provides a fee cap of \$300 for 16-19 year olds in a range of identified traditional trade apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-employment courses which are seen as priority areas for Tasmania. These include areas of skills shortages, support for the Pulp Mill project and support for communities and enterprises that may experience displacement of skills and semi-skilled workers through the Pulp Mill project.

The Tasmanian Government also provides a 50% training fee concession in areas determined to be Government Industry Priority (GIP) areas. The fee cap for these courses is \$495 per year. In 2008 this will provide support for non apprentices over the age of 25 years undertaking training in traditional trades (except for hairdressing); children's services; support for aged care; disability services; career pathways through Link and Learn programs; pre-apprentice cookery training; and higher level training in Agriculture and in Local Government. Where a Tasmanian student is eligible for both the concession fee cap and GIP, the lower fee will apply.

Table 5 Concessions and exemptions

ACCESS TO CONCESSIONS AND EXEMPTIONS								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Gov't benefit recipients	\$50 per course	\$55.00	75% concession (max. \$208)	\$1.20 p.h. ^a	Max. \$275	Max. \$275	\$0	50% concession
Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander students	\$0	\$55	75% concession	33% reduction for Cert I & II, 66% for Cert III +	\$275 max. for ABSTU DY holders	\$275 max. for ABSTU DY holders	\$0	scholarships available
Remote students							\$0	
Students with a disability (first course pa)	\$0							
Students with a disability (additional courses)	\$50							
Special Access courses	\$0		75% for under 17 with no yr 12, \$0 for literacy and numeracy	Under 26 in state care, \$0 for two fields of study	\$25 per semester			\$0
Prisoners		\$0		\$1.20 p.h.	max \$275		\$0	
Learning network				Equity fee assistance reduces fees by further 30%.				200 hours free For Learning Options.
Secondary students	\$0		\$0		\$0	max. \$275	\$0	
Permanent resident refugees							\$0	

a. South Australian rates include all costs of resources and materials.

Average tuition fees

The different fee structures make a comparison difficult. Costs in Western Australia in particular cannot be calculated without reference to the length of units being undertaken. In other systems, where fees are based on hourly rates, the cost is dependent on the total number of nominal hours undertaken in a year of study.

A fulltime study load is defined as 720 hours in a year. However a program of study which constitutes at least 75% of the normal full time load is regarded as fulltime. Thus any student undertaking 540 hours or more of study is regarded as a fulltime student. (NCVER 2007) Nonetheless, under an hourly rate, students who are undertaking the full 720 hours would pay more. Some 38% of Advanced Diploma students (other than RPL) study for 540 hours or more. (NCVER 2007a)

The reality is that 51% of AQF students and 62.6% of all students undertake courses of less than 199 hours per year. (NCVER 2007a) The average length of study for all VET students is 222 hours in a year. (NCVER 2007)

It seems appropriate to consider the comparative costs for each of these three levels of study.

Average costs of 720 hours study

NSW higher level courses are more expensive than courses in almost every other system for students undertaking 720 hours study in a year. In relation to Advanced Diplomas, the exceptions are some more expensive courses in South Australia. However, when the South Australian rate is discounted by 40% to remove resources and materials, the most expensive courses at this level in South Australia are still cheaper than those in NSW. At Diploma level, courses at CDU in the Northern Territory would also be more expensive than those in NSW. All other states offer cheaper rates for students in higher level courses who are undertaking 720 hours of study.

For students undertaking 720 hours of study at Certificate IV level, tuition costs in NSW are higher than those in Victoria, Queensland (without the student services fee) and some courses in South Australia. For Certificate III courses and below being undertaken over 720 hours, NSW courses are cheaper than those in all other systems apart from some courses in South Australia.

