Rebuilding TAFE for Australia's future



Earlier this year, the Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomed the announcements that the Commonwealth and state and territory governments would be making historic investments in TAFE under the National Skills Agreement. The AEU also acknowledged the progress in national policy including the VET Workforce Blueprint and Fee-Free TAFE.

The change in direction has been life-changing for the TAFE teaching profession and the many thousands of TAFE students.

However, for a sector that has endured more than a decade of funding cuts under the previous coalition government, there are many issues in relation to the workforce, capital infrastructure and student learning needs which remain outstanding.

It is time for a national policy reset and all governments to commit to rebuilding TAFE as Australia's premier, trusted and public vocational education provider.

The AEU's 2024 *State of Our TAFE* survey found that:

- Two thirds of TAFE teachers are considering leaving the profession.
- Fifty-five per cent of those surveyed said that their TAFE institute had not allocated additional services to support students enrolling in Fee-Free TAFE.
- Seventy-seven per cent of those surveyed said that workload has had a major impact on the recruitment and retention of TAFE teachers from industry, followed by pay (67 per cent) and employment conditions (59 per cent).
- The top three supports that would encourage TAFE teachers to remain in the sector were a reduced admin burden (67 per cent), improved pay (60 per cent) and better treatment from their employer (57 per cent).

The Albanese Government has prioritised *A Future Made in Australia* as a key policy initiative. This initiative must be delivered via a strong skills and vocational education system, that has TAFE at its centre.

That requires further investment in the TAFE teaching workforce, to attract and retain high quality teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for the future.

Additionally, these teachers must be supported with state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities and their students supported with additional funding to aid student retention, engagement and achievement.

In marking National TAFE Day last month, the AEU called on all governments to commit to the full funding of TAFE, including:

1. A TAFE teaching workforce attraction and retention strategy, including investing in building the skills and knowledge of teachers with fully funded professional development.
2. Ongoing funded support for students with additional needs enrolling in Fee-Free TAFE, to improve student engagement, retention and achievement. This funding should focus on support such as foundation skills, mental health and digital literacy for students with complex needs.
3. Investment in capital works and equipment, including information technology, to match the significant funding commitment that the Commonwealth has made to Fee-Free TAFE courses so that TAFE can provide high quality vocational education in state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said: “TAFE continues to provide high quality public vocational education in Australia, but it must be backed by governments to do so.”

It is paramount that in the lead up to the next federal election, the Albanese Government commits to additional investment in the TAFE workforce, infrastructure and teaching programs.

“We recognise the extraordinary dedication and skills of TAFE teachers across the nation who are carrying the responsibility for delivering high-quality vocational education for their students including those from diverse backgrounds and many who have complex needs,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“However, there are still significant concerns amongst TAFE teachers about workload, job security and the level of support required by students on the Fee-Free TAFE program.

“Governments need to support TAFE teachers with urgent investment to rebuild the TAFE teaching workforce and to provide high quality and state-of-the-art teaching and learning spaces for students.

“Additional resources are needed to ensure student outcomes are improved and the complex needs of an increasingly diverse student cohort can be met.

“We are calling on all governments to back Australia’s TAFE teachers and students by investing in rebuilding with TAFE, only then will a future made in Australia be realised.”

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