

Wednesday, 16 May 2012

Training and Further Education

The Training and Further Education (TAFE) sector in Australia is the pre-eminent provider of vocational education to students and workers across Australia. It delivers more than 80% of government funded vocational education in every major city and most regional and rural areas across the country.

TAFE provides high quality trades training in industries across the country and high level skills in a range of key industry sectors. TAFE offers opportunities for workers and students to access literacy and numeracy and second chance education. It is a highly valued public institution whose resources belong to the Australian community.

In the past twenty years, governments at state and federal level have neglected the TAFE system, despite the fact that it plays a crucial role in developing Australian industry, addressing skills shortages, building communities and in innovative responses to the future needs of the Australian economy.

Congress considers it disingenuous for governments to continue to profess their support for the important role that TAFE plays, while at the same time introducing and prosecuting policies that have the very effect of undermining its ability to provide quality, affordable training to Australians of all backgrounds.

Between 2004 and 2009 government recurrent expenditure per hour of training declined by 15.4% part of a longer term trend that has seen funding per hour decline by about 25.7% from 1997.

Government funding for TAFE has declined both because of the decline in recurrent public VET expenditure per hour, and because of the shift of government recurrent funding away from the TAFE sector and towards private for-profit providers that has occurred under market-driven policies of contestable funding. If both expenditure per hour and TAFE's share of that expenditure had been maintained at even 2004 levels, TAFE's funding would have been about \$974m (or 18.9%) greater in 2009 than it actually was.

Conditions in the recent COAG agreement will result in increased marketisation and competition. A number of State governments across the country are poised to introduce these so-called "reforms". Events in Victoria over the last three years should be a salutary lesson for the rest Australia.

The Victorian government has been at the forefront of market reforms of the TAFE sector. Between 2008 and 2011, TAFE “market” share in Victoria dropped from 75% to 48%. At the same time, private provider market share trebled from 14% to 40%. At the end of 2011, as a result of a massive budget blowout, TAFE funding was cut and this led to 300 permanent teacher redundancies, and the loss of many casual and contract positions in the sector.

In the 2012 budget on May 1, the Victorian government slashed a further \$300m from TAFEs. This will result in further massive job losses, campus and course closures and will deny Victorian students and workers access to high quality vocational education.

Congress condemns the Victoria government for slashing the TAFE budget, and calls for an immediate re-instatement of TAFE funding in that state.

Congress calls on the Federal Government to properly scrutinise the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement with all States and Territories, but particularly with Victoria, ensuring that funding from the Federal Government does not flow to any state or Territory, but particularly to Victoria until it has met condition 29 (b) in the agreement requiring the development and implementation of strategies:

which enable public providers to operate effectively in an environment of greater competition, recognising their important function in servicing the training needs of industry, regions and local communities, and their role that spans high level training and workforce development for industries and improved skill and job outcomes for disadvantaged learners and communities.

Congress calls on state and territory governments to demonstrate their support for TAFE by requiring that the entitlement to a guaranteed training place is offered only at TAFE, as they are entitled to do under the terms of the National Partnership Agreement.

Moved: Pat Forward, AEU

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