



The Hon. Michael McCormack MP
Minister for Small Business
Department of the Treasury
PO Box 6022
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the Australian Government's 2017-18 Budget process.

A high quality and responsive tertiary education and training system is critical to the future prosperity of Australia. Now more than ever governments of all levels must ensure that the policy and funding settings that support the further education and training sector are focussed on achieving a high standard of student outcomes, while supporting industry and employers in driving economic growth.

As Queensland's largest provider of vocational education and training in the state, TAFE Queensland is able to provide a unique perspective to the Australian Government on the major issues currently confronting the further education and training sector. To that end, I am pleased to present TAFE Queensland's Pre-Budget submission for consideration.

Should you have any queries or require further information in relation to the submission, I invite you to contact me on (07) 3514 3601 or by email at Jodi.schmidt@tafeqld.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jodi Schmidt", written over a large, stylized, light-colored scribble or watermark.

Jodi Schmidt
Chief Executive Officer
TAFE Queensland

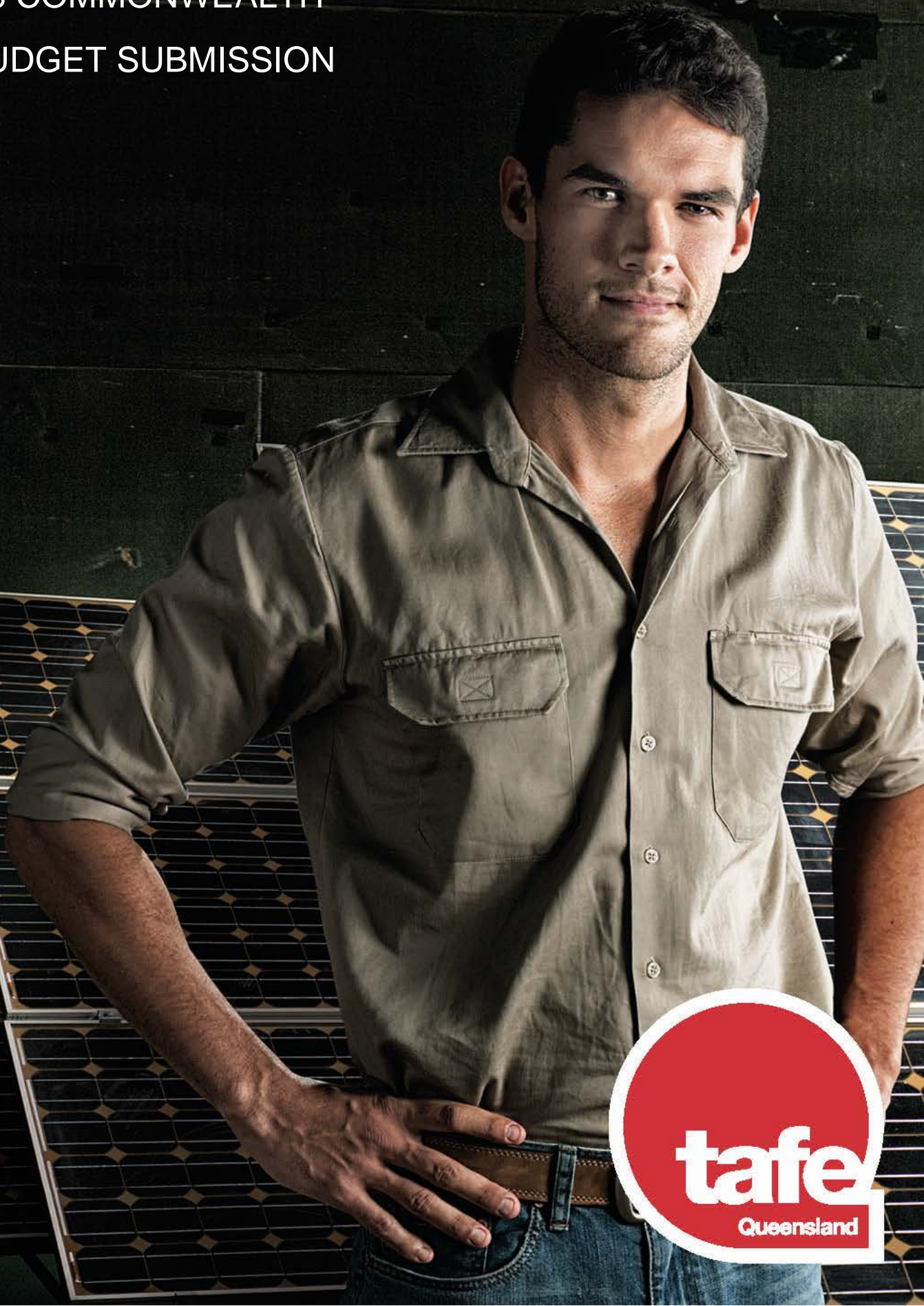
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TAFE QUEENSLAND

2017-18 COMMONWEALTH

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



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Purpose

To provide recommendations to the Australian Government to support the development of the 2017-18 Commonwealth Budget.

