



Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

**Submission in response to the
Senate Standing Committees on Education
and Employment inquiry into technical and
further education in Australia**

March | 2014

Recommendations

1. Consult disadvantaged young people on any significant changes to the TAFE system to ensure TAFE continues to be accessible and supportive.
2. Recognise and seek to improve the role TAFE plays in providing young people experiencing disadvantage and leaving school early with an education and a pathway to further study or work.
3. Recognise that the learning environment at TAFE is a key factor in providing educational services and good outcomes for at risk young people.
4. Integrate youth specific employment services within TAFE to ensure a concrete pathway to employment is established.
5. Conduct an audit of the support and flexibility of TAFE providers to assess and address the need for consistency in meeting the needs of young people with disabilities and other groups with particular needs.
6. Support inclusive learning environments through staff training to understand how good access and engagement support student outcomes.
7. Reconsider fee increases in light of the effects on disadvantaged students.
8. Ensure any fee increase to TAFE courses include exemptions for disadvantaged students, including early school leavers.

Introduction

As the National peak body for young people and the youth sector, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is uniquely placed as a conduit for government and other stakeholders to engage with young people and those that support them across Australia. AYAC strives to improve the lives of young people by building their capacity to be contributors to the Australian economy and society. We work with and for young people aged 12 to 26 years in collaboration with government, research institutions and the community sector.

The young people, youth leaders and youth development professionals who comprise AYAC are experts in the engagement of young people and in the development of services that build the capacities of all young people to be educated, healthy, and employed; to contribute to the success of their communities and to the productivity of the nation. For submission to the Inquiry into the role of TAFE in Australia, AYAC has utilised its vast networks and membership to canvas the diverse experiences of young people across the country. AYAC is particularly committed and experienced in hearing and sharing the views of young people who experience barriers in gaining access to services and opportunities in education and employment and are often hard to reach by other means of engagement.

AYAC contributes to the Inquiry the views and insights of young people into their own experiences and to their own hopes in contributing to Australia's future. In preparation for submission to the Committee, AYAC consulted directly with 58 young people (aged 15 - 26) who have participated in education and training at TAFE. The online survey was conducted nationally, reaching metropolitan, regional and rural young people and specifically, young people from backgrounds of disadvantage.¹ AYAC's survey yields important insights from a key stakeholder in the TAFE system - young people.

In this submission AYAC will respond to the following items of the Terms of Reference for this inquiry:

(1) Role of TAFE in (a)(iv) the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment;

(d) what factors affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business;

(f) the application and effect of additional charges to TAFE students

Research suggests that the role and importance of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in providing pathways for education, training and employment to young Australians should not be underestimated.² In Australia, TAFE plays a significant role in providing accessible pathways to education, training and employment for young Australians. It provides services to over half a million young people Australia wide, with 1 in 3 young people aged 15-19 are engaged in education and training at TAFE

¹ For the purposes of this submission, disadvantaged is considered in terms of socioeconomic status, geographical location, educational attainment, ability as well as cultural and lingual background.

² T. Karmel, 'Vocational education and training and young people: Last but not least', Occasional Paper, National Centre for Vocational Education and Training, 2007

as well as 1 in 5 young people aged 20-24.³ The participation of young people in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector has, overall, increased considerably since 2002⁴, which shows that education providers, like TAFE, will continue to play an important role in enabling disadvantaged young people to get an education.

The National Report on Social Equity in VET 2013 has shown that many people who receive education at TAFE are from backgrounds of disadvantage and do so because TAFE is more accessible and appropriate to their needs.⁵ Young people also access education and skills development at TAFE when other educational institutions do not suffice.⁶ Over half of early school leavers access VET courses⁷ and in this sector TAFE is a major provider.

