

VTA Response to VET Funding Review

VET Funding Reform and the impact on student support services in TAFE Institutes and Dual sector Universities

Executive Summary

This submission is made by the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA). The VTA is the peak body for Victoria's public VET providers. The VTA fully supports the Victorian Government's objective for a more stable VET funding system that can adapt to Victoria's changing economy and support investment to allow the training system to thrive.

This submission is informed by a focus group attended by representatives of fourteen VTA members (TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities) and draws attention to elements of the terms of reference regarding the expectations of Victorian Government to provide certain levels of services (community services obligations).

VTA advocates that key to successful VET outcomes is the provision of adequate funding by the Government for TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities to provide sufficient support to learners, particularly those experiencing social disadvantage.

VTA asks the VET Funding Review to consider the impact of VET funding reforms, particularly since 2012, on the capacity of public providers to ensure that all learners have access to supportive learning environments that are cognisant of students' academic and personal needs. Effective and timely responses to their needs contribute to successful learning outcomes and job-readiness.

VTA invites the VET Funding Review to:

- Take a closer, in-depth look at changes to the profile of student support services which have occurred over recent years, and to assess the extent and impact of service downgrades;
- Explore how Government funds are best allocated to support student services in a way that is mindful of how policy settings in other areas impact on the need for such services;
- Develop funding arrangements for TAFE student support services that recognise the cost of delivering such services:
 - equitably in small population centres/to small campuses;
 - adequately across a wide range of industry/qualification areas;
 - to high needs groups which TAFE has a particular brief to support, and which were always a high proportion of the TAFE student cohort.

Quality learning outcomes and completion rates are central to TAFE Institutes' offer to the training market. They represent social and economic value. Securing both relies on highly skilled teaching and assessment, informed by an understanding of current and evolving employer expectations and workforce needs.

Skilled teaching and effective learning and assessment are not, however, isolated activities or processes. Effective learner support services underpin student success.

TAFE Institutes are in the business of developing and maintaining the conditions in which students persist and engage in their studies – the social context of learning is necessarily part of our brief.

Our students need support to manage their changing circumstances – support that has, as one of its goals, to help them stay engaged in their learning.

Student support services are essential ingredients in high quality learning outcomes and completions. They are not simply ‘nice to have.’

Some characteristics often impact on the need for a responsive mix of general support services and learning support services. TAFE Institutes must have the flexibility and service depth to engage with students who are returning to work, retraining, disengaged, confronting retrenchment, homeless, disabled, Indigenous. These personal backgrounds and circumstances are not deficits – they simply bring different individual challenges for success. They are challenges that student support services are specifically intended to help students meet.

Through consultation with TAFE Institutes, the VTA has identified the suite of student support services that are essential for high quality learning outcomes and completions. This submission examines these service lines, noting the funding constraints that now impinge on their reach and adequacy.

Preamble

This submission is made by the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA). The VTA is the peak body for Victoria's public VET providers. VTA members include four dual sector Universities, twelve stand-alone public TAFE institutes and an Associate Member, AMES. Services provided by VTA to members include public policy advocacy, workforce relations advice, education projects, research, government liaison and representation, and professional development.

The VTA fully supports the Victorian Government's objective for a more stable VET funding system that can adapt to Victoria's changing economy and support investment to allow the training system to thrive.

VTA has elected to make several submissions to the VET Funding Review in relation to key matters, including where government policy decisions impact on the ability of TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities to be competitive in the current VET market, and meet the needs of industry and their communities. This submission is informed by a focus group attended by representatives of fourteen VTA members (TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities). VTA members may respond to the review in areas of particular interest. Individual examples provided of changes, tabled at the focus group, to service levels are indicative of changes across public VET providers.

This submission draws attention to elements of the terms of reference regarding the expectations of Victorian Government to provide certain levels of services (community services obligations) and that as public entities they will fulfill a role as instruments of public policy implementation. TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities are the public face of the Victorian Government's VET policy.

VTA advocates that key to successful VET outcomes is the provision of adequate funding by the Government for TAFE Institutes and dual sector Universities to provide sufficient support to learners, particularly those experiencing social disadvantage.

VTA asks the VET Funding Review to consider the impact of VET funding reforms, particularly since 2012, on the capacity of public providers to ensure that all learners have access to supportive learning environments that are cognisant of students' academic and personal needs. Effective and timely responses to their needs contribute to successful learning outcomes and job-readiness.

