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Thank you for receiving this submission to the inquiry into TAFE and it's operations.

My Submission is based on my personal experience as a **disabled mature age** student at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and briefly recounts how my decision to undertake retraining has not only provided me with valuable new skills and the potential to contribute to the local economy but also, importantly, has enabled me to establish strong new social connections which continue to enable further both social and economic opportunities.

I began at the CIT in 2010 as a part time student in an evening certificate III course in Design Fundamentals with the Visual Arts department. My intention was to ease the isolation I was experiencing from long time chronic illness with 20 years out of the work force as well as the isolation of being at home with two children for 11 years. I was also keen to develop my interest in visual arts but did not know where to start. The only thing I knew for sure about what I was undertaking at the CIT is that it was affordable.

It is not an overstatement to say that within weeks of beginning this course I knew I was in an environment which held the potential to turn my life around. The quality of the teaching and structure of the course itself were nothing short of inspiring. At the end of the year I graduated with a High Distinction and the teachers encouraged me to continue on to the Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Visual Arts.

Due to my chronic illness I expressed concern about continuing with study as the diploma course, at the part time level, required two full days from 9-3 a week. The response of the Visual Arts department to these concerns is something I will forever be grateful for. They made a room and a bed available to me (with a door that locked) where I was able to go when not well enough to continue with a class. For the next two years I used my lunch hour to retreat to this room, sleep, recharge, then return to class. The teaching staff remained, without fail throughout this two year period, flexible to my needs, supportive, accommodating and encouraging. In addition the course itself impressed with it's high quality of content, structure and delivery. I should add that before I got ill I was employed by the government as a Research Economist so where in a position to compare institutions such as the ANU (where I trained) and the Productivity Commission (where I worked) the CIT Visual Arts department teaching staff more than held their own with regard to academic professionalism and standards. They delivered a course which was challenging, comprehensive, relevant and imminently vocational.

Now I have graduated and am finding my way in the local Industry for Visual Arts I am able to reflect at every turn just how well prepared I am to do so, thanks to the CIT. I continue to marvel at a course that in a relatively short time frame delivers so much, providing it's graduates with not just a high quality skill base but the tools to successfully navigate a chosen industry as I am now doing. I have already secured my first exhibition with craftACT for it's Centenary program, and work steadily towards that goal.

In short I am eternally grateful to the TAFE system for it's ease of **accessibility** for individuals like myself, who had been closed out of the workforce for many years, and it's **delivery of affordable high quality training**. Since that first week of commencing a Certificate III course in 2010 I have not looked back.

Sincerely,

Jo Walters