However this effects only a very small proportion of students: only 17.5% of Certificate IV students, 9% of Certificate III, 4.4% of Certificate II and 7.5% of Certificate I students are estimated to be undertaking more than 540 hours study in a year. (NCVER 2007a)

Table 6 Cost of 720 hours a year

COST OF FULL LOAD COURSES (720 hours)								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Advanced Diploma	\$1,420	\$877	\$756 (\$956) ^a	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188) ^b	\$1100 ^c	\$990	\$1368	\$1045 ^d
Diploma	\$1,184	\$877	\$756 (\$956)	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188)	\$1100	\$990	\$1368	\$1045
Cert IV	\$890	\$877	\$756 (\$956)	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188)	\$1100	\$990	\$1368	\$1045
Cert III	\$654	\$877	\$756 (\$956)	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188)	\$1100	\$990	\$1368	\$1045
Cert II	\$418	\$877	\$756 (\$956)	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188)	\$1100	\$990	\$1368	\$1045
Cert I	\$418	\$877	\$756 (\$956)	\$468-\$1980 (\$281-\$1188)	\$1100	\$990	\$1368	\$1045

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component.
- c. Assumes that a full time student would be required to pay the maximum fee.
- d. Fee range listed on the CIT website is \$1100-\$1980. This suggests that the billing hours exceed 720 hours.
- e. Sources provided in References and sources.

Average costs of 540 hours study

NSW Advanced Diploma courses for students studying 540 hours in a year are more expensive than those of any other system for which this information is available. This is also true at the Diploma level for all but a small number of South Australian courses.

At Certificate IV level, Victoria, Queensland and CIT offer lower costs to students studying for 540 nominal hours, as does South Australia for a range of courses. For Certificate III, Queensland has a lower tuition fee but when the centrally determined student amenities fee is included, becomes more expensive than NSW. Some courses in South Australia are cheaper than those in NSW, but rates in all other systems listed are more expensive for students studying 540 hours in a year.

Certificate I and II courses over 540 hours are cheaper in NSW than all other systems listed except for some courses in South Australia.

The proportion of students in lower level courses who are studying for this number of hours is small. Some 25.9% of Certificate III students, 7.5% of Certificate II and 4.2% of Certificate I students are defined as fulltime (540 hours or more) by NCVER. (NCVER 2007a)

Table 7 Cost of 540 hours a year.

COST OF FULL TIME COURSES (540 hours)								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA ^c	Tas	CDU	CIT
Advanced Diploma	\$1,420	\$740	\$567 (\$718) ^a	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188) ^b		\$945	\$1,026	\$784
Diploma	\$1,184	\$740	\$567 (\$718)	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188)		\$945	\$1,026	\$784
Cert IV	\$890	\$740	\$567 (\$718)	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188)		\$945	\$1,026	\$784
Cert III	\$654	\$740	\$567 (\$718)	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188)		\$945	\$1,026	\$784
Cert II	\$418	\$740	\$567 (\$718)	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188)		\$945	\$1,026	\$784
Cert I	\$418	\$740	\$567 (\$718)	\$351-1980 (\$211-\$1188)		\$945	\$1,026	\$784

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component.
- c. Unit costs prevent this form of calculation.
- d. Sources provided in References and sources.

Average costs of 200 hours study

Across the AQF courses, 51% of students are studying for up to 199 hours a year. As indicated in Table 1, this includes 30% of students at Diploma level and above, around 45% at Certificates III and IV, and over two thirds of students studying at Certificate I and II levels.

This means that the majority of students in NSW are paying significantly higher costs than they would in any other system, with the only exception being some courses at Certificates I and II level in South Australia.

To provide a few concrete examples of this difference: a Certificate IV student in NSW studying 200 hours in a year pays 324.8% what that same student would pay in Victoria, while a Certificate III student pays 238.7% more and Certificates I and II students pay 152.6% more than they would across the state border. In comparison to Queensland, even when the student services charge is include in the fee, a NSW Certificate IV student pays 334.6% more and a Certificate II student pays 157.1% more in NSW. The same NSW Certificate IV student pays 254.3% more than in Tasmania, while the Certificate II student in NSW pays 119.4% more. Clearly there is a gross inequity here when NSW students are paying so much more because of where they live.

NCVER (2007b) reported that around three-quarters of TAFE students are employed prior to commencing their training, which is one of the factors that explain the part time nature of most TAFE study. However, even where the courses are undertaken within one semester, which halves the NSW fee, the NSW rates for Certificate IV courses undertaken over 200 hours in a year remain more expensive than all other listed systems, and the NSW Certificate III would still be more expensive than in Victoria, Queensland, at CIT and some courses in South Australia. Only NSW Certificate I and II courses completed within one semester would be cheaper than in other systems.

