LET’S TALK ABOUT TAFE

RESULTS OF A STATE-WIDE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION BY THE NSW TAFE COMMISSION BOARD AUGUST 2013
“...the vocational education and training world is changing and we will need to adapt our business to succeed in a new environment with new issues...”
Foreword

On behalf of the NSW TAFE Commission Board, I am pleased to present the results of our state-wide stakeholder consultation. The Let’s talk about TAFE project was undertaken in response to a request by the NSW Minister for Education, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP.

We recognise that the vocational education and training world is changing and we will need to adapt our business to succeed in a new environment with new issues:

- skills training is in demand but student and employer needs are changing
- NSW needs a more highly skilled workforce to grow its economy
- competition from universities and other training providers is growing
- Smart and Skilled vocational education and training reforms will commence in July 2014.

TAFE NSW is the Government training provider in NSW and it fills a unique role that no other provider can. But we have to move with the times to stay relevant to the people who need us. That is what this consultation is all about.

Let’s talk about TAFE is the largest consultation undertaken by TAFE NSW. To ensure we heard from as many people as possible we commissioned a Newspoll survey, created an online consultation on the NSW Government’s Have Your Say website and held face to face forums with stakeholders including students, employers and industry, staff, community and special interest groups.

In the following pages you will find what the people of NSW have told us about TAFE NSW. As an organisation, TAFE NSW is deeply valued and intimately connected, but like all institutions there are improvements to be made.

To those who took the time to have their say about TAFE NSW, thank you. This feedback will help inform the future directions of TAFE NSW.

Margy Osmond
Chair, NSW TAFE Commission Board
# LET’S TALK ABOUT TAFE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.0 Executive summary</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.0 Context and methodology</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.0 Key insights</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE NSW is universally valued</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE NSW is vital to the economy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE NSW is crucial to communities</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE NSW also needs to change</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.0 Detailed summary of findings</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspoll survey</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Your Say online consultation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder forums</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.0 Executive summary

The NSW Minister for Education asked the NSW TAFE Commission Board to undertake this consultation specifically to understand what the people of NSW value about TAFE NSW, how effective it is in meeting industry and community needs, and how TAFE NSW needs to adapt in a changing environment.

TAFE NSW’s largest ever stakeholder consultation has provided a series of insights which should help inform future policy decisions about TAFE NSW as the public provider of vocational education and training in NSW. The Let’s talk about TAFE project consisted of a representative survey of 1,905 adults in NSW, 844 responses to an online consultation and 70 face to face stakeholder forums and meetings.

The key insights from Let’s talk about TAFE for the NSW Government, as the ‘owner’ of TAFE NSW are:

TAFE NSW IS UNIVERSALLY VALUED

TAFE NSW is seen as the backbone of the state’s vocational education and training system, and stakeholders share an expectation and desire for this contribution to continue.

TAFE NSW is almost universally recognised by 97 per cent of people. Some 96 per cent of NSW residents who are aware of TAFE say the services provided by TAFE NSW are valuable to the state, with 88 per cent saying those services are very or extremely valuable. In an indication as to how the people of NSW value TAFE NSW qualifications, just over half had undertaken a TAFE course themselves.

The TAFE NSW brand, itself deeply valued, is closely associated with the provision of quality training.

Respondents value TAFE NSW as a networked organisation with its state-wide footprint of Institutes and expect consistency and choice as a result. The value of the brand is significant and respondents say more can be done to promote and protect it.

TAFE NSW IS VITAL TO THE ECONOMY

The people of NSW clearly value the contribution TAFE NSW makes in providing skills critical to the economy. Among those aware of TAFE NSW, some 94 per cent of NSW residents say TAFE NSW’s services are valuable for business and industry. TAFE NSW is seen to produce work-ready graduates, with its focus on practical skills training, particularly for apprentices, and is valued by industry and employers alike.

Stakeholders show an understanding of and appreciation for the role TAFE NSW plays and the quality of the teaching it provides as the public provider of vocational education and training in NSW. The most important factor for stakeholders is access to training – people want to see TAFE NSW delivering training across the state and expect students to have a reasonable choice of courses no matter their location.

Participants in Let’s talk about TAFE clearly understand that TAFE NSW plays an important role in skills training across the state. Stakeholders are clear in their desire to see TAFE NSW delivering training at all levels, from basic skills to higher level and technical training, to help students gain the skills they need to secure work, improve their career prospects and also change careers.

“Some 96 per cent of NSW residents aware of TAFE say the services provided by TAFE NSW are valuable to the state, with 88 per cent saying those services are very or extremely valuable...

...Some 94 per cent of NSW residents say TAFE NSW’s services are valuable for business and industry.”
TAFE NSW IS CRUCIAL TO COMMUNITIES

TAFE NSW is deeply connected to the people of NSW with many people reporting multiple relationships – student, teacher, employer of TAFE graduates – with the organisation. There is support across the board for TAFE NSW’s role in helping students overcome disadvantage and find a job or progress to further education and training. Stakeholders value the role TAFE NSW plays in individual communities in providing a range of quality local training options, and an alternative to university. Respondents, particularly past and present students, also value the support services provided by TAFE NSW to help them succeed.

Many stakeholders were aware that TAFE NSW needs to find efficiencies but wanted to ensure key services remain available.

TAFE NSW ALSO NEEDS TO CHANGE

While people in NSW understand and value the significant role TAFE NSW plays, there is recognition that it must adapt to remain relevant and competitive in a changing environment. Common suggestions included:

- increasing options for delivery of training, including online, face to face and blended learning
- responding more rapidly to employer and customer needs, including access to information
- simplifying enrolment systems and offering more flexible enrolment options
- maintaining quality of teaching, training and facilities
- operating more like a business and cutting red tape
- increasing local autonomy to respond to local needs
- improving marketing and promotion of the TAFE NSW brand.

