TAFE sector horror stories



The dire state of the TAFE sector is negatively impacting on community members that need affordable access to education and training the most, the SSTUWA has been told.

The TAFE Works on Tour forums have started, with the SSTUWA visiting regional and metropolitan locations around WA to raise community awareness of how TAFE is being hurt by rising course fees, budget cuts, staff departures, course closures and decreased student numbers.

SSTUWA vice president Samantha Schofield said about $110 million in funding had been cut from WA's TAFE colleges in the past three years.

The SSTUWA has heard at these forums about the impact on everyday people by these cuts and inaction by state and federal governments on capping course fees.

The first forum was held at the SSTUWA office in Perth.

Guest speaker Christina Ward, the deputy director of the Edmund Rice Centre in Mirrabooka, said her not-for-profit organisation was starting to see the problems being created by a weakened TAFE system.

The Edmund Rice Centre provides education and settlement programs for refugees and migrants, as well as community programs for northern suburbs youth and people from Indigenous and low socio-economic backgrounds.

"We have a good relationship with the TAFEs and we encourage students (when ready) to transition to further education," Ms Ward said.

"The negative impact increases in costs have made, and will continue to make to our students, clients and their families is more than significant.

"It is in fact further increasing the gaps in a multi-tiered society facing our client group and all other marginalised communities."

Ms Ward said the centre was working with two Sudanese women who were qualified teachers in their home country but those qualifications were not recognised in WA.

They were excited about doing TAFE courses but were reduced to tears when realising they could not afford the fees.

“Many of our clients have large families and are paying more than 50 per cent of their income on rent,” Ms Ward said.

“If they paid the fees, they could not afford to feed the kids or to pay the rent.”

There was another example of an 18-year-old Eritrean girl whose parents paid for her TAFE studies by using other welfare payments meant for the education of her siblings.

Other students are taking on VET FEE-HELP loans so as not to lose their access to further education.

“They will come out of that with a debt but at least they were happy that there was an opportunity for them to continue their studies,” Ms Ward said.

“They were all adamant there was no other way they could afford to start now.

“It is shameful that in a wealthy society such as ours, the decision of who gets further education and opportunities is based on how much money you have and not desire and potential,” Ms Ward said.

The stories of inequity stemming from a weakened TAFE sector has been the same at resultant forums in varied locations such as Thornlie, Rockingham, Albany, Broome and Kalgoorlie.

Miss Schofield said: “TAFE has and continues to provide high-quality, public education to assist people to prepare for their working lives, re-train to start a new career, or further develop their skills and knowledge.”

“We all know somebody who has benefited from a TAFE education. We all know the need to have a high quality accessible and affordable public TAFE system.

“But it seems this government has not worked this out. With five ministers for training in just six years it is clear that this government does not consider TAFE or public education as priority.

“If this government truly cares about the future economy of this state then it needs to ensure that it funds TAFE and TAFE course appropriately.”

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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