Table 8 Cost of 200 hours a year

COST OF 200 HOURS STUDY A YEAR								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA ^c	Tas	CDU	CIT
Advanced Diploma	\$1,420	\$274	\$210 (\$266) ^a	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480) ^b		\$350	\$380	\$290
Diploma	\$1,184	\$274	\$210 (\$266)	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480)		\$350	\$380	\$290
Cert IV	\$890	\$274	\$210 (\$266)	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480)		\$350	\$380	\$290
Cert III	\$654	\$274	\$210 (\$266)	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480)		\$350	\$380	\$290
Cert II	\$418	\$274	\$210 (\$266)	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480)		\$350	\$380	\$290
Cert I	\$418	\$274	\$210 (\$266)	\$130-\$800 (\$78-\$480)		\$350	\$380	\$290

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component.
- c. Unit costs prevent this form of calculation.
- d. Sources provided in References and sources.

A comparison of specific course fees

Given that Western Australian rates could not be assessed on the basis of annual nominal hours, specific courses have been selected in order to provide some examples of how the rates differ across systems. Nominal hours for particular courses vary between systems and do not necessarily reflect actual hours, but they are the basis for determining the hourly fee.

The comparisons below are based on the nominal hours required by NSW for each of these courses. They have been selected to provide a range of qualification levels and fields of study. The NSW course requirements have been summarized here but full details are available at www.tafensw.edu.au

Advanced Diploma in Civil Engineering Design (91248NSW)

The 28 compulsory units in the course require a total of 1696 nominal hours and it is assumed that the course would be taken over three years. The first eight units, a total of 586 hours, is just over one third of total hours.

The units are:CHCCHM3C 120 hours; CHCCHM4B 120 hours; NSWTBCC401A 36 hours; NSWTBCC403A 72 hours; NSWTBCC404A 54 hours; NSWTBCC405A 36 hours; NSWTBCC406A 90 hours; and NSWTBCC407A 108 hours.

A one year fee comparison based on this part of the NSW course and the fee rates in other systems indicates that only South Australia would be more expensive than NSW. But when the South Australian rate is discounted to remove materials and resource costs, NSW remains as the most expensive fee.

Table 9 Advanced Diploma costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF ADVANCED DIPLOMA IN CIVIL ENGINEERING DESIGN								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Advanced Diploma	\$1,420	\$803	\$615 (\$779) ^a	\$1,980 (\$1,188) ^b	\$836	\$990	\$1,183	\$857

a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.

b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$4 ph

Diploma in Business Management (BSB50401)

The NSW course is listed as 630 nominal hours. The course requires undertaking six compulsory AQF 4 units, totaling 235 hours. In addition, four units of AQF 4 elective units, and six units of AQF 5 units must be completed. Hours on these units vary and it has been assumed that one unit of 30 hours and three units of 40 hours have been selected for the AQF 4 elective units and six units of 40 hours for the AQF 5 units. The total nominal hours of these units is 625 hours.

It has also been assumed that the course will be undertaken in one year. Study on a part time basis, say over two years, would double the relative costs of study in NSW.

Compared to NSW fees, only CDU is equally costly. When South Australian costs are discounted for resource costs, the course would be slightly cheaper there. In all other systems the course

would be considerably cheaper than it is in NSW. A Queensland student, for example, would save \$353, or 29.8%, compared to a NSW student.

Table 10 Diploma costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF DIPLOMA IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Diploma	\$1,184	\$856	\$656 (\$831) ^a	\$1,875 (\$1,125) ^b	\$928	\$990	\$1,188	\$908

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$3 ph

Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management (Vertebrate Pest Management) (RTD40102)

This NSW course requires 12 units to be completed. Five of the six group 1 units must be completed and the unit with the least hours (RTD4404A, 20 hours) has been omitted in this example. In addition, a further seven units are required from the Group B and C units, of which no more than two can come from Group C. In Group B, the shortest five units have been omitted (RTC4701A, 15 hours; RTC4702A, 25 hours; and RTC4703A, 25 hours. The average length of units in Group C is 46.3 hours, so RTD4906A and RTD4910A, both 50 hours in length, have been selected. This totals 495 nominal hours.

This Certificate IV would be most expensive at CDU. The discounted South Australian rate is equal to the NSW rate and Tasmania is only slightly cheaper. There would be considerable savings to a student enrolled in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia or at CIT, relative to the NSW costs. Once again part time study over two years would double the costs for a NSW student.