Specific points of focus for the VET Funding Review's investigations

VTA invites the VET Funding Review to:

- Take a closer, in-depth look at changes to the profile of student support services which have occurred over recent years, and to assess the extent and impact of service downgrades;
- Explore how Government funds are best allocated to support student services in a way that is mindful of how policy settings in other areas (such as earn or learn entitlements, job service provider programs, regional development) impact on the need for such services;
- Develop funding arrangements for TAFE student support services that recognise the cost of delivering such services:
 - equitably in small population centres/to small campuses;
 - adequately across a wide range of industry/qualification areas;
 - to high needs groups which TAFE has a particular brief to support, and which were always a high proportion of the TAFE student cohort.

Systemic context for student support services

Victoria's TAFE Institutes are dedicated to delivering high quality learning outcomes for all our students. By definition, high quality learning outcomes in the VET sector entail direct benefits to current and future employers of our students.

A priority learning outcome is course completion which provides the greatest benefit to students and employers through a developed capability to apply a suite of integrated skills in the workplace. Completions maximise the return to public and private investment in vocational education and training.

Quality learning outcomes and completion rates are central to TAFE Institutes' offer to the training market. They represent social and economic value. Securing both relies on highly skilled teaching and assessment, informed by an understanding of current and evolving employer expectations and workforce needs.

Skilled teaching and effective learning and assessment are not, however, isolated activities or processes. The learning context for every student is both individual and social. Engagement in learning and the willingness to persist in completing a course are substantially influenced by many factors beyond specific student-teacher interactions. Effective learner support services underpin student success.

Engagement and persistence – how student support services contribute to quality outcomes

Persistence is influenced by the learning capabilities and foundations our students bring to every VET unit of competency and every subject in a higher education qualification. Consistent delivery of quality learning outcomes and a high completion rate fundamentally rest on the capacity of TAFE Institutes to provide learning support services that respond to diverse individual learning needs as they are identified at commencement, and as they evolve during a course of study.

Persistence is sustained through connections with other students and a sense of belonging. Friendship networks among students provide a support network. Effective study collaborations, including group assessment tasks, emerge in supportive social environments. TAFE Institutes are in the business of developing and maintaining the conditions in which students persist and engage in their studies – the social context of learning is necessarily part of our brief. One way learning can be facilitated is through the provision of informal learning spaces but these sort of developments are expensive and Institutes may struggle to prioritise such developments under the current funding arrangements.

The ability to persist through to successful completion is influenced by personal circumstances. Among other things, family functioning, health conditions, access to personal financial resources, housing, may be unstable from the time of enrolment or deteriorate over the period of study. Our students need support to manage their changing circumstances – support that has, as one of its goals, to help them stay engaged in their learning.

Student support services are essential ingredients in high quality learning outcomes and completions. They are not simply 'nice to have.' Many students make limited or occasional use of such services. Many make substantial use of them. Use varies across qualifications levels and industry areas.

Some characteristics often impact on the need for a responsive mix of general support services and learning support services. TAFE Institutes must have the flexibility and service depth to engage with students who are returning to work, retraining, disengaged, confronting retrenchment, homeless, disabled, Indigenous. These personal backgrounds and circumstances are not deficits – they simply bring different individual challenges for success. They are challenges that student support services are specifically intended to help students meet.

The essential suite of student support services

Through consultation with TAFE Institutes, the VTA has identified the suite of student support services that are essential for high quality learning outcomes and completions. The service lines are:

- libraries
- academic skills development
- language, literacy and numeracy support
- disability liaison
- Aboriginal liaison
- generalist counselling
- course information and careers support
- student activities services
- apprenticeship support.

This submission examines each of these service lines below, noting the funding constraints that now impinge on their reach and adequacy. Aboriginal liaison services are also an essential student support service with their distinctive roles in supporting individual students, strengthening links between Institutes and Indigenous communities, and improving the cultural intelligence of all Institute stakeholders. These services are not specifically dealt with in this submission due to the differing funding arrangements that apply to them.

Access to student supports has materially declined

TAFE Institutes have emphasised access to student welfare¹ and support services as a distinguishing marker of TAFE's offer to the market. However, funding reforms since 2012 have materially depleted TAFE's capacity to sustain engagement and persistence across the student cohort. Diminished service provision, and therefore service access, has occurred at the same time that student expectations of service availability have increased with higher student fees. TAFE Institutes report markedly increased complexity of individual student needs and rising instances of mental health needs.