“Stakeholders value the role TAFE NSW plays in individual communities in providing a range of quality local training options, and an alternative to university.”
2.0 Context and methodology

**CONTEXT**

TAFE NSW is the public provider of vocational education and training in NSW and the leading provider of vocational education and training in Australia. TAFE NSW has more than 550,000 student enrolments each year across its ten Institutes.

TAFE NSW’s legislated objectives are to meet the skill needs of students, business and industry by providing technical, further, basic and pre-vocational education and training. The training provided must recognise the changing nature of work and the need for skills to be current. TAFE NSW must also provide disadvantaged groups with access to and support in undertaking vocational education and training, and provide pathways for students into further tertiary and higher education.

These complex objectives require TAFE NSW to continually adapt so that its services keep pace with changes in industry, the labour market, the NSW population and also changes in the tertiary and vocational education and training policy and regulatory environment.

TAFE NSW is preparing to face new challenges with the *Smart and Skilled* reforms which will be implemented in 2014. *Smart and Skilled* will introduce greater competition for publicly funded vocational education and training as students with an entitlement to a government supported training place will have greater choice of provider.

In October 2012, the NSW Minister for Education, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP, asked the NSW TAFE Commission Board to lead a process of consultation and engagement with key industry and community stakeholders to gain feedback on the role of TAFE NSW and its effectiveness in meeting local industry and community needs.

The findings were to help shape TAFE NSW’s future direction.

In response to the Minister’s request, the NSW TAFE Commission Board led a targeted stakeholder consultation and engagement strategy: *Let’s talk about TAFE*.

**METHODOLOGY**

*Let’s talk about TAFE* was designed to ensure consultation was efficient and effective and engaged key stakeholders in discussion about what they most value about TAFE NSW and how it should change to meet their needs.

*Let’s talk about TAFE* involved three concurrent and complementary methodologies:

- An independent survey of NSW residents to gauge community awareness of, support for and expectations of TAFE NSW. Newspoll Market Research conducted a telephone survey with a representative sample of 1,905 NSW residents aged 18 years and over. The sample was geographically stratified across the ten regions of NSW that roughly map to the locations of TAFE NSW Institutes: Sydney, Western Sydney, South Western Sydney, Northern Sydney, Hunter, Illawarra, New England, North Coast, Riverina and Western NSW.

- An online consultation to confirm what stakeholders most value about TAFE NSW and to help guide how TAFE should operate in the future. TAFE NSW used the NSW Government’s Have Your Say website to ask stakeholders in detail about what they valued about TAFE NSW and how it could change in the future. The online consultation was promoted on TAFE NSW campuses through postcards and posters, direct contact with stakeholders, print and digital advertising.

“*Smart and Skilled* will introduce greater competition for publicly funded vocational education and training as students with an entitlement to a government supported training place will have greater choice of provider.”
media interviews and social media outreach. The Have You Say website attracted some 844 responses and 245,000 words in comments.

Face to face consultation with key TAFE NSW stakeholders, led by NSW TAFE Commission Board members and senior staff. Some 70 meetings and forums were conducted by Board members, the Managing Director of TAFE NSW, Institute Directors, senior TAFE NSW staff and the Chairs of Institute Advisory Councils.

The results of these three approaches to consultation have been carefully analysed to identify the key findings. While the Newspoll survey revealed the views of a representative sample of the people of NSW, the online and face to face consultations provided rich insights and understanding from those stakeholders who wished to express their views about future directions for TAFE NSW.

While these insights are qualitative rather than statistically representative, they are highly valuable in understanding the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the role of TAFE NSW, the value of its services and how it should change.

Let’s talk about TAFE was undertaken between late February and early April 2013. The project coincided with engagement with TAFE NSW stakeholders on two other vocational education and training issues. These were negotiations within TAFE NSW on a new enterprise agreement for teaching staff, and community consultation, conducted by the NSW Department of Education and Communities, regarding the Smart and Skilled Draft Quality Framework. The analysis of the Let’s talk about TAFE results does not reveal a great deal of crossover between these consultations.

“...the online and face to face consultations provided rich insights and understanding from those stakeholders who wished to express their views about future directions for TAFE NSW.”
3.0 Key insights

While the methodologies used in the Let’s talk about TAFE consultation were deliberately different to capture the broadest range of stakeholders (Newspoll survey, Have Your Say online consultation and face to face forums), some clear themes emerged from the results. These are that TAFE NSW is universally valued, vital to the economy and crucial to the communities in which it operates. However, stakeholders also say TAFE NSW needs to change in order to remain relevant and responsive.

TAFE NSW IS UNIVERSALLY VALUED

The results of all consultation activity point to a widespread and strong belief in the value of TAFE NSW to the people of NSW. The awareness of and support for the TAFE NSW brand and the services it delivers are remarkable.

Figure 1. Awareness of TAFE

Q: TAFE NSW is a state government organisation that provides career related courses, education and training. Had you heard of TAFE before today?

97% Yes/heard of TAFE

3% No/don’t know

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE; A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)
TAFE NSW – highly recognised and deeply connected

There can be no doubt that TAFE NSW is a known entity across the state. An overwhelming majority of Newspoll respondents were aware of TAFE NSW.

Not only is TAFE NSW highly recognised, it is intrinsically connected to the NSW population. A large majority have one or more connections with TAFE NSW. Proof of TAFE NSW’s contribution in delivering skills training to the state’s workforce can be seen in the finding that over half the adults polled had personally undertaken a TAFE NSW course.

