

16 November 2015

The Hon John Barilaro MP  
Minister for Skills  
GPO Box 341  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Minister

The TAFE Community Alliance welcomed both your freeze on TAFE fees and the reduction of fees for some pathways courses. However, we also recognise the freeze on TAFE funding and continue to express considerable concerns as to the future of TAFE NSW. Whilst additional funding may have been allocated to TAFE NSW over the last year, it is obviously not enough given the appalling situation that TAFE is in. Again we continue to hear of courses closing and teachers losing their jobs on almost a daily basis. We have addressed these issues around morale and instability in the sector in a previous letter.

Here we would like to raise some specific issues relating to TAFE fees, and pathways and access courses. In doing so, I will reiterate our opposition to the large increase in TAFE fees overall and express concerns with VET Fee-Help which is being exploited by some private providers, and is being used by others including TAFE, to help prop up other courses. We do not believe that such funding arrangements should be adopted by educational institutions.

When we met with you recently, you expressed your concerns around pathways courses and the access of young people to TAFE courses. We agreed with you, and assume that your announcement around TAFE fees was in some way a response to your concern. However there are a number of other access and pathways courses that also need to be treated in the same way.

These include:

1. The Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC), which we raised with you, and  
The Higher School Certificate

Both of these courses have been vital pathways courses for many seeking a second (or first chance) chance to progress into a higher qualification or for a career that requires such a qualification. Often these students have been those who failed at school, but after some years have reached the stage of being able to recommence their studies, or students who have migrated from other countries and require an Australian 'end of school' qualification. At one time TAFE NSW was the largest provider of the HSC across the state. However, with funding constraints, often these courses have been the first to go, under a vision that assumed that TAFE was about vocational courses only.

The TAFE Community Alliance does not share this view, and points again to the TAFE Commission Act, and TAFE's responsibilities in 'second chance' education under that Act. We ask that targeted funding be allocated to TAFE to run these courses, at a fee level that is affordable like the schools, and that this funding be particularly allocated to those geographical areas where such support is most needed, including south western Sydney and western Sydney.

2. The following programs are used effectively by TAFE Outreach to engage and support students into pathways for successful study. The Certificates 1 and 11 are a significant stepping stone for those students needing more preparation before moving on to further study. This can include many women returning to the workforce.

- Course in Vocational and Community Engagement National Code: 10093NAT
- Certificate I in Access to Work and Training (Introductory) National Code: 10087NAT
- Certificate I in Access to Work and Training National Code: 10088NAT
- Certificate II in Skills for Work and Training National Code: 10089nat
- Certificate II in Skills for Work and Training in the Community Sector 10090NAT

There are also a number of pathways courses which have been very successful in preparing Aboriginal students for further study:

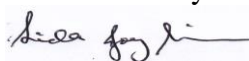
- Certificate III in Vocational and Study Pathways (10098NAT) - This course is designed for Aboriginal people who require skills and knowledge for entry to the NSW Police Service, the Department of Corrective Services and the NSW Ambulance Service and /or further education and training.
- 11942 Dip of Aboriginal Studies for Professional and Community Practice

As you can see this is not a large list of courses that require your discretion to set at a low fee or to again allow students a fee exemption, as has been past practice. You may also like to consider giving Institute Directors support and discretion to put together skills sets with fee exemptions to be used as pathways to these qualifications. Whilst reducing fees is important, the administration involved with fees, interrogations and proof of being deserving of concessions, can be a very costly process in itself. We spoke to you about the need for a far simpler process of applying an accessible fee regime in TAFE. Many of our members have found that administering the current practice is a costly and ineffective administrative nightmare that severely undermines good educational practice.

As an example of the effectiveness of free access courses, Western Sydney Institute has been able to offer from mid-October until the end of the year, free skills sets. More than 90 courses were identified from which the skills sets were taken. By November 12, there were 2455 enrolments. Whilst these were not just in the access or pathways area, they still exemplify the role that is so essential in areas such as western Sydney, where we must ensure that people are able to build their skills, both for their own benefit, and for the economy of NSW.

We look forward to working with you further around free courses, and accessible course fees in TAFE NSW.

Yours sincerely



Linda Simon

On behalf of the TAFE Community Alliance

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