

Survey reveals sorry state of sector

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TAFE urgently requires investment from all levels of government to ensure it can deliver high-quality vocational education and be at the forefront of Australia's post COVID-19 recovery.

But increased workloads, arduous compliance tasks and a lack of resources and funding have been identified by TAFE teachers as key factors damaging the public vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The Morrison Government has touted a "skills-led recovery" as the way out of the COVID-19 crisis but a survey by the Australian Education Union (AEU) reveals the sorry state of the TAFE system, which the government has driven into the ground.

More than three-quarters of TAFE staff have considered leaving their jobs in the past three years, according to the results of the AEU's 2020 *State of our TAFEs* national survey that exposes the knock-on effect on the sector of billions of dollars of Coalition Government cuts.

Since coming to power, the federal Coalition has cut \$3 billion from vocational education funding, and overseen a 24.5 per cent decline in TAFE enrolments.

In 2019 alone, the Morrison Government also cut \$3.9 billion from the infrastructure-focused Education Investment Fund, cut \$325.8 million in funding from TAFE budgets and diverted \$200 million of vocational education funding from TAFE.

The AEU survey, the first detailed snapshot of the sector in a decade, highlighted issues with workload, resourcing and lack of staff support.

Budget cuts at all levels of government led to the total number of TAFEs falling to 35 nationally in 2017/18, down from 57 in 2013/14. The subsequent campus and course closures have had a detrimental impact on students and staff, leading to increased workloads and low morale.

TAFEs and their teaching staff are expected to deliver more work with much less funding. More than two thirds of AEU survey respondents (68 per cent) had courses cut in the past three years at their college, with a lack of funding cited as the most common reason, and 81 per cent of respondents reported departmental budgets being slashed. Nearly half (49 per cent) of those in teaching roles said class sizes had increased.

Current levels of TAFE capital works and equipment investment were considered inadequate and requiring of some or significant investment by the vast majority of respondents.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, Australian industry was already facing a looming workforce crisis, including a severe shortage of skilled, qualified welders.



According to a recent employment outlook survey in Australia, skilled trades workers (such as electricians and welders), engineers (electrical, civil and mechanical) and technicians are scarce.

According to the Report on Government Services, total annual government VET expenditure has fallen by \$1.6 billion (21.3 per cent) from the 2012 peak of \$7.65 billion.

Since 2013, the federal Liberal- National Government:

- cut \$3 billion from vocational education
- oversaw 140,000 fewer apprentices now than when it was elected
- closed the \$3.9 billion Education Investment Fund
- cut a further \$325.8 million in funding from TAFE and vocational education budgets in 2019.

AEU President Corenna Haythorpe said it was essential that funding and prominence be restored to TAFE in acknowledgement of the organisation's unique position and ability to provide hope, opportunity and lifelong qualifications and skills for millions of Australians.

"This is a wakeup call to governments across the nation. Once the COVID-19 crisis has passed, Australia will have an urgent need for qualified workers across all industries, and TAFE is the only institution that has the infrastructure, the workforce and the trusted reputation to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19," Ms Haythorpe said. "We need to invest in TAFE as the anchor institution of vocational education."