SURPLUS staff cost TAFE SA almost $5.5 million a year even after some had their original positions abolished, official documents show.

In some cases the training institution’s 46 “excess employees” are earning wages that top $141,000.

Most of the “surplus” staff are lecturers, and some have had their position declared “excess” a decade ago.

Of the total surplus staff, 18 earn six-figure salaries.

The documents, provided by Higher Education and Skills Minister Tom Kenyon in response to questions from Opposition MP David Pisoni, also revealed that in the past financial year TAFE SA reported a 2 per cent, or $7.7 million, deficit.

Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology chief executive Raymond Garrand said that only some of the surplus employees were placed in ongoing temporary positions.

“These placements involve meaningful projects in line with skills and experience of the employees,” he said.

“Surplus employees have priority placement for positions in TAFE SA and DFEEST. If a suitable placement is not available within TAFE SA or DFEEST, they are also considered for vacancies across government.

“These employees are also assigned a case manager who meets with them regularly to consider options and opportunities for future employment.

“Where opportunities for redeployment are low, targeted voluntary separation packages may be offered.”

Mr Pisoni said this was an indication of poor management, which was a concern at a time when TAFE SA was separating from the department to become a statutory body.

“It’s poor management when an organisation turns to increase fees and charges, which we have confirmed with a hike in diploma fees, before it looks at sound principles of managing its own staff,” he said.

“If a separate and corporatised TAFE has imported the same culture it developed under the department we will see more fee rises, inefficiencies and bailouts in the future.

“South Australian TAFE students have every right to feel aggrieved.”

In the documents, Mr Kenyon said: “TAFE SA will be accountable for achieving the budgeted operating outcome.”
Union backs jobs push
Joanna Mather

The tertiary union has rejected claims that its bid to force universities to create 2000 extra permanent jobs will result in a doubling or even tripling of lecture costs.

Writing in today's edition of *The Australian Financial Review*, National Tertiary Education Union general secretary Grahame McCulloch argues that in many cases university salary budgets would rise by just 1 per cent.

In a significant departure from previous policy before a new round of enterprise bargaining, the union agreed in June to negotiate on the use of teaching-focused staff in entry-level roles.

It had in the past rejected the notion that academic jobs could entail anything but a combination of teaching and research, although several universities established such posts anyway.

In the upcoming bargaining round, the union will seek to negotiate the creation of about 2000 “scholarly teaching fellows” across Australia’s 39 universities.

But it will insist the new jobs be filled by some of the sector’s 60,000 casuals. Mr McCulloch describes the claim as “reasonable and unlikely to cause any serious budget stresses as part of carefully negotiated packages”.

“Our claims have been carefully crafted to ensure that at most universities total additional costs can be held to around 1 per cent of the total salaries budget,” he writes.

Mr McCulloch’s comments come after Ian Argall, the former head of the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association, estimated that the union’s plan would double or triple the cost of delivering lectures. Thanks to additional salary costs and superannuation, universities would end up paying $319 a lecture to scholarly teaching fellows compared with $174 for casuals at present, he said.

Along with the 2000 permanent jobs, the union’s ambit claim includes a pay rise of up to 28 per cent over four years.
Training providers should be rated: ACCI

Joanna Mather

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has called for a star rating system for vocational education and training (VET) providers as a national body carries out a review of standards and the government prepares to launch its My Skills website.

Just as top hotels are awarded stars based on the quality of their accommodation and fine restaurants can earn hats, VET providers should aspire to receive the maximum star rating for their service to students and industry, ACCI training director Jenny Lambert said.

“The concept of a star rating is something that has been a long-held view of industry,” she said.

“There is an opportunity to provide more information to industry and students about the performance of providers.”

The chamber’s star rating proposal is outlined in its submission to the review of the standards for VET regulation by the National Skills Standards Council. The council, which is chaired by former Labor minister John Dawkins, is overhauling standards for the registration of training providers.

The review has come at a time when VET providers are under heavy criticism for course quality.

“The sector has gone through a series of major changes, including the introduction of a national regulator and state-based reforms to training provision.

In its submission, the ACCI said it supported the development and implementation of an industry owned and led star rating system for grading registered training organisations.

The proposed model would consist of three levels of recognition — the first demonstrating a provider is “committed to excellence”, the second “advancing towards excellence” and the third an “excellence award”.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training, representing privately owned providers educating about 2 million students nationally, does not support the idea of star ratings.

ACPET chief executive Claire Field said that another such scheme was introduced by the Howard government’s Institute for Trade Skills Excellence, but that it failed.

