

Vocational education policy failure

June 13, 2019

For many years, Federation has warned all levels of government about the flaws in the private vocational education market.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported on 23 May: "The proportion of NSW Year 12 graduates studying or training the year after they leave school has fallen to its lowest point this decade, driven by a steady decline in vocational education and improved job prospects."

The NSW Secondary Students' Post School Destination and Expectations report shows NSW student participation in vocational education is lower than at the start of the decade, since increased taxpayer funding has gone to private for-profit training organisations.

"In 2017 ... 9.4 per cent were studying for a VET certificate, a drop of more than 6 per cent on 2010," The Sydney Morning Herald lamented.



'The first review of vocational education in more than 40 years should be carefully considered and thorough'

The Morrison Government commissioned a rushed report into vocational education before the election in May. The review was announced by Mr Morrison on 28 November, 2018, with submissions due by February 2019 and the report delivered by March.

The report, Expert review of Australian Vocational Education and Training System, was chaired by Steven Joyce, New Zealand's former minister for tertiary education. Unfortunately, report recommendations and ongoing policy problems will continue to disadvantage TAFE students.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) submission to the review was deeply critical of the review procedure and appointment of Mr Joyce. "The AEU ... [has] substantial concerns regarding the very short time frame available for consultation ... The first review of vocational education in more than 40 years should be carefully considered and thorough ... It should most definitely not to be rushed through a politically expedient timetable."

The AEU had "strong concerns about the choice of chair ... Steven Joyce, under whose tenure as New Zealand's minister for tertiary education ... vocational education funding was reduced by \$3 billion.

"Public regional polytechnics were gutted by Mr Joyce's 'reforms', privately owned training centres saw funding increased by tens of millions of dollars."

The Joyce review has recommended to continue with contestable funding, which has been a disaster for TAFE with increased funding going to dodgy private training colleges. Contestable funding has also led to the

unsustainable compliance workload now facing our TAFE members.

Recommendation 5.1 states “the policy would involve the commonwealth preparing agreed national average costs and subsidy levels, with the states and territories continuing to allocate places on a contestable basis to meet skills demand”.

This recommendation would mean TAFE students do not get guaranteed funding and the current race to the bottom in educational quality will continue.

Mr Joyce recommends that TAFE students get no extra commonwealth funding, abdicating all TAFE funding responsibility to the states and territories in recommendation 5.2.

Mr Joyce is also advocating for the continuation of the decreased funding levels of the NSW Smart and Skilled policy.

Federation will continue to advocate for guaranteed funding for TAFE students. We will also continue to oppose the increased compliance workloads on our members and demand our role as professional adult educators enables teachers to focus on our students’ education. Teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions.

References

1. SMH May 23 2019
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2. NSW Secondary Students’ Post School Destination and Expectations.”
www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/