



MEDIA RELEASE

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Overwhelming response to ‘Free TAFE’ shows Victorians enthusiastic for new training opportunities

The undoubted success of Free TAFE in Victoria reveals more about the aspirations of Victorians for career change and new work opportunities than initial teething problems reported in *The Age* last week.

Following years of upheaval in the delivery of vocational education and training in Victoria as a result of too many non-TAFE providers seeking profit over the interests of students, many prospective students rightly paused before contemplating the effort and expense of acquiring new skills, the CEO of TAFE Directors Australia, Craig Robertson said.

“Yet, the world of work has changed dramatically over that time,” he said.

“The demand for Free TAFE shows that everyday Victorians understand that vocational education is the right pathway to success but have probably been held back by upfront costs or concern about the state of the training sector following the much-publicised failure of training providers.”

“The success of Free TAFE also demonstrates the level of community trust in a TAFE qualification,” he said.

Free TAFE has been a feature of the strategy of the Andrews Government to rebuild confidence in vocational education through its Skills First policy which supports high quality non-TAFE providers operating alongside TAFEs.

“Free TAFE has been the right strategy to bring people back into vocational education because it removed financial barriers and ensured options were available across the state,” Mr Robertson said.

All of the sector is rebuilding, especially after the disaster of VET FEE-HELP which saw many sudden closures of private providers, leaving students stranded and TAFEs picking up the pieces.

“But it would be naive to think that upheaval hasn’t impacted TAFEs. They are also rebuilding and some teething problems in the face of such demand is understandable,” Mr Robertson said.

The situation Victoria finds itself in shows why it is critical to stay the course and continue building the VET sector with TAFE at the centre. TAFEs have the footprint across the state and scope of courses, so new entrants can select the course that best suits them without needing to change providers. Free TAFE graduates also have options within their local TAFE to continue on their learning journey.

“A free-for-all allocation of training places across the full range of registered providers causes rapid growth and an eventual crash, and is the last thing the sector needs,” Mr Robertson said.

“A rebuild of vocational education with TAFE as the anchor is the sensible approach.

“Free TAFE students are voting with their feet and showing their faith in quality training. They should persevere with their training in the knowledge that TAFE changes life chances.”

Claims from some teaching staff about unnecessary new profession development requirements taking them away from classes, or from teaching altogether, has arisen following a national decision implemented by the federal government. The requirement came into effect on July 1 in the hope that the new mandatory requirement would improve training practices, even for the most experienced staff.

“This is a one-size-fits-all solution being applied across the sector in the hope of lifting quality in providers, yet many non-TAFE providers appear to be closing due to poor practices identified by the national regulator.

“Such an approach is a drag on TAFE and other quality providers who always aim to do the right thing,” Mr Robertson said.

“It’s about time that TAFEs, in particular, were treated under national policies in line with the size and quality of their operation, backed up by their state governments.”

Note: Craig Robertson worked in the Victorian Department of Education and Training assisting in implementing Skills First, the Andrews Government policy for vocational education and training.

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TAFE Directors Australia is the peak national body representing 28 TAFE institutes, including six dual sector universities with TAFE divisions.