Moreover, TAFE generally provides good outcomes for young people in terms of further study and gaining employment. NCVER reported that for young people VET resulted in a good outcome for approximately three-quarters of young people.⁸ A 'good outcome' being defined as employment after training (in a person's intended occupation or at the same or higher skill level than intended occupation) or enrolled in study to further their education.⁹

The significance of the role of TAFEs in Australia in providing education and skill development to young people should be viewed within the context of the employment market for young people, and Australia's shifting demographics. After 2020 the retirement of the baby boomer generation will begin to have a tangible impact on the Australian economy. Between 2010 and 2050 the proportion of the population of traditional working age (15 to 64 years) is projected to fall by around 7 percent,¹⁰ resulting in a slowing in the rate of growth of real GDP per person.¹¹ This highlights the real need for all Australians of working age to be participating in the workforce. However, as the recent research by the Brotherhood of St Laurence reports, "Youth unemployment currently represents just under 40% of all unemployment in Australia. In other words, more than one in three unemployed Australians are young – between the ages of 15 and 24."¹²

Research has noted that it is harder for 15 to 24 year-olds who are starting out in the workforce to get a 'good'¹³ full-time job, however those young people with higher-levels of education are better placed to access 'good' job opportunities.¹⁴ Employment opportunities for young people improves after they have completed training,¹⁵ which means if young people - particularly those experiencing

³ Australian Education Union, *The Value of TAFE in Australia – Fact Sheet*, (March 2013) accessed via stoptafecuts.com.au/files/5313/6564/9809/Factsheet_Value_Of_TAFE.pdf

⁴ J. Stanwick, T. Lu, T. Karmel and B. Wibrow, *How young people are faring 2013, Report for the Foundation for Young Australians*, Melbourne: FYA, 2013

⁵ S. Rothman, C. Shah, C. Underwood, J. McMillan, J. Brown, & P. McKenzie, *National report on social equity in VET 2013*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013.

⁶ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Beyond Learn or Earn: Young People Tell How Policy Can Better Support Those Who Need it Most*, AYAC, November 2012.

⁷ T. Karmel, *op. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Australian Government 2007, *Intergenerational Report 2007*, Australian Government, 2007

¹¹ Australian Government, *Australia to 2050: Future Challenges. Intergenerational Report 2010*, 2010

¹² Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Australian Youth Unemployment 2014: Snapshot*, 2014, p.4 accessed via http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/MyChanceOurFuture_Youth_unemployment_snapshot_Feb2014.pdf

¹³ The concept of a 'good' job is based on a occupational index analysis of skills, income and status, as in J. Stanwick, et al., *op.cit.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ T. Karmel, *op. cit.*, p.25

disadvantage - can access genuine training pathways their workforce participation will improve.

There are conflicting trends among young people, an increase in educational attainment and achievement on the one hand, while at the same time they experience high levels of unemployment and underemployment.¹⁶ At times of economic downturn the unemployment rate for young people increases disproportionately. As of January 2014, the unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds was 12.2% - an increase from 8.8% in 2008 - compared with 6% for the population as a whole.¹⁷ Participation in the labour force is particularly low and persistently low for people with no post-school qualifications.¹⁸ Young people in Australia rate youth unemployment as one of the most significant issues they are facing today.¹⁹ In relation to employment, the OECD report that "investing in young people is vital to avoid a scarred generation at risk of long-term exclusion".²⁰

The COAG Reform Council highlights that one in four young Australians are not fully engaged in work or study, and that this proportion has increased over the past 5 years.²¹ Half a million young people are also currently at risk of leaving school without the skills and knowledge to participate effectively in a globalised economy.²² TAFE can play a role in addressing the high rates of disengagement because of its proven track record with young people who would otherwise disengage from education.

The practical, flexible education delivered through TAFE is a means by which disadvantage young people can stay engaged in - rather than excluded from - formal education and consequentially, the workforce. From a National perspective, underachievement stemming from disadvantage represents a waste of potential human capital. The Australian economy cannot afford to have young people that are not engaging in education and employment, especially when they are willing to do so. TAFE plays a significant role in ensuring access to education for young people at a disadvantage, who would - without TAFE - otherwise remain unengaged.²³ We therefore need to ensure that these pathways, such as TAFE, are available, sufficient and are appropriate to all young people.

