



Submission from the TAFE Community Alliance to IPART

Part 1

Pricing VET under Smart and Skilled

TAFE NSW is owned and valued by the people of NSW and supports the development of skills to sustainably increase productivity, prosperity and well being (TAFE NSW website)

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Preamble

The TAFE Community Alliance welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the IPART issues paper 'Pricing VET under Smart and Skilled'. The Alliance understands that the extent of the market reforms proposed in 'Smart and Skilled' policy agenda and shaped through the proposed pricing structures in the IPART paper will have an irreversible impact on the way VET is delivered through the NSW TAFE system. We believe these market reforms will not work in the best interests of the common good and call on IPART to reconsider the entitlement and higher fee proposals particularly in relation to the social policy implications of a market driven agenda.

The TAFE Community Alliance is an advocacy and strategy network that supports the central role of the public VET provider in the building of social, cultural and economic capacity of communities across NSW. The Alliance will campaign to maintain TAFE's central role in vocational education and training. We support a strong public TAFE NSW. Our strategies include holding forums, developing strong networks of interested community members; sustaining campaigns to raise awareness about the effects of the competitive training market and loss of funding for TAFE NSW; strengthening alliances with other groups interested in building the common good through a public TAFE system, including community groups, professional associations, industry groups, unions and political parties; providing research, case studies and background information to inform members of TAFE's transformative role in the community and a communication strategy through media and on-line social networks.

TAFE NSW is a quality public Vocational and Education Training system that caters for a diverse range of students, and delivers quality vocational education and training. We believe that it is essentially a government responsibility to fund vocational education and training, and that the costs should not be passed on to students through the commercialisation of courses nor large increases to TAFE and VET fees.

TAFE NSW VET provision plays a critical social and economic role in Australian society. The TAFE public benefit is comprehensive, multifaceted and universal. VET does not enjoy the elevated status of higher education and we do not see that the returns for most individuals will operate in the same way that they do for students studying at university. The Alliance opposes the competitive market based methodology implicit in this pricing VET proposal. Our professional experience and academic research shows that competitive market based models produce a complex, confusing and fragmented educational sector which compromises consistency of easy access, delivery and outcome.

We are also concerned about the implications of announcement by the NSW State Government that increasing TAFE student fees and cutting funding under the VET reforms proposed through Smart and Skilled NSW will help fund the Gonski reforms in schools. The pressure to raise revenue to implement these important Gonski reforms undermines an objective analysis of the pricing of VET and we question the ethics of this current political strategy. It is of great community concern when one educational sector is pitted against the other in this way.

There is an urgent need to ensure TAFE NSW effectively funds the ongoing provision of second chance and further education opportunities for disadvantaged people and their communities. TAFE NSW education and training programs that build stronger metropolitan, rural and remote communities across NSW include specialist programs such as Multicultural, Outreach Place Based programs, Disabilities, Language, Literacy and Numeracy, General Education, Counselling, and Aboriginal programs. VET market reforms are stripping TAFE of these critical programs and support services and undermining the Australian Government Social Inclusion initiatives where communities can Learn to Work, Engage and Have a voice.

Our website at www.tafecommunityalliance.org provides extensive information about the work we have been involved in supporting TAFE since the launch of the Alliance late 2012.

TAFE, Citizenship and the Common Good

Unpacking the public benefit of TAFE

The VET system has proved to be resilient and responsive to issues as they arise in the economy and society and has played a crucial role in the nations well being (Ryan, 2011). This is due largely to the responsiveness and flexibility of the public provider. The formation of the current TAFE (Technical and Further Education) system in the mid 1970's was linked to the emerging social and neo-liberal economic policy issues of the time and identified second chance education as a fundamental strategy for people without the skills or qualifications to compete in an increasingly fragmented labour market. Participation in education and training became recognized as a form of active citizenship and TAFE quickly developed a key civic responsibility to ameliorate social and economic disadvantage in the broader community (Kell, 2010). Vocational Education and Training became an instrumental mechanism for evolving social and economic policy agendas. Over time the foundations of TAFE second chance education and civic educational benefit have been over ridden by an increasingly vocationalist push towards industry based competency standards as the competitive training market began to drive the VET policy agenda (Ryan, 2011).

Despite the sustained implementation of marketisation policies over at least 20 years, there is little evidence that they have succeeded and it is difficult to find any research that demonstrates that fully contestable markets in education have achieved the outcomes sought by government anywhere in the world (Wheelahan 2009). Yet the market policy agenda in VET persists producing ongoing contradictory results. Mitchell (2012) finds that the industry led VET system of the last 20 years is being undermined by an individual entitlement based user choice market mechanism, where the consumer leads the program agenda. He also contends that the idea of informed choice in the VET context has not been fully explored and in the proposed system making wrong course choices will lose students valuable entitlements. The compulsory nature of the entitlements encourages rash and inappropriate decisions resulting in unsuitable pathways to employment and ultimately wastes valuable public money. Complex fee structures, the 'race to the bottom' pricing models and the lack of accessible information on subsidies in states where this market model exists have resulted in calls for better consumer protection and effective regulation of the VET market (Burke and Veenker, 2012). Surely such policing of the market increases the cost to the public and is economically counter productive to the non-financial aspect of the public benefit (that is the tax paying public). It is hard to see where such

market –based public policy makes better economic sense for the broader community.

Current Australian and international welfare to work policies employ the same market principle in a model that seeks to ‘activate’ income support recipients. The international research identifies the gaps between accounts of agency grounded in the lived experiences of social actors (policy-makers, front-line workers and service users) and hypothetical models of individual agency (e.g. ‘rational economic man’), which have been more influential in policy design. In the UK nine out of ten jobseekers find employment within a year of claiming benefits without contact with employment programs and those who remain in the system are generally the most disadvantaged (Wright, 2012). Public policy and practice that is developed and grounded in the lived experiences of front-line workers and service users rather than a one size fits all ‘choice’ model makes for better public and private benefit outcomes overall.