It is important to note that there are variations across TAFE Institutes on access to general and learning support services for students. Institutes have rapidly adapted their student support services profiles to cope with reduced staffing and financial resources. Institutes have trialled and implemented innovations of enduring worth. However, many innovations are workarounds and cost containment measures. They represent Institutes' best attempts at retaining a reduced presence for services that make a marked difference to our students' learning outcomes. It is clear that students attending and relying on regional and smaller Institute campuses are most substantially affected by limited access to student support services.

¹ Including scholarship and funding support

Variations in service profiles due to variations in scale of TAFE operations

Organisational arrangements for the essential suite of student support services have always differed across TAFE Institutes. Variations have depended on factors like relative need among each Institute's student cohort, size of student cohort, size of campus, and cost of service provision.

Institutes had always emphasised depth of specialist skills in each service area, and open access. However, managing a reducing resource base has meant compromises to both depth and access.

A common TAFE Institute response to maintaining a presence across student support services has involved reconfiguring organisational designs. Student support services have amalgamated, adopted more integrated management frameworks, and co-located. The goal has been to maximise direct service delivery through reducing administration and management costs.

Innovative responses of this kind are apparent across TAFE Institutes. It has proved more feasible for larger, metropolitan Institutes to maintain a student centred focus while changing service profiles. More viable alternative organisational designs have been available to them because their starting point was a wide pool of staff in each student support service. Smaller, regional Institutes have had fewer options. A clear compromise for many Institutes has involved trading off depth of expertise in each service with adequate coverage across services.

Rapid loss of student support service development capacity

Of concern for many TAFE Institutes is the rapid loss of development capability – the capacity to innovate relies on thoughtful experimentation with service profiles. The pressing need to reduce costs quickly has resulted in loss of staff with expertise in a range of student services. Remaining staff have, of necessity, concentrated on direct delivery of service to students, leaving limited time to consider the service design options that best meet student needs.

As already noted, many Institutes have amalgamated student services. This strategy has reduced the number of management roles. However, rapid loss of supervisory and middle management roles means some Institutes have lost depth of knowledge associated with student service delivery, and lost considerable capacity to coordinate and integrate service provision adjustments.

It is important to recognise that loss of student support capability has impacted on remaining staff. Their deep commitment to student wellbeing, persistence and engagement has left many feeling the strain of delivering supportive services with fewer resources. Many coordinators, supervisors and managers have incorporated into management roles more direct delivery of services to students. Consequently their capacity to devote time to trial and evaluate service redesign options is reduced.

Physical environment

The physical infrastructure for student support services must be fit for purpose. Existing physical infrastructure is not well suited to a smaller student services footprint on campuses. Co-location of services has imposed new demands on physical infrastructure. Inappropriate physical infrastructure has varied impacts, related to the size of the student cohort, the campus footprint and new configurations for services. TAFE Institutes have not had the resources to refurbish infrastructure such as office space, reception or customer service stations. This also includes general maintenance and upkeep of areas.

The lack of a match between service design and physical infrastructure has implications for service access and service delivery, and has placed additional strain on staff and managers.

Impact of funding reductions on TAFE student support services

As TAFE's market share has fallen precipitately in a contracting market, VTA consultations have revealed impacts on each of the essential student support service lines listed earlier. The community holds high expectations that TAFE Institutes will respond effectively to student support needs. Their expectations are considerably higher than those attached to smaller RTOs. Institutes have attempted to meet those expectations but a reducing resource base is severely hindering their capacity to do so.

An overview is presented below for each essential student support service line, along with information about innovations that Institutes have adopted or are considering in the light of reduced student numbers and resources for student services.

The scope and rate of change in student support services since 2010 has varied markedly across Institutes. Resources and time limit the VTA's capacity to undertake a detailed investigation into each service type which would yield precise quantitative data. The qualitative data presented below represents a consistent view across Institutes. The information presented below nonetheless indicates substantial service reductions in aggregate. As an illustration, a metropolitan TAFE Institute has indicated that across the suite of student support services, staffing has fallen from 50.9 EFT in 2010 to 26.8 EFT in 2015 – an approximate reduction of 50 per cent.