TAFE Queensland Overview

TAFE Queensland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Government's deliberations on the 2017-18 Budget. As a member of the vocational education and training (VET) sector TAFE Queensland is a key stakeholder and contributor to the Australian Government's stated objectives of economic growth and job creation.

TAFE Queensland is the State's public provider of VET and with over 130 years of history and a state-wide network of institutes, TAFE Queensland is the most experienced provider of VET in Queensland. TAFE Queensland offers training through a variety of modes including traditional classroom delivery, distance learning, online tuition, workplace training and a blended delivery method combining two or more delivery modes.

TAFE Queensland continues to be the largest provider of VET services in Queensland with more than 120,000 students choosing to study with TAFE Queensland in 2015/16. Students from 85 countries choose to study with TAFE Queensland due to its international profile, world class standard of training, state-of-the-art facilities and the wide range of programs offered.

During 2015/16 a total of 52,000 qualifications were awarded ranging from statements of attainment to bachelor degrees in over 600 program areas. TAFE Queensland delivers high quality outcomes for students and employers, demonstrated by:

- Competency completion rates of more than 89%
- Students that are employed or in further education at more than 87%
- Student satisfaction at more than 88%
- Employer satisfaction at more than 91%

Overview

As clearly identified in the Australian Government's 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian economy continues to transition from a period of investment to support mining activity to broader-based growth. This transition is supported by recent research by a number of groups that highlight the changing nature of work and skill demand within the Australian economy.

These structural changes must be supported by a strong VET sector that is enabled to deliver high quality skills to the areas of the economy that demand them. The sector has undergone significant reform in recent years and has continued to deliver for Australian employers with 86.5% of graduates from the sector in 2015 in employment or further study. Recent research undertaken by CSIRO and TAFE Queensland identifies that the sector is delivering the skills that are in demand now and into the next five years and this result is supporting Australia's economic transition.

Despite this, reform is ongoing and there a number of areas that must now come into the Government's focus. Critical to this reform is the need for a clearly articulated and long term strategy for the sector beyond 2016-17. This necessity has been identified by both the Australian Government's review of the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (NPA) and a 2016 report on the sector by the Centre for Economic Development Australia (CEDA) as the most important matter confronting the sector.

TAFE Queensland acknowledge that such a task is significant and that the benefit of such an initiative would be far reaching for the sector. A future focused long term strategy for vocational education and training would address a range of issues including but not limited to:

- the long term role of the sector in both the Australian education system and the economy more generally including interaction with the higher education system;
- funding of the sector, including Commonwealth-State responsibilities;
- the critical areas of focus for the sector, including both skilling areas and qualification level; and
- a strategic approach to building a VET market and protecting against market failure, including through establishing a benchmark for quality in the sector.

TAFE Queensland acknowledges that the 2017-18 budget is being prepared within an environment of budget repair and that investment opportunities are not infinite. Therefore, each of the recommendations in this submission are directly linked with the Australian Government's stated objectives of ongoing economic growth and job creation.

Recommendations

TAFE Queensland recommends:

- 1. To ensure adequate time for negotiations on a new national skills agreement to occur, current arrangements under the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform should be extended to 2017-18 at 2016-17 funding levels.***
- 2. Development of a national VET strategy that lays the foundation for the role of the sector and identifies key outcomes in its delivery of the skilling needs of the future.***
- 3. That the new national VET strategy (recommended above) incorporate a skills strategy targeted at the skilling requirements of the next decade in areas where employers and individuals are unlikely to invest in at this point.***
- 4. Enable greater emphasis on applied research and innovation already being produced in the VET sector through a \$50 million investment over four years to be allocated through a competitive allocation process as a key strategy to boost productivity and economic growth.***
- 5. Increase integration of reforms in the VET and higher education sectors to ensure a holistic approach to post-secondary education and training.***
- 6. Extend access to Commonwealth subsidies for higher education qualifications to high-quality, low risk VET providers to support opportunity and choice in higher education, while maintaining rigour and quality.***
- 7. Caution be exercised in any reform of (higher education) funding at the sub-bachelor level to ensure that industry based VET qualifications remain viable and the preferred choice for prospective students (i.e. that differences in funding between higher education and VET programs do not adversely affect student choice).***
- 8. The Australian Government support the establishment of a Workforce Development Strategy for the VET Sector supported by a VET professional association through the investment of \$3 million over three years.***