Australia’s marketised employment services system has been the subject of ongoing media investigations and is currently under review. In the current system a Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) is used to identify barriers to work and if intensive assistance is required a further Job Capacity Assessment is undertaken which aims to provide personalized help and target services training and education generally through an RTO. Job seekers are streamed and priced into four streams; with stream one the more job ready and stream four the most disadvantaged. Submissions to the review indicate that the system is complex, over-engineered and under-resourced. The fee structures and performance management mechanisms tend to standardize rather than customize or innovate employment support services. There are problems with the professionalism of JSA staff involved in frontline activity especially in relation to assessing the complex social needs of JSA clients. Market calibrated outcome payments for Streams 3 & 4 do not meet the client’s sustained and complex employment support needs. A common pattern emerges - market-based public policy measures do not meet the complex needs of the most disadvantaged individuals. The current system is failing the most vulnerable in our communities and this includes JSA’s who are also registered for profit and not for profit RTO’s delivered accredited VET training; see submissions by the National Welfare Rights Network, ACOSS, the University of Melbourne and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (<http://home.deewr.gov.au/submissions/default.htm>).

The University of Melbourne submission to the Employment Services Review effectively summarises the needs of this group:

“For the most disadvantaged groups of learners especially those of disability support pensions and Streams 3 / 4 on Newstart- the aim of a range of stakeholders is to break the cycle of disadvantage holding this group back from meaningful participation in society and the economy. The focus on a deficit model, together with the scarcity of employment opportunities to suit the needs and circumstances of people with multiple and significant labour disadvantages, financial disincentives to move from welfare to work and the stricture of policies and regulations produced by various arms of government funding services for welfare recipients undermine progress towards breaking the cycle of disadvantage. In this income support structure VET students who are on Disability Support or Stream 3/4 JSA clients struggle with a broad range of personal, family, lifestyle, health or equity issues accessing multiple services. They face discrimination in the job market, have

unstable housing, or live in isolated areas, have been involved in the justice system, have learning, mental health or substance abuse issues and often have poor foundations learning skills. They are often fast tracked into accredited training programs that rarely leads to sustainable employment (low level qualifications) without solid learning foundations and these learners don't fit into a linear learning pathway especially a system that gives them 'one bite a the cherry' or a training entitlement at each qualification level." (Considine, M, O'Sullivan, S & Olney, S, 2013 p6)

There is strong support for a place/ area based consortium model for the most disadvantaged jobseekers/learners where there is collaboration not competition between employment and other services (including TAFE) to assist people with multiple needs. Better collaboration and long term planning between agencies and levels of government in PLACE/area based consortium initiatives can have great social and economic outcomes. TAFE plays a crucial role in these initiatives particularly in supporting and engaging disadvantaged students and in developing the knowledge and skills that are needed for an innovative, competitive workforce. TAFE *anticipates, develops, codifies and institutionalises* knowledge and skills needed the workforce now, but also in the future (Wheelahan, 2013).

Pricing mechanisms and Community Service Obligations

Based on the growing amount of evidence surrounding the market failures in public policy, the TAFE Community Alliance find the pricing mechanisms outlined in the IPART paper such as disadvantaged cost loadings, entitlements, the public/ private benefit rationale and narrow definition of Community Service Obligations TAFE particularly concerning. We fail to see how these mechanisms can be sustainable public policy mechanisms for a socially just and cohesive society.

The rationale for the pricing mechanisms in the IPART paper mirrors the assessing of the public and private benefits of higher education outlined in the Grattan Institute 'Graduate Winners' report (Norton, 2012). Defining the private /public return on VET qualifications in an policy framework that suggests that subsidising performing arts graduates in higher education provide little or financial public benefit (they fail to pay enough tax) is alarming. In fact most actors are gainfully employed and paying tax in a job that may or may not be related to the performing arts. This economic logic muddies the real social purpose of education including VET. Who's cost is it anyway - the public (we the people), the employer (who is a member of the public anyway) or the individual (who is also a member of the public)?

It is interesting to note that the real public value of education is briefly outlined in the public non-financial benefits associated with VET. These are benefits to individuals, organisations or members of the broader community and less obvious or tangible. The Productivity Commission describes

- Spillover benefits to third parties such as increased rates of innovation, new ideas, increased generic skills and basic knowledge capabilities
- Civic benefits relating to social cohesion, support to the functioning of democracy, lower crime rates and increased community health benefits

It is of no surprise that these non- financial benefits describe the social and economic foundations of the current TAFE system. Second chance education and the role a public TAFE system plays in citizenship, community building and social inclusion cannot be underestimated. As stated in the Productivity Commission's Report into the Vocational Training Workforce (2011) education and training are essential to generate the skills and knowledge required for a productive economy. They also facilitate social inclusion and civic participation. The fundamental issue in the assessment of the public or private benefit in education is how effectively that assessment understands the facilitation of social inclusion and civic participation. How does the community service obligation guarantee social inclusion for the common good? TAFE NSW has a highly professional and effective social inclusion strategy that includes Counseling, Disability Consultants, Aboriginal, Outreach and Multicultural teaching sections who work in partnership (place based) with the government and non-government sectors to achieve the best learning and work outcomes for TAFE students. Social inclusion is a complex process that requires informed, professional workers to build individual and community capacity.

How does social inclusion work?

Social inclusion aims to address the situation where individuals and groups are excluded from participating in the social, economic and political activity of society as a whole due to poverty, lack of education and other circumstances (Vinson, 2009). Social exclusion is a lack of access to civil, political and social rights and opportunities. The process of social inclusion for the most disengaged learner is a complex and often an immeasurable process. The interplay of inclusive/exclusive factors work along a social trajectory, so much so that education levels, work skills and participation in employment, level of income, the rates of disability, indicators of child care and observance of the law, among other measurable attributes, tend to operate like a constraining web in unfavourable circumstances, or like a trampoline thrusting people upwards in more favourable circumstances (Vinson, 2013).

The characteristics of social exclusion and poverty in Australia including education levels have been identified extensively in the literature see (Vinson, 2009); (Saunders, Hill & Bradbury, 2008); (Fawcett et al, 2009) and (ACOSS, 2010). The interplay of these factors can have intergenerational effects on disengaged families and their communities. Davies, Lamb & Doecke (2011) find that low-skill and disengaged learners are disproportionately drawn from key groups of disadvantaged Australians including the indigenous community, people with disabilities, early school leavers, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, low skilled older people without qualifications and individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged families. These learners can have a range of backgrounds and experiences that exclude them from education, training and work including a lack of knowledge of education and training options, low confidence or interest in learning, lack of transport and money, low foundation skills and educational attainment and learning anxiety. Other barriers include family commitments, low income, disabilities, health issues, refugee status, age and childcare. Community and vocational networks are generally limited compounding low aspiration and an inability to negotiate career pathways. Insecure housing, homelessness and the prospect of low skilled insecure employment are the lived realities of these communities.