Support for disadvantaged young people

AYAC submits the following in relation to:

(1) The role of TAFE in: (a)(iv) the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment;

¹⁶ J. Stanwick, et al., *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Brotherhood of St Laurence, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ A. Anlezark, *Young people in an economic downturn*, LSAY Briefing Paper no. 23, NCVET, Adelaide, 2011.

¹⁹ AYAC, 2013, *Australia's Youth Matters*.

²⁰ OECD, *Invest in Youth to Tackle Job Crisis*, 2010, accessed via http://www.oecd.org/document/1/0,3746,en_2649_37457_46733377_1_1_1_37457_00.html

²¹ COAG Reform Council, *Education 2011: Comparing performance across Australia Report to the Council of Australian Governments*, 28 September 2012

²² S. Thomson et. al., *Challenges for Australian education: results from PISA 2009: the PISA 2009 assessment of students' reading, mathematical and scientific literacy*, Australian Council for Education Research, 2011, accessed at <http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PISA-2009-Report.pdf>

²³ J. Stanwick, et al., *op. cit.*

Australia has a high standard of education compared to our counterparts in 27 OECD countries. However, with regards to equity in education the same cannot be said. The disparity in academic performance between the highest and lowest performing students is increasing.²⁴ In Australia, socio-economic status, family and social background has a greater impact on young people's educational outcomes than in other high performing OECD countries, such as Finland and Canada.²⁵ Only 74% of students from low socio economic backgrounds complete Year 12 or equivalent compared with 94% of students from high socio economic backgrounds.²⁶ Differences in educational resources and opportunities for those at a disadvantage have flow on effects to the efficiency of the labour market. It is therefore important to consider and improve the role TAFE has in providing equal educational services and programs to young people of disadvantaged backgrounds.

TAFE plays a major role in the delivery of education services to disadvantaged young Australians, providing an alternative pathway to getting an education for disadvantaged young people. TAFE is one of the largest providers of VET with its services comprising 66% of VET in Australia. VET is an important pathway for young people who do a trade after school, who are not engaged in conventional schooling, and those who experience disadvantage.²⁷ Supporting those who experience disadvantage is key national goal of the VET system.²⁸ In relation to participation of disadvantaged groups:

- In 2011, 22% of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population participated in VET - a participation rate of over twice that of non-indigenous population²⁹
- Students with disabilities represented 8% of VET participants³⁰
- 190 000 were students in TAFE from a non-English speaking background³¹

In relation to government funded VET, there is a high rate of participation by students from remote and very remote locations compared to other locations. It is also important to note that 40% of Australian students involved in VET in 2010, were from the two most disadvantaged quintiles on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage.³²

TAFE plays a role in education and skill development of early school leavers, who are highly disadvantaged in the labour market. Early school leavers comprise more than one-half of those engaged in government-funded VET.³³ While Year 12, plus further study, is one of the most successful pathways from school to work, the persistent rate of early school leavers indicates a greater focus on alternate learning pathways is needed.³⁴ Young people who have not completed Year 12 are likely to experience long-term unemployment, entrenching disadvantage and rendering them unable to contribute to national productivity. Research has shown that the most

²⁴ F. Argy, 'Educational Inequalities in Australia', *The New Critic*, Issue 5, University of Western Australia, 2007.