The emergence of student support services 'hubs' makes direct comparisons between current and former service profiles complex. For example, in 2010 one TAFE Institute had 14.0 staff delivering disability liaison, careers, youth pathways and generalist counselling services. Currently, the Institute has 6.6 staff delivering services in these areas. In broad terms, this is a 50 per cent reduction in staffing. However, there are fewer supervisory positions due to the introduction of a hub model with a revamped management structure.

Libraries

A well-functioning library service is at the heart of any educational institution and the provision of library services is linked to student retention². TAFE Institute libraries support students and teachers across a diverse range of industry areas. They provide a range of services including access to collections and skill development in information literacy, digital literacy and research. They provide study spaces for groups and individuals. Library spaces need to be conducive to the learning styles.

Collection development has suffered in recent years. Databases, ebooks, videos, manuals and books are expensive in their own right, and need to be contemporary. Cuts to library acquisitions budgets have meant reduced access to resources – one TAFE Institute reports a 30 per cent reduction. As fees have risen, students have found it more difficult to purchase their own resources – one Institute reports diverting a proportion of its acquisition budget to purchasing class sets.

The number of librarians employed by TAFE Institutes has fallen, and librarian functions have often been invested in redesigned customer support officer roles. Service reductions have varied across Institutes, from reductions in access to higher cost specialist skills through to limiting library opening

² Haddow, G. & J. Joseph. 2010. Loans, logins, and lasting the course: Academic library use and student retention. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*. 41(4): 233-244.

hours. Regional Institutes have recorded substantial service declines. One regional Institute reported:

- the level of staffing at the Library in 2015 stands at 30% of the staffing level in 2011,
- there has been just over a 25% reduction in opening hours at the main branch since 2011 and
- circulation (loans) statistics show a huge decrease in borrowing between 2011 and 2014 (60% decline). While just one indicator of Library use, this decline is far greater than any other 3 year period since records began being kept.

In another example again in regional Victoria, two campus libraries in smaller regional towns now have no librarians on site – customer support officers now provide limited library services. A metropolitan TAFE Institute reports that it no longer has any staff at one of its campus libraries which now fulfils a reference library function with staff attending weekly to tidy the library space. Reduction in library services undermines the professional collaboration between library staff and teachers to enhance outcomes for students.

Libraries are regarded as important centres of student activity and attraction. However, lack of resources to attend to physical maintenance and upkeep is detracting from the attractiveness of many libraries as a destination for individual and group study and networking. Lack of resources has also meant that library spaces designed pre- students bringing in their own devices, do not meet current needs of learners who have embraced technology. The Australian Library and Information Association (<https://www.alia.org.au/>) provides advice on benchmark standards for library services. ALIA is currently drafting Guidelines and benchmark standards for Australian VET Libraries.

Academic skills development

Academic skills development services are fundamental for most students, from well prepared students who are embarking on new fields of study, to disengaged early school leavers. Such services cover a range of skills, including study skills, time management, report writing, academic referencing, essay writing and research. The demand for these services has enlarged in scope as TAFE Institutes become more engaged in delivering higher education qualifications, including supporting students on higher education pathways.

TAFE Institutes have responded to reduced resources for these services in several ways. Online academic skills development services are more prominent today than they were five years ago. One Institute has begun offering online tutoring six days a week and reports that this is effective for about 80 per cent of its students. The incorporation of learning management systems has delivered substantial benefits in cost-effective delivery and student engagement over the past decade. However, the investment in LMS infrastructure relies on building and maintaining students' capacity to use LMS platforms effectively. Direct assistance to students has suffered in recent years. For example, a regional Institute reports a halving of its IT and e-learning support roles since 2010 with consequent reductions in helpdesk services to support student use of Moodle.

However, students with high needs have increased as a proportion of the remaining student body and there is no viable alternative to one-to-one support for diagnosis of need and, in many instances, for ongoing skill development.

Some TAFE Institutes have introduced student advisory teams that deliver services once offered separately through libraries, academic skills development services, and language, literacy and numeracy support. The capacity to support these models varies between Institutes, as does the model adopted. One Institute has reduced staffing for academic skills development services from 5.6

to 1.8 and supplements this smaller permanent staffing complement with casual staff as resources permit and demand changes. However, the overall student support function is considerably reduced. A regional TAFE Institute replaced its academic skills unit in 2013 – this reorganisation limits access to academic skills development service to just 12 hours per week across the Institute.