“However, in highly disadvantaged areas programs must be sustained for a substantial period – say, 8 years or longer. Otherwise there is a demonstrated risk of a ‘boomerang effect’; that is: the reassertion of previous problems.” (Vinson, T 2006)

Vinson (2013) identifies learning as an extremely effective way of engaging with adults who have been isolated from both the labour market and other aspects of wider society, and further education has a crucial role to play here. He recommends that it would make economic sense as well as social sense if premium funding were provided for the recruitment and retention of learners from disadvantaged communities. But first it needs to be recognised that even those who engage with learning but do not go into active employment, or are learning in areas not straightforwardly related to their employment, contribute to their communities in other important ways – such as improved civic political engagement, including volunteering, and better health (including mental health) and reduced crime. The value of learning and working in social and community enterprises is often the most effective way of engaging individuals. The value of the men’s shed movement is an example of the importance of this learning to work engagement pathway.

Burke and Veenker (2012) from their report on the Victorian VET market identify that more work and research is needed into the funding implications of high needs learners with complex issues. They found that disengaged learners and students needing support have difficulty maintaining commitment to VET without considerable support in and outside the classroom. Careful consideration is needed of the levels and forms of support needed.

Social inclusion requires strategic policy making grounded in experience and practice to ensure that the most disadvantaged in the community are really given a ‘fair go’. TAFE is integral to this process. How will the Community Service Obligations and price loadings outlined in the paper guarantee that TAFE is an active and professional part of the social inclusion process? As Burke and Veenker (2012) conclude in their analysis of the Victorian VET system more research, better funding/pricing models and careful consideration is needed before NSW implements a pricing system in a social policy vacuum.

TCA Responses

1. Do you agree with our proposed approach for developing a methodology to determine prices, student fees and government subsidies for government- funded VET?

Do you think this approach will lead to arrangements that ensure students and government make an appropriate contribution to the efficient costs of providing VET courses, qualifications and part-qualifications?

There is a presumption that the market is the most effective way of allocating public money.

We have some concerns around the key components of the price and fee arrangements which include

- a) base price: in this context what does efficient mean and how is the required quality standard assessed?
- b) Loadings: in terms of disadvantage how will this be assessed, will for example the public provider still have the capacity to make professional decisions around more complex disadvantage. This would require CSO funding to maintain specialist units to identify needs and provide support. While some aspects of disadvantage might be simply categorized complex disadvantage requires specialist services that do not further disadvantage the marginalized.
- c) In Box 2.3 a statement narrowly directs Community Service Obligations (CSOs) towards thin markets, which we see as excluding significant sectors that must be included in such funding. For example for a student with a disability the CSO would be expected the operational costs and specialist disability staff for the Disabilities unit, while the loading should cover the in class support.

Furthermore there is strong evidence that TAFE achieves outstanding outcomes with huge public benefits in very disadvantaged communities through its wrap around services of TAFE Outreach, Multicultural Coordinators, the Aboriginal Education units, Counselling units, specialist disability support and libraries. As community service obligations to achieve social purposes and social policy (Commonwealth of Australia 1997) those units would require funding from this source. It should be noted the public benefit for these program far exceed private benefits.

Further investigation and understanding of additional costs associated with training disadvantaged and regional students are required to determine loadings and CSOs. Research such as "The Complete Package" (Allen Consulting p6) provides valuable evidence. 'Specialist positions and services provided by Institutes work with local communities to offer flexible and innovative programs for students with multiple barriers and provide pathways to further training and employment. The specialised units responsible for delivering improved outcomes to certain community groups are an important feature.'

Guenther 2006 finds VET provision "points to the important role of VET in building community capacity".

2. Are our proposed assessment criteria for the review reasonable and consistent with our terms of reference?

Concerns are that the assessment criteria overlook key elements of the terms of reference, specifically:

- dimensions and characteristics of the VET market
- entry requirements and barriers to the market
- market failures
- size of market segments (thin or robust)
- potential for cost-shifting

How can any adverse effects arising from base prices that reflect an average cost within an industry group be addressed (eg, service quality implications)?

If pricing by qualification how do you deal with non completion or failure of units? Can student return at any time to complete, do they have to pay for full qualification again?

5. With reference to method 2 (map costs to UoC):

How should the methodology take account of different modes of delivery (ie, classroom based and flexible delivery)?

While this method appears to be fairer it would be extremely complex. We would question the economic viability of executing systems.

Reasonable adjustments to cater for our full range of students must be included in costing including; adapting learning resources based on the universal design for Learning Principles and assistive technologies for students with disabilities

There should be no difference between modes of delivery, as teachers are still required to prepare up to date resources, provide ongoing input, support and feedback, as well as assessments of students. With flexible delivery the necessity of communicating with students outside a fixed time allocation leads to an increase in workload.

6 What student groups are more costly to train, and why? What additional costs are associated with providing training for these students?

The IPART *Pricing VET under Smart and Skilled Issues Paper* identifies certain groups who will attract a loading : disadvantaged students (eg Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, students with a disability , and long-term unemployed) as well as those studying in regional locations.

Disadvantage needs to be clearly identified as this connects to two key assumptions behind the Issues paper.

The first assumption is that future VET students all have the key abilities to make appropriate course choices and career decisions in the first instance when choosing their education or training program. The second assumption is that students are prepared for undertaking their training program. These assumptions are crucial to the proposal to charge fees to those not 'entitled' to training and to charge a higher rate of fee to those studying a second or subsequent qualification.

The paper acknowledges that the human capital approach to assessing private and public financial and non financial benefits “assumes that students (and potential students) have complete information about the costs of potential earnings from undertaking different courses and qualifications” (p.48). It notes that Smart and Skilled envisages “improved information provision ...so that consumers “have better information to make informed choices about their training” ” (p.48). Yet “ in choosing career pathways, information is necessary but not sufficient to support decision-making” (Westell and Panizzon, 2011). Information should be supported by career guidance provided by qualified professionals (Burke & Veenker, 2012; DEEWR, 2011).

Career decision making (and learning) are dependent on cognitive processes and abilities. The core abilities required for career decision making are the “executive functions” of working memory, cognitive flexibility and impulse inhibition which *generally* develop in late adolescence, early adulthood. These abilities enable people to engage in planning, prioritizing, problem solving , verbal-reasoning, sustaining and switching attention – all involved in both decision making and learning. These functions also contribute to optimism and future orientation.