78% have had a personal, family or work connection with TAFE NSW

75% have undertaken a TAFE course themselves or have a family member who has undertaken a TAFE course, including 51 per cent having personally studied at TAFE NSW

13% have a family member who has worked at TAFE NSW, with 5 per cent having personally worked there

8% say they are an employer or manager of people undertaking TAFE courses.

This interconnectedness was also reflected in the responses to the Have Your Say online consultation. Respondents were asked to describe their relationship to TAFE NSW and the majority responded in multiple categories. Many TAFE NSW staff members and employers indicated they were also former students. Many people who identified as staff members are also currently working in industry and others were employers in their previous and current roles. Some people who identified as employers also teach part time in TAFE NSW.

The majority of respondents to the Have Your Say consultation expressed support for TAFE NSW, seeing great value in the organisation and the social good it represents. Students, employers, staff members and community partners all see great value in the aspects of TAFE NSW with which they are associated.

Students value the training environment provided by TAFE NSW citing the relaxed atmosphere, friendly adult learning environment and skilled teachers.

“…everyone wants to be there to learn. There is a collaborative goal amongst students.”

Respondent – Have Your Say

Employers are generally satisfied with the training provided by TAFE NSW. In stakeholder forums, employers from across industry expressed an increased willingness to partner with TAFE NSW to ensure the relevance and responsiveness of TAFE’s training.

While some staff expressed concern about uncertainty in the sector, the majority commented positively about the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students as well as personal benefits.

Many of the stakeholders attending the face to face forums described a long history of interaction with TAFE NSW. Like the respondents to the Newspoll survey and the online consultation, these associations were characterised by changing and evolving relationships with TAFE NSW, from student to employer to teacher and, in some cases, back again. Participants showed strong support for TAFE NSW and were concerned that TAFE NSW maintain its position as the major provider of training across the state.
Support for the role of TAFE as public provider

In addition to being well connected with the people of NSW, TAFE NSW provides services which are highly valued by the community. Among those Newspoll respondents who are aware of TAFE, some 96 per cent of respondents value TAFE NSW and the vast majority, 88 per cent, described the services it provides as extremely or very valuable. Belief in TAFE’s value to NSW was slightly higher among women than men, people aged 35 to 49, those living in the Sydney region, and those who have studied at TAFE.

Figure 2. Value of TAFE

Q: Overall, would you say TAFE, and the services it provides, are valuable or not valuable? If valuable: is that extremely, very or somewhat valuable? [Base: those aware of TAFE]

Let’s talk about TAFE – August 2013
“Allowing people to better themselves after they’ve done their school years.”

“It’s for the youngster to earn and learn; they need someone to teach them, it’s part of the learning process of life.”

“Does a number of things besides educating people to take on various careers, also assists students who fall through the cracks of high school, to help them...”

Reasons given by respondents about why TAFE NSW and its services are valuable to the state – Newspoll

The nature of the online consultation and stakeholder forums allowed for more in-depth exploration of the role TAFE NSW should play as the public provider. Respondents were asked to consider the roles played by TAFE NSW and indicate which of these were most important to them.

- The roles rated as most important were: Delivering training across the whole state, including regional rural and remote locations and ensuring students and communities have a reasonable choice of courses through a local TAFE college, and ensuring students have access to support services. These roles are focused on TAFE NSW’s geographic reach and provision and appeal to the broadest student population.

- Roles focused on the needs of students were seen as next most important: Providing training for people to help students overcome disadvantage with the aim of getting them into the workforce and developing pathways to help students move through school, VET and higher education qualifications.

- Next most important were broader less direct roles focused on the needs of industry and employment: Delivering skills training in the areas that are important to the NSW economy or need a rapid response, such as industry restructuring and helping make business more competitive by upskilling the workforce.

- Providing centres of excellence for high cost programs that need specialist facilities and expertise was seen as most important by a smaller number of respondents.

“All are equally important to ensure a skilled workforce and sustainable rural economy. These roles ensure there is equity of access to lifelong learning and retraining.”

Respondent – Have Your Say

Meanwhile there was broad support from all stakeholders in the face to face forums for the roles described. TAFE’s contribution to meeting the economic, skill and social needs of individuals, communities and the state were highly valued.

Stakeholders identified a number of apparent pressures on TAFE NSW being able to maintain its current roles and capacity arising from increased competition from private training providers, its current financial pressures, and the potential impact of Smart and Skilled. These pressures were evident in feedback concerning the need to maintain the breadth and depth of TAFE’s current provision to ensure it meets the training needs of individuals, communities and industry.

TAFE NSW IS VITAL TO THE ECONOMY

Another standout factor in the feedback received was the contribution TAFE NSW plays in providing training at all levels, from basic education and skills to higher level qualifications and technical training.
Figure 3. Importance of TAFE services

Q: Do you think it is important or not important for TAFE to offer...?  
[Base: those aware of TAFE]

* Figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE, A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)
Providing invaluable skills training

The Newspoll survey found that of those aware of TAFE, 94 per cent of respondents described TAFE NSW’s contribution to training people for business and industry as valuable – 49 per cent said extremely valuable, 35 per cent said very valuable and 10 per cent said somewhat valuable.

When asked specifically about different levels of training, trade training such as apprenticeships was almost unanimously regarded as important at 99 per cent. Responses also indicated strong support across the full breadth of TAFE NSW training from basic courses to higher level technical skills.

TAFE NSW’s charter to provide statewide access to technical and further education attracted the highest number of comments on the Have Your Say website. The most commented upon feature was the need for TAFE NSW to maintain a presence in regional and rural communities across the state.

In general, Have Your Say respondents also strongly supported the need to provide access to a broad range of courses to cater for new entrants and people needing upskilling as well as those needing support and encouragement to access ‘second chance’ learning or take up further education and training.