Key Issues

Funding and Policy Priority for the VET Sector

The most pressing issue confronting the sector in the immediate future is replacement of the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform, which is due to expire on 30 June 2017. Replacement of this agreement is critical at both an investment and policy level. Despite the urgency of this task it is important that it lays the platform for the overall direction of the sector over the funding period and considers the impact of any policy levers that it utilises. The Australian Government's review of the agreement, undertaken by ACIL Allen, provides insight into what any new agreement must achieve. The final report recognises that the VET sector has not been the beneficiary of a comprehensive review, similar to what occurred in the higher education sector with the 2008 Bradley Review of Higher Education and specifically identifies the development of a 'roadmap' to support the future reform of the sector. This position was also supported by the Centre for Economic Development Australia in its publication *VET: securing skills for growth*:

"...a holistic VET policy has been sorely missing from the landscape, with VET policy debates relatively narrow in focus, for example, the redesign of the VET FEE-HELP program..." – CEDA

The new agreement needs to be cognisant of the multi-faceted roles that the sector plays and be informed by a strategy that clearly identifies the objectives of the sector in the short to medium term. It is noted that recent findings of a report into the VET FEE-HELP program by the Australian National Audit Office included the finding that the inadequate design of the program and failure to put in place appropriate regulatory and quality measures led to the eventual failure of the system.

Given the complexities involved with the sector any new agreement must be developed in a considered and evidence based manner. In November 2016 the Hon Yvette D'Ath Queensland's Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills called on the Australian Government to extend the current agreement to allow for a new agreement to be developed, which TAFE Queensland strongly supports.

Recommendation 1: To ensure adequate time for negotiations on a new national skills agreement to occur, current arrangements under the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform should be extended to 2017-18 at 2016-17 funding levels.

TAFE Queensland's submission to ACIL Allen during the review of the NPA outlines a series of key points that the new agreement would need to address. These included:

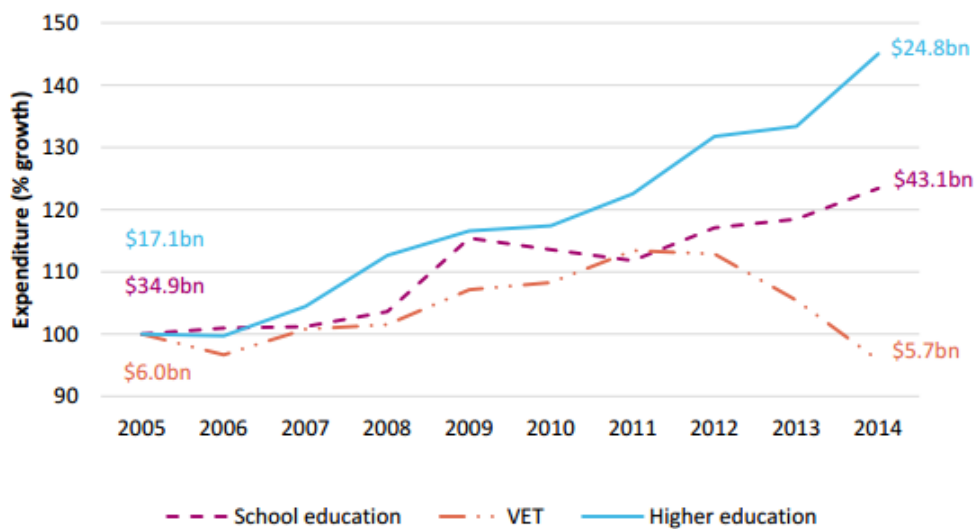
- The new funding agreement should be supported by a long term strategy that clearly establishes the forward trajectory of the sector;
- Increasing the cross-jurisdictional consistency of both policy and funding settings of the sector for the benefit of students and employers;
- Increasing the role of quality in the sector to offset competition reforms, which in part, have increased focus on price;
- Provide a clear statement on the role of TAFE in the sector, including its role in establishing a quality benchmark.

Recommendation 2: Development of a national VET strategy that lays the foundation for the role of the sector and identifies key outcomes in its delivery of the skilling needs of the future.

A Renewed Focus on Skills Investment Required

A future VET strategy and associated funding agreement must address the slow growth of investment in the sector and bridge the widening gap in funding growth between the VET sector and the other components of the education system (policy coherency between the two sectors is discussed later in this submission). The contrasting approach by government to the different educational sectors has been most graphically illustrated by the Mitchell Institute, which recently found that funding of the VET sector has fallen in real terms by 4.2% (\$300 million), alarmingly in 2014-15 VET expenditure declined by 9%. As illustrated at figure 1 while VET funding was declining over this period higher education expenditure grew by 45% and as VET funding fell by 9% in 2014-15 higher education grew by 8.7%.

