

Human Rights Consultation

NO HECs, NO Debts 4 Tafe Campaigners



Elouise Tuai

Human Rights Submission

Reference Number - AGWW-7NUU3H

NO HECS, NO DEBTS 4 TAFE

My name is Elouise Tuai and I would like to put forward my thoughts in the Human Rights Charter regarding a very worrying matter. This concerns Children's Rights and Education for all not just the rich!

I am concerned that the Victorian Government is forging ahead with plans to implement a controversial new fee structure for Tafe courses in July 2009. The new structure involves increasing Tafe fees and offering HECS style loan system to students. The Governments suggestion is that this move will assist the worsening skills shortage crisis by engaging more people in formal training.

The idea that Tafe will be able to attract more students by increasing fees is ridiculous. For many people Tafe is the only affordable option to pursue any kind of further education. This includes people from low socio-economic backgrounds, new migrants and refugees, single parents, women returning to the workforce and those who for whatever reason dropped out at school early. These are the exact people the Government should be targeting to undertake further education and training to boost the skill levels of our community. This is a social justice issue!

Our society is a socially inclusive society one that promotes equality of opportunity. People are attracted to Tafe studies for many reasons, one of the most significant being the low fee structure and access to concessions. If fees at Tafe are increased the opportunity to attend will be limited to those who can afford it. The loan style is only a further disincentive to undertake study.

These changes can only have a detrimental effect on the skills crisis this country is facing and further reduces the opportunities for economic participation for disadvantaged people. For people living in rural areas with Tafes close by to them, they already have financial burdens. They are living in an area, where the government needs to help them build their towns, bring in water and stay as close to the rural land as possible not move away to the city to find employment because they cannot access Tafe.

As part of a group of students who disagree with the governments HECS style loan system. We have banded together to start a campaign and formed a committee from our group calling ourselves the **'Student Social Action Club' (SSAC)**. Funding was acquired at

Dandenong Tafe through Dandenong Student services namely the Liaison Officer – Matt Posetti. As a group we are made up of individuals who vary in age, gender and cultures. We are a diverse lot in many ways however, some of us are here because it is the one opportunity, we have to further our education and hope for a brighter future for ourselves and our children. As a mature aged parent, I wish to have a career advocating and supporting those in the community who are considered to be disadvantaged? As a group we hope to advance ourselves through further education and we are able to accomplish this because as TAFE students we are able to access affordable, government supplemented fees. Had it not been for the availability of these supplemented fee's most of us would not have this opportunity now.

We have been actively pursuing all avenues of protest using strategies that would assist us in our cause. Firstly we gathered information from the Australian Education Union (AEU), Victorian Government Skills Reform Discussions Paper and The Tafe Futures Enquiry 2006 as well as newspapers and the media.

A Flyer was created to raise awareness in the community using the funding from SSAC, which has been distributed to all TAFE campuses in Victoria plus to all university student advisory representatives. We are speaking to all students who have relied on supplemented fee's informing them on what the introduction of HECS to TAFE will mean for them and their children (if they have them).

We have created both on line petitions, and hard copy petitions to gain signatures to make people more aware of the plight that would in effect, affect them. With the help of an ex Dandenong TAFE student and now a Member of Parliament – Tammy Labato – we have been able to have a voice within the Victorian Parliament and lobby other MP's.

Badges were made in class to sell when we attended protests outside the steps of Parliament in Melbourne last year 2008. Badges are still being sold to help raise awareness to the public; we needed to be socially active to make the change. Posters are actively used in protests and in newspaper interviews.

A class web-site, <http://sites.google.com/site/nohecsnodebts4tafe/> and links into Face book were created. We have made pamphlet drops to letterboxes, at markets and shopping centers to make the public aware of what the government is trying to implement.

We are sending out letters to all MP's both locally and state wide and we have again set up regular phone contact groups to ring MPs continuously.

Some of our group have marched in rallies in 2008. Barriers such as time, have been put in front of us so we are now once more turning our attention to the media – TV, radio, newspapers, letters to the editors, and written articles knowing that we will be considered. Currently, we have had interviews with our group representatives, so the public can hear our concerns.

The government have tried to introduce a program to disadvantage the disadvantaged.

1. A re-introduction of concession cards would be a start,
2. An elimination the large fees for a second diploma they wish to introduce in July 2009 would be a fantastic.
3. No affordable education for Tafe students if the Skills reform was voted in.

If this Government is serious about boosting skill levels, and increasing participation, they need to adequately fund Tafe programs, and make them accessible to all.

Thank you
Elouise