Respondents were also concerned about the need for TAFE NSW to remain a low cost provider to ensure access is not limited by affordability. Concerns were raised that increasing the fees for TAFE NSW training would contribute to increasing socio-economic divisions within the community.

Some employer stakeholders wanted to maintain critical training in ‘thin markets’ which private training providers were unlikely to service. This issue was also raised by employers in stakeholder forums. These employers felt that TAFE NSW services are often critical to the development of high level skills needed by those operating in niche industries.

Face to face forums also found that TAFE NSW is seen to be delivering skills training in areas that are important to the NSW economy by responding to the often changing needs of industry and employment. Participants recognised that TAFE’s size and reach position it well to provide training in high demand employment areas.

Maintaining local access to a broad range of training

There was resounding support from the community for TAFE NSW to offer both a broad and deep range of training courses and to ensure these services are available across the state.

“[There are three things] I believe to be the key reasons for TAFE NSW’s existence. Firstly, ensuring NSW businesses have a supply of skilled labour to ensure that these businesses are highly competitive and effective. Secondly, ensuring that school leavers have adequate training to gain jobs and thirdly, to inject a level of equity for those people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Respondent – Have Your Say

“It gives people who don’t get into university opportunities. I’ve seen many friends and relatives come out a lot better than university students. I think they’re a valuable institute to have as an alternative to university.”

“...it provides a broad range of courses for people, that’s the main [value].”

“...retrains people; gives you a head start in getting the right career path.”

“They’re good for people late 20s and over, like women who have had children to get skilled and back into the workforce...”

Respondents on why they value TAFE NSW – Newspoll
A large number of Have Your Say respondents were concerned about the potential impact on economic development in rural and regional locations arising from any potential reduction in services in those areas. Many noted TAFE NSW is often the only option for students in small communities who seek training. Further, where TAFE provision in these communities is responsive to local industries, it provides an important link between students, industry, employers and employment.

Participants in the face to face forums were passionate on this topic. They wanted to maintain state-wide access to training through TAFE Institutes’ network of colleges and campuses. Other feedback included:

- TAFE NSW should continue to provide for all skill levels: basic skills through to cutting edge and higher level skills training needed to meet the needs of employers and employment. Access to entry level training is seen as being the first step to moving young people who failed to reach basic skill levels and the unemployed into the workforce. The provision of higher education by TAFE NSW was supported, including associate degrees as a pathway from vocational qualifications into bachelor degrees.

- Continued provision of Certificate I and II courses was seen by both internal and external stakeholders including employers, as being needed in disadvantaged communities, including those with high proportions of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. They were seen as essential in providing the base from which these workers will proceed to higher level qualifications and team leadership roles in the workplace.

- Regional employers indicated that Certificate I and II courses are important for skilling, reskilling and multiskilling workers in industries such as meat processing and small retail businesses where there has not previously been a strong tradition of accredited training.

- Stakeholders expect TAFE NSW to continue to provide a reasonable choice of courses across communities and that employers and industry, in particular, expect demand for training to increase.

**TAFE NSW IS CRUCIAL TO COMMUNITIES**

There can be no doubt that TAFE NSW is seen as an important pillar of communities across the state particularly in regional and rural areas. People were quick to emphasise the importance of TAFE NSW to their local communities and were also concerned about the potential impact of any closures.

**TAFE NSW is a vital part of the community ‘fabric’**

Consultation in every forum found that TAFE NSW was an integral part of local communities for the vital skills training delivered, for providing career advancement opportunities, for ‘second chance’ education and for overcoming disadvantage. While this was true no matter the location or connection, the importance of TAFE NSW was even higher in regional and rural areas.

“They provide young people with an avenue for education that they otherwise wouldn’t get…”

“…gives children and older adults an option and is usually easier to access in rural communities than going [away] to school or uni…”

“TAFE is always there to help them, to educate them and get them back on their feet, they have counselling there and everything to help them achieve their goals.”

Respondents – Newspoll
The Newspoll survey found that of those aware of TAFE:

74% of respondents saw TAFE as extremely or very valuable to their local community.

51% of those living in regional and rural areas saw TAFE NSW as extremely valuable to their local community.

43% of those living in metropolitan areas saw TAFE as extremely valuable to their local community.

Alternative to university

When Newspoll respondents aware of TAFE were asked why TAFE NSW is valuable to the state, the most popular response, mentioned by 53 per cent, was TAFE’s vocational focus. Some 36 per cent believed that TAFE NSW was valuable as an alternative to university or as an alternative for those who did not do well or did not complete school.

Respondents to the Have Your Say consultation were emphatic about the importance of TAFE NSW to the communities around them. Indeed TAFE’s role in reducing the effects of disadvantage in communities was the second most frequently commented upon area across survey responses. TAFE NSW’s contribution in rural and regional communities was seen

Figure 4. Reasons why TAFE and its services are valuable to NSW

Q: For what particular reasons do you think TAFE and its services are valuable to New South Wales?*
[Base: those who say TAFE is valuable to NSW]

* Open ended question – responses grouped in main themes. Respondents could give more than one.

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE, A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)
to go beyond skills development to community building. TAFE NSW was seen as the only option to raise the education and employment expectations and outcomes of marginalised young people and adults to the point where they could become independent, engaged community members.

“I value my teachers’ supportive attitudes and willingness to work with me to do the very best I can.”
— Respondent – Have Your Say

Participants in the face to face forums spoke of the importance of the support services TAFE NSW provides to assist students to overcome socio-economic and other disadvantage and gain access to ‘first step’ and ‘second chance’ education. It was not surprising that Newspoll found that current and recent students valued the support services more highly than the general population. Key stakeholders considered these support services as increasing participation in and outcomes from training.

