

## TAFE bound by outdated training packages

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TAFE should be approved to develop local qualifications outside the present restrictive training package regime, according to renowned academic and former TAFE teacher Professor Leesa Wheelahan.

In her article *Saving TAFE: What will it take?* on the Stop TAFE Cuts website, Professor Wheelahan is highly critical of the present package system in line with teachers' concerns.

"Training packages are now 20 years old — it is time we recognised that they are bad qualifications based on bad models of curriculum that result in rigid, one-size-fits-all qualifications for all Australia," she wrote.

NSW TAFE teachers have complained for years that training packages are not effectively delivering high-quality vocational education, but have opened the door for low-quality training providers to deliver substandard qualifications in a race to the bottom. More accurately, the primary interest of the for-profit providers is the bottom line.



The urgent need to change the training package system will then have ramifications for the current compliance and auditing policed by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). TAFE teachers continue to complain and criticise the onerous compliance requirements of ASQA, loading teachers and students with unnecessary red tape.

Professor Wheelahan argues that "TAFE should, within a national qualification assurance framework, be entrusted with developing local qualifications that meet the needs of students, communities, local industries and regions".

"We have had review after review that tinkers at the edges of training packages in vain efforts to fix their many deficiencies," she said. "We need a new model of qualifications, one that places the development of the student in the context of their broad intended occupation at the centre of curriculum and pedagogy."

Professor Wheelahan said TAFE can be a powerhouse for local, socially inclusive and sustainable social and economic development.

"Rather than limit its work to responding to existing requirements for skills, TAFEs need to be funded to consider the knowledge and skills that will be needed for work in the future, and to develop, codify and institutionalise this knowledge," she said.

Such an approach would support innovation and help future-proof communities and occupations.

"For example, the teachers of electrical trades apprentices should be supported to consider how the latest insights from engineering will change the work of electrical trades apprentices five or ten years in the future,"

she said.

“Or, teachers of aged care workers should be supported to consider, and develop appropriate curriculum, to ensure that the aged care workers of tomorrow understand the implications of the latest research on dementia for working with elderly people with Alzheimer’s.”

TAFE is more than a skills “provider”, Professor Wheelahan wrote, it is a “key institution contributing to renewal through sustainable and socially inclusive, regional, social and economic development”.

In a nutshell: “TAFE is the anchor of its communities,” she said.

“It needs to be funded to support sustainable and socially inclusive social and economic development. It can work in partnership with schools and universities to achieve these goals, based on an understanding of its distinctive contributions and locally responsive and locally focused missions.

“TAFEs don’t just respond to ‘demand’ for skills; they are key local institutions which have responsibility for working with local communities and industries to develop solutions to problems and to creating opportunity.”

Members are encouraged to read Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan’s article on the Stop the TAFE Cuts campaign website [stoptafecuts.com.au/blog/saving-tafe-what-will-it-take](http://stoptafecuts.com.au/blog/saving-tafe-what-will-it-take).

Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan was the Associate Professor at the L.H. Martin Institute for Tertiary Education Leadership and Management at the University of Melbourne. She is now the William G. Davis Chair in Community College Leadership at the University of Toronto. She has taught in tertiary education for approximately 22 years, including time as a TAFE teacher.