

## Direct Federal engagement with Australia's Public Provider (TAFE) Institutes: *National Entitlement to Training*

### Objective: A high quality technical and further education sector in Australia

Direct engagement with Australia's public provider (TAFE) Institutes is essential for future skills funding agreements, including the National Partnership on Skills and Workforce Participation.

Currently the Australian Government negotiates Compacts with public universities. However, in the case of technical and further education, shared funding under \$9 billion in annual Commonwealth, State and Territory remains outside formally articulated funding arrangements and strategies for Skilling Australia targets. This includes National Entitlement to Training, scheduled for introduction 1st July 2014.

Australia's 61 public provider (TAFE) Institutes have been nominated as being critical to the successful delivery of quality technical and further education under the Council of Australian Governments scheme, the '**National Entitlement to Training**'. A National Entitlement to Training, part of the demand-led 'voucher' system for students, was authorised under the National Partnership on Skills and Workforce Development (NPA) and will be phased in during 2013-14 across all state and territory jurisdictions. Premiers and First Ministers signed the NPA along with the then Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP and, by doing so, agreed in principle to 'transition support to TAFE' in the new competitive VET environment.

Meeting as the 'SCOTese Ministerial Council', Australian Education & Training Ministers also specified their support for the Australian TAFE network, and its unique and important role in technical and further education.

"... the importance of the key role of public providers of vocational education, including their delivery of high-cost technical training, encouraging participation of disadvantaged students and offering services in regional and remote areas."

(SCOTese Communique, November 2011)

However, Commonwealth negotiations with the States since have been unable to agree on the transition arrangements under the terms of the NPA.

# A National Charter for TAFE

In 2012, Australia's TAFE Directors passed a unanimous resolution to create a National Charter for TAFE based on four principles that will enable Australian public providers to support the National Entitlement Scheme:

## PRINCIPLE 1

### **Funding maintains the viability and responsiveness of public providers**

Fair and adequate funding for TAFE to meet community service obligations and to provide accessible programs for individuals, industries and communities.

## PRINCIPLE 2

### **Quality criteria are substantially enhanced**

Enhanced quality criteria for teaching and learning to ensure consistency in delivery by all registered training organisations (RTOs).

## PRINCIPLE 3

### **Governance enables flexibility and responsiveness**

Governance arrangement for TAFE that enable Institutes to respond to market demands. Equivalent standards of transparency in reporting and accountability are required of all VET providers in receipt of public funds.

## PRINCIPLE 4

### **Recognition of the innovation and leadership roles of TAFE, including its pivotal position in rural and regional Australia**

Recognition by governments of the critical role of TAFE in the economic and social development of regional and rural communities across Australia.

## Our Case

Through the National Charter, TDA argues that TAFE is well positioned to work with industry to meet the Commonwealth Government's objectives for improved productivity, educational attainment and social inclusion in Australia's workforce. TAFE also plays a key part in Australia's engagement with Asia and has been sourced by regional governments and international donor agencies to support capacity building and curriculum for technical and vocational education.

In 2013, TDA presented a detailed submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Further and Technical Education (TAFE), which outlined the mission of quality vocational education leadership by TAFE in the technical and further education sector. The submission argues that any articulation of TAFE's role must be embedded as national policy and therefore be given effect by the Australian Governments party to such an agreement.

Direct engagement with Australia's public provider (TAFE) Institutes is essential for future skills funding agreements. This includes the National Partnership on Skills and Workforce Participation.

## Recommendations

Recommendations made by TDA to the House of Representatives Inquiry include:

- 1** The role of the TAFE network should be defined within National Partnership Agreements and/or other Commonwealth funding agreements;
- 2** A 'review of TAFE base funding' is undertaken to establish the minimum, guaranteed funding required to sustain the public provider network in its role as a comprehensive service provider, separate to contestable funding;
- 3** The review should examine the effectiveness of current partnership arrangements in achieving the desired policy outcomes of an increase in the number and level of qualifications in the Australian workforce and an improvement in national productivity.