

## Wider focus for TAFE would better prepare students for their working lives

July 16, 2019

New social policy is desperately needed for the vocational education and training sector says Centre for Future Work associate Pat Forward.

And she advocates for students to be at the centre of new policy relating to the TAFE system.

“We’ve got to advocate for students who have to be powerful, knowledgeable worker-citizens — not just repositories of just-in-time skills for narrow, short-term jobs,” Ms Forward, previously the Australian Education Union’s Federal TAFE Secretary, told Federation’s Annual Conference on Tuesday.

TAFE teachers are concerned that competency-based training, narrowly focussed on individual employers and jobs, is limiting opportunities for young people’s careers.

In past decades, TAFE was given a broader social contract by government than just training people for specific jobs, for example contributing to social integration, equity and other social goods.

In criticising the current, narrower focus of TAFE’s mission, Ms Forward referred to the 1974 Kangan Committee’s report to the federal government, on the development of technical and further education in Australia:

*“a) Opportunities throughout life for recurrent education should give priority to the needs of the individual as a person and to his or her development as a member of society, including the development of non-vocational and social skills that affect personality.*

*“(b) The broader the approach in technical and further education the more the likelihood of creating an environment in which self-motivated individuals can reach their vocational goals and in which motivation may be regenerated in people who have lost it.”*

Ms Forward believes that the Kangan vision still resonates today, and is vastly superior to the current ideological preoccupation with markets as the only organising principle in the sector.

She said Federation was ideally placed to lead and support the research, and a public discussion that would lead to new social policy for TAFE and vocational education.

“TAFE is the most scrutinised sector in terms of statistical evidence and yet the least publicly examined in



terms of social policy," she said.

"We've got to do that work because the think-tanks won't do that work and the consultants won't do that work and the increasingly commercialised bureaucracy cannot do that work."

— Kerri Carr