“Aside from being very costly, the star ratings scheme did not recognise excellence in a consistent fashion,” she said. “For example, a faculty on one campus in a large institution could receive a rating, yet no other faculties or campuses would be reviewed as part of the assessment,” she said.

“By contrast in a smaller RTO [registered training organisation] with a specialised area of focus, the entirety of their business operations would be rated.”

Ms Field said the government’s My Skills website, due to be introduced later this year, would provide consumers with performance information.

The website will give information on about 5000 registered providers and courses on offer in the VET system. Providers would include small hairdressing colleges, universities with auxiliary language centres and large companies such as Qantas and McDonald’s that train their own staff.

In another test for VET providers, the standards council is considering new measures to assess graduate outcomes.

Mr Dawkins said the Council of Australian Governments had indicated a desire to focus on outcomes for students and employers.

One option might be independent assessments of graduates.

“We’ve tended to focus the quality of the provider,” he said. “But there’s a question as to whether or not we should also be focusing on what you might call the product.

“It is one thing to say a provider has adequate facilities, adequate staff, but we want to ensure that those facilities and those staff are producing the training which the country needs.”

KEY POINTS

- The ACCI outlined its proposal in a submission to the National Skills Standards Council review.
- But a private provider peak body does not support star ratings.
Father of HECS is happy with what he sees

Joanna Mather

In the most glowing terms it is called the “Dawkins revolution”. Others settle for the more circumspect “Dawkins reforms”. Either way, former education minister John Dawkins presided over a series of changes that produced a dramatic increase in the number of Australians attending university.

Of course, the reforms of the late 1980s also brought an end to “free” degrees, earning Dawkins enemies on the far left of the Labor Party.

In addition, the overhaul required vice-chancellors to provide governments with an economic rationale for course offerings and measured outcomes to justify research spending — the beginnings of a red tape burden university leaders curse ever more loudly.

But few political figures have had a greater influence on Australian higher education than Dawkins, who won the marginal seat of Tangney in Western Australia at the age of 27.

He went on to hold senior ministerial positions in both the Hawke and Keating Labor governments before his sudden resignation in 1993.

Dawkins’ influence did not end there, although his more recent endeavours have occurred largely behind the scenes. And if his focus as education minister was on quantity, his attention has turned to quality.

Dawkins chairs two top-level councils providing advice to ministers on standards in education and training: the Australian Qualifications Framework Council and the National Skills Standards Council.

His latest assignment is a review of standards to regulate the vocational education and training (VET) sector, which has been beset by visa rorts, college collapses and, more recently, questions surrounding the veracity of some of the government-subsidised courses on offer in Victoria.

Amid persistent quality concerns among employers, students and provider groups themselves, the review will examine the standards for registration as a training organisation in Australia.

“The quality of the training system is of crucial importance to the success of the economy,” says Dawkins, who generally avoids interviews and posing for photographs these days.

“I think there will always be quality issues in the education system. It’s a question of how long the ‘tail’ is because not all providers are going to perform at the highest level.

“We should aim to have all providers performing at an acceptable level. Some are close to not achieving that level of acceptability.”

Dawkins attended Roseworthy College and has an economics degree from the University of Western Australia. Before he became education minister it was mainly the middle-class women the primary beneficiaries, economists say.

Dawkins’ reform agenda also included the forced mergers of universities and colleges of advanced education, some of which were successful and others not so.

“The 1988 changes were all about expanding provision which was limited by the availability of funding from the federal budget as the Commonwealth was funding the total cost of all places,” he says.

Nearly a quarter of a century later the Labor government has completely removed any restrictions on how many places universities can offer.

The government now funds a place for every student who is accepted into university and there is very little unmet demand among qualified applicants. The goal is that 40 per cent of Australians have a bachelor degree or higher by 2025.

Could Dawkins have envisaged such a legacy? “If you talked about uncapping it in 1988 that would have been a huge step,” he says.

“But as the system expands the limitation becomes the suitability of the entrants. As we approach the point where almost everyone who is qualified receives a place, uncapping is a relatively small step compared with what it would have been had we...
adopted it 24 years ago.” Back then, Dawkins had the very difficult task of convincing the Labor Party to agree to fees for degrees.

According to economist Bruce Chapman, the consultant who was asked to come up with a workable model for reintroducing fees, it was Dawkins’ masterful negotiating skills that got the HECS policy through.

“His political contribution to that debate was profound,” says Chapman, a professor with the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University.

Contemporary Labor has gone even further, commissioning a review headed by Jane Lomax-Smith to examine, among other things, what the appropriate mix between public and private contributions should be.

The government has yet to respond to the review’s recommendations, which include a uniform 40-60 split between student and government contributions. At present, student contributions are higher than 40 per cent in some disciplines, lower in others. Dawkins will not be drawn on this but he does say universities should be worried about entry standards in an uncapped system.

