

Ms Julia Agostino  
Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Agostino

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment on the *Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014* (the Bill).

### **Evocca context**

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Evocca delivers vocational education and training courses to over 12,000 students. Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications are offered in business, IT and multimedia, community services, events, and travel and tourism. Evocca is accredited to offer VET FEE-HELP and currently operates in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. We are partnered with Griffith University, Australian Catholic University, University of Southern Queensland and the University of Western Sydney in a pathway program that provides students with up to a year of credit in the corresponding university degree.

### **The Bill**

Evocca supports the intention of the Bill to enable reforms to expand opportunity and choice in higher education in Australia. Tertiary education participation in Australia lags behind comparable nations in the five years following secondary school (e.g. 83% of the Australian population in this bracket were enrolled in tertiary education in 2011 compared with 95% in the USA, 96% in Finland and 100% in Korea).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while the OECD average for post-secondary attainment (Diploma or above) in 2013 was 53.5%, Australia's average was 45%.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, Evocca welcomes reforms that make education and training more accessible and by extension, further welcomes reforms that will contribute to the ongoing financial sustainability of the Government's contribution to higher education.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Bank: [www.data.worldbank.org/indicators/Se.TER.ENRR](http://www.data.worldbank.org/indicators/Se.TER.ENRR)

<sup>2</sup> OECD Education at a Glance 2013 Indicators (for 25-34 year olds)

## **Improving Access**

Provisions in the Bill to expand demand driven funding to higher education qualifications below bachelor degree level, thereby expanding choice and opportunity for students wishing to undertake further education and training, are fully supported.

Removal of the 20% loan fee that applied only to vocational education and training students accessing VET FEE-HELP is also welcomed and fully supported by Evocca as a means to reduce red tape and make the system more equitable.

To further improve access to training and education, Evocca recommends lowering access to VET FEE-HELP to Certificate III students and above. The provision of VET FEE-HELP in the VET market from 2009 greatly assisted in removing the financial barriers associated with the upfront costs of higher education, providing better support for disadvantaged Australians seeking education, and increased options available to students – all of which are the goals of VET FEE-HELP. The further extension of VET FEE-HELP can be undertaken in conjunction with amendments to income contingent loan repayments (discussed below) which would assist in making the model more sustainable. Extending the provision of VET FEE-HELP for certificates III and IV would further assist in removing the red tape and compliance complexities around State Government funding for these qualifications. We have also found that students who would otherwise commence their studies at a lower qualification choose instead to enter at the Diploma level because the financial barriers have been removed from Diploma and above qualifications through the provision of VET FEE-HELP.

Finally, continuing with the policy to have no up-front out-of-pocket fees is very important for the continued participation of many students seeking further education and training.

## **Making the model sustainable**

Evocca supports the intention of the Bill (as outlined in the Minister's second reading speech) for higher education students to make an increased contribution to the cost of their studies. It has been our experience that students with 'skin in the game' are more committed from the outset and are more likely to finish their studies and/or find employment. Lowering the current repayment threshold for Income Contingent Loans (ICL) from \$53,345 to \$50,638 will go some way towards the government seeing a return on its loan sooner (and will enable slightly more student 'skin in the game'). However, Evocca supports this threshold being lowered even further, as was suggested in the Commission of Audit, so that ICLs can continue to be offered for future students over the long term.

Similarly, in an effort to make the system more sustainable over the longer term, Evocca supports the Government's intention to raise the ICL repayment rate in line with the Treasury 10-year bond rate, to a maximum of 6%. Indeed, while we are not advocating for the New Zealand model, it is interesting to note, by way of comparison, that in New Zealand, students pay back their ICL at a flat rate of 12% once their income exceeds \$19,084 (2012/13), in a bid to make the New Zealand ICL model sustainable.

## **Success stories**

We have had some brilliant success stories from so many students whose lives have been turned around by undertaking further studies and being able to do so through the FEE-HELP model. None of these students would have been able to access education and training if up-front fees and out-of-pocket tuition was required. We share just a few with you on the following pages.

## **Conclusion**

All initiatives that expand the scope of the demand driven funding system for higher education, while taking measures that will ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Federal Government's contribution to the sector, are warmly received by Evocca and we commend the Government for their vision and initiative to undertake these reforms.

Yours sincerely

MR ROBERT GORDON  
Managing Director  
Evocca College

Attached: Student success stories

## ATTACHMENT 1 – Evocca success stories

### Paul Joseph – Brisbane Business Management

Paul chose to study at Evocca College to provide himself with the fundamental skills needed to succeed in business. Paul completed his diploma and with the help of the Evocca Confidence Program, he was successful in getting a job at a 5-star hotel chain that has helped build his confidence as an employee.

Further education doesn't stop there for Paul; he is now attending university where he will be studying a Bachelor of International Hotel Management. Paul's dream is to one day own and manage a hotel in Africa.

“The immense support and encouragement I received from Evocca College gave me the confidence to achieve my goals.”