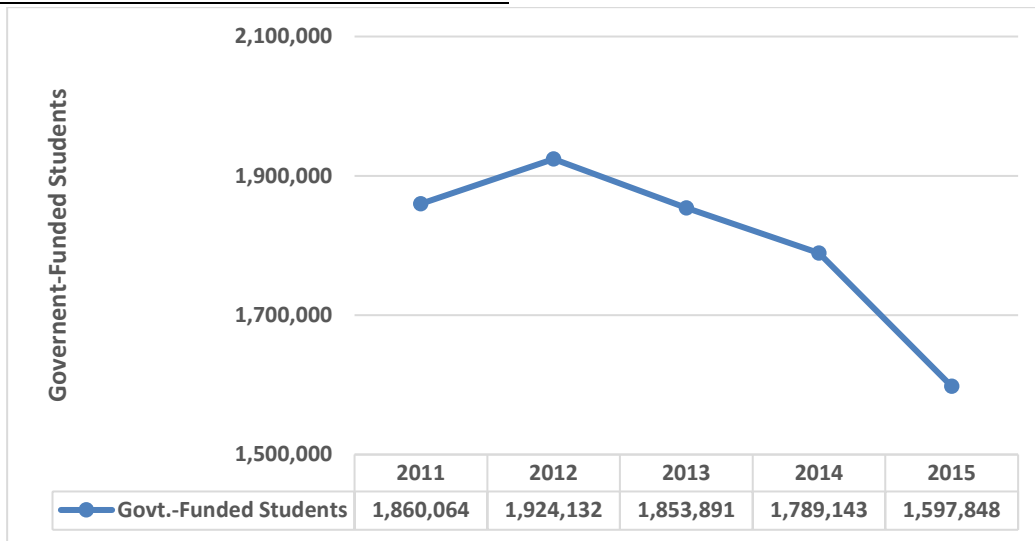
Figure 1: Change in expenditure on education by sector 2005-06 to 2014-15 (base year 2005-06 = 100)



Source: ACIL Allen Consulting analysis based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data

Declining expenditure is impacting participation levels in government-funded VET activity. Figure 2 illustrates the declining numbers of government-funded students between 2011 and 2015 and shows a 14.1% decline in participation over this period, which strongly correlates with the decline in expenditure shown above.

Figure 2: Government-funded students 2011-2015

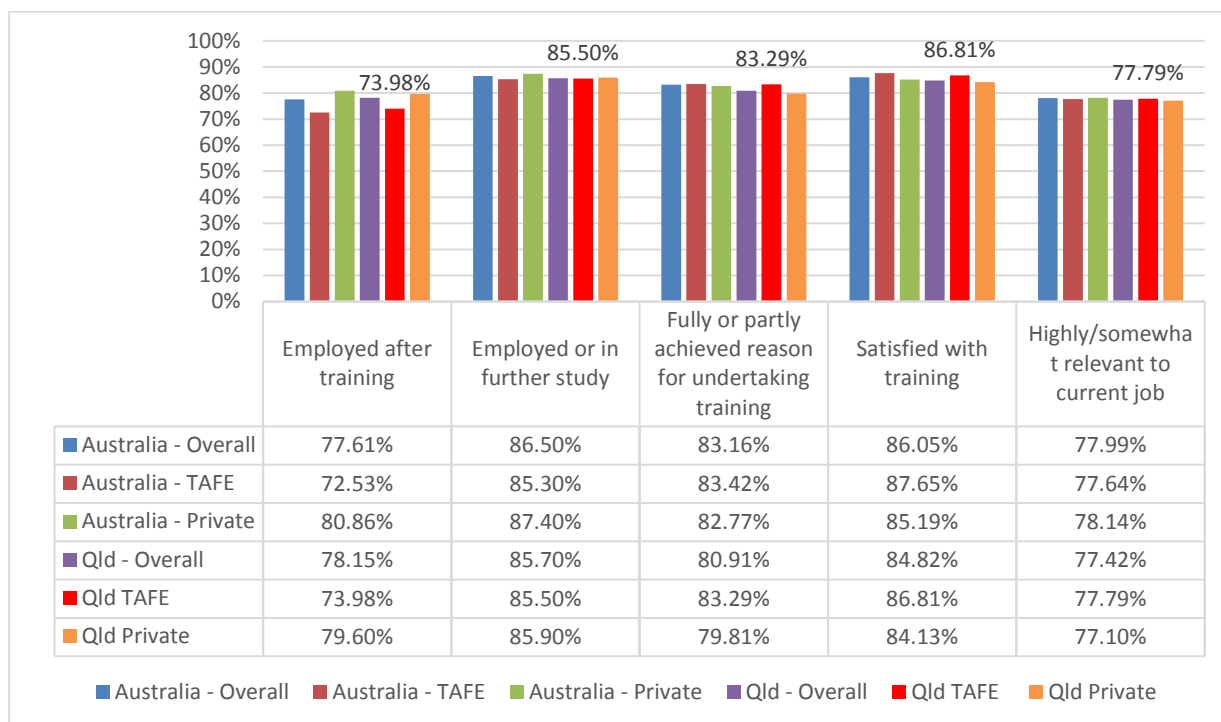


These numbers are offset by the dramatic increase in fee for service VET FEE-HELP students (not captured above), however it is important that income contingent loans that are ultimately repaid by loan recipients are not seen as a substitute for government investment, which is critical to future economic growth. The above decline will have an ongoing impact on the economy and the skills that are being delivered in areas that governments have identified where demand from industry and employers is highest.