Table 11 Certificate IV costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF CERTIFICATE IV IN CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT (VERTEBRATE PEST MANAGEMENT)								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Cert. IV	\$890	\$678	\$520 (\$658) ^a	\$1,485 (\$891) ^b	\$758	\$866	\$941	\$719

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$3 ph

Certificate III in Children’s Services (CHC30402)

The NSW course lists 11 core units which are compulsory and total 386 hours (excluding five hours for professional experience to ensure the on the job requirements are met.. In addition four elective units are required. The nominated subgroup for Centre Based Care has four units totaling 149 hours. Thus the course has 535 nominal hours in total.

The Queensland tuition cost for this course is cheaper than all others, although this is not the case if the student amenities fee is included. The South Australian discounted cost is marginally cheaper too than the NSW rate. These aside, the NSW charge is considerably cheaper for this course, providing that it is done over one year. A student in Tasmania, for example, would pay \$282, or 43.1% more, on this basis. If the course is done part time however, then the cost over two years would be far greater in NSW than elsewhere.

Table 12 Certificate III costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF CERTIFICATE III IN CHILDREN’S SERVICES								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Cert. III	\$654	\$733	\$562 (\$712) ^a	\$1,070 (\$642) ^b	\$804	\$936	\$1,017	\$777

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$2 ph

Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) (THH22002)

The Certificate is listed by NSW as having 333 nominal hours. It includes 10 compulsory units totaling 211 hours and a minimum of four electives, of which at least three must be completed from Group 2 and another from Group 2 or Group 3.

Units suggested for employment as a cook in a Fast Food Outlet such as a coffee shop or canteen establishment are 2673C (14 hours); 2673B (36 hours); and 2674C (42 hours). The addition of a further course of 36 hours from Group 3 (2676E) takes the total to 339 hours.

The South Australian cost for this NSW course would be vastly more expensive than in any other system, even as discounted. The NSW rate for this course is cheaper than any other system, when the student services fee is included for Queensland. It is 49.1% cheaper than the same course would be in Tasmania, for example, and 11% cheaper than it would be in Victoria.

Given the length of this course, it would be possible to complete it in one semester, studying fulltime. This would halve the cost of the NSW course and make it very substantially cheaper than any other system. Doing it over two years would double the cost in NSW.

Table 13 Certificate II costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF CERTIFICATE II IN HOSPITALITY (KITCHEN OPERATIONS)								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Cert. II	\$418	\$464	\$356 (\$451) ^a	\$1,356 (\$814) ^b	\$536	\$593	\$644	\$494

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$4 ph

Certificate I in Horticulture (RTF10103)

The Certificate as listed by NSW requires one compulsory unit to be undertaken of 10 hours and five elective units, of which at least two and up to five can come from Group 2 units. No more than three of these units can come from Group 3. Most of the Group 2 units are 20 hours long and most of the Group 3 units are 10 hours long. Selecting four elective units of 20 hours and one of 10 hours leads to a total for the course of 100 nominal hours.

If this course is undertaken over two semesters, costs in NSW are substantially greater than in any other system. To do the same course in Queensland would cost 25.1% of the NSW rate, and in Victoria it would cost 32.8% of the NSW cost.

Even if the course were done over one semester, which halves the NSW cost, the reality is that it would still be more expensive to undertake this course in NSW than in any other system. South Australia's published rate would be more expensive over one semester but this is no longer the case when that fee is discounted for resources and materials.

Table 14 Certificate 1 costs

COMPARATIVE COST OF CERTIFICATE I IN HORTICULTURE								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	CDU	CIT
Cert. II	\$418	\$137	\$105 (\$133) ^a	\$300 (\$180) ^b	\$148	\$175	\$190	\$145

- a. Figure in parenthesis includes student amenities fee.
- b. Figure in parenthesis indicates costs discounted by 40% to remove estimated resources and materials component. Base is SA rate for this course of \$3 ph

Summary: how NSW compares

The analysis of both average hours and of particular courses has indicated that the comparison of NSW rates with those in other systems is not altogether straightforward. The relative expense depends on the level of the qualification and the nominal hours of the course, but also on whether the student undertakes the course over a semester, a year, or longer. In the case of South Australia, it is appropriate for any comparison to discount the listed price to remove resource and material charges.