Language, literacy and numeracy support

For many TAFE students, language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) support is crucial in attracting them to enrol, and in assisting them to persist with their studies through to completion.

Again, it is important to note that the proportion of students needing LLN services has increased as student numbers enrolled in TAFE have fallen. Unfortunately, not all TAFE Institutes have been able to retain LLN resources at scale. A number effectively now provide LLN support on a case by case basis, with those most in need receiving services and those ‘in the middle’ missing out. There are now considerable constraints on resourcing in-class LLN support services and in some instances this kind of support is now unavailable. One TAFE Institute reports that attrition in one paraprofessional qualification has risen as access to in-class numeracy support services has been withdrawn.

For some students who hope to move along a pathway to a higher qualification – whether at certificate, diploma or degree level – limited access to LLN support services affects their educational attainment and puts their hopes in jeopardy.

Limited access to LLN support services jeopardises the successful outcomes for some students who embark on pathways to higher qualifications at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

Disability liaison

Disability liaison services are instrumental in ensuring persistence, engagement and completion for many students who have disabilities. Again, the proportion of students who declare they have disabilities has increased as the overall number of students enrolled in TAFE has declined. TAFE Institutes report that overall demand for disability liaison services is increasing at the same time. People who have disabilities, their families and specialist disability support agencies place considerable emphasis on access to high performing, responsive TAFE courses and student support services.

Meeting the needs of students who have disabilities is resource intensive, and it is difficult to forecast support needs in advance – the level of support relates to the kind of disability, individual circumstances, and the course in which the student enrolls. Students often do not disclose that they have a disability until after enrolment. For some students, the nature and complexity of their disability requires high levels of intervention and with that come significant costs to the provider. Interpreter services for hearing impaired students are expensive – some providers report that these services consume a large proportion of reducing disability support resource budgets. Inclusive technology can require substantial adjustments. A teacher who has not previously taught a student with a disability may require high levels of support.

Institutes have responded to the continuing and growing need for disability liaison services in a variety of ways. For example:

- One Institute has retained staffing at the same level as applied five years ago whilst supporting a 50% increase in disability registrations since 2012, though the staff team no longer has a coordinator as the team now sits within a broader ‘hub’ service model;
- At another Institute, disability liaison staffing has reduced from 1.8 EFT to 1.0 EFT;

- In-class support has reduced in some in many instances with one Institute reporting a 50 per cent reduction;
- Another Institute reports that staffing has remained at 2.0 EFT, but that the resource budget on which they call has reduced substantially.

Generalist counselling

As is well appreciated, factors external to study frequently influence student progress and likelihood of completion. Ready access to generalist counselling services is important to ensure students are supported to manage the broader personal, family and social contexts in which their study takes place. Teachers also need support from generalist counsellors who provide advice and strategies for assisting particular students.

TAFE Institutes report that demand for such support is increasing and some Institutes report that diminishing resources mean demand is often inadequately met. Students attending smaller campuses are particularly vulnerable as fewer counselling staff are concentrated on larger campuses. Several Institutes reported rising demand for financial counselling and personal budgeting services as students weigh up their capacity to pay fees before enrolment, or strike difficulty in managing fees and other financial demands during their studies.

Again, TAFE Institutes have resiliently applied new models of delivery to counselling services so that access is maintained at the highest level possible given the resources available. Innovations have included:

- The introduction of e-counselling services to improve access for students who cannot easily attend the counselling service available at a large campus – however, this service model is not always appropriate and follow up can be complex;
- One TAFE Institute has reduced counselling staff from 3.0 EFT to 1.0 currently, supplementing its service with up to two counselling students on placement – while a valuable response, it does mean that permanent staffing is committed to supervision of students on placement;
- A regional Institute has partnered with a university provider to draw on a co-delivered service.

Despite these efforts, it must be acknowledged that counselling services are more constrained today. One TAFE Institute, for example, reports that over five years the number of counselling staff has reduced from 1.5 EFT to 0.6, with obvious impacts on flexibility and students access. A regional Institute that previously bundled 3.9 EFT across generalist counselling and youth pathways now has 1.0 EFT committed to this work.