²⁵ NOUS Group, *Schooling challenges & opportunities: A Report for the Review of Funding for Schooling Panel*, August 2011

²⁶ COAG Reform Council, *Education 2011: Comparing performance across Australia Report to the Council of Australian Governments*, 28 September 2012

²⁷ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Vocational Education and Training (VET) and young Victorians: a way forward*, YACVic, February 2013

²⁸ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government services*, Australian Government, 2013

²⁹ S.Rothman, et al., *op. cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Australian Education Union, *op. cit.*

³² NCVER, *Tertiary education and training in Australia 2010*, NCVER [updated March 2013]

³³ S. Rothman, et al., *op. cit.*

³⁴ M. Circelli & D. Oliver, *Youth transitions: what the research tells us*, Adelaide, South Australia: NCVER, 2012.

popular paths back into education for early school leavers in Australia is participation in VET courses (91%), with a continuation of secondary school relatively uncommon (9%).³⁵ Most early school leavers are enrolling in certificate levels II and III, which is considered by the Australian Government as being equivalent, at least, to an upper-secondary school certificate.³⁶ This evidence shows the clear link between levels of disadvantage and the uptake of VET. TAFE is often a preferred pathway for young people, providing the necessary levels of education for young people to uptake further opportunities to continue the education, or contribute to the workforce.

Research shows that TAFE produces good outcomes in terms of engaging young people in further education or employment.³⁷ In AYAC's TAFE survey of young people aged 15 - 26, 26% identified as a young person with disabilities, 14% as having English as their second language, and 7% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of respondents were currently engaged in either education or work, including those facing disadvantage. When asked about the role of TAFE in helping young people, 67% of respondents reported TAFE had helped them to find work, continue to university, continue to another TAFE course or continue onto another course and further study.

AYAC's TAFE survey results show that this was certainly young people's expectation of TAFE, including those respondents experiencing disadvantage. Survey respondents reported choosing to study through TAFE because it gave them a pathway to employment or further study. This was true for respondents within the range of identified disadvantage. When asked why young people chose to enrol in TAFE, 40% of young people responded that they wanted to further develop their skills and education, 22% indicated that they chose TAFE as a pathway to gain employment and for 11% TAFE was a pathway to higher education, such as University. For a further 22% of respondents access issues lead them to choose TAFE, including that other institutions did not offer the best course for their chosen area of study, better learning environment, more flexibility, not being able to get into Uni and that TAFE was more affordable.

Learning environment is a key factor in providing educational services to at risk young people, with research showing how a positive school environment can help moderate the adverse impacts of low socioeconomic status on a young person's engagement with their school and, ultimately, school completion.³⁸ TAFE provides an environment that is not always found in mainstream schooling, and is conducive to the engagement of young people who might otherwise remain on the margins of education and employment. However, the role of TAFE in providing services to disadvantaged young people is not consistent. Of the young people who reported that TAFE did not help them to access employment or further education, 27% of explained that they did not receive the support they needed from TAFE. Our survey respondents said:

"TAFE qualifications do not link you with an employer. But employers want people who have qualifications and experience. Completing TAFE qualifications is a waste of your time, unless you know an employer who is willing to take you on once you have completed your course, or your a apprentice."

– Survey respondent

³⁵ C. Polidano, D. Tabasso & Y. P. Tseng, 'A second chance at education for early school leavers', *Education Economics*, 2013, p.9.

³⁶ Council of Australian Governments (COAG) *Council of Australian Governments Hobart Communiqué*, Hobart, April 30, 2009.

³⁷ T. Karmel, *op. cit.*

³⁸ M. Circelli & D. Oliver, *op. cit.*

“they were disinterested once I was enrolled.”

– Survey respondent

“it shut down funding and cut my hopes of what would of been years of studying at tafe turned to 6 months.”

– Survey respondent

“I was asked to leave several of my schools because the schools didn't think my needs could be accommodated. One was a private school, one a selective school. I had to hide my disability from TAFE in order to enrol. Later when I had proved that I was a good student, I told them about the extent of my disabilities and they said they wouldn't have let me enrol, but were glad that I had because I got the best results in the HSC that they'd ever had. It was a real struggle through the bureaucracy though.”

- Survey respondent

The variability in responses from young people to AYAC's survey question on whether TAFE assisted them in furthering their education and employment outcomes indicates a lack of consistency in support across TAFE providers in Australia. Given that both research and the results of AYAC's survey show a portion of young people continue to remain disengaged it is important to persist with equity goals to ensure young people who are facing disadvantage can access education at TAFE.