This decline in funding and the ongoing disparity between higher education and the VET sector is contrasted by the student outcomes that continue to be achieved within the sector, particularly by public providers.

Figure 3 illustrates the results of NCVER’s Total VET Graduate Outcomes 2016 survey. At a sector wide level the results show the outcome focus of the sector with more than 86% of graduates either employed (77.6%) or in further study (31.5%). Student satisfaction was also high with 86% of graduates satisfied with the training they had received.

Figure 3 – 2016 TVET Outcomes



VET – A key tool in economic transition

The declining levels of funding and participation in the sector in the skill areas that are most in demand restrict the role that the VET sector can play in Australia’s short and long term economic evolution. As succinctly put by the Hon. Karen Andrews MP, Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills to the TAFE Directors Australia 2016 Convention:

“...Our economic prosperity depends on the quality of our graduates, the outcomes of the training you give them and whether they are skilled in the way employers need them to be skilled. Our international competitiveness depends on skilled people meeting employers’ needs...” – The Hon. Karen Andrews MP, Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills

This position is backed by increasing research which identifies the need for a stronger focus on the skills of the future as a means to transition the economy. In 2016 TAFE Queensland and the CSIRO worked together on the research report ‘The VET Era: Equipping Australia’s workforce for the future digital economy’. This report identified that during periods of economic transformation, such as the global financial crisis (see figure 4) there is an increase in movement of individuals between occupations and with this comes an increased need for new skills to meet emerging demands. The skills identified during this work with CSIRO included the well-known growth areas of STEM, digital literacy and entrepreneurialism, however interestingly the analysis found that the areas of greatest growth were in the communication skills cluster, including service orientation, negotiation and active listening.

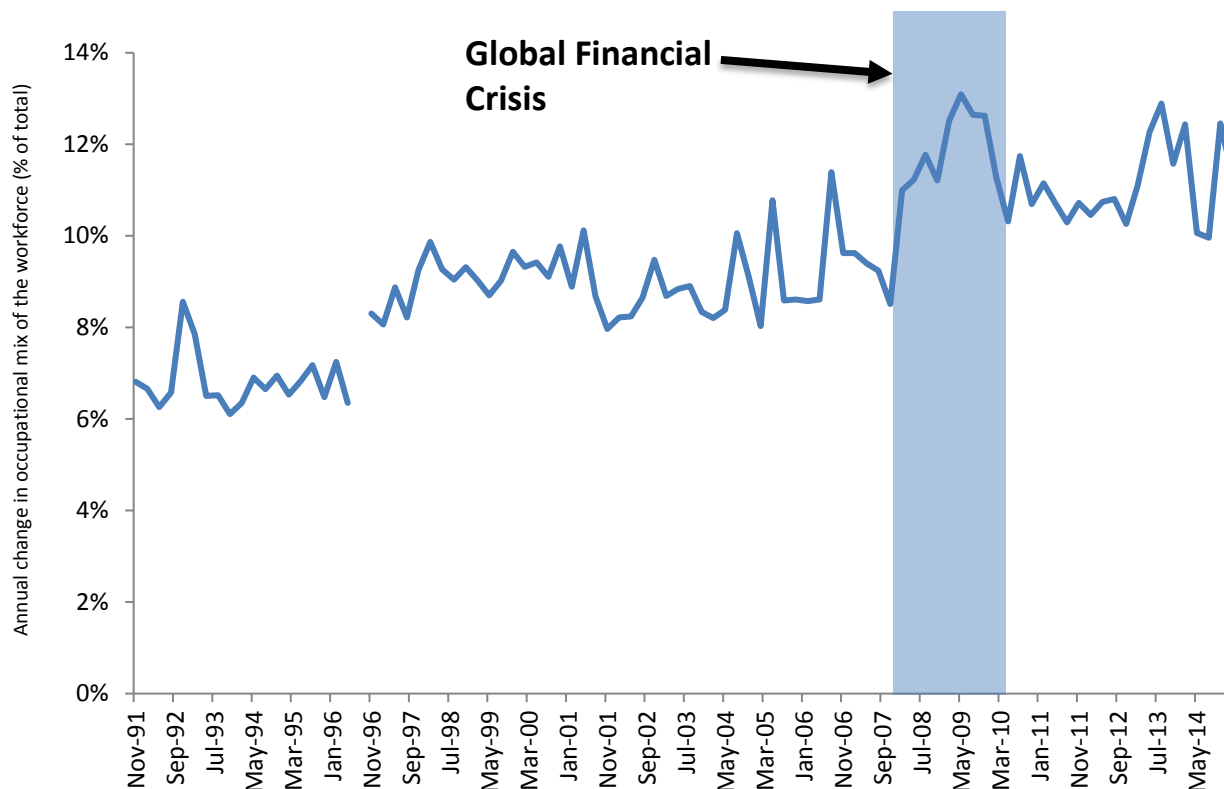
Many of the skills identified through this research can be delivered by the VET sector, which has historically played a central role in economic transition and the current changes need to be supported by a high quality and appropriately funded sector. The report also notes that the sector has strongly

aligned with employer demand “...VET graduations are significantly correlated with job vacancies, suggesting that the VET sector is addressing skills shortages within the economy...”

