

Unlocking the full potential of TAFE



Pictured: TAFE student photo competition 2024, South Australia winning photo by Guojie Cai

The Australian Education Union has released a report about the Albanese Government's Free TAFE program, confirming the significant benefits of the initiative to the Australian economy, TAFE teachers and students.

Key findings of the report *Unlocking the full potential of TAFE* show that:

- Free TAFE is providing pathways for individuals, and particularly those for whom vocational education is a barrier to further study.
- TAFE is providing access to priority cohorts in greater numbers compared to private registered training organisations (RTO).
- TAFE is addressing critical skills shortages in areas of need.
- Women make up close to 60 per cent of the Free TAFE student cohort, compared to around 50 per cent in the overall body of VET students.
- TAFE program completers are more likely to represent the bottom two quintiles for socio-economic disadvantage when compared to students of private VET providers, demonstrating that the program is assisting those who need it most.
- Fifty-six per cent of parents would encourage their child to explore TAFE as a pathway, whereas only 29 per cent said the same about private RTOs.
- TAFE and universities share similar outcomes for employment, with 78 per cent of TAFE students and 79 per cent of university students finding employment after study.
- Among VET graduates who received income support prior to study, 39 per cent are no longer on income support two years after completion.

From January 2023 to September 2024, there were nearly 600,000 enrolments in Free TAFE, including:

- More than 150,000 enrolments in the care sector.
- More than 54,000 enrolments in the technology and digital sectors.

- More than 40,000 enrolments in the early childhood education and care sector.
- More than 39,000 enrolments in the construction sector.
- More than 22,000 enrolments in the agriculture sector.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the report highlighted how Free TAFE had been life-changing for students and teachers.

Parliament passed the Free TAFE Bill (2024) through the Senate in March, which means from 2027, there will be a permanent 100,000 Free TAFE places a year.

“The Albanese Government's Free TAFE program has changed the lives of TAFE teachers and students, is addressing skills shortages and provides significant benefits to our economy,” she said.

“Making Free TAFE permanent provides certainty to TAFE teachers and students and ensures that quality vocational education delivered by TAFE, the public provider, is available to all Australians.”

Ms Haythorpe said it was disappointing that the Coalition voted against the legislation.

“By contrast, the Coalition has been crystal clear that they do not support Free TAFE,” she said.

“This means fewer nurses, fewer care workers, fewer early childhood workers, fewer construction workers, fewer technology workers and fewer manufacturing workers at a time when Australia desperately needs them.”

To read the *Unlocking the full potential of TAFE* report, click [here](#).



Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026