Those who have difficulty with these capacities include some young people with slower development, people with *learning difficulties*, those with *learning, other neurological or intellectual disabilities / disorders* and people “ dealing with chronic stress, anxiety or worries (including the chronic stress of social disadvantage). This “ has a clear and demonstrable negative effect upon executive functioning and ability to learn, make decisions and plan” (Westell and Panizzon, 2011, p. 22). Additionally, chronic stress which impacts on cognitive functioning includes people experiencing homelessness, problems with drug or alcohol dependency, domestic violence, sexual assault, torture/trauma, refugee detention, bullying, depression, anxiety, other mental health problems or disorders which impact on both cognitive functioning and interpersonal behaviour/relationships. Students who left school early or missed significant portions of schooling may not have developed these skills to their capacity, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. Certain medications for physical or mental health conditions can also impact on cognitive function, resulting in slower processing or capacity learn restricted to certain times of day.

The population most likely to undertake VET studies has significant challenges. Over 26% of Australians aged 16-24 experience a mental health disorder in any year (ABS, 2007). Of these figures:

- prevalence is higher for young women (30%)
- significant numbers experience a substance use disorder (12.7%) with these figures being higher for young men (15.5%)
- more than 25% experience 2 or more co-occurring disorders, confirming teachers experience of needing to support students with more complex needs.
- the highest incidence (first experience) of mental health disorders is in the 18-25 age bracket, when more people are first engaged in post secondary education and need assistance to identify what is happening and to remain engaged in an appropriate level of training (ABS, 2006).

Life crises may contribute to reduced capacity to engage in learning at key points in a person's training pathway.

TAFE teachers and support services are aware of the significant need to support these students beyond the inclusion of literacy and numeracy training. Such students and future students need professional assistance and encouragement to:

- select courses appropriate to their level of ability and preparedness for learning
- to develop individual learning plans
- to adjust to the demands of the learning environment and to succeed in their studies. They need assistance to develop basic learning skills and personal management as identified in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development.

Within the TAFE NSW system, there is a network of services which provide this professional assistance, offering multiple entry points for students and future students to receive such assistance. The services include:

- TAFE Counselling and Career Development services which assist future and enrolled students who are having difficulty with course and career decision making and learning. This is an integrated service enabling assessment of educational and learning capabilities and difficulties, career decision making capacity and psychological preparedness for study, as well as providing integrated, targeted support with these issues through all phases of learning. TAFE Counsellors also assist students to overcome the barriers created by the range of psychosocial and interpersonal issues mentioned above
- Specialist Disability services who bring expertise to understand the impact of particular disabilities on learning and to provide targeted educational support to students as appropriate (consider the needs of a student with cognitive problems as a result of drug dependency, compared to the needs of a student with a severe learning disability, or the needs of a student with epilepsy, or a student who is blind).
- Foundation studies sections which provide specialist language, literacy and numeracy skills development prior to or during their vocational studies, as well as providing assistance to build confidence as a learner
- Outreach teachers who engage the most disadvantaged students in a professionally supportive environment using adult education strategies to design programs customized to specific groups
- Course information officers who have guidelines for referring confused or uncertain prospective students to the relevant TAFE support service

The network of services enables the identification and assessment of students or future students who will most likely have problems with choosing appropriate courses and/or engaging in and completing their studies. The services are then able to implement targeted support for students to complete. By being embedded within TAFE Colleges, these support services are able to build a body of knowledge about vocational training as well as linkages with teachers in various industry areas and vice versa. This informs the service and information provided to students with complex difficulties.

It should be noted that Smart and Skilled acknowledges the need to assist students with a disability, including via concession fee and loading but does not state what definition of disability will be used, how such students will be identified, and what support they will be provided. It should also be noted that future students with obvious *sensory, physical or intellectual disabilities* are usually provided with a transition support program into VET studies and are referred by their school to TAFE or VET providers. Most others, including those mentioned above, will arrive at VET training providers without identifying their learning support needs. They will either minimise their needs due to concern about stigma, or lack insight into the impact of their needs. A network of support services, working closely with teaching sections is crucial to success in VET.

Groups which are more costly to train include those identified by IPART and those requiring training using more expensive equipment which frequently involves more intensive supervision in order to ensure safety, as well as those doing compulsory work experience programs which require supervision and mentoring, for example, nursing, welfare, child studies.

In addition, students having difficulty with engagement and motivation, difficulty with learning in their course place higher demands on college services to assist with engagement.

Furthermore groups with multiple dimensions of disadvantage and complex needs are more costly to train and include; socially isolated, intergenerational poverty, homeless and at risk of homelessness and refugees. In a recent study of the Lifecourse institutional costs of homeless and vulnerable groups, costs for the individuals studied ranged from \$900,000 to \$5.5 million (for the youngest person) (Baldry, et al, 2012). Place based early intervention programs for these vulnerable groups that include ongoing VET support (CSO's) will help reduce these cost to the community in the longer term.

It is critical these programs continue as Special Access Courses exempt from fees. Many have no means to pay a concession, whether they be welfare recipients or the working poor. Current ABS statistics show 8% of the working population were not fully employed with most of the people wanting to work more hours. This cohort has grown since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

Special Access Courses are used for vocational and community engagement, teach skills in career opportunities, community training, employment skills, literacy, numeracy, reading and writing, school mentoring, signed language, volunteer tutoring and work readiness.

In community capacity building programs this also prevents ghettoising classes or undermining class dynamics. Many students with complex disadvantage living close to the poverty line have no means of paying the concession fee let alone other fees. Many are not motivated to undertake study, have had negative education experiences and do not have the skills and knowledge required to undertake further study, do not have the confidence and have little awareness of their own potential or how to access available support services. Special Access Course provides a space for disadvantaged people and communities to be re engaged in programs with specialist support (2012 Partners in Learning and Community Enterprise (PLACE) Project Final Report - 2009 -2012, Davies, Lamb & Doecke, E. 2011, NSWTOx Case studies 2012). Vinson (2013) suggests:

“It would make economic sense as well as social sense if premium funding were provided for the recruitment and retention of learners from disadvantaged communities”.