In general, Advanced Diploma and Diploma courses are considerably more expensive in NSW than they are in other states, with the exception of some Diploma courses in South Australia. Costs for some courses with high billing hours at CIT, and fulltime Diploma students at CDU, are higher than those of NSW. For higher level courses undertaken over two years, the costs in NSW are very substantially higher than they would be in other systems.

For fulltime students in a Certificate III course or below, NSW provides a cheaper option than do other states. This is true for students studying for both 540 and 720 hours in a year. The Certificate III in Children's Services reflects this situation, showing that it would be considerably cheaper than most other systems, providing it is done within one year. However the Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management, with just under 500 nominal hours, was more expensive in NSW than in most other systems. The Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations), with 339 nominal hours, is also considerably cheaper in NSW if taken within a year, and even more so if undertaken over one semester.

However, the reality is that fulltime students are a small proportion - 11% - of all students. In particular, only a small proportion of students in Certificate III courses and below are studying fulltime. Over half of all students are studying for up to 199 hours per year. Even at Diploma level and above, some 30% of students undertake no more than 200 hours per year.

This means that for the vast majority of fee-paying TAFE students, costs in NSW are considerably higher than they are in other states, with the only exception being some courses at Certificates I and II level in South Australia. The analysis of costs for students studying 200 hours per year shows that NSW students are paying often two and three times what they would be

paying in other states. Only NSW Certificate I and II courses completed in one semester would be cheaper than most other systems over 200 hours. Yet as the Certificate I in Horticulture shows, a course with shorter hours is considerably more expensive in NSW and would be more costly even if undertaken over one semester.

The national vocational education and training system aims to provide flexibility for students and clients. The fundamental flaw in the NSW fee structure is the failure to assist and support students to undertake studies at the pace which suits their circumstances. The cost structure favours fulltime study when it is known that three quarters of all students are in employment prior to commencing their training, and when 89% of students study part time. It is of particular concern that entry level courses which are shorter courses or are undertaken on a part time basis over a year are substantially more costly for fee-paying NSW students than they would be in other states.

There are really two options for NSW to consider here: the introduction of proportional fees for students studying part time or the introduction of a fee structure based on nominal hours. The former option could be based on the existing fee structure but give recognition to the level of study towards a qualification undertaken in a year. The latter option would take into account the number of nominal hours that apply for each particular course but the effect would also be that courses at the same qualification level would be charged differentially according to their length. The most appropriate direction is a matter for policy consideration by the NSW Government in consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, student associations and other stakeholders.

The cost of higher level courses, Diploma and Advanced Diploma, is too high in NSW relative to other states. While this affects around 10% of students, system policies should be encouraging, rather than discouraging, students to undertake higher level qualifications which will be critical for Australia's future economic development

The lack of a cap on annual fees is not just an issue of higher level courses which are too expensive. It is true that a fee structure with a flat rate for each qualification effectively acts as a cap at each level. The cap in other systems ensures that longer courses do not become unduly expensive. Such fee structures have the potential effect of encouraging students to undertake additional study during the year without additional costs above the maximum. For students who require study across more than one course, this serves to make the option more affordable.

The issue of a cap applies also to students who are able to access fee concessions and exemptions. Disadvantaged students and second chance learners may well begin with a lower level course, or a non-award course, or a subject. Fee structures should be designed to encourage such students to continue their studies beyond the initial approach, in order to improve their chances at employment and personal wellbeing. While it would seem that NSW continues to offer a wide range of fee concessions, the introduction of a \$50 fee which is payable for every course in which the student enrolls would pose a significant barrier to continued study for those surviving on benefits. If this fee is to be required, it should be the maximum payable in a year, in order to provide greater encouragement to students to continue their studies beyond the initial entry point.

Not having the necessary skills to enter the workforce was seen as the major barrier by young people in NSW aged 12-25, in a survey recently undertaken by Youth Action & Policy Association NSW Inc (Ferguson 2007) Fee structures must ensure that students are encouraged and supported in their efforts to undertake or upgrade qualifications. That survey found support for a proposal to remove TAFE fees in areas of skills shortage. The Tasmanian Government has taken steps in this direction and it is worth serious consideration by the NSW Government.

The vast majority of fee-paying students in NSW currently face a fee structure which is inequitable relative to other states, and which fails to facilitate flexible study that meets each student's circumstances. This is a situation which must be reviewed.

