Funding for degree courses offered at TAFE

(Feldhoff: Many people and you may be one of those people who has gone along to TAFE to do a course … more and more people are heading to TAFE to do degree courses … because either they haven’t been able to get into university … or maybe they come from a lower socioeconomic group and perhaps don’t want to pay HECS fees … these courses are now making it more possible for people to go on and do … tertiary education … the call has come out now regarding funding and whether some of the funding that traditionally goes to universities … should now be shared in the TAFE area … Pam Caven is Director of Policy and Stakeholder Engagement at TAFE Directors Australia … why this call for more funding, why do you think now is the time when this issue needs to be looked at?) … you were right in your introduction, there are a growing number of TAFE institutes that offer bachelor degrees and an increasing number of students that are accessing their TAFE institutes, in some cases they will have done other courses and then they will find a pathway through into a bachelor degree. TAFE Directors Australia says in this situation where the course is … a degree offered by a TAFE institute it should be treated in the same way by the Government as are universities. There should be equal eligibility to funding … we argue it’s really a question of equity. If a student goes to a TAFE institute to undertake a bachelor degree … for the most part they’re paying full fees. That’s not the case in universities. (Feldhoff: … how different is it to do a degree course in TAFE as to university funding … for instance would a student still be up for a HECS debt?) … they wouldn’t have the same eligibility for a HECS debt as they would if they were undertaking a university course. They would be paying considerably more than a university student … (Feldhoff: And would they have to pay that up front?) Yes … they have to pay it during the course of their undertaking the degree, in some cases it will be a matter of paying up front, some loans may be arranged but the significant point here is that the Australian Government has agreed to fund public higher education providers for the students who are eligible to undertake their degrees … that means that students who you could argue are perhaps the most advantaged people in our society will get that kind of Commonwealth support while TAFE students who often come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will not have that same eligibility. They will need to invest in their own training in a much greater way than their colleagues at university. (Feldhoff: Why would a person at this stage do a TAFE degree course as opposed to a university one … is the rigour for instance of the course different to that offered by a university?) There’s absolutely no difference in the rigour … the bachelor degrees offered by TAFE institutes have to go through the same rigorous quality process as university courses so it’s not a question of quality but some students who choose to undertake their degree in a TAFE institute because perhaps they’ve already done a course there, they’ve got good support from the staff at the TAFE institute, or they’re in the region where geographically they can stay within their town and undertake a bachelor degree rather than moving to a city. (Feldhoff: Okay … at the moment if a person chooses to do a degree course through TAFE they would be required to pay for that course themselves, there are very few options open to them in that way. If funding were increased to TAFE to do degree courses
would that make it easier for people to do a degree course financially?) Well it would make it easier and what TAFE Directors Australia argues is that TAFE has enormous expertise in offering certain kinds of courses so the kind of degree courses that TAFE institutes are offering are in many cases in niche areas where they’re working closely with industry, which is a strength of TAFE, they’re providing technical skills, they’re in fact meeting the Government’s requirements for greater participation and for greater productivity but there’s no doubt there’s a disincentive for TAFE institutes to offer degrees when there’s not equitable funding arrangements. (Feldhoff: … can you tell us what courses currently you’re offering that are under this banner … TAFE obviously caters for lots of different areas but not all of them are degree courses.) Well that’s right … TAFE has a very important mission … in a wide array of courses particularly technical courses. People are always familiar with apprenticeships in TAFE but there are a whole range of paraprofessional courses as well that TAFE offers but in the last few years TAFE has increasingly moved into the degree area … sometimes in its own right and often in partnership with … other providers or with universities. (Feldhoff: Would it be fair to say that when it comes to those degree courses they’re usually vocational, for instance you wouldn’t just do a Bachelor of Arts, you might do nursing or accounting or something like that?) … exactly right … one of the popular degrees that’s being offered by TAFE is in nursing and that does in fact attract Commonwealth supported places … only two courses currently that do, one is nursing and the other is early childhood development, but the other kind of courses are in a … variety of niche vocational areas, equine studies, viticulture, there’s special electronics courses that are offered … they respond to industry demand … they have very significant technical skills which are of great importance to the Australian economy. (Feldhoff: And are some of these courses not offered in universities in South Australia?) … there may be some offered in courses, I can’t give you an exact answer on that, but generally what the TAFE institutes are doing is identifying gaps in the marketplace and gaps where they fell they’ve got very, very strong industry connection, very strong technical expertise, they’ve got the staff, they’ve got the resources and … their degree goes through the same rigorous process as any university’s. (Feldhoff: … if funding were increased to TAFEs around the country or certainly here in South Australia … would that mean that people who perhaps wouldn’t normally be able to go and get tertiary degrees would have more access to them … they’d be financially more able to do it and also as a locality as well?) That is our strong belief … that what TAFE institutes have developed over quite a long period is real expertise in dealing with a very diverse student population, particularly people from low socioeconomic backgrounds but not exclusively … we believe that if these kind of courses were more accessible, were given stronger funding from the Government then there would be a real boost in the number of people who could access them, particularly … in regional areas where TAFE has a very big footprint. (Feldhoff: … thank you …)