There were concerns from a number of Have Your Say survey respondents, and in particular from community partner organisations, for the future of this aspect of TAFE NSW’s role in a competitive funding environment. Many responses to this and other questions commented that such roles needed to be guaranteed funding.

“The role of support services within TAFE NSW and TAFE’s charter to provide ‘further education and training’ have emphasised accessibility and making this a reality for many people. In turn this has made TAFEs often the heart of their communities.”
— Respondent – Have Your Say

Participants in the face to face forums expressed concern about TAFE NSW’s capacity to provide training under increased financial pressure, specifically that people’s capacity to access training could be compromised.

Accessibility of training was an issue for some respondents, who wanted to ensure those most in need of skills development received it.
Figure 5. Reasonable travel time

Q: To get to your classes, what sort of travel time would you regard as being fairly reasonable? [Base: those aware of TAFE excluding those that don’t know travel time]

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE, A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)

Participants said the capacity of some people to travel to undertake training is limited by their employer’s ability to release them for blocks of time out of the workplace and students’ financial capacity to meet travel and accommodation costs.

Newspoll also canvassed those aware of TAFE about what would be a reasonable time for students to travel to a TAFE NSW campus and most agreed that up to 30 minutes was reasonable.

Concern about potential impact of changes

Broadly, participants in the Let’s talk about TAFE consultation understood that the environment in which TAFE NSW operates is changing. Respondents to the Have Your Say online consultation and stakeholder forums clearly understood that TAFE NSW is in a more competitive market and will need to operate in a more commercial manner.

There was however, a range of concerns raised about the impact of change and primary among these was the potential for selected campuses to close.

For example, the Newspoll survey found that 70 per cent of those aware of TAFE overall were concerned about their local campus closing and this rose to 79 per cent in regional and rural areas.
Have Your Say respondents, especially employers and staff from regional and rural areas, were also concerned about the impact of campus closures on local communities.

There was conditional support for the establishment of centres of excellence. While some respondents commented that TAFE NSW’s facilities compared poorly with those of some private training providers, others commented about the high costs of maintaining and keeping facilities current. They noted that these costs were unlikely to be met by many private training providers and consequently the infrastructure costs for high demand skills training in thin markets or with narrow margins would default to TAFE NSW.

Some respondents commented about the potential establishment and location of centres of excellence and the risk of impact on existing provision. As one respondent noted, they must be able to train large numbers of students and to increase the overall number of places available to students from across the state. Other respondents were concerned with the possible rationalisation of existing provision and that the location of centres must be easily accessible.

A number of respondents commented that each TAFE Institute should have the autonomy to determine if and where best to establish centres of excellence.

In the face to face forums, stakeholders identified a number of pressures on TAFE NSW affecting its ability to maintain its current role and capacity in the face of increased competition from private providers, as well as its current financial pressures and the potential impact of Smart and Skilled.

**TAFE NSW ALSO NEEDS TO CHANGE**

While TAFE NSW should be heartened by the deep support for its brand, services and contribution to the community, there was also plenty of feedback about change. Both the Have Your Say and face to face forum respondents, who were likely to be quite engaged and knowledgeable about TAFE, offered detailed comments and suggestions about why and how TAFE NSW needs to change.

**Increase options including blended online and face to face learning**

The Newspoll survey asked those aware of TAFE how they felt about a move towards online learning. Most people said either that it was acceptable where appropriate for TAFE to replace classroom with online courses (45 per cent) or they had no particular view about it (25 per cent).

However when it came to personal preference about one third (34 per cent) said they would prefer to attend a classroom with a teacher, 8 per cent would prefer online and 57 per cent would prefer a mix of the two. The youngest (18-24 years) and oldest (65 years plus) respondents were strongest in preferring classroom or mostly classroom based learning – more than 65 per cent in each of these age groups.

Have Your Say respondents also saw and supported the need for more online delivery but wanted to see a blend of face to face and online learning. This option for change prompted a large volume of responses.

“While younger respondents were most accepting of completely online learning, 57 per cent of people supported a balance between face to face and online delivery.”
For many respondents the issue was simply the range of courses on offer. Many of these respondents were concerned as to what they saw as conflict between this priority and the course rationalisation that has occurred recently and could potentially be further influenced by the Smart and Skilled reforms. For some respondents, a particular concern was the potential loss of courses available to students and employers in rural and regional areas.

There were a number of claims for retention of specific courses and programs from staff members and employers, including calls for retention of courses specific to the wool industry, viticulture and the fine arts.

“I think that TAFE NSW has become more firmly planted in today’s computer based world, with online tutorials, online support and Facebook forums and has become a lot more accessible to everyone. Offering more flexibility and choice for students has meant that I have been able to change careers, better myself and still look after my children.”

Respondent – Have Your Say

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE, A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)
Respond more rapidly to employer and customer needs, including access to information

Some respondents saw the need for TAFE NSW to develop the flexibility and capacity to be able to respond more rapidly to customers as critical to its competitiveness. A number of staff members and employers cited instances where TAFE NSW had not been able to deliver training within the timeframe required by industry and consequently the opportunity had been lost to a private training provider.

Others cited instances where courses and training packages needed to be adapted to meet the unique needs of employers.

Have Your Say and face to face forum findings were also closely aligned when it came to calls for more focus on meeting customer needs. Limited access to information was a common theme and many suggested the TAFE NSW website needed to hold more course information and be more user friendly. Employers called for better communication, particularly about their students’ progress.

Maintain quality of teaching, training and facilities

A significant proportion of respondents focused on maintaining and improving quality as a priority for TAFE NSW. For many, high quality teaching, training and facilities were needed to set TAFE NSW apart from other providers and to increase its attractiveness to students and employers so that TAFE NSW becomes the provider of choice.