Recommendations

1. That NSW review the current TAFE fee structure to provide greater equity relative to other systems' costs and to support students need for flexibility.
2. That the revised fee structure incorporate a cap on maximum course fees chargeable for a year of around \$900 and no more than \$1000. Current fees for Advanced Diploma, Diploma and Certificate IV courses would need to be reduced.
3. That the revised fee structure incorporate recognition of the dominance in TAFE of part time study by the introduction of proportional fees for students studying part time or the introduction of a fee structure based on nominal hours.

4. That if the concessional fee of \$50 for benefit recipients is maintained, it be the maximum fee chargeable in a year to any such student for study undertaken in a year, and apply also to students with disabilities who enrol in a second course.
5. That consideration be given in the review to a policy of providing fee exemptions or concessions in defined areas of skills shortage.
6. That the review of NSW fee structures be undertaken in consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, student associations and other stakeholders.
7. That the TAFE system in NSW and across the country be provided with increased government funding to reduce the reliance on student fees and charges and the commercialization of courses provided to individual students.

Further work

This initial survey of tuition fees in TAFE systems has left a number of significant questions unanswered.

Further work is required on a number of issues, including:

- the current cost of resource and materials charges, as well as other charges faced by students;
- levels of access to tuition concessions and exemptions across systems;
- trends towards the commercialisation of courses and the impact on students;
- the desirability and feasibility of more consistent fee structures across Australia; and
- current and proposed schemes to support students in their capacity to meet the cost of vocational education and training courses.

It is hoped that the AEU and its Branches and Associated Bodies, and TAFE systems themselves, will ensure that this work is undertaken. This too is recommended.

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March 2008**

References and sources

General sources

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- Kronemann M., 2002, *Trends in TAFE Student Fees and Charges*, AEU Research Report, AEU, www.aeufederal.org.au
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- Watson L., 2003, *What do TAFE students pay? A review of charging policies in Australian vocational education and training*, NCVER.

Information on fee structures in TAFE systems

Information and advice was sought from AEU Branches and Associated Bodies. In addition, information was sought from system websites. The level of public information provided by systems varies considerably.

ACT:

- Canberra Institute of Technology, www.cit.act.edu.au
- Canberra Institute of Technology (Fees) Determination 2007, www.legislation.act.gov.au

NSW:

- www.det.nsw.edu.au
- TAFETA, 2007, *Briefing Notes- TAFE fees*, NSWTF and other related documents.

Northern Territory:

- Charles Darwin University, www.cdu.edu.au

Queensland:

- www.tafe.qld.gov.au
- Queensland Parliamentary Council, Vocational Education, Training and Employment Regulation 2000, reprinted as in force on 1 January 2008.

South Australia:

- www.tafe.sa.edu.au
- TAFE FSI 500 Fees for 2008, Schedule of Fees, DFEEST Admin instruction.

Tasmania:

www.tafe.tas.edu.au

TAFE Tasmania, *Enrolment Information 2008*.

TAFE Tasmania Annual report 2006-07

Victoria:

www.rmit.edu.au

Executive Memorandum, 13 September 2007, Indexation of Student Fees and Charges for 2008, OTTE.

Ministerial Directions to Councils of TAFE Institutes and Universities with TAFE Divisions (Fees and Charges Amendment) 2004

Western Australia:

www.tafe.wa.gov.au

Department of Education and Training, *VET Fees and Charges in 2008*, effective 1 January 2008, Government of Western Australia.

APPENDIX: Changes in TAFE fees in NSW

CHANGES IN TAFE FEES IN NSW					
	2003	2004	Change 2003-04 %	2008	Change 2003-08 %
Grad Dip	710	1650	132.4	Commercial	
Grad Certificate	260	850	226.9	Commercial	
Advanced Diploma	710	1200	69.0	\$1,420	100.0
Diploma	710	1000	40.8	\$1,184	66.8
Cert IV	260	750	188.5	\$890	242.3
Cert III	260	550	111.5	\$654	151.5
Cert II	260	350	34.6	\$418	60.8
Cert I	260	300	15.4	\$418	60.8
Apprentices eligible for a Comm. Rebate	260	350	34.6	\$480	84.6
Apprentices not eligible for a Comm. Rebate	260	350	34.6	\$394	51.5
Trainees	0	350		\$394	

Source: NSWTF 2007