

11 November 2015

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT. 2600

Dear Prime Minister

The TAFE Community Alliance welcomes your recognition of the problems currently existing within the vocational education and training sector, and the commitment of your Government to addressing these problems and restoring a strong quality VET system in Australia.

The TAFE Community Alliance is an advocacy and strategy group that recognises the central role of the strong comprehensive public VET provider in the building of social, cultural and economic capacity of communities across NSW. Our website www.tafecommunityalliance.org tells the TAFE story and provides extensive information about our advocacy work, events and has links to relevant research papers.

The Alliance has been particularly concerned at the impact of VET reforms on the quality and sustainability of TAFE Institutes across the country. We have watched with increasing concern the growth of private VET providers in the market, whose focus is on making money at any cost, rather than the delivery of quality vocational education qualifications and opportunities for both young and old. This has had a negative impact on the qualifications delivered to many students, the perceptions of the VET sector and enrolments in TAFE. The current funding arrangement is leading to a public TAFE system that is critically weakened in terms of providing a professional training system. TAFE Institutes have been required to cut training hours, delete access programs, and reduce services, including the deletion of positions involved in developing and adapting curriculum, researching the needs of a diverse student body, and liaising at a professional level with industry, the community and higher education. At the same time, in comparison with many other countries, teachers in the vocational education and training sector, are required to have an unsatisfactorily low level of professional training.

We hope that as a new Prime Minister, you will ensure that your Ministers value the role and importance of TAFE not just to individuals, but also TAFE's ability to engage industry and the community and to drive economic growth and build social capital.

The new National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, to be negotiated very soon, gives your Government the opportunity to refocus the VET sector, and to ensure states and territories are not coerced through the Agreement to continue to develop competitive training markets. These do not work for the citizens of Australia. Instead, funding can be distributed in different ways, including with a target to ensure that TAFE Institutes are properly funded and valued as the major providers of VET across Australia.

It must be obvious to you as Prime Minister that we cannot continue to support a VET system that is currently failing its students. This is a result of market design. Seeking to address the significant range of problems by increasing funding to ASQA and hoping it can rein in 'shonky' VET providers, will not work, if the fundamental flaws of the market are not also addressed.

We ask that your Education and Skills Ministers put the redesign of the VET system on the table during these discussion around a new Agreement, and that there is a commitment to ensuring that TAFE is properly funded.

Yours sincerely

Linda Simon

On behalf of the TAFE Community Alliance

cc. The Hon Simon Birmingham MP, Minister for Education
The Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP, Minister for Vocational Education and Skills