TAFE sector must be supported post-election From the Senior Vice President

By Matt Jarman
Senior Vice President

New data from the Australian Education Union has highlighted the Morrison Government's failure to take responsibility for TAFE.

It shows continued and entrenched underfunding, excessive workloads for staff and greater uncertainty for students.

The data, drawn from the AEU's most recent State of Our TAFE survey, shows the devastating impact of a decade of cuts to TAFE funding.

Key findings from the survey show:

- Seventy-five per cent of TAFE teachers are experiencing increased workloads.
- Sixty-five per cent of TAFE teachers say their workload is unmanageable more than half of the time.
- Eighty-three per cent of TAFE teachers report that their institution had closed courses in the past three years, with lack of funding as the most commonly cited reason.
- Seventy per cent of TAFE teachers report decreases in their department's budget in the past two years.
- Almost half of all TAFE teachers report increased class sizes in the past two years.
- Sixty-four per cent of TAFE teachers say that they had had hours "shaved" from the courses they teach with no reduction in course content.
- Eighty per cent of TAFE teachers report that they do not believe students studying today are receiving the same quality of education as they did two years go.
- Fifty-seven per cent have felt pressure from management to pass students that might not be competent.

The findings are alarming and mirror what our members here in WA are telling us, despite the TAFE sector in WA receiving more support at the state government level compared to the federal level.

They are damning and shocking and show Australia's TAFE sector under enormous strain from a decade of funding cuts perpetrated by the Morrison Government.

We have TAFE teachers working excessive workloads under increasingly difficult conditions, grappling with larger class sizes and being expected to deliver content within slashed teaching hours.

The data also shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the detrimental impact of the underinvestment in TAFE, with TAFE teachers reporting they are working up to the equivalent of a whole day unpaid each week and with little to no support from their institutions. Once again education is being resourced on the goodwill of teachers and lecturers.

It is TAFE students who are impacted ultimately as their courses are cut and campuses closed at a time when the demand

for vocational education is at an all-time high due to the critical skills shortages in many industries.

The State of Our TAFE survey findings are based on responses from 1,563 AEU TAFE division members, and with responses received from every TAFE institution in Australia.

TAFE plays an incredibly important role in our nation. Not only does TAFE help prepare students for future employment, ensure businesses have access to a highly trained workforce and help industries address skills gaps, the sector also contributes an estimated $92.5 billion to our economy every year.

Years of funding cuts by the federal coalition governments, privatisation and contestable funding settings have failed TAFE and that is having a detrimental impact on staff and students across the nation.

TAFE is a high quality public provider of vocational education and it must be supported by government to do what it does best, teach the nation’s students and prepare them for work and life.

The next federal government must guarantee a minimum of 70 per cent of total government funding for the public TAFE system.

We need to elect a federal government that will support the TAFE system so it can be rebuilt.

By restoring investment and rebuilding the system, we can ensure TAFE teachers are properly supported to deliver high quality courses to students with state- of-the-art equipment and fit for purpose facilities.

That is what is possible if TAFE is recognised in its rightful place as the anchor institution for vocational education in Australia.

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