Recommendations:

1. Consult disadvantaged young people on any significant changes to the TAFE system to ensure TAFE continues to be accessible and supportive.
2. Recognise and seek to improve the role TAFE plays in providing young people experiencing disadvantage and leaving school early with an education and a pathway to further study or work.
3. Recognise that the learning environment at TAFE is a key factor in providing educational services and good outcomes for at risk young people.
4. Integrate youth specific employment services within TAFE to ensure a concrete pathway to employment is established.

Affordability and accessibility for young people

AYAC submits the following in relation to:

(d) what factors affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business;

Access and affordability to TAFE is impacted by numerous factors, such as geographical location, income, ability, education as well as other factors relating to levels of disadvantage. It has been established that TAFE provides an important pathway for disadvantaged young people. This section outlines some of factors that

have impacted on the accessibility of TAFE. While TAFE is the chosen option for some young people, for others it is the only option. To continue to ensure that those on the margins of the workforce have access to gain skills and education, TAFE should continue to become more accessible and inclusive of young people of all abilities and backgrounds.

VET is more accessible than University in non-metropolitan, regional and remote areas areas that have a high Indigenous population. Access to VET by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people is generally by virtue of what is available in their location. VET is also more accessible than other institutions for young people with disabilities because VET courses can be shorter, more flexible and can address some of the specific workforce barriers experienced by this cohort.

For those living in rural and remote Australia they are at a disadvantage when it comes to access to employment, education, support services, and government services because of the nature of their location.³⁹ Access to VET specifically is limited by the costs and hazards associated with long-distance travel, but the participation of this cohort remains high.⁴⁰ While online participation is an option, many students will receive greater xx from a face-to-face environment, particularly if they face other forms of disadvantage.⁴¹ For students from low socioeconomic backgrounds their access is hindered by "...negative attitudes towards formal study, a lack of confidence in relation to study, financial difficulties, family circumstances, work commitments, and educational history". TAFE students from low-income families, find it difficult to finance costs such as fees, textbooks, and equipment.⁴² They are less likely to have access to family financial support, more likely to be providing support to families and are constrained from study by commitment to employment and family as well as long travel times. ⁴³ TAFE has proven to be more accessible to various groups of young people facing disadvantage, however there continues to be on-going issues that require further support from TAFE to facilitate educational accessibility.

While data in the VET sector on 'second chance learners' is limited, AYAC research report *Beyond Learn or Earn* outlined some of the key issues and recommendations in relation to policy responses for early school leaving. Young people who had dropped out of high school, otherwise known as 'second chance learners' were found to have faced a range of barriers that prevent them from succeeding in conventional schooling – bullying, family problems, mental and physical health concerns, entrenched poverty, unstable home lives.⁴⁴ Many came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were therefore far more likely to disengage from formal education. Many of these young people left school early out of frustration due to poor literacy and numeracy, as well as strong dissatisfaction with a school system that was inflexible towards their needs.⁴⁵

For those young people able to enter an apprenticeship, completion rates are under 50%, representing high economic costs both directly and in relation to medium and long term skills shortages.⁴⁶ Research participants who had taken up an apprenticeship noted the difficulty they encountered balancing their training with

³⁹ S. Rothman, et al., *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ AYAC, *Beyond Learn or Earn*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

meeting basic financial requirements such as rent, food, and utility bills.⁴⁷

Many (if not all) early school leavers need flexible and inclusive learning models connected to schools that are accessible to all young people who need them. A third of the young people in the AYAC study who had disengaged from education were accessing specialised programs that were tied to TAFE and VET courses to help them overcome barriers and re-engage with education. One young person described their experience:

"I was going downhill for a while with a lot of outside problems. If it wasn't for this flexible learning centre and its services I'd probably be in jail or dead. If it wasn't for these types of services that are willing to help people in my situation it could've been a lot worse, so I'm lucky that I'm still here... This (flexible learning) school has changed my life dramatically in every way possible."