These students are the disengaged learners identified in the Victorian paper (Davies, Lamb & Doecke, E. 2011) Strategic Review of Effective Re-Engagement Models For Disengaged Learners. In order to engage these learners fee exempt specialist programs are required to overcome complex barriers.

The report refers to the successful TAFE NSW Outreach place based program which aims to “overcome barriers to participation; to deliver community based learning opportunities in partnership with community/support agencies; to develop pathways for tentative learners; and to complement, link with and provide access into other TAFE provision” (Cooke et al., 2010).

“outreach strategies which are community-based, which seek out specific target groups, and which acknowledge complex patterns of disadvantage, appear to have the best chance of increasing VET access” (Considine, Watson, & Hall, 2005 p15).

In the case of some disabilities assistive technologies are imperative to the learning process as are interpreters, learner support or other support strategies for students with hearing, physical, intellectual, neurological and psychiatric disabilities and acquired brain injury. It is essential that there continues to be funding for these highly specialised disability support services. TAFE students that have disabilities can receive support from specialised TAFE disability consultants and this support is often the difference between them undertaking and completing their studies or withdrawing. (Cooke et al., 2010).

Vinson’s Dropping of the Edge study found building cohesion through meaningful strategies such as education and training/re-training to be effective in addressing community disadvantage:

“However, in highly disadvantaged areas programs must be sustained for a substantial period – say, 8 years or longer. Otherwise there is a demonstrated risk of a ‘boomerang effect’; that is: the reassertion of previous problems.” (Vinson, T 2006)

7. Regarding thin markets:

What training markets are likely to have low levels of demand and high operating costs (these markets may be defined geographically, by occupation or demographically)?

Should we test for a thin market by using the difference between the cost per student and the base price (plus loadings) expressed as a percentage?

If so, what is the appropriate threshold of cost in excess of the base price (plus loadings) do you think is appropriate?

What other test should we consider?

The TCA supports the commitment to providing vocational education and training in all markets, including 'thin' markets and supports the TAFE's crucial role in ensuring training is provided in all regions, to all demographic groups and where skills are required.

IPART has clearly identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, which should be incorporated. Other groups not to be overlooked include:

- Young people at risk who need a targeted and supported program to develop foundation skills before entering vocational training
- Students with a disability (intellectual or other) who need an access program prior to entering a mainstream vocational training program.

When using thin markets to identify disadvantaged groups where public economic benefits can be substantial, the time, expertise and wrap around support services effectively applied in TAFE must be factored in. As with those assessed by stream 3 and 4 by the DEERW Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) and Job Capacity Assessment, the solutions are not quick fixes they take time and a space where students are given the space to drop in and out of programs without being penalized but instead maintaining relationships and building confidence and access to required support services applying adult education strategies.

8 How should the price and fee arrangements take account of the Government's training priorities when sharing base prices between student fees and government subsidies?

Should the arrangements also consider the private and public net benefits that may be realised when a student undertakes VET?

What alternative approach or criteria should be used to decide how the efficient costs of VET should be shared between students and taxpayers?

Vocational Education and Training that is profit driven risks thin learning, stripping learning back to the core of curriculum "narrow tightly prescribed skill sets", as opposed to broader skill sets that better equip students to manage change in various aspects of life including work Allen Consulting (2006 p10). Consideration needs to be given to the paradox posed by the system with qualified students achieving narrow skills thus needing more training which they are less likely to be able to access with fees becoming a greater barrier. Allen Consulting (2006 p18) examines benefits including personal, firm and community benefits:

“While there are clear benefits for individuals undertaking vocational education and training, and for the firms that employ such people, there are also a set of broader benefits that are captured by the community as a whole.

In effect, training is just one element within the machine that is our economic system: to the degree that training improves firm performance there is greater employment opportunities for all, greater taxation revenue for governments, and so on; to the degree that training improves employee incomes there is likely to be greater personal expenditure, resulting in more local jobs, and greater government taxation revenue.”

Particular communities have identifiable characteristics in their complex needs and multiple dimensions of disadvantage. Examples of this being:

- The City of Sydney area has over an representation of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness this includes people sleeping rough, people living in crisis accommodation and boarding houses, people with disabilities, ex-offenders, people with chronic drug and alcohol issues, youth at risk, women at risk of domestic violence and the isolated social housing residents.
- Mt Druitt identifies intergenerational disadvantage where families may have experienced welfare dependency and unemployment for generations. DCS in Mt Druitt have also identified this as local characteristic. Their disadvantage is complex and entrenched and costly in terms of community safety, welfare payments, drug and alcohol misuse, health and mental health costs.
- Warwick Farm socially isolated and excluded, here is markedly high number of single dwelling occupancy (ABS 2011). Many of these are men have mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse, poor health, unemployed, welfare dependency.
- Fairfield: refugees recovering form trauma and torture. Highly literate to non-literate in own language, interrupted schooling, some with high level spoken English language and little written English language, high level of responsibilities for caring health, interpreting, services appointments

Beneficial outcomes for individuals vary considerably. The identified ‘private benefits’ refer to higher after-tax earnings, increased likelihood of employment as well as non-financial benefits such as increased self-esteem, life satisfaction and happiness. Such benefits are based on complex factors and outcomes vary with individual circumstances and opportunities. The question arises as to where is the equity in costing private benefit for those who do not actually obtain higher earnings, or who continue to struggle with personal or psychological barriers which undermine “self-esteem”. The price and fee arrangements should not take into account estimated personal benefits. Should it be the difference between public benefits and the cost?

Paying for subsequent qualifications – in a family context family finance priorities take precedence over study – more likely to try and get any job rather than continue on to achieve potential.

9 What is the effect of the level of student fees on students' participation in VET?

What effect might a hypothetical doubling of fees have?

Stone's (2013) research shows a disproportionately high level of the 2nd quintile of most disadvantaged in NSW are VET students. Based on those statistics and stakeholder feedback students currently struggle to pay their fees, even concessions. The doubling of concessions has impacted on students with some not able to continue on their trajectory to further study. Recent fee increases have had similar effects particularly noted in working poor families where women in particular had factored in the costs and were prepared to make sacrificing to pay the fee, the fee increase put the course beyond reach. This is a loss to the student, the family, the economy and society.

Doubling student fees serves to create greater division in society where some can afford to study on move through vocational streams to achieve their potential while others are trapped in jobs they are not satisfied in and often poorly paid. For example in unskilled work people become less physically able to perform their duties, to them re skilling or upskilling would become an unaffordable luxury.

