

TAFE SA disaster could hit schools

TIM WILLIAMS
EDUCATION REPORTER

PARENTS fear further audits of TAFE SA courses could throw the SACE qualifications of their Year 12 children into doubt and force them to redo parts of vocational courses.

More than 6300 students, in excess of 40 per cent of those who completed their SACE this year, used a vocational training component.

Authorities have not been able to say how many had done TAFE SA courses.

Sixty high school students studied courses that were among the 14 from which national regulator the Australian Skills Quality Authority has suspended TAFE SA from taking further enrolments, following a damning audit. Of those, 14 students needed the courses for SACE completion.

TAFE SA has written to the SACE Board saying it has worked with the regulator and could advise there was "no risk to any parchment or result" for the students affected by the audit outcome.

"Remediation has been completed by TAFE SA for affected SACE students and submitted to ASQA," it said.

But parents are worried that more audits planned by the regulator next year will find problems with more courses that their children have studied and put toward their SACE.

Parent group SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey wrote to Education Minister



Susan Close, pointing to her admission it was likely other courses were substantial.

"Parents are worried about the impact the results of these audits may have on high school students completing - or believing they have completed - their SACE, only to discover they are in fact short required credits," he wrote.

"This could create a raft of problems . . . (for) those enrolled in tertiary study based on their SACE, and those who have left school and are working or attempting to find work based on their SACE."

Dr Close and TAFE SA both said they could not comment on future audits.

Dr Close said lessons from this year's audit were being applied to all courses, while ASQA had "demonstrated a willingness to work with TAFE to ensure school students are not adversely affected".

TAFE SA interim boss Alex Reid said it trained 4500 school students per year "who may or may not use this training toward their SACE".

She was confident a new quality framework for all courses would ensure they were "up to the standard that we expect".



DISCIPLINED: Roger Spence in step with partner Dru Evans.

Picture: CALUM ROBERTSON

Roger busy dancing with the ATARs

TIM WILLIAMS

IT takes two to tango, but Roger Spence's Year 12 achievements are all his own.

The Forestville man, 73, the longtime president of the Adelaide Tango Club, is the oldest person in the state to gain his SACE this year.

He achieved an impressive Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank of 90 and hopes to begin a science degree at Flinders University next year with a physics major.

The Advertiser first met Mr Spence in 2014, when he took his mathematical studies exam almost 50 years after he missed

his UK "A-level" maths exam as a teen in 1965 because he turned up at the wrong time.

Over the past three years he has also done two more SACE maths subjects, IT, and had two cracks at physics, improving his original B- to a B+ this year.

"I'm a little bit disappointed in myself because I've got to improve my ability to do exams," he says modestly. "I know I've changed a bit since I've been studying. I'm definitely more disciplined".

The retiree took classes at Hamilton Secondary and Marden Senior colleges, while making time for regular bridge and tango club commitments.

"You dance totally to the music as it is. Your partner doesn't know what you are doing one minute to the next. You lead and she follows," he says of his tango passion.

After Mr Spence's exam mishap in 1965, he "spat the dummy" and starting saving for a trip to Australia. He ended up working as a meteorological observer and aircraft refueller on Manus Island, before a fuel explosion burned 60 per cent of his body.

He returned to the mainland, moved to Adelaide in 1972 and switched careers, eventually running the national help desk for Beaumont TILES.

Mark these two late risers as our Year 12 guns

TIM WILLIAMS

IT'S a good thing Ben Fitzgerald and Cassandra Larobina (pictured page one) didn't procrastinate in their Year 12 studies as much as they did when it came to checking their results yesterday.

St Michael's College graduate Ben, 17, woke at 8.30am, when results were officially released, then lay in bed another hour before his school called to see how he'd done. But not until after a trip to the dentist did he finally go online to find his stellar score of five subject merits and the highest possible uni admissions rank of 99.95.

"I was very, very shocked. I thought something must be wrong. I was definitely not expecting that," he said.

Six-merit and 99.95 scorer Cassandra, 18, from St Ignatius' College, slept in and didn't look at her results until her dad woke her to say her school had called.

"I was too nervous so I made (my parents) go in another room. I thought it was a typo. I was in shock. I thought 'surely not!'" she said.

The pair were among four students to achieve perfect results by the SACE Board's criteria of five merits, including the research project subject.

Both are planning gap years, after which Cassandra wants to pursue medicine and Ben maths, science or engineering. A total of 28 students received Governor of South Australia Commendations for excellence in the SACE, many combining study with a wide range of volunteering and extra-curricular pursuits. Half of them gathered in Victoria Park yesterday.

Ben thanked his teachers, family and mates for "putting up with a lot" throughout the year, including "friends answering questions at 2am".

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