- Young Person, Beyond Learn or Earn research participant

All the young people involved in alternative schooling spoke highly about their experience. For young people, the flexibility of this environment was more appropriate to their circumstances than to that of conventional high school. Some students were able to negotiate their hours, school days and subjects, and most learning programs were able to cater to individual circumstances and interests. Along with their VET courses, very basic skills were taught and self-confidence developed as well as their resilience to dealing with problems and barriers to participation.

"I've probably done more work here in the short time I've been here than in my mainstream school. There's no deadline, they don't say if it's not in by this date you're going to fail sort of thing, there's no stress about that. It's 'take your time, if you need help I'm here'. That's amazing, that's what a lot of kids need."

- Young person, Beyond Learn or Earn research participant

Most young people are located in schools where the dominant pathway is University study. While Year 12, plus further study, is one of the most successful pathways from school to work, the consistent rates of early school leavers indicates a greater focus on alternate learning pathways is needed.⁴⁸ As research has highlighted that "[y]outh transition is a time when young people try different school and post-school options, so it would be naive to assume that each individual will only take a single path",⁴⁹ especially as Australia moves into a world "...in which Year 12 is losing its importance".⁵⁰ For young people who end up as early school leavers, there needs to be a greater emphasis on applied skills, practical learning, employability and life skills in secondary education curricula. TAFE provides education and training for the many thousands of young people who rely on TAFE for second-chance education, literacy and numeracy support, and the opportunity to gain skills for employment.

Funding cuts to the VET sector in Victoria, NSW and Queensland mean that the most vulnerable young people – particularly early school leavers, young women, and those living in rural and regional areas⁵¹ – will be forced to depart from TAFE, or will not

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ M. Circelli & D. Oliver, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ T. Karmel, & S. H. Liu, *Which Paths Work for Which Young People? Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Research Report 57.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd., 2011, p14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *op. cit.*

continue to consider TAFE as an option. Young people experiencing disadvantage are seeking to gain skills and education relevant to employment opportunities, however increased fees, fewer courses, and inadequate support for barriers like homelessness, mental health issues, and poor literacy and numeracy will deter many disadvantaged young people from gaining new skills.

In the AYAC TAFE survey, just over half (51%) of participants noted difficulty in receiving an education from TAFE. When asked 'Have you experienced any difficulty in getting an education at TAFE?' those who responded Yes noted their difficulties related to:

- Financial difficulties (27%);
- Travel / location of TAFE (19%);
- Difficulty due to lack of support for disabilities (19%);
- Limited options due to cuts to courses (12%);
- Scheduling (8%); and
- Difficulty navigating the TAFE system (8%)

Recommendations:

5. Conduct an audit of the support and flexibility of TAFE providers to assess and address the need for consistency in meeting the needs of young people with disabilities and other groups with particular needs.
6. Support inclusive learning environments through staff training to understand how good access and engagement support student outcomes.

Application and effect of additional charges

AYAC submits the following in relation to:

(d) the application and effect of additional charges to TAFE students

An increase in charges or fees without additional financial supports or payment options to young people engaged in education at TAFE is likely to result in excluding some of the most marginalised young people from being able to participate in TAFE.

When asked whether additional charges at TAFE would affect them, a high proportion (75%) of young people selected 'Yes'. Those who selected 'No' mentioned they had completed their TAFE course and had moved into further education or employment, and fees would no longer be of consequence to them. Of those who responded that an increase in charges would affect them (75%), 38% elaborated to say they would no longer be able to study, and have to quit TAFE. Twenty-seven percent also indicated poverty as a likely effect of additional charges. These results are important to consider, given the importance of engaging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Youth survey respondents highlighted the issue for them if TAFE fees were to increase:

"Very expensive for apprentices especially when you are not able to live at home and do the apprenticeship and TAFE. I am already on a payment plan and this has been going on for 2 years. I can't afford any more and if it cost more I might have to quit which would really piss me off because then I couldn't finish my apprenticeship without finishing TAFE."

