



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

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6 March 2022

The Hon Stuart Robert MP
Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business
Parliament House, Canberra

Dear Minister Robert: Re Free TAFE courses for Australia
The Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc. (ISAA) was founded in 1995 as an Australian-wide association for the promotion of education. The association has a diverse membership and broad purpose that give ISAA knowledge and capacity for informed judgement in vocational education and training matters. TAFE should be a valued and essential part of Australia's post-COVID economic recovery and is integral to the nation's vocational education and training system. Yet it has been run down since around 2012, depleting Australia's pool of skilled workers.

In the period since 2012 leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commonwealth relied heavily upon migration to deal with skill shortages in preference to training Australian workers. This has not been possible during the pandemic, resulting in businesses increasingly reporting skills shortages. Skills shortages are an area of economic reform that free TAFE courses would assist in helping Australia build back more strongly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2019 there have been initiatives to provide free TAFE courses in Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales. These initiatives are evidence of the political will to arrest the decline in students undertaking vocational education, particularly in areas of skill shortages.

One of the main attractions of TAFE is its hands-on approach to delivering education. This is particularly helpful for people who do not want to learn in a more academic or theoretical setting. TAFE provides ready access to vocational education and training because students do not require prior qualifications while gaining experience in a field without a large financial commitment. TAFE offers course flexibility and a pathway for students while supporting disadvantaged students. TAFE courses prepare students for most occupations on the skill shortage list.

ISAA supports the provision of free TAFE courses that would provide opportunities for all Australian workers and, significantly, expand the number of women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds engaging in vocational education. These courses provide opportunities for young people and older age groups who see TAFE as the best option to attempt a late change of careers.

ISAA supports The McKell Institute report, *Trading Up: Free TAFE*, which recommends a national program of free TAFE without restrictions on the eligibility of participants, to build a more robust Australian economy in a post-Covid environment. ISAA appreciates your serious consideration of these matters.

S. K. Randell

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cc. Hon Richard Marles MP, Shadow Minister National Reconstruction, Employment, Skills & Small Business