



OPINION

Each month, OPINION features contributions from invited guest writers. The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association.

REGULARS

Fear, Threat, Crisis: Victorian TAFE library funding

In the 2010 paper *Monash University Centre for the economics of education and training for TAFE and the education targets* the authors state "TAFE has ... suffered both from the overall decline in the level of recurrent public VET expenditure per hour and in the shift of recurrent government funding away from the TAFE sector" (www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/2010/CEETreport2010.pdf). Now the Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries (VATL), the peak body for all Victorian TAFE libraries, is calling on the Victorian Government to recognise the importance of TAFE libraries to student education.

Since the creation of a technical and further education sector in 1974, Victorian TAFE libraries have grown and developed to support the teaching and learning educational strategies of their institutions. Victoria operates under a decentralized system of governance and currently has four dual sector institutions (i.e. universities with both TAFE and higher education (HE) sectors) and 14 other TAFES, all involved either through direct delivery of, or pathways to, higher education.

Since 2009, the Victorian TAFE sector has undergone exceptional transformation. External pressures such as changes to the labour market and a decline in the international student market have driven a push for productivity through training and education. In Victoria, this has equated to opening up the government-funded training market to private registered training authorities (RTOs) as well as greater university enrolments. Additionally, the 2008 Bradley Review's endorsement of HE student places has facilitated expansion towards higher level qualifications while also mandating increased enrolments of students from lower socio-economic status and/or indigenous/cultural backgrounds. This has placed increased cost on TAFE libraries to support a wider cohort of students in their studies and special needs.

Victoria has taken a staged approach to the introduction of its student driven entitlement model. Starting in 2009 and applying to qualification at diploma level and above, by 2011 full implementation covered all age groups across all qualification levels. A comparison between the three types of VET (vocational education and training) providers in Victoria- TAFEs, RTOs and ACE (or community education providers) demonstrates the significant restructuring of VET education in Victoria. Private RTO delivery, especially at the lower qualification level of VET education, has grown exponentially since 2008.

Fierce competition from below (the expanding RTO sector) and above (universities entering their traditional domain) will escalate further the sustainability of Victorian TAFE institutions.

On the 21st October, 2011, Skills Victoria initiated further changes to the student funding model and broader TAFE funding. These changes included a reduction in the industry weightings applied to training in selected industries (i.e. a reduction in government funding) and a 25% reduction in the TAFE and nonTAFE funding differential for large TAFEs and TAFE Divisions. In addition, from next year, a new HE student entitlement funding model that favours universities will witness their increasing encroachment of the traditional TAFE market of higher VET qualifications.

TAFE libraries operate on minimal budgets. For TAFE libraries the impact of further reductions to operational budgets is critical. These changes threaten key infrastructure of the largest tertiary sector in Australia: the vocational, education and training sector.

VATL requests recognition of the role played by libraries in supporting and servicing all VET teachers and students. It requests a review of the private provider model, a landscape with a VET sector potentially populated only by RTOs that do not have infrastructure, such as libraries, to support their students or teachers, an infrastructure that is currently required by students and teachers for quality educational outcomes.

Victorian TAFE students are at risk of losing services that are available in other states. With the advent of a national education and training curriculum, this loss will put Victorians at a serious disadvantage.

TAFE libraries provide a unique service which fundamentally supports the training of our workforce. They deserve secure funding to continue in their vital role. VATL invites the Victorian State Government to ensure that TAFE library services are not eroded by changes in the training industry.

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| | ENROLMENTS | STUDENTS | HOURS |
|-------------|------------|----------|-------|
| TAFE | +3% | -3% | +2% |
| Private RTO | +113% | +112% | +128% |
| ACE | +4% | +6% | +21% |

Vocational training enrolment figures charts a changing landscape for education in Victoria. (Table reproduced from the second quarter progress report (as at 30 June 2011) of The Victorian Training Guarantee: Vocational Training Market Delivery and Demand report produced by Skills Victoria (www.skills.vic.gov.au/skills-and-jobs-outlook/training-market-reports#victorian-training-guarantee-progress-reports).