There is concern about a diminished capacity to respond to, ‘flash point’ student issues that affect individuals, teachers, and other students. A regional Institute has reduced its counselling and student wellbeing staffing across two campuses by more than 50 per cent, from 4.45 EFT in 2010 to 2.15 EFT in 2015. Over the same period, a metropolitan Institute has reduced personal counselling support from 4.2 EFT to 1.4 EFT – a 60 per cent reduction.

Institutes continue to explore options for delivering high quality, accessible counselling services. A metropolitan Institute is assessing the possibility of a service hub that incorporates health, mental health, and counselling services – an option that may be open given the Institute’s size and scope of delivery.

One TAFE Institute is considering how best to link more effectively with existing services in the community that could provide holistic support to students, including counselling services. It is recognised that this approach may place additional demand on stretched local services but there is a willingness to examine the possibilities.

Several metropolitan and regional Institutes have trialled outsourcing generalist counselling services. This is expensive, and external counsellors are not always aware of the educational context and Institute culture within which students seek support. The overall value of this approach remains unclear.

Participants in VTA consultations noted that reduced access to generalist counselling services – and particularly their role in assisting students to navigate mental health issues – leaves teachers as the mainstay of student support. It is acknowledged that teachers may now need professional development if they are to fulfil this kind of student support role in future.

Course information and careers support

Course information and careers support is essential for many prospective and current TAFE students. TAFE Institutes and dual-sector Universities do a significant amount of work with industry to develop opportunities for students, including work placement as part of the course, volunteering and event based opportunities.

Students must make choices about fees and pathways in a complex environment. Funding arrangements for student entitlements vary, pathway selection is influenced by individual mobility constraints, and employment prospects (both local and wider afield) are difficult for prospective students to evaluate. Offers of inducements to prospective students complicate decision making for prospective students. In the absence of well - informed careers advice in this current period of system complexity and confusion (around education funding entitlements, pathways options, skill shortage areas etc) there are many opportunities for potential and existing students to be poorly guided and encouraged to undertake courses which are of an advantage to a VET provider and not necessarily (sometimes a clear disadvantage) to a student.

Course information and careers guidance services have experienced reductions in recent years, despite the growing complexity of the student decision making environment.

One Institute reports that careers guidance staffing has fallen from 1.0 EFT to 0.4 EFT currently. Staffing to support students to evaluate pathways has reduced – one Institute reports a fall from 0.8 EFT to 0.6 currently and others indicate that this form of support is no longer available as a specific service. Another Institute indicated during consultation that course information and careers advice staffing had reduced from 1.2 EFT to 1.0 EFT – however this smaller EFT allocation has also taken up responsibility for alumni and scholarship management. A regional Institute indicated that in 2015 it has no capacity to offer careers counselling. Large institutes are also increasingly offering a call centre model for student recruitment with limited capacity for face to face consultations with prospective students.

Student activities services

Participants in the VTA consultation considered that student activities services were important for generating a sense of belonging among students. Involvement in student activities enhances student engagement and assists students to build personal networks beyond their own study area.

Staffing for general student activities has been a real casualty of VET funding reforms coupled with reductions in student numbers. Many Institutes reported that these services have been wound back significantly or withdrawn. One Institute participant reported that on the day of our consultation the Institute was closing a fitness centre.

Apprenticeship support

Participants in the VTA consultation stressed the importance of providing strong pastoral care and mentoring to apprentices, particularly in the first two years of their apprenticeship. In the past, apprenticeship field officers built close networks with apprentices through a case managed approach. Recent years have seen a shift from a successful model of engagement with apprentices that included elements of pastoral care, to a focus by apprenticeship field officers on regulatory support and contract compliance. Changes to the apprenticeship field officers and support officers push students out of the apprenticeship system or back to the reduced support services of the TAFE providers.

TAFE Institutes recognise that pastoral care and contract compliance are important to individual apprentices and the apprenticeship system. They are keen to work towards a better balance that sees a support function, inclusive of pastoral care, extended to cover the life of an apprenticeship. There is also considerable enthusiasm for developing a mentoring program for apprentices. Such measures are known to improve outcomes for apprentices.

Current resourcing constraints make it difficult – and in the case of smaller TAFE Institutes, impossible – to consider reprising the pastoral care role in another form, or to consider developing a mentoring program. However, both are seen as worthy candidates for services that hold strong potential for improving apprenticeship recruitment and completion rates.

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