

Open Letter (Transcript from Facebook Post 6 November 2016)

Hon Liza Harvey MLA  
Minister for Training and Workforce Development  
11th Floor, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street, West Perth WA 6005

In 2015 I retired from teaching art after 50 years, some 36 in TAFE teaching Sculpture.

Over the years my involvement with Claremont School of Art and subsequently moving to the remarkable new purpose built facility that was Central School of Art proved to be the most rewarding and productive years of my life.

I treasured the job, the experiences and the interaction with students many of whom became my colleagues and lifelong friends.

Many are now leading practitioners of the visual arts in our state and they continue to make a significant contribution to our identity and impact on the cultural landscape of our state.

In truth it wasn't just a job, as most teachers know, it is a vocation not measured by time or money.

Over the last 16 years or so, in the city in a purpose built art school, one that I had a hand in shaping, a new ethos was coming into being after the demise of the Claremont and St Brigid's schools.

A hard won reputation and identity was forming. Where you learnt and who taught you is equally as important as a formal piece of paper. It is in fact a necessary and essential qualification for an artist.

The school was recognised for teaching both skills and theory and being open to the ideas, aspirations and the idiosyncrasies of staff and students.

It was uniquely known for the delivery of some specialist skills and areas of study that did not take place elsewhere.

It was staffed and equipped to deliver the key ingredients of a tertiary art education.

It had the required level of leadership and support staff that underpinned the teaching effort.

There is now real concern that the wheels are falling off.

Leadership has been stripped away, and generic heads of department and office staff have replaced teams with expertise and corporate knowledge.

Art schools are different and require special management skills; it is a holistic experience from top to bottom.

The highly valued and respected Advanced Diploma is no more and the promised Associate Degree has been emasculated and priced out of reach of the typical applicant.

I am more than disappointed, I am angry that this has happened so quickly.

I am deeply concerned that with the renaming of Central to "North Metropolitan TAFE" the art school loses its valuable brand, sacrificing years of effort in building the name and identity that is crucial for a graduate's long term security.

The Art school should retain the name Central School of Art within the North Metropolitan TAFE "umbrella"

It is apparent that we are witnessing the death of the Art School.

There has been a failure of duty of care to the reputational goodwill of Central School of Art.

It is disappointing to see administrators' and managers' lack of vision or commitment to the art school; they have rolled over without a fight when they should have been resisting and making the case for this highly valued cultural institution.

Sadly students are no longer the radical activists they once were. They have been dumbed down by successive cuts to courses and slugged with outrageous increases in fees.

Whilst private providers have ripped off the government, credible accountable, reputable hard working core TAFE programs are paying the price.

I would hope that by writing this letter others would join the cause, find a voice to resist and engage with the need to halt this cultural vandalism.

Tony Jones

OAM, Cit WA Arts and Culture