

Your say: Half-baked ideas endanger us all

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The article in The Australian, "TAFE's shortcut courses get a rise from bakers", on 18 July 2018, stated that TAFE is offering a shortened version of Certificate III in Retail Baking that allows a student to earn the same qualification in 18 weeks as someone who has completed a four-year apprenticeship. What a half-baked idea.

During his reign as NSW Minister for Skills, John Barilaro has wrecked much of TAFE through his disastrous Smart and Skilled program, and dumbed down the high standard of tradie training that was once the envy of other countries. His program also led to the sacking of about 5000 teachers and support staff.

This blunder was compounded when funding for TAFE fell by \$3000 per student and face-to-face delivery of courses dropped from 864 hours to 700 in some trades areas. Meanwhile, the funding for poorly performing private providers (PP) has increased greatly.

Back in December 2015, when I first raised my concerns about John Barilaro, a PP issued a Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician's diploma (UEE 30811) to an ex-Telstra worker after attending the course for six weeks and a total of just 72 hours. A similar course at TAFE would take 756 hours. Four weeks later, he got his electrical contractor's licence.



Another PP boasted they have processed 200 electricians this year and that not one of them got less than 85 per cent. A different PP delivering the same program in Electrotechnology tells their applicants there is no classroom study required as they can do it online. Our lives are being placed in these untrained hands.

The article in The Daily Telegraph, "Millions in fines for NBN fails", on 4 July 2018, reveals broadband providers could face fines up to \$10 million for failing to deliver services to consumers under new regulations unveiled by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This is all part of rising costs caused by increased structural failure sparked by the savage erosion of TAFE's world-class training programs.

New research by ACMA shows one in six new NBN internet connections fail, leaving customers without phone or internet services for up to a week. Furthermore, one in 10 new connections that fail leave customers without a service for more than two weeks.

This dreadful performance highlights how few of these technicians have gone through rigorous TAFE training. Most of these installers are working on 457 visas and appear to have low standards of electrical and electronics trade training. They spend just 4-5 days earning a cabling license with a fibre optic extension endorsement. When I did my four-year apprenticeship, Telstra technicians also did a four-year apprenticeship. For good reason, too.

Under the O'Farrell, Baird and Berejiklian NSW state governments, the training of our tradies has become a very sad joke. TAFE funding cuts to boost private providers is not smart or innovative. Quick training courses of dubious quality and questionable public benefit are a waste of money and a danger to society. What many of the private providers are delivering is a looming disaster and the NSW Government is helping to finance it. Clearly, we need a four-year apprenticeship for MPs.

Tony Morrissey is retired