



# Trish Doyle MP

## Member for Blue Mountains



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### **New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly**

#### **Stop TAFE Cuts**

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Tonight I acknowledge TAFE NSW as the major provider of quality, comprehensive, public vocational education and training. Our TAFE system has built the economic, cultural and social capacity of communities across New South Wales. It has provided equity in education. It has offered opportunities and pathways for students and teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is a public education system that provides quality education regardless of a student's capacity to pay and there are important and positive stories to tell—for example, the inspiring story of Melissa and her TAFE Outreach experience in the Blue Mountains.

Melissa worked as a hairdresser but when a serious car accident left her with a disability she was unable to stay in that profession. She was recovering both physically and psychologically when her husband lost his job. They lost their home. Melissa saw a notice in a shop window advertising a TAFE Outreach course in sustainable gardening being run in partnership with the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre in my electorate. She enrolled. Melissa enjoyed this course; it restored her self-confidence. She then enrolled in a computer course and learnt how to use Microsoft Office. Following this success, she enrolled in a business skills course. Melissa then successfully applied for a paid position managing the local school canteen. She said that the gardening course gave her familiarity with the food industry, food handling and healthy eating, while the computer studies and business skills courses gave her the necessary background to promote and manage the business.

Today, under the changes to TAFE implemented by Mike Baird's Government, Melissa would not be able to afford to study. The problems facing TAFE are numerous and its future is dire. There have been funding cuts, course cuts, fee increases, a botched administration system, a drop in enrolments of at least 30 per cent and eligibility changes that will exclude people from further education. The negative impact of the Liberals' ridiculously named Smart and Skilled policy has been far-reaching and devastating. The privatisation of public education and a commitment to disprove,

reckless, conservative economic ideology is not smart, and the Minister is not skilled in pursuing it.

This policy has seen the focus shift from quality public education to a business model concerned with employers, industry and private profit. Private training providers run education as a for-profit business. Our reputable and quality TAFE system, as the public provider, should not be forced to compete on that basis. With a youth unemployment rate of 13 per cent across the State and 20 per cent in the Blue Mountains, we need a government that cares about young people and the unemployed, and provides them with opportunities, rather than these conservatives who want to look after their mates in private industry.

In recent times we have heard the Baird Government talk of being open to a process of asset recycling and rationalisation. What this nonsensical, neo-liberal doublespeak means is that the Baird Government will sell our TAFE campuses. Premier Mike Baird thinks that TAFE can be demolished and its parts sold for scrap to the highest bidder. The message I send to the Premier is that his war on TAFE has to stop. Not content with stripping down and selling off TAFE campuses and gouging students with fee hikes, Premier Mike Baird has ramped up his war on TAFE by downgrading TAFE teachers' skills and introducing the new category of "trainer".

This attack on teachers is yet another devious strategy to dismantle our TAFE system. The offer of either a reduced salary or redundancy does little more than destabilise and demoralise TAFE teachers. It is a kick in the teeth. It is a blatant and damaging display of disrespect to the teaching profession. Downgrading TAFE teachers' skills will have a devastating impact on education outcomes. Already many experienced teachers have left. I pay tribute to the dedicated teachers who are still swimming against the tide, who are frustrated, saddened, angry and depressed. I speak for them today.

TAFE institutes are going through constant restructures and reforms to reduce staff numbers and lower costs. At the Western Sydney Institute, which operates in the Nepean-Blue Mountains region, seven head teacher positions will be cut and more than 30 full-time teaching positions will be abolished. This represents a cut of almost 50 per cent of the Blue Mountains teaching staff. At Blue Mountains College the head teacher, three full-time teachers, and some part-time teachers will be replaced by casual teachers. There is no spinning these statistics. They paint a dire picture for public education in New South Wales and represent a betrayal of our community by the Baird Government. The Premier should shelve the privatisation agenda and start reinvesting in TAFE.