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“Smaller classes. Great teachers. Hands-on learning.”

National survey reports higher education students in TAFE value quality ‘work-ready’ degrees

A national survey of TAFE higher education students shows their priority in tertiary education is gaining quality ‘work-ready’ qualifications in settings other than universities.

The highlights for students are the highly specialist nature of TAFE’s sub-bachelor and Bachelor degrees, the quality of the courses, industry experienced teachers, and the ‘applied’ approach to learning that leads to employment on graduation.

Commissioned by TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), and administered by InsyncSurveys, the national survey was open to over 5,000 TAFE higher education students during October 2014.

In TAFE environments, students are most satisfied with the opportunities they have to communicate with their teachers, the skills and knowledge they receive for work, the quality of teaching, and the level of academic support available to them (Figure 1). These opportunities are not always available at universities.

What students say

“Teachers in TAFE are industry specialists. They are very helpful and take good care of students.”

“In TAFE we have much smaller classes especially in the first year. Direct contact with lecturers is significantly higher at TAFE than at a university, and there is a more structured and industry-specific environment.”

“Higher education in TAFE is filled with case studies of real life business. We get to dissect the industries and find out how they are operating, and understand essential indicators for success.”
Overwhelmingly, students called for funding equity with universities to support their studies. Many indicated that with comparable support from the Commonwealth, they would be able to focus on their studies rather than spending many hours working to meet living expenses.

“We are doing the same course, to receive the same qualification. Why should we not have the same rights as university students?” one student responded.

Martin Riordan, Chief Executive Officer of TDA, said the survey provides hard evidence that diversity in higher education is a priority for industry and for students seeking ‘work-ready’ skills, and is also vital for innovation in the sector.

Martin Riordan added: “Greater choice in higher education is essential to meet future workforce skill demands, and is a growing trend we are seeing in many countries.”

Only two of 58 TAFE Institutes currently have access to funding for higher education students, with the remainder of TAFE Higher Education Providers required to charge full fees – with only FEE HELP instead of HECS loans available for students.

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) is the peak incorporated body for the 58 public provider (TAFE) institutes, with 28 TAFEs offering 135 higher education courses (Attachment 1).

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