The role of this sector in the skills drive is also supported by the Australian Industry Group in its submission to the Australian Parliament’s Innovation and Creativity Inquiry:

“The rise of entrepreneurialism is an important factor to promote innovation in the new economy. A highly skilled workforce is a key ingredient across the economy and for the growth of small business. These skills need to include the technical as well as the non-technical and the role of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector should not be overlooked.” – Australian Industry Group

Figure 4: Proportional change in occupational mix of the Australian labour force



Ongoing disruption within the economy and the subsequent need for upgrading and acquiring new skills is forecast by a number of analyses undertaken, including work done by CSIRO. Additionally the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) has been active in researching the changing nature of work and have identified that 70% of young people are entering jobs that will be radically impacted by digital disruption. The research so far has also identified that there is the need to focus on the skills that are being delivered and “...the urgent need for investment in a national enterprise skills and careers educational strategy...”.

Recommendation 3: That the new national VET strategy (recommended above) incorporate a skills strategy targeted at the skilling requirements of the next decade in areas where employers and individuals are unlikely to invest in at this point.

VET and the Innovation Agenda

TAFE Queensland has been actively engaging in the ongoing *Inquiry into innovation and creativity: workforce for the new economy* being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. The critical point that TAFE Queensland has been making during the consultation phase of this inquiry is the ideal position that the vocational education and training sector is in to support the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA).

TAFE Queensland and the VET sector more generally have strong links with industry, particularly small to medium enterprises. These strong industry links are very much the foundation of what the TAFE Queensland delivery model is built on, that is, industry relevant skills. This active integration with industry in its delivery model is also now supported by TAFE Queensland's *Redspace: Centre for Applied Research and Innovation*. TAFE Queensland has established RedSpace to identify, support and amplify the work of educators, experts and students as they continue to tackle complex problems of industry and community partners that are not currently on the radar of the more established research bodies.

As noted in its submission to the inquiry TAFE Queensland is currently undertaking this work without being able to easily access funding sources (the Australian Government currently provides \$1.6 billion per annum for university research).

An international example provides guidance on the outcomes that can be achieved by enabling the VET sector to drive innovation and economic transition. In Canada there is a highly successful model where the SAIT Polytechnic in South Alberta have had great success in facilitating applied research projects involving collaboration between learners, educators and commercial partners. SAIT offers Applied Research and Innovation Services (ARIS) and provides services to industry including, advice on intellectual property and patenting, rapid prototype design/fabrication, new product testing and market analysis. This initiative now sees four research divisions working closely with industry through 12 partnerships.

This work is strongly supported by the Canadian Government, which has identified the important role that the VET sector can play in the innovation ecosystem. This support has equated into funding with the ARIS project receiving CA\$7.2 million in funding during 2014.

The growth of this initiative and the benefits it is returning to the Canadian economy provide an indicator to the current opportunity that is being lost here in Australia.

Recommendation 4: Enable greater emphasis on applied research and innovation already being produced in the VET sector through a \$50 million investment over four years to be allocated through a competitive allocation process as a key strategy to boost productivity and economic growth.

Connecting Post-Secondary Policy Reform

The funding disparity between the VET and higher education sector is illustrated above. Funding growth within the higher education sector has largely been driven by the demand driven funding model that pushed up participation and university attendance. While increasing educational access and participation is undoubtedly the goal of all within the post-secondary sector, ensuring that the mix and level of skills are meeting labour force demands is also critical.

It could be argued that certain emerging trends in the sector suggest that while participation has improved, outcomes have not. The Group of Eight identified that in the 2014 Graduate Destination Survey the proportion of new bachelor degree graduates in full time work was lower than immediately

after the 1990s recession. The VET sector has also experienced the singular drive toward participation with the VET FEE-HELP program driving enrolments, however student outcomes have been poor with two year completion rates at 22% in 2014. In addition to this only 14% of students accessing VET FEE-HELP were doing so in a qualification that had been identified by a state or territory as a priority area (noting that public provider completion rates are significantly higher than the averages quoted).