Students need to be at the centre of an easily understood fee system as demonstrated in Toner's research and the Victorian system. The complexity under Smart and Skills is likely to pose the first barrier. Under the proposed model we also have concerns around students being able to make informed choices in a market that is confusing and the student is at the mercy of profit driven providers.

The public benefits are extensive for programs that change the lives and communities of marginalized people as mentioned in the introduction. These come through as increased social inclusion, improved wellbeing, better school attendance and motivation to continue, lower government spending on welfare dependency, health, mental health, law and order, family breakdown and suicide. Stronger more productive communities.

10. What is the impact of any capacity to pay and/or credit constraints faced by students or prospective students?

Fees are highly significant for those in lower socio economic groups. For the most disadvantaged a part of the special Access programs would be about motivating them to discover their potential and develop a viable pathway to achieving their career goals. Support in finding viable financial means to pay costs, even concessions, can be challenging and a barrier to further learning despite capabilities and long term benefits. In a family context family finance priorities take precedence over study, the student is more likely to try and get any job rather than continue on to achieve potential. These students are also vulnerable to unscrupulous RTOs who offer incentives such as less time or gimmicks as with the ipads. A recent experience saw a young woman ready to take on a preparatory Cert II level program in order to gain entry to a Cert IV. She was recruited by a new local RTO to do a Diploma in minimal time. How does the pricing of VET guarantee quality in VET provision?

We're concerned at the debt burden being promoted in order to achieve relatively low level qualifications that are not likely to improve income capacity significantly.

11. How could the approach to sharing base prices between student fees and government subsidy take account of any positive externalities associated with the provision of VET?

(Toner, 2010) There are large potential costs in VET service delivery failure. Inadequate training lowers labour force productivity. Contracting imposes inefficient search costs on potential users seeking to avoid adverse selection of VET providers. It also creates a negative externality for public and private providers in terms of ‘reputational risk’ to higher quality providers as the perception of low quality may deter potential students and other potential users from participating in VET.

12 . Do any other characteristics of the VET sector warrant additional government subsidy of the costs of VET provision?

The community capacity building and developmental process of the TAFE access and entry level programs, Outreach vocational and community engagement, prevocational, foundation, language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills require additional funding. These programs can take time to build based on the complex characteristics outlined in Question 6 and contextualised in our preamble.

In the case of some disabilities assistive technologies are imperative to the learning process as are interpreters, learner support or other support strategies for students with hearing, physical, intellectual, neurological and psychiatric disabilities and acquired brain injury. It is essential that there continues to be funding for these highly specialised disability support services. TAFE students that have disabilities can receive support from specialised TAFE disability consultants and this support is often the difference between them commencing their studies and completing their studies or withdrawing.

13. What is the appropriate relativity between student fees for VET and student contributions for university study?

The completion premiums attached to university qualifications are consistently significant 3 years on and increase over time whereas VET completions tends to have only small effects on earnings, disappearing within 3 years (Herault et al, 2010)

The earnings of VET graduates and apprentices are low. Horticultural trainees average \$32, 216 pa, apprentice tilers and textiles workers are next up the list of low-income workers with Baristas at the 15th lowest on \$37, 928. The other categories include Hairdressers (\$38, 363), laundry workers (\$39, 185), service station attendants (\$40, 755) and waiters (\$41, 073). From this report it is estimated that it would take only 2,900 surgeons to earn \$ 1 billion and a staggering 26,000 hairdressers to earn the same (SMH, May 4th-5th 2013). The relativity of private benefit is clear! Pricing VET in these vocational areas is a further tax on the working poor.

14 . Which of these options do you think best meets the assessment criteria for this review:

- **the student fee (and government subsidy) is an increasing percentage of the base price, depending on qualification level or**
- **the student fee (and government subsidy) is the same percentage of the base price for all qualification levels areas.**
- **Are there any other options that better meet these criteria?**

TCA supports full government subsidy for foundation skills training (language, literacy, numeracy and foundational ICT); prevocational training (Year 10 CGVE, Year 12 HSC and TPC general education training); access prevocational programs to encourage engagement of disadvantaged students or in areas of trades skills shortages.

To encourage completion of higher level qualifications, student contributions should not be an increasing percentage with higher level qualifications. This would otherwise contradict the assumptions in recognition: if higher level qualifications contain embedded lower level qualifications and units, the units should be charged at a constant rate regardless of what level is being studied.

Paying for subsequent qualifications for example in a family context, family finance priorities take precedence over study – the student is more likely to try and get any job rather than continue on to achieve potential. This is a loss to the individual, the economy and society

15 What criteria do you think we should use to decide on the additional contribution that should be made by students undertaking a subsequent qualification?

Could these criteria be the basis of a fee setting rule?

The TAFE Community Alliance does not support an additional contribution for undertaking subsequent qualifications for several reasons. This practice would undermine the notion of lifelong learning “the key to remaining competitive and maintaining and enhancing community prosperity” (Allen consulting 2006) and the reality that the “world of work is in continuous and unrelenting change. New businesses, industries and jobs are emerging involving tasks, services and products that may not have existed previously. In this world of work, individuals may experience a succession of jobs in a lifetime (McMahon and Tatham, 2008, p7). “Skills are no longer ‘front end loaded’ onto a career. They are characterized by lifelong development and renewal. Most skill sets have a finite life” (Career Development and Upskilling, Kelly Global Workforce Index, p16).

The fact that Australia has one of the most casualised work forces and that individuals are more likely to experience unemployment and underemployment several times throughout their lifetime heightens the need for lifelong learning so they can respond to the changing needs of the workforce (McMahon and Tatham, 2008).

The link between particular vocational training and occupational outcomes is also tenuous as some training pathways are more tightly linked with specific jobs while others have a much weaker relationship (Wheelahan et al., 2012). It is not clear what actual benefits any given

individual will receive as a result of their training. See TCA Case studies for importance of flexible pathways without penalty.

