'Fire sale' could gut Qld TAFE

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• From: The Australian
• September 08, 2012 12:00AM

A MASS sell-off of campuses could be a double-blow to Queensland TAFEs if they aren't given more autonomy, the peak public training body has warned.

TAFE Directors Australia said a draft recommendation to close 38 regional campuses could rob many communities of what was often “the largest institution in town”.

But the move would be “a disaster” if TAFEs were denied the proceeds of the “fire sale”, said CEO Martin Riordan.

The interim report of the Queensland Skills and Training Taskforce recommends a “rationalised structure” for regional TAFEs which would see institutes merged and 82 campuses reduced to just 44.

But it also recommends giving TAFEs more autonomy by transferring their governance to a new statutory authority. The government isn’t responding to the recommendations before it receives the final report, which it expects by the end of November.

Mr Riordan said that if the government decided to close campuses, it would have to act on the autonomy recommendation first.

“Queensland TAFEs are essentially asset-rich and income-poor (but) they could be in the worst of ever positions of being asset poor and income poor,” he said.

He said universities regularly disposed of assets and used the proceeds to revitalise other facilities. TAFEs should have the same power, he said.

The shadow federal employment participation minister, Sussan Ley, said the report showed that Queensland’s TAFE network was unsustainable. “If the system is not sustainable, something has to happen,” she said.

But she said the state government had made no decisions, and Queensland’s regional nature meant government MPs would want to protect their communities. “I don’t think what the interim report is suggesting necessarily spells doom and gloom for TAFEs at all.”

But federal Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans said the proposal would leave thousands of Queenslanders with no access to training.

“Employers (would) be forced to rely more and more on foreign workers,” he said.