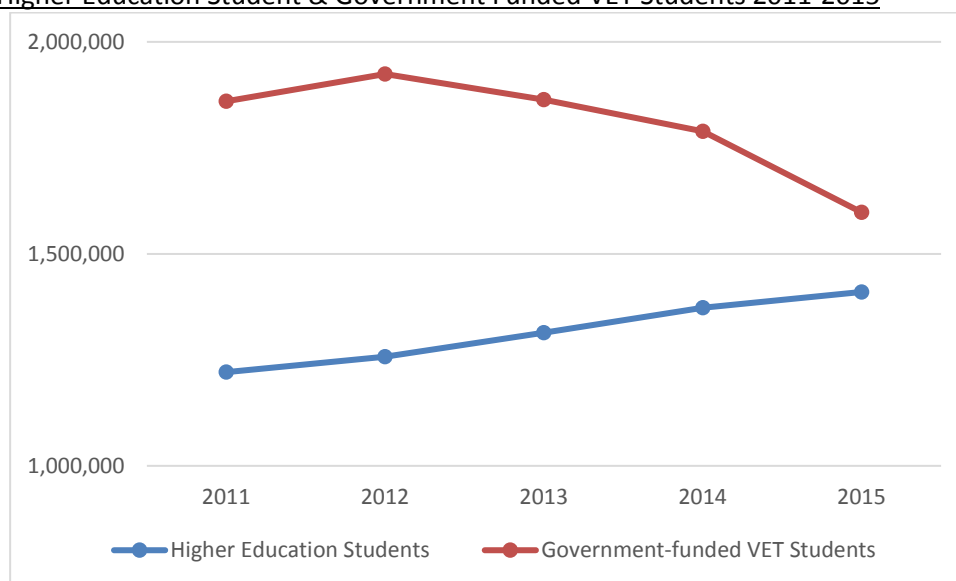
The 14.1% decline in government-funded VET participation since 2011, contrasts strongly with higher education growth (see figure 4) and has and will continue to have an impact on skills. This point was articulated by the Group of Eight’s CEO, Vicki Thomson when speaking about the demand driven model and an oversupply of Bachelor level graduates:

“...they have let down the economy by reducing the value of vocational study and allowing sub-bachelor contribution to wither...we should be encouraging vocational study; not allowing it to be seen as a consolation prize...” – Vicki Thomson: CEO, Group of Eight

This imbalance in approach is clear for those within the sector and the above remarks were strongly supported within a sector that has been the subject of both funding and policy neglect, as represented by TAFE Queensland’s CEO, Jodi Schmidt following Ms Thompson’s speech:

“People are making choices based on expectation. We have lost sight of the need for skilling and the balance between higher education and vocational skills and where they fit in the economy...” – Jodi Schmidt: CEO TAFE Queensland

Figure 4 – Higher Education Student & Government Funded VET Students 2011-2015



Source: Department of Education and Training Higher Education Statistics; NCVET Government Funded Students and Courses

The above trends and some of the student and employer outcomes that they are driving illustrate the need for VET and higher education policy to be more closely aligned and consistent. Specifically, finite investment needs to be more closely targeted to delivering qualifications that will support the economy and where necessary this will require an adjustment in focus from participation to outcomes. A critical starting point would be for the ongoing discussion around higher education reform (discussed below) and the reform of the VET sector not only need to be cognisant of each other they should, where possible be incorporated.

Recommendation 5: Increase integration of reforms in the VET and higher education sectors to ensure a holistic approach to post-secondary education and training.

Higher Education Reform

TAFE Queensland provided a submission to the Australian Government's '*Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education*'. This submission took a position on a range of the reforms raised in the discussion paper. Perhaps the two most critical points related to the extension of subsidies to all higher education providers and the expansion of access to sub-bachelor courses at public universities.

In relation to the first point TAFE Queensland's regional footprint which includes 56 delivery locations throughout Queensland and its proud history of working with disadvantaged learners places it in the ideal position to drive opportunity and choice in the higher education sector. In addition to this, TAFE Queensland's strong links with industry and the applied nature of its delivery model have the potential to improve post-study outcomes in the higher education sector.

Despite the advantages that the VET sector can bring to higher education reform, TAFE Queensland is mindful that the extension of subsidies to all higher education providers requires careful consideration and design. Recent quality issues within the VET sector show that opening access to public subsidy needs to be carefully balanced with sound regulatory structures. A key finding of the recent Australian National Audit Office Report into the VET FEE-HELP program was that when the scheme was expanded the approval process was not adequately rigorous to address risks.