For many of these respondents, the means to raising quality rests largely with teachers and the quality of what they do. For them, the primary issues were teacher qualifications and access to upskilling and professional learning.

These respondents’ view was that, if the quality exists, the clients will follow and that clients are prepared to pay more for quality training. Holding competitors to high standards was also seen to be an important role for TAFE NSW.

Students and teachers made wide ranging comments about the importance of support services in quality provision and student success. The most commonly accessed support services were libraries followed by career counselling, disability support and support for Aboriginal students.

Operate more like a business and cut red tape

Stakeholders identified the need for sections of TAFE NSW to be run more like a business, employing visionary leaders and specialist managers. Operating as a business would require sections and units to clearly articulate business plans to drive performance and direction and consider rationalising underutilised courses and facilities. Stakeholders said TAFE NSW needed to be more commercially focused, build commercial revenues and find new markets such as in international and higher education.

“Students and teachers made wide ranging comments about the importance of support services in quality provision and student success.”
Staff respondents’ suggestions included a flatter structure, with less management and more frontline teaching staff. Industry and employer stakeholders wanted to see more training delivery in the workplace and faster responses to changing needs.

Also, staff wanted to see less red tape and bureaucracy. Respondents noted that management processes are unwieldy, calling for greater autonomy within management structures and systems. The processes to initiate and gain approval for enrolments, training plans, commercial contracts, advertising and travel were characterised as being so complex that by the time approval had been given, the opportunities had often been lost.

Increase local autonomy to respond to local needs

There was consistent support for the value of TAFE NSW as a networked organisation providing services across the state, however there was also recognition that individual TAFE NSW Institutes would benefit from more autonomy at a local level. Streamlining of the systems used, removing unnecessary and cumbersome layers of controls and giving more local autonomy to Institutes to make decisions were seen as necessary to making TAFE NSW more responsive and competitive.

Several respondents commented that the flexibility to meet the needs of employers and industries is best achieved through greater autonomy and devolved decision making processes at the college level. Some employers cautioned that consistency in quality of training across regions and colleges should not be lost and suggested the need for more collaboration and communication across Institutes.

“Given that training is often in partnership and locally driven, training arrangements need to be fluid and able to meet geographical and regional needs.”

Respondent – Have Your Say

Improve marketing and promotion of the TAFE NSW brand

Industry, community and employer stakeholders also said TAFE NSW, itself deeply valued, needed to better promote its brand and be more effective in marketing its courses and services. Respondents noted that the TAFE NSW brand was highly valuable but can be damaged where services are not consistent across the state. This was particularly relevant for industries which relied on TAFE NSW to attract and train people for their workforce.

In conclusion, many thousands of words and valuable data on the role and value of TAFE NSW were collected through the Let’s talk about TAFE process. This feedback will inform the NSW TAFE Commission Board, TAFE and its Institutes to help set future directions. It’s clear that the contribution of TAFE NSW is recognised across the state. The last word should go to an employer who summarised one of the key themes:

“TAFE students are well regarded in our industry as they have broad practical knowledge which complements the theoretical knowledge they gain in the course.”

Respondent – Have Your Say
4.0 Detailed summary of findings

The key insights from the Let’s talk about TAFE consultation were synthesised from the results of the three consultation methodologies. The full Newspoll research report and detailed reports of the comments and feedback from respondents to the online and face to face consultations can be found at the TAFE NSW website: www.tafensw.edu.au. Summaries of the findings of each report are provided here for reference.

NEWSPOLL SURVEY

As part of the consultation process with various community groups, TAFE NSW sought to obtain the views of a cross-section of the broader community through a representative survey. The telephone survey was conducted by Newspoll between February and March 2013 with a total sample of 1,905 people aged 18 years and over.

The findings of this state-wide survey into community perceptions about TAFE NSW are summarised below.

Had you heard of TAFE NSW before today?

- Awareness of TAFE is almost universal at 97 per cent.
- A large majority, some 78 per cent of people, have also had a personal, family or work connection with TAFE.
- 75 per cent had either personally undertaken a course or had a family member who has undertaken a TAFE course, including 51 per cent who had personally studied at TAFE.

Figure 7 overleaf outlines Newspoll respondents’ connections with TAFE NSW.

The 97 per cent of respondents aware of TAFE were asked the following questions:

Overall, would you say TAFE and the services it provides are valuable or not valuable to NSW?

- TAFE NSW was seen to be of value across all segments of the community – men and women, all age groups, all areas across NSW.
- While perceptions of the value of TAFE NSW were higher among those who had an existing connection, even those who had no connection valued it extremely highly with 90 per cent describing it as valuable to NSW and 80 per cent describing it as extremely valuable or very valuable.

Would you say TAFE is valuable or not valuable specifically to your local community?

- The vast majority, or 86 per cent of people from all demographic and geographic segments, regarded TAFE NSW as being valuable to their local community.
- Belief in the value of TAFE to local communities was higher in non-metropolitan Institute regions, where 51 per cent saw it as extremely valuable, compared with 43 per cent in metropolitan areas.
- Those aged 35–64 regarded TAFE’s value to the community the highest, with the 18–24 age group recording the lowest perceived value.

Would you say that TAFE’s particular contribution to training people for business and industry is valuable or not valuable?

- Overall levels were again high, with 94 per cent believing that TAFE NSW makes a valuable contribution to business and industry.
- Women were supportive of this belief slightly more than men, as were those with an existing connection to TAFE.
Figure 7. Respondents’ connections with TAFE

TOTAL POPULATION – 18+ YEARS

78%  
Have had personal, family or work connection with TAFE

19%  
Not connected

3%  
Not aware of TAFE

75% *  
Self/someone in family undertaken TAFE course

13% *  
Self/someone in family worked at TAFE

8% *  
Employer/manager of people doing TAFE courses

5%  
Personally worked at TAFE

8%  
Not personally, but someone in family has

51%  
Personally undertaken TAFE course

24%  
Not personally, but someone in family has

7%  
Undertaken course in the past 12 months

4%  
Currently at TAFE

* Could provide multiple responses

Data from Community Perceptions About TAFE, A research report prepared for TAFE NSW, Newspoll (March, 2013)
For what particular reasons do you think TAFE and its services are valuable to NSW?