“It’s not for the government to be trying to force up entry standards by limiting places. It’s universities, which presumably have an interest in maintaining their own reputations, that should answer for those that they are admitting to their courses.”

The number of students in the VET sector has also grown, as has the number of providers.

Dawkins says the standards for regulation have not been reviewed for five years and it’s time to review them in the context of significant growth in the number of providers.

“We must ensure that these organisations are offering an appropriate training experience and that the qualifications obtained are worth something to both the graduate and the employer who is going to employ them,” he says.

Dawkins also chairs the Australian Qualifications Framework Council, which tightened the parameters of formal qualification. There’s a certain contention over master’s degrees, with some arguing they will be mandated at a length that will make Australia uncompetitive. Universities have also protested against the proposed removal of graduate certificates from the framework.

But Dawkins says the changes are the result of university input. Of most concern to the council on the master’s issue was that qualifications were being offered at six months in length.

“When we undertook the review of the AQF it was the universities themselves who said the duration of some master’s courses was too short.”

The council is not concerned with the mode of delivery and does not want to be so rigid as to prevent innovation, Dawkins says.

“What we are concerned about is the volume of learning and how that is achieved and so we thought that, in response to basically the pleas from the universities, we should tighten up on the volume of learning in relation to master’s,” he says.

“Any university is able to offer a master’s but they all carry with them the kudos of being a master’s from an Australian university, so we don’t want to see the qualification diminished. Some involve a very intense one year, others two years. That’s not our issue.

“We don’t want to set in stone a system which can’t respond. On the other hand we don’t want to see the overuse of one kind of qualification at one level diminish qualifications at the same level or either side of it.

“It is a question of maintaining the integrity of the framework while at the same time providing opportunities for universities and VET providers to respond to a changing market.”

Asked if the education and training sector today looks like he had hoped, Dawkins says: “Broadly yes, in that the system has expanded.

“I think quality has been largely maintained,” he says. “The research effort has expanded considerably and, as a consequence, we now have a better-equipped workforce and the research effort contributes to Australia’s prosperity.”

The system has expanded. I think quality has been largely maintained.

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### YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENT

- **1974** – elected federal member for Tangney in WA at age 27 but defeated at the 1975 election.
- **1977** – returned to federal Parliament in the seat of Fremantle, succeeding Kim Beazley (senior).
- **1993** – Appointed Treasurer by new Labor leader Paul Keating.
- **1993** – Resigned from politics. He has since worked as a higher education consultant for the World Bank, UNESCO and the OECD.
- **2008** – present chairman, Australian Qualifications Framework Council.
- **2010** – present chairman National Quality Council (now the National Skills Standards Council)

**John Dawkins on . . .**

**Quality issues in education and training:**

“I think there will always be quality issues in the education system. It’s a question of how long the ‘tail’ is.”

The revised qualifications framework:

“It is a question of maintaining the integrity of the framework while at the same time providing opportunities for universities and VET providers to respond to a changing market.”
Former education minister John Dawkins is particularly pleased with the expansion of research and its contribution to Australia's economy.

Photo: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN
Conservatism is to blame

IT IS the conservative governments that stirred up the financial mayhem – they are the ones that fattened the golden goose on a raft of unsustainable monetary projects that destroyed world finance. They are the ones now in opposition who are the patrons of oligarchs and deliver syrupy sermons, that taxes are a thing of the past – that good government relates to less tax where big business, the obscenely rich, are destined for overflowing wealth in Australia and elsewhere, on the backs of workers.

EJ Dionne Jnr in his column in The Washington Post, July 16, had this to say about conservatism:

"Conservatives once stubbornly insisted that inequality wasn’t a problem because the United States was the land of opportunity and upward mobility. Now they are facing the fact that we are by no means the most socially mobile country in the world."

Reports show that social mobility is greater elsewhere, notably in Denmark, Australia, Norway, Finland, Canada, Sweden and Germany.

What do these countries have in common? Not to put too fine a point on it, all have national policies that are, in right-wing parlance, more "socialist" or (to be precise) socially democratic than ours. They guarantee their citizens health insurance. They have stronger union movements and more generous welfare states. They tend to keep higher education more affordable. In most cases, especially Germany’s, they have robust apprenticeship and job training programs. They levy higher taxes.

From my knowledge of Australian politics it is a reasonable assumption that Tony Abbott’s "vague policies" are aligned with the American Republicans and the extreme right, a situation where the rich get richer and the poorer get poorer. Australia under these policies would evolve, over time into a social club inherited by the wealthy; in this event, an explosion of social welfare would not only destroy living standards but our standing in world economics similar to that being experienced in Europe and America.

