

THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO DE-SKILL TASTAFE AND DE-SKILL TASMANIA

TASTAFE PRIVATISATION MODEL AND POLICY – SUMMARY

The Tasmanian Government has adopted a policy agenda to privatise the operations of TasTAFE and has now put legislation to Parliament. The deeply flawed Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) TasTAFE privatisation plan and the TasTAFE (Skills and Business Training) Bill 2021, if passed by Parliament, will start the process of degrading and deskilling TasTAFE to the detriment of students, employers, regional communities, and our economy.

HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW:

JOB CUTS AND CAMPUS CLOSURES

Australia-wide where TAFEs have been commercialised, regional communities have been hit hard. In South Australia a dozen regional campuses closed and subsidised courses were cut along with 450 full-time teaching positions. Twenty courses were cut from TAFE's metro campus which included all subsidised childcare, aged care and disability courses – forcing students to study with expensive and poor-quality private providers.

HIGHER COURSE FEES

The Government wants TasTAFE to operate like a business and seek "full cost recovery" which is code for higher fees for students and employers. In a taste of what's to come, TasTAFE doubled the advertised cost on courses such as early childhood education, albeit briefly. After media attention the price rises and comparisons that had appeared on their website were taken down, however course costs remain prohibitive in areas of workforce shortages (\$8,000-\$22,758 for Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care).

POOR QUALITY AND EXPENSIVE TRAINING

In the PESRAC plan, private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), notorious for high fees and poor-quality, are to be favoured to deliver profitable courses, while a downgraded TasTAFE provides the remaining expensive-to-deliver training, described as "thin markets". This will force students wishing to study courses like aged care and early childhood education, into the private RTOs. Those who can't afford the private fees are then forced to take out student loans to cover costs. Billions of dollars of taxpayers' money has already been rorted by corrupt private RTOs, under the old VET FEE HELP scheme.

DEGRADING TASTAFE, WORSENING WORKFORCE SHORTAGES.

Delivering "high quality", "nationally accredited training" that "builds the productivity of the Tasmanian workforce" and that helps "prevent skill shortages" are key legislated functions of the existing TasTAFE but have been cut from the new model. Tasmania needs to more than double its workforce to deliver public infrastructure projects and increasingly companies want employees with nationally accredited training – not "micro skills" from short courses. The private RTOs won't fill the void because they favour cheap-to-run, short courses which are more profitable. Degrading public VET in this way narrows the skills of the graduates, which in turn limits their employment prospects and exacerbates existing workforce shortages.

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEGRADED

Providers of services such as aged care and early childhood education have complained about the quality of the training provided by for-profit RTOs which, in a commercialised training market, predominate. Tasmania's social services sector is expecting exponential growth with 4,000 jobs needing to be filled by 2024 and vulnerable Tasmanians need high quality employees. Health is another area of chronic workforce shortage and TasTAFE recently passed its five-yearly Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) accreditation process for the Diploma of Nursing. As we rebuild from COVID-19 there has never been a more important time to strengthen TasTAFE and its ability to deliver high quality, affordable public VET for the benefit of the community and economy.

CASUALLY EMPLOYED “TRAINERS” TO REPLACE PROFESSIONAL “TEACHERS”

Deskilling TasTAFE starts with deskilling its workforce and moves are already underway on multiple fronts. The government wants to remove the requirement for TasTAFE teachers to be registered by the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) and Education Minister, Sarah Courtney, has pointedly changed her language from “teachers” to “trainers”. The government also wants to increase the number of sessional, or casual, teachers that TasTAFE can employ. The radical component of the attack is in the legislation which expels teachers and support staff from the state service and onto Fair Work, where current pay and conditions can be eroded and “trainers” employed on lesser private sector Award conditions. The end game is to have less qualified, less skilled but cheaper-to-employ “trainers” teaching TasTAFE students.

EXACERBATING TEACHER SHORTAGES – PRIVATISING STAFF

TasTAFE struggles to attract and retain skilled teachers and the new TasTAFE Business Bill, which expels employees from the Tasmanian state service and into the private sector (Fair Work), will be disastrous for recruitment and retention of high-quality educators. Contrary to government claims, existing employees at TasTAFE will be immediately worse off, in part because they lose some conditions associated with being a Tasmanian state service employee. Teachers hired under the new model will be placed on a basic Award and far worse off with big cuts to pay and conditions, as well as insecure employment. Teachers hired in the “new TasTAFE” will be paid an estimated 30% less. TasTAFE operates state-wide and reducing the pay of employees ultimately takes money out of local businesses and regional economies.

EMPLOYERS AND STUDENTS RATE TASTAFE HIGHLY

Surveys of employers and students consistently show very high satisfaction ratings with TasTAFE. As part of gaining national accreditation, TasTAFE is required to report on employers' satisfaction levels. In 2020, as in the previous two years, satisfaction was over 85%. Of note were responses to three quality indicator statements:

- Overall, we are satisfied with the training – 86%
- We would recommend TasTAFE to others – 87%
- We would recommend the training to others – 89%.

In contrast, just one out of 178 submissions to PESRAC raised any concerns about TasTAFE and this lobby-group submission spruiked a privatised “Jetstar model”.

SCHOOL HOLIDAY FLEXIBILITY FURPHY

TasTAFE teachers have periods of compulsory leave where they are directed to take holidays – for example over Christmas. Many teachers and support staff would welcome the flexibility to take their annual leave outside school holidays to avoid higher costs and crowds, but they are not permitted. The proposed TasTAFE Business Bill does nothing to change these arrangements, and if there is evidence of demand for an expanded training calendar the Government could present the details and negotiate changes under the current model.

KEY CHANGES THE GOVERNMENT SAYS ARE URGENT CAN BE DONE NOW

The existing TasTAFE model gives the government flexibility to be as much or as little involved in TasTAFE's operations and direction as it wishes. If the impetus was there, the Education Minister could, for example, change TasTAFE's strategic focus, she could change its operating hours, or she could change its governance arrangements. What cannot be easily done now is to cut and casualise the TasTAFE workforce and that is the sole purpose of the proposed laws.

BROKEN ELECTION PROMISE AND NO MANDATE

Peter Gutwein promised at the last state election that he would not privatise TasTAFE but the combination of the PESRAC plan and the draft Bill is privatisation by any other name. Publicly provided training will transfer to private RTOs and public sector TasTAFE employees will be forced into the private sector employment arena. Context is also important and it should be noted that the proposal for a privatised model for TasTAFE came from the fundamentally flawed PESRAC process. The Premier's hand-picked Council lacked broad representation, the consultation was rushed and carefully engineered, and questions remain over transparency and conflicts of interests (AEU Joint Submission, Draft TasTAFE Bill 2021, pp.13-15). TasTAFE is a public education provider for the public good, and the Premier has no mandate to privatise its operations, degrade its capacity and deskill its workforce to the detriment of all Tasmanians.

FURTHER DETAILS AND REFERENCES

See the [AEU's Joint Submission Draft TasTAFE \(Skills and Training Business\) Bill 2021](#)

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