“Vocational streams consist of linked occupations within broad fields of practice and, in turn, each occupation leads to a number of jobs. Individuals need capabilities that allow them to move vertically and horizontally within vocational streams, rather than knowledge and skills for a specific job” (Wheelahan et al., 2012p8). Vocational streams are not tightly defined by individual jobs, but consist of linked occupations within broad fields of practice, and in turn, each occupation leads to a number of jobs. Individuals need capabilities that allow them to move vertically and horizontally within vocational streams, rather than the knowledge and skills for a specific job. (Wheelahan et al., 2012)

“There is a huge irony in a system of private VET provision that regards education as being about preparing young people for their one job until age 65, as people of all ages are needing more flexibility to move in and out of work, have families, retrain, work internationally, change fields and participate in work at any age.” (Golding 2012 p20-21)

General skills provide economy wide efficiency gains, especially improved labour market mobility. (Toner 2011p5) [Private and public benefits.] A wider skill and knowledge base of workers fits them for a wider range of job openings and enables them to adapt more readily to technological change.

16. What evidence is there on the benefits of part-qualifications? Is it appropriate to share the costs of part-qualifications between students and taxpayers in the same way as full qualifications?

If not, what other approach would be appropriate?

Part qualifications are suitable for many potential students including:

- people who due to personal circumstances at the time are unable to complete a full qualification. These students most frequently are from disadvantaged backgrounds (See Q6)
- Overseas qualified migrants who need to select individual units to adapt their skills and knowledge to the Australian local workforce.
- People who have completed a qualification but need to complete elective unit(s)/ competencies required in a particular job
- People without qualifications who have existing skills and need additional upskilling / competencies to secure employment, for example, when made redundant. They frequently cannot afford the time or money to undertake a full qualification.
- Those who are uncertain about a career pathway and need to try a particular area

This question relates to the recognition process. There is no mention in the issues paper of how recognition would be costed yet recognition is a key principal and requirement of the Australian Qualifications Framework. The TCA would support freely available or low cost recognition services.

18 How important are concession fee arrangements (rather than the availability of concession fees themselves) for providing equitable access to VET?

Should concession fee arrangements be aligned with fee arrangements for other students? For example:

Should concession fees be charged per qualification rather than per annum (or time served)?

Should the level of the concession fee vary by level of qualification?

Concession fees are essential for unemployed and low-income earners. As many of these experience considerable disadvantage, they frequently need to take longer to complete their qualification due to health, psychosocial stress, social demands and other factors.

This would require a fixed low fee (per qualification) rather than annual fee as these already disadvantaged students would otherwise be penalized for needing to take extra time to complete training. Providers would then need to be fully subsidized for provision of training with additional loading or special funding

We have already seen this year with the doubling of concession fees student not being able to continue with study.

Those eligible for concessions have a comparable capacity to pay thus penalizing a prospective student for attempting a higher level qualification unfair and poses limitations or barriers to students' progress.

21 Should the current payment arrangements under the Apprenticeship and Trainee Training Program (ATTP) and Strategic Skills Program (SSP) be maintained? If so, should the staged payment of student fees also match these arrangements?

The current payments for identified equity groups are already inadequate. The narrowly identified equity groups also fail to include other groups previously mentioned in this submission

24. In the years following implementation of Smart and Skilled, would it be appropriate to set a range for the student fee, rather than a single student fee, for each qualification?

No

25. Do you support relaxing fee regulation in areas of the government-funded VET market where competition is considered effective?

No. Private colleges already have the opportunity to set their own fees. As government funding is being used, there should be a fixed rate. It is not the role of government to promote profit for private enterprises using government funds.

There would be sufficient opportunity for those outside of government-funded organizations to have unregulated pricing.

Case Studies from Support Services

1. Mr M, a 45 yr old male refugee with an overseas law degree was unable to gain work in Australia due to the different legal system and no prior local work history. He enrolled in a Cert III in English for Further studies to prepare for study in English and to learn about Australian education and learning system. Experiences flashbacks in classes triggered by other students' behaviour. Wishes to withdraw and is supported by counselling service to remain in course. Student needs to work part time, as Centrelink benefit does not cover accommodation, travel and living expenses. He enrolled in a Cert II in security course to satisfy his short-term plan of obtaining work. His longer-term plan is to re-train in Accounting. Mr M enrolled in a Cert IV in Accounting. He was unsure of his ongoing ability to study as he has PTSD from his experiences of torture and imprisonment. Mr M studied part time while working. He received ongoing counselling assistance when he became overwhelmed with workload pressures as well as family pressures from his country of origin. He was assisted to negotiate adjustments in his assessments. Mr M then progressed to complete his Diploma in Accounting. HE was given support and encouragement to apply for associated university studies – explanation of the university application process, explanation of recognition schemes and schemes for educational disadvantage.

Comment: Mr M needed pathways to higher qualifications, whether at Diploma or University level. His pathway included moving from a Cert III to a Cert II before continuing to a Cert IV in a different field. This enabled him to manage the stress of PTSD and adjustment to a new culture, including a different education system as well as meet short-term goals to work. He gradually regained confidence in his ability.

2. Mrs A is a 42 yo woman who cares for her adult daughter who has a severe intellectual disability. Mrs A completed a cooking course when she left school and worked in restaurants for many years. She sustained a back injury and was no longer able to continue in the hospitality industry. Mrs A has excellent garment construction skills and a business plan for a niche market in fashion. Mrs A has a severe learning disability. This, together with the demands on her personal life, means that she would struggle to complete a Diploma or Certificate IV in Fashion at her stage in life. She wants to do a part qualification to develop essential skills to make her products or obtain work in an area of talent.
3. J is a 26yo female studying a Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) IV (Year 12 equivalent). J had previously studied a Cert II in Aged Care work which she did through an Outreach program so that she could get casual work – she thought she was good with old people and did not know what she wanted to do for a career. J had previously started a TPC but dropped out for 2 years because of drug and alcohol problems, court appearances and problems with the justice system. J was very unconfident about her prospects but showed potential. J struggled with her drug issues and ongoing court demands. She needed to adjust her TPC study program on 2 occasions, by reducing her load. J needed tutorial assistance for Chemistry and Maths which was required to become a primary school teacher.

Comment: J commenced her training without having a career plan but wanting to “get my life together”. She had a couple of false starts prior to completing the TPC. During her study J received counselling from a TAFE Counsellor to develop study and organization skills, to assist her in developing a career plan and making a decision for her future and in managing family and life stresses which arose during her study. J received tutorial support from the Disability unit. J was accepted into University and had been drug free for 12 months when she left TAFE.