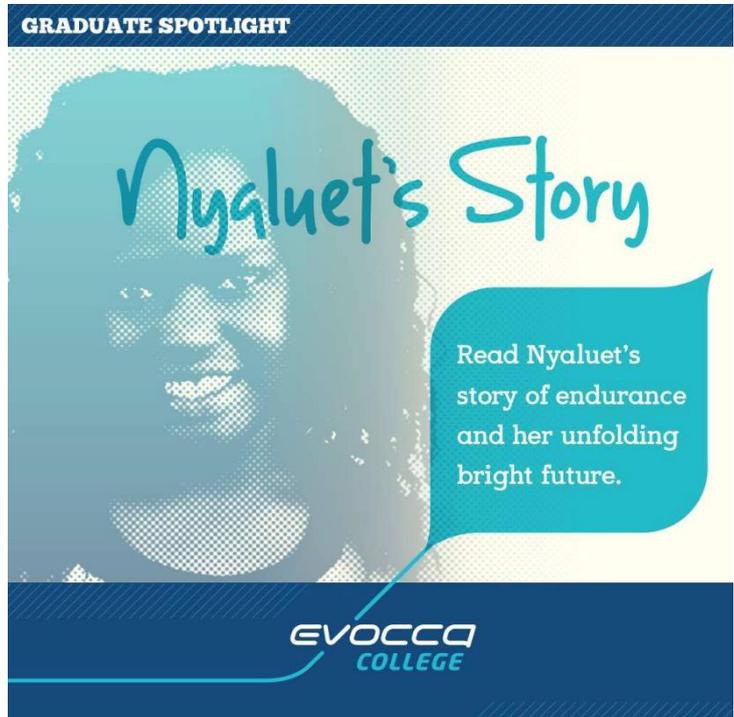
### **Nyaluet Molang – Frankston Business**

Nyaluet was originally a distance student who enrolled in November of 2012, after coming into the College in January she transferred into classroom. At the time, Nyaluet had not completed any course units BUT after a lot of hard work and perseverance Nyaluet graduated in July with a Business Diploma.

Nyaluet attribute her success to the learning environment and style at Evocca College.

“I like the flexibility and freedom to study my own pace,” said Miss Molang

She has also been guaranteed a place at Victoria University to further her business studies. We are so proud of Nyaluet for conquering her Diploma and know that she has a bright future!



### **Krystal Bradbury – Campbelltown Business**

Campbell town graduate and mother of three, Krystal Bradbury, is conquering goal after goal and is now studying full time at Wollongong University after completing a Diploma of Business.

Krystal completed her diploma at Evocca College in February; she thought she was too late to apply for a place at Wollongong University to study a Bachelor of Commerce.

“I wasn’t going to apply because I had already missed the closing date for applications but my Branch Manager, Cynthia Carrasco, encouraged me to apply regardless,” Krystal said.

Not long after finishing her application she received a calling telling her that she was accepted into the course and she could start the following day.



Prior to enrolling in the diploma at Evocca in October last year, Krystal said she was in a bad place.

“I felt lost, with absolutely no direction, and I really didn’t think I would be able to do a diploma, let alone a bachelor degree,” she said.

Being a single mum to three children, ages 1, 3 and 4, the two oldest having mild autism, while working part-time and studying, Krystal is proof that anyone can study.

“My time management, Evocca tutor and weekly goals have helped me come so far and achieve so much.”

Krystal’s tutor, Abdullah Yousuf, said Krystal is a hard worker who deserves all that she has achieved.

### **Esther Smith – Liverpool Community Services**

Esther Smith is a mum of eight children and is currently studying a Diploma of Counselling at Evocca College's Liverpool branch.

Earlier this year, Esther won the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET Student Awards at the South West Regional Finals, which recognised her strong understanding and knowledge of the vocational education and training system and the relevance of a lifelong learning for herself and her community.

“I’m passionate about my studies and the work I do in my local Aboriginal community, so to have that recognised is very special.”

After her husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer, Esther left her full-time role as a disability support worker to take care of him. Before he passed way in 2013, he encouraged her to do something for herself and continue her studies. As a working mother she enrolled at Evocca College for its flexible learning.

“I’ve gained employment at Gandangara Aboriginal Land Council, and hope to graduate from Evocca College this November,” Ms Smith said.



### **Lisa Rogers – Business Distance**

Lisa realised she needed a change after working as a Manager at a local supermarket, she began thinking about her life and where she wanted to be in 5 years. She decided she wanted to be working for herself, building her own dreams, not someone else's.

Now, Lisa has completed a dual Diploma of Business and a Diploma of Management through Evocca College. At the beginning Lisa never thought she could complete one assessment let alone two Diplomas.

“To be honest, at the beginning I never thought I could complete one assessment let alone two Diplomas, but I have. I am so proud of myself and I couldn't of done it without my tutor Hannike,” said Ms Rogers

Still following her dreams, Lisa has started up her own business selling Jewellery, called Lucky's Avenue which is doing really well and keeping Lisa busy.

### **Bobbie Willmer – Caboolture Community Services**

Bobbie commenced her Diploma of Community Services Work at Evocca College's Caboolture location in February of 2013. Eighteen months on Bobbie has just submitted her final piece of assessment, completing her Diploma and will be graduating with her classmates in November.

Bobbie has achieved so much through out her Evocca journey. She completed 200 hours of Vocational Placement at the Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre and as a result she is now running the Financial Counselling Service, including budgeting programs and client referrals. Bobbie also recently co-ordinated and organised the Cashopoly program at the Neighbourhood Centre as part of the Money Smart Week, which was a big success in the Caboolture community. She also undertakes administration tasks.



Bobbie has just been accepted into university to undertake a Bachelor of Forensic Science and Bachelor of Criminology, majoring in Criminal Justice.

“The people at Evocca, both students and staff are all completely different and are from different walks of life. When I first started with Evocca I was not confident, but with the support of staff, students and obviously the course I am studying, I have finally realised my potential and am running for my goals.”

“Without Evocca I would not have the amazing opportunities or support that I do.” Said Miss Willmer

Evocca College has been so impressed with Bobbie's attitude and work ethic that she has been appointed a Student Mentor at the Caboolture Community Services Branch. In this role she encourages her fellow students to participate in events and motivates them to achieve.

Under the endorsement of Anne Oakley, Community Services Faculty Leader, Bobbie has applied to the Global Voice delegation. Bobbie is a high achiever and has high expectations of her own capabilities and uses this to motivate and encourage others in a positive way.