- Responses can be broken down into two main themes:

  1. Vocational focus – more than half, 53 per cent, felt TAFE NSW is valuable as it helps train people for careers and this includes 23 per cent who specifically referenced training for trades and apprentices.

  2. TAFE as an alternative to university – the next most prominent theme for 36 per cent of people related to TAFE NSW as an alternative for those who did not do well at school. 14 per cent mentioned that it represents a ‘second chance’ to finish school or provided a pathway to university.

- Others mentioned TAFE NSW being a more affordable option than university (13 per cent), being more inclusive ‘a place for anyone’ (12 per cent), a place that offers practical technical training (10 per cent), having a wide variety of courses (8 per cent).

To get to classes, what sort of travel time would you regard as being fairly reasonable?

- Responses varied from five minutes to two hours or more.

- Most said 30 minutes is reasonable and that an hour is too long.

- On average, 37 minutes was regarded as a reasonable travel time to attend a TAFE NSW course.

What sort of travel would make you think it’s just too far away?

- Most people said that an hour’s travel is too far. Only 22 per cent of people thought an hour is reasonable travel time.

The importance of TAFE services

Respondents were asked their opinions on what services they felt it was important for TAFE NSW to offer. The survey measured perceptions of six broad categories of training or other services provided by TAFE NSW.

While high levels were assigned to all six categories, respondents ranked TAFE NSW services as follows:

- Apprenticeship training was considered the most important, with 97 per cent ranking it as extremely or very important.

- Ranked second was training unemployed people, providing basic skills courses and disability learning support, each of which embodies a social dimension to TAFE NSW services.

- Ranked third was the provision of higher level technical training with a still substantial 53 per cent describing it as extremely important.

- The final category was vocational counselling which, even though it was ranked last, had almost 80 per cent of respondents say it is either extremely or very important that TAFE NSW offer this service.

Analysis of responses across demographic and geographic segments showed women believed more in the importance of each category than men, while younger age groups ranked the social services as more important. There were only small differences between regions.
One idea is to provide more education and training online. Have you heard about this type of online education before now?

- 71 per cent of people had at least heard of the concept of online education.
- Awareness was higher among people under the age of 35 and from metropolitan regions and among those who had undertaken a TAFE NSW course in the past 12 months.
- Awareness was comparatively low among people aged 65 and over.

When asked about their personal preference for classroom or online teaching for career-related education or training:

- About one third, 34 per cent, said they would prefer to attend a classroom with a teacher.
- 8 per cent said they would prefer online education.
- 57 per cent said they would like a mix of the two.
- Interestingly, it was both the youngest and oldest age groups who had the strongest preference for classroom or mostly classroom teaching.

The survey also sought community attitudes to the idea of TAFE replacing more of its classroom courses with online courses.

- Some 45 per cent of respondents were of the view that this is an acceptable thing for TAFE NSW to do.
- 25 per cent had no particular view.
- A significant minority, 26 per cent, objected to this idea.
- 15 per cent objected to it strongly.

TAFE wishes to upgrade some of its campuses and also create some industry-specific training centres, with specialised teaching and state-of-the-art equipment. One option to fund such an upgrade program would be to reduce the number of campuses maintained by TAFE.

- Just over half of those aware of TAFE NSW, 56 per cent, said they would object to closing some campuses to fund an upgrade program.
- 39 per cent said they would strongly object to it.
- 18 per cent believed it would be acceptable for TAFE NSW to do it.
- 21 per cent had no particular view.
HAVE YOUR SAY
ONLINE CONSULTATION

The Let's talk about TAFE online consultation was open to the public through the NSW Government’s Have Your Say website www.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au between 4 March and 17 April 2013.

Visitors were able to respond to a survey which comprised general questions about TAFE NSW and questions specifically for TAFE NSW students, employers and community partners of TAFE NSW, and TAFE NSW staff. The survey was advertised through the Have Your Say website, TAFE NSW social media activity, the TAFE NSW website and in daily newspapers.

Many survey respondents had more than one relationship with TAFE NSW, reflecting the strong connections with TAFE NSW in the community. The 844 responses from staff, students and employers yielded varied and often conflicting responses. However, there were common overarching themes with the face to face feedback.

Key themes

The strongest message was support for maintaining TAFE NSW’s state-wide access, its presence in regional and rural communities and breadth of delivery. The most important roles for TAFE NSW were seen to be: delivering training across the state, ensuring students and communities have a reasonable choice of courses through a local TAFE NSW college and ensuring students have access to support services.

Providing training for students to help overcome disadvantage with the aim of getting them into the workforce, and developing pathways for students through school, vocational education and training and into higher education were seen as the next most important roles.

Students and employers valued the services and learning environment TAFE NSW offers and frequently raised the need for TAFE NSW to remain affordable. Staff, students and employers expressed concern at the possibility of reduced course offerings and services as a result of budget cuts.

While centres of excellence were seen as valuable in ensuring the latest resources, technology and links to industry, there was concern that this could reduce accessibility for regional students and employers.