4. Sue was a 19yo young woman doing a Cert III business traineeship with a government department and enrolled in TAFE. Her parents, both migrants to Australia, were proud that she had this opportunity. Her employer acknowledged that she had excellent interpersonal skills for an entry-level position. She was polite and friendly when dealing with customers but had significant problems with understanding and remembering more complex instructions at work. Sue’s teachers were also concerned that she was struggling with the work despite their support in class. Sue was referred to the TAFE disability consultant for support, as it was known that she had some learning difficulties. The Disability consultant referred Sue to the TAFE Counsellor who, following psychometric assessment, identified that Sue had an intellectual disability. Sue required particular targeted support and placement in a more appropriate level of training. Sue was out of her depth in this training program but had excellent skills that could assist her in other areas of work. Both Sue and her parents needed sensitive support and explanation to adjust to the news of her disability. Sue was subsequently assisted with learner support to complete a lower level Cert I business course and was placed in a different workplace to complete the work side of her traineeship. She was also assisted by TAFE Counselling to adjust to her disability. She was subsequently referred to a Disability Employment Service.

Comment: Under the Smart and Skilled proposal would Sue be penalized for choosing the wrong course and level by being required to pay the Cert III fees? Would the provider, in this case TAFE, only receive funding for delivering the Cert I which she completed or the Cert III which she commenced? How would the cost of essential assessment and learning support be funded? Her parents could not have afforded this assessment privately.

Individual and Community Case Studies

Abduls Story

One year ago I was struggling to finish my HSC at Granville Boys High School. I was already part of the Auburn Community Development Network (ACDN) when I got selected to be part of a new project Dream Big, that helped young people think about coming up with a social enterprise that they wanted to do.

We were asked to Dream Big and all ten of us decided that we wanted to start an events management business especially one that helps out other young people get experience and jobs and work with communities. Part of the project was to get training so ACDN organised with TAFE Outreach for us all to do practical training and we had a TAFE teacher come out to ACDN where we are based and designed a special accredited training for us doing a Certificate 3 in Events Management so after we completed the training at ACDN we would get a certificate that

would allow us to go straight into a Diploma in Events Management as long as we did the last subject of the certificate in TAFE and that's what I decided to do.

I finished my HSC finally at the same time as doing the training at ACDN with TAFE and was designing and managing events and I got more out of the practical side of training than I did at school.

I really had no idea what I was going to do when I was in high school and until I got to be part of Eventasia Enterprises, that's the name of our social enterprise, I was lost. I love being at TAFE and doing the Diploma and I finish it in two months and hopefully by then we will get more work through Eventasia Enterprises which is available to help you out at any time by the way at any time.

TAFE really did save me and if it doesn't have the funding to do what it does best like help people like me then I feel sorry for the young people who are lost and looking for something meaningful to do with their lives.

I am not a number at TAFE. I am a person who had a hard past and a bright future. Thanks.

TAFE in Action at Warwick Farm

The Project at Warwick Farm has continued to have a positive effect on the community as a whole since its inception in 2008. The original proposal for a social enterprise coffee shop was followed up with OHS and Barista courses conducted at Wetherill Park College of TAFE which put the students in a position to work in the coffee shop. One of the ex-students managed and worked in the shop initially, it now grown from two mornings a week to five days a week with 5 students working in the shop and two days a week dinner is offered at reduced prices and the enterprise is making a profit. Two of our original students now work for the Neighbourhood Centre: One is managing the coffee shop along with other duties, and one is working as a project officer.

At the request of students at Warwick Farm, a Certificate III in Micro Business was conducted and students were given the support they needed to complete and pass this course. For many of the students in the group, this was a first for them and they were very proud of their achievement. Many of those students are the ones who are employed in the enterprise and some of them are also attempting to set up their own business. The Woman's forum has become involved in order to provide seeding money. they have offered a business manager and a mentoring service to those who set up a small business.

A new enterprise has commenced of lawn mower for locals. An internet cafe is also open on the premises and students who have already studied computers are assisting other participants to access the internet. As a result of this program, there is also a women's health clinic being conducted out of the centre one day per week. There is also a chiropractor who provides a service one day per fortnight from the centre. A newsletter, Our Neighbourhood Our Future is the Warwick Farm community newsletter which is distributed by the students.

Regular community events, fetes and information days are conducted by the current class and stalls are organised and manned by students and catered by the coffee shop, which is also the students. The coffee shop also provides service to local community, interagency and health

meetings held on site. The Heart Smart program, in partnership with the Department of Health, is also a partner with the Doorways program to encourage healthy exercise, walking and healthy eating programs. Students have organised a range of seminars including Drug and Alcohol, and Community Safety. Finally Links to Learning has agreed to partner with Liverpool TAFE Outreach to implement programs for the local youth.

Brendan – a TAFE Equity student

Brendan is a 21 year Aboriginal student who commenced studying at Foundation Studies (Literacy and Numeracy) program at Petersham TAFE College where he received intensive support for a learning disability. This support continued during his studies in aged care at TAFE Outreach in July 2012. In this Access to Aged Care course students study a range of access units and three subjects from the Certificate III qualification for which they receive advanced standing when they pathway to the Cert III.

Brendan has now successfully completed *Access to Aged Care* and as part of his studies completed a week of work experience at Wyanga Aboriginal Age Care at Redfern where they were so impressed with his skills and knowledge they offered him a job. During his work experience at Wyanga he visited UTS where he met Michael McDaniel's, the head of the Jumbunna Indigenous Centre of Learning. He encouraged Brendan to look long term at Nursing at UTS where he will receive support from Jumbunna.

While studying Brendan received support from his teachers, TAFE counsellors and Head Teachers. His counsellor nominated him for a TAFE Equity Scholarship and fortunately this was successful which will help towards the costs of studying his next course a *Certificate III Acute Care Nursing* at Ultimo TAFE College in 2013.

Prior to 2012 Brendan had attempted to complete several mainstream courses but had not been successful. This case study illustrates the importance of specialist literacy and disability teachers, counsellors and adequate access pathways – the professionals and provision that is being undermined by recent cuts to public education and that will be further undermined by *Smart and Skilled* in 2014.

Brendan's time at Petersham TAFE has been transformative, he has gained so much confidence and sees himself as someone who can learn and apply his knowledge. One week after completing his course he visited the college and told of how he had used his newly acquired first aid skills to care for an elderly couple who were involved in a car accident. He was commended by both the paramedics and police for his actions that averted much more serious injuries.

There are many more people like Brendan and current government agendas are destroying future education opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage.

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