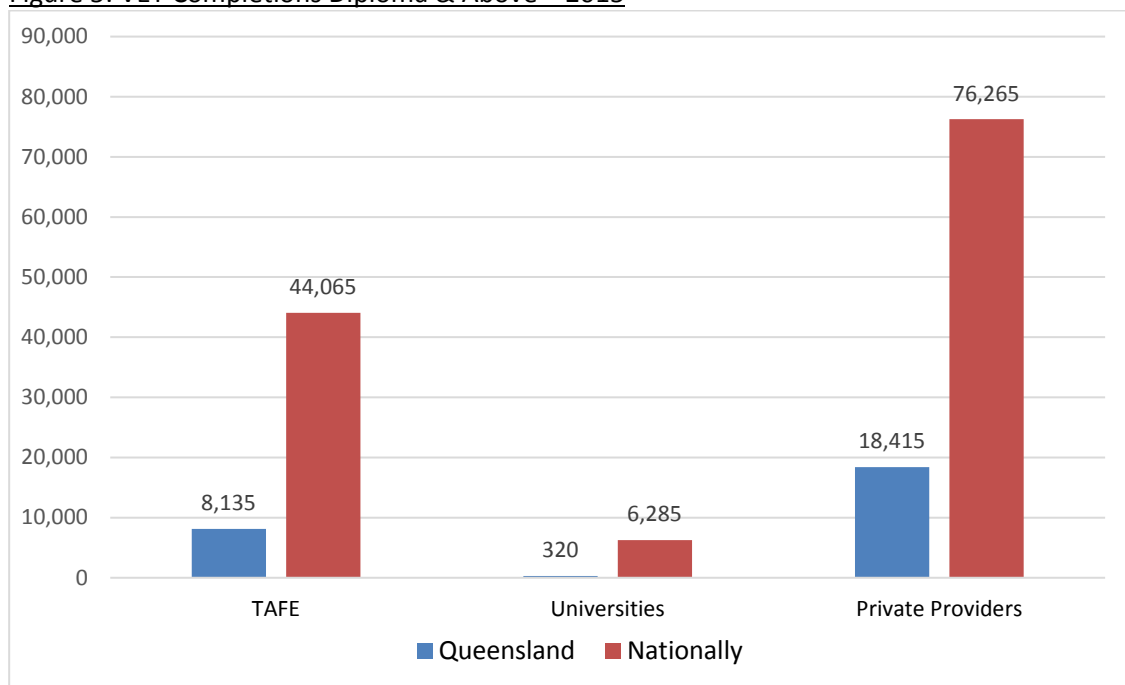
It is for this reason that TAFE Queensland support the extension of subsidies at the higher education level to high quality, low risk not-for-profit providers only. These providers will actively contribute to the Australian Government's objectives of increasing opportunity and choice, while limiting any risk of reducing the quality of qualifications being delivered.

Recommendation 6: Extend access to Commonwealth subsidies for higher education qualifications to high-quality, low risk VET providers to support opportunity and choice in higher education, while maintaining rigour and quality.

TAFE Queensland would not support the extension of the demand driven model, in its current form, to sub-bachelor qualifications. Any such move would have the potential to divert students away from undertaking sub-bachelor studies with providers not eligible for university funding. Currently, providers not eligible for university funding such as TAFE Queensland deliver highly accessible, industry led education and training. The extension of the demand driven model would provide students with a disincentive to access this training through non-university avenues and impact on the skills that are currently being delivered to employers at this level of qualification.

In 2015 TAFE Queensland enrolled 27,535 students at this qualification level, many of which were disadvantaged learners and those looking to reskill. In relation to outputs Figure 5 illustrates the significant contribution that TAFE and the vocational education and training sector currently makes to overall completions at this qualification level.

Figure 5: VET Completions Diploma & Above – 2015



Recommendation 7: Caution be exercised in any reform of (higher education) funding at the sub-bachelor level to ensure that industry based VET qualifications remain viable and the preferred choice for prospective students (i.e. that differences in funding between higher education and VET programs do not adversely affect student choice).

Driving Quality – VET Professional Association

TAFE Queensland has been advocating for the establishment of a professional association for the VET sector for a number of years. Such an association provides the opportunity to ensure high standards of professional practice. In 2011 a survey conducted by Clayton & Guthrie reported that 91.4% of 817 survey respondents supported the establishment of a professional association of some form.

The main argument that supports the creation of an association is that it has the potential to benefit not just the employees within the sector, but that it would drive increased quality within the sector and in turn benefit both students, industry and the broader economy. Some of the benefits that could be expected to be derived from such an association include the following:

- **A voice for VET employees:** The association would provide the opportunity to increase the engagement of the VET workforce with key policy discourse and increase engagement with policy-makers.

- **Strengthened Capability of the VET Workforce:** Meeting the changing demands of industry and students is constant. More than ever the sector needs to be focused on ensuring its workforce is highly capable and delivering quality education.
- **High standards of Professional Practice and a Professional Identity for VET:** An association would recognise and drive a high standard of professional practice and enable the development of a code of practice for VET professionals.

As discussed above this is not a new concept and following a 2013 round table including a range of stakeholders a small working group was formed. This group developed a business proposal on the concept and this was presented to the then Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham in June 2015.

This business case included the identification of \$3 million over three years to effectively establish a viable and valuable not for profit association. This investment will support the long term effectiveness and viability of the association and the initial investment will need to be supplemented by membership fees, sponsorship and events.

TAFE Queensland would support the VET Professional Association being incorporated into a broader development strategy for the VET workforce.

Recommendation 8: The Australian Government support the establishment of a Workforce Development Strategy for the VET Sector supported by a VET professional association through the investment of \$3 million over three years.

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