Many respondents commented on the merits of online learning as a way of enabling state-wide access, increasing course choice and better meeting the needs of younger students. However many teachers in particular were concerned that online learning alone could not ensure the delivery of practical skills such as those integral to the traditional trades or the use of specialist machinery. Most supported blended learning where online delivery is supplemented by face to face teaching.
The priorities selected by the respondent groups, for TAFE NSW to remain relevant were:

- for staff members, primarily the need for user-friendly enrolment and information systems, better facilities and becoming more entrepreneurial
- for students, offering more choice including online learning options
- for employers, giving students more choice including online options, becoming more entrepreneurial and having improved enrolment systems
- for community partners, giving students more choice including online options and improved enrolment systems.

There was broad support among all stakeholders for giving greater autonomy to TAFE NSW Institutes so that they could be more responsive to local employers and communities. Some respondents however, were concerned at the risk of duplication of administration. There was also a consistent message about the potential value of TAFE NSW as a state-wide networked organisation where high quality can be achieved by sharing professional expertise and resources, without being constrained by unnecessary administrative policies and processes.

Many staff respondents saw a need to be innovative, entrepreneurial, competitive, flexible and responsive but felt constrained by administrative and management practices and structures. Cutting red tape and changing management structures were seen as ways to reduce costs, shift decision making closer to frontline services and increase innovation and competitiveness.

The primary reasons why students would choose TAFE NSW over other providers were the affordability of TAFE NSW training, that TAFE NSW qualifications are recognised as being of high quality, and the quality of TAFE NSW teachers.

Employers were generally satisfied with the training provided by TAFE NSW. Industry representatives and employers expressed their willingness to partner with TAFE NSW to ensure the relevance and responsiveness of TAFE’s training.

While most employer respondents believed TAFE NSW is responsive to their business or industry needs, some were critical. These employer respondents described inflexible organisational structures and approval processes that prevent TAFE NSW responding quickly to the needs of employers and industry, and variable course coverage and quality across industry areas, regions and colleges.

Repeated concerns for TAFE NSW to address include:

- a more user-friendly TAFE NSW online enrolment system
- improved access to information about courses through the TAFE NSW website
- better promotion and marketing of TAFE’s services.

TAFE NSW teachers frequently commented that they appreciate the TAFE NSW environment, including the common purpose of the organisation and their role in making a difference in people’s lives.

Students and staff made wide-ranging comments about the importance of support services in helping students succeed. The most commonly accessed support services were libraries followed by career counselling.

Many of the suggestions made for improvement, are already in place such as offering short fee for service courses for upskilling in particular fields, providing consultancy services to industry, forging links with universities to enable skills transfer, and greater promotion of how TAFE NSW is changing.
STAKEHOLDER FORUMS

Let’s talk about TAFE face to face consultation with local, state and national stakeholders involved 70 forums and meetings led by NSW TAFE Commission Board members, the Managing Director of TAFE NSW, Institute Directors and senior staff and the Chairs of Institute Advisory Councils.

The consultation targeted TAFE NSW students and staff, employers, business, government and media leaders, community organisations and special interest groups. In total, 140 groups and organisations across NSW participated. Five local, state or national peak bodies made formal submissions to the Managing Director.

Notes taken of the discussion at meetings and forums were collated and analysed and the key comments and themes were identified.

Key themes

Stakeholders value most about TAFE NSW:

- its state-wide access and accessibility, including through smaller campuses. Proximity was a reason for choosing TAFE NSW and concerns were raised that cuts to TAFE NSW would mean less access to courses and services.

- its broad provision across industry areas and all levels of training. Stakeholders expressed the need for the breadth and depth of provision to be retained.

- the support services it provides to assist students to overcome socio-economic and other disadvantage and gain access to ‘first step’ and ‘second chance’ education. Stakeholders considered these support services as increasing participation in and outcomes from training.

- the affordability of TAFE NSW training was seen as critical in ensuring students’ access to training. The rationalisation of courses and the increasing number of courses offered only at commercial rates were seen as potentially limiting access to skills development.

Increasing the number of online courses was broadly supported but online delivery was seen as needing to supplement and complement, not replace face to face delivery.

Centres of excellence were seen as maximising expertise and the efficient use of resources, and potentially able to be established in industry centres, to improve access to cutting edge equipment. But ensuring they are accessible to students state-wide was an issue raised by a number of respondents.
And TAFE NSW needs to change. Repeated areas for improvement and change were:

- the need for a simpler enrolment system and better support for students when enrolling
- upgrading the TAFE NSW website to provide sufficient, accurate information for students and employers on what courses and services we offer
- greater local autonomy to manage the business and respond more rapidly to local needs.

A number of respondents commented on the need for TAFE NSW to improve customer service, respond faster and communicate and engage better with employers about TAFE NSW services, including monitoring student progress.

There was discussion regarding the need to increase TAFE NSW Institutes’ ability to manage training locally. However, some employers also expressed concern that this could potentially increase inconsistency in the quality of training across teaching sections, industry areas, regions and colleges. Respondents highly value the TAFE NSW brand and consider that where services are inconsistent, the TAFE NSW brand is tarnished. Many commented on the need for more collaboration and communication across Institutes.

Respondents had mixed responses on:

- the extent to which TAFE NSW had already changed to meet industry needs or needs to be more flexible
- the quality of TAFE NSW provision, whether TAFE currently provides high quality services or should improve
- the current strength of TAFE NSW industry partnerships and whether TAFE needs to build stronger partnerships. Comments depended on the industry area.

Some recurring themes from both the forums and the Have Your Say online survey warrant further investigation to identify the most effective solutions and to continue to review how and where TAFE NSW services can be improved. These include how best to:

- be more responsive to industry and increase flexibility as employers have varying needs
- improve customer service and attention to customers’ needs. While many comments addressed the need for better information to customers and enrolment processes, there were wide ranging views on what ‘improved customer service’ actually means.
“To those who took the time to have their say about TAFE NSW, thank you. This feedback will help inform the future directions of TAFE NSW.”