- Survey respondent

"I have only a disability pension."

- Survey respondent

"I work two jobs to support myself and having to pay so much money for the course I would struggle to support myself. It costs a lot for people that are not getting benefits and as I do not receive any help\benefits because I fund myself I still pay a fortune."

- Survey respondent

Funding allocation mechanisms need to ensure the most disadvantaged and disengaged groups of young people can access an education system that is flexible and youth-friendly, in order to meet their complex needs and allow them to receive a superior education that effectively prepares them to thrive – both in school and beyond school. TAFE provide accessible education and training for many disadvantaged young Australians, with a significant proportion of TAFE students aged 15 to 24 years.

Recommendations:

7. Consider any fee increases in light of the effects on disadvantaged students.
8. Ensure any fee increase to TAFE courses include exemptions for disadvantaged students, including early school leavers.

Case Study: Good Practice

Source: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Vocational Education and Training (VET) and young Victorians: a way forward*, YACVic, February 2013

UB Tec (University of Ballarat, Technical Education Centre)

UB Tec provides access to education and training for young rural Australians experiencing disadvantage. Early school leaving has been recognised as a particular concern in the Grampians, especially at a Year 10 level, and as such UB TEC grew out of a need to offer an alternative to the popular VET in Schools for secondary school students, in a TAFE setting. For senior students UB Tec offers accredited hands-on training for young people aged 15-19 in a supported adult learning environment. In 2012, 154 students were enrolled, with a balanced gender ratio. Study options include:

- Certificate I and II in General Education for Adults, which develops literacy, numeracy and generalist skills, plus Certificate I in Vocational Preparation,
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at an Intermediate level, with a Certificate II or III in an area such as automotive, media, community services, plumbing, hair and beauty, construction, hospitality, health, or engineering.
- Senior level VCAL, with the option of completing another Certificate II or III.

While many students who enrol at UB Tec are already enthusiastic about learning a trade, it is common for them to report that they did not enjoy conventional schooling. In contrast, young people have highlighted that good relationships with teachers and an atmosphere of flexibility and respect, as well as work undertaken at a level with which they can cope, are significant to their engagement with TAFE. Students are provided with a level of support not always available at conventional schooling, which at UB Tec range from a Wednesday Breakfast Club, to increase students' knowledge of nutrition, to a pilot program for young people from out-of-home care. The students learning needs are met holistically, for example through small class sizes (10 at most), and by providing teachers trained to deal with the impacts of childhood trauma.

Despite UB Tec's commitment to accessible education, funding levels, mechanisms and issues such as transport continue to represent a real challenge to being able to maintain levels of engagement.

When working with students facing disadvantage, it is important to recognise small steps towards progress, and to acknowledge that school is not the first priority for a young person struggling to find safe, secure housing or deal with turmoil at home. They need to be able to learn in an environment that is stable and supportive, and where they can maintain consistent relationships with staff (keeping in mind that many of their relationships with adults in the past have been fleeting or unstable). It is also important that staff have enough opportunities to debrief, share expertise and undergo professional development because they will be on the 'front line' when issues arise in class, even though students may be supported by outside social services. This makes the loss of TAFE base funding a big concern for this institution. As of next year, UB Tec students may no longer have access to a counseling service, and reduced management and staff hours will mean less ability to manage the impact of personal issues on students' capacity to engage in vocational education and training.

For regional institutes, transport also presents challenges. Some students come to UB Tec from smaller rural communities like Ballan and Bacchus Marsh, but most are too young to drive and do not have guaranteed access to school buses.

VCAL students are limited in the number of Certificate courses in which they can enroll, due to the maximum training funded by Government (referred to as the "two-course rule"). This increases the risk of disengagement for those who select an area which turns out to be unsuitable. UB Tec have also noted that continued engagement in education for 'at-risk' young people is challenged by Government's "two-course rule". New students often have little prior experience of the trades and would benefit from more opportunities for 'taster' courses and early experiences of VET during their schooling.