Gus Geurson, Adjunct Professor, UniSA (891 ABC 16.17-16.18) Funding for degree courses offered at TAFE

(Feldhoff: Professor Gus Geurson has given us a ring … Adjunct Professor at UniSA … you wanted to make a point?) Yes I just wanted to really make something which really needed to be understood … that is that 80% of the funds that go currently to university are funds that don’t come from Government but they’ve come back through HECS and are therefore paid by students … the students are in fact picking up in our current environment 80% of university teaching costs … I don’t believe that that’s the case for TAFE. (Feldhoff: … are you saying by that that you don’t believe TAFE should then get some of that funding that is contributed by students in
that way?) I don’t see why TAFE can’t be funded exactly the same way as universities are through HECS fees. (Feldhoff: ... thank you ...)

**Back to Pam Caven**

(Feldhoff: Back to Pam in just a moment ...) (**Caller Tony:** ... what kind of advertising are you doing to overcome the stigma or the attitudes of employers saying, oh TAFE course, that’s mums doing a part time cooking course ...) (Feldhoff: So Tony despite the fact that Pam says that the rigour is still there you think that the perception is that a TAFE degree isn’t worth as much as a uni degree?) (**Caller Tony:** Absolutely ... I have seen it, if you have a degree in computer science from ... University of SA ... then you have a TAFE of XYZ degree ... for computer science and there’s 100 applicants, 89 of them are TAFE ones, they are just thrown in the bin and the 11 are looked at to see which ones they’re going to choose ...) (Feldhoff: ... Pam ... do we need to address that attitude ...) ... Tony is raising quite an interesting point ... there’s no doubt in Australian society that at times there is a perception that universities are superior in so many ways ... but ... that will change over time ... the TAFE institutes have a much wider presence nationally than universities, they’ve got 1,300 locations throughout Australia and in many cases ... if we look at regional locations, the TAFE institute is really a very significant part of the community ... there is an issue there, the status of VET ... in the new marketplace which is about competition ... TAFE institutes are now going onto the front foot and ... increasingly you will see a new kind of media savvy and an positioning of TAFE as they ... move to really compete with universities and other providers for students. (Feldhoff: ... do you think TAFE could look at a HECS style system that might address the funding issue?) ... there’s much to recommend it ... where students are doing the same kind of courses ... there’s quite a groundswell now of support ... there ought to be the same kind of funding ... where similar courses are being offered ... there seems to be a recognition now if Australia wants to have a smart population, if it wants to have increasing number of the population with bachelor degrees then there have got to be a whole range of quality institutes that offer degrees and that they ought to be appropriately supported. (Feldhoff: ... thank you ...)

Topics of discussion include:

- Caller Jane says her son did Certificate IV in business studies at TAFE and went on to study at Edith Cowan Uni in WA