J. Macleod, Berry.
THE Australian Industry Group has joined the Refugee Council of Australia to call for more support for refugees to find jobs, and demand an overhaul of the system.

Ai Group regional manager Tim Farrah told The Australian the system was “one size fits all”.

“Even though the Job Service Australia has four different ‘streams’ that they put a jobseeker into, people like the refugees still don’t get the specialised help they need and employers don’t get the full story about how good they are to have in the workplace,” he said.

“I have been able to find about 20 jobs on an ad hoc volunteer basis for members of the local Bhutanese community purely by advocating their cause and attributes directly to employers.

“To the best of my knowledge all but one are still employed, after two years.” The Ai Group has secured funding from the federal Employment Department to employ a refugee employment advocate for a year in the NSW-Victorian border city of Albury to help the refugee community.

The role, which starts next month, will assist Bhutanese refugees to find jobs by working with local businesses.

There are about 400 Bhutanese refugees resettled in Albury-Wodonga through the humanitarian resettlement program, they have come from camps in Nepal.

Refugee Krishna Subedi, who now works at Milspec Manufacturing in Albury, helping to manufacture items for the Australian Defence Force, spent 16 years in a refugee camp in Nepal before receiving a UN High Commissioner for Refugees place to be resettled into Australia.

He said finding work was hard, and refugees needed more help to fully integrate.

“I got married in the refugee camp,” he said. “I came in 2009. I worked as a builder as a volunteer for the UNHCR. It took me 12 months to find a good person who would give me a job.”

Refugee Tila Chauhan, who also lives in Albury, is still unemployed. She has gone to TAFE to get childcare qualifications but works for free because she can’t get work.

The refugee council says in a submission to the Immigration Department it should work with the Employment Department to develop a national refugee job strategy.

“Miscommunication occurs frequently and can lead to jobseekers being interviewed for job positions that are not suited to them or enrolling in training courses that are not relevant or suited to their aspirations and capabilities,” their submission says.

Refugee council chief executive Paul Power said the government said it was aware of their concerns.

“In the Refugee Council of Australia’s consultations, many refugee community members and service providers expressed frustration at the employment and training systems that are meant to assist refugee and humanitarian entrants to find work and develop skills,” he said.

“Most people we spoke to felt that Job Services Australia providers were ineffective in helping refugee and humanitarian entrants find jobs. Those that did find jobs did so through their own networks or with the help of settlement and other community services.”

He said they had heard many reports of refugee and humanitarian entrants being referred to, or targeted by, unscrupulous vocational education and training providers offering sub-standard training courses that were not recognised within industries, particularly aged care and children’s services.

“We have raised these concerns with Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research Chris Evans.”
Join the booming natural health industry now

NATURAL solutions to health and wellness problems are becoming increasingly popular with consumers, with Roy Morgan data revealing a 40 per cent increase in the number of people using alternative health services over the past ten years.

An increasing body of research supporting the benefits of complementary health services published in scientific journals around the world has also led to a stronger demand for qualified, well-trained natural health practitioners.

Endeavour College of Natural Health director of admissions and marketing David Hoey said there was no need for those interested in joining the dynamic industry to wait until next year to start study.

“The next phase of your life can start now, with Endeavour College accepting enrolments for Bachelor of Health Science degrees majoring in Naturopathy, Nutritional Medicine or Musculoskeletal Therapy for semester two, which commences from July 30,” he said.

“The College also offers a highly engaging online learning experience with subject intakes open every month in the year.”

Other reasons to work in the health sector

- Australian Government careers and labour market research site Job Outlook said employment prospects for complementary health professionals are expected to grow very strongly in the period to 2014-15.

- Job Outlook said the proportion of complementary health professionals leaving their profession is 6.4 per cent annually, substantially lower than the average across all occupations (13.1 per cent).

“The range of industries employing our graduates continues to grow.”

Mr Hoey said many past students were enjoying successful careers in private practice, teaching, corporate wellness, aged care and day spas and resorts.

“Musculoskeletal Therapy and Nutritional Medicine graduates are particularly finding work with sporting teams, the Australian Institute of Sport, five-star health resorts, such as Chiva Som and multi-service health clinics,” he said.

Students are eligible to apply for the Federal Government loan Fee-Help to assist in meeting tuition fees.

Endeavour College of Natural Health is the largest provider of higher education and vocational qualifications courses in natural health and fitness in the Southern Hemisphere.

Enrolments are also open for the Vet Fee Help approved Diploma of Remedial Massage commencing in September.

For more information call 1300 462 887 or visit www.endeavour.edu.au