



EDUCATION

1. Education is a human right and a public good. Pivotal to the achievement of social inclusion and cohesion is education policy which aims to ameliorate social divides.
2. Public education, free, secular and universally accessible, is recognised as the foundation for a socially cohesive and prosperous Australia. The greatest benefit of public education is realised in the local, socially representative public school.
3. Congress believes that public investment in early childhood education, schools, TAFE colleges and universities is not only an investment in education it is also a capital investment with significant economic and social benefits to society.
4. Congress calls upon the Government to adopt policies that promote lifelong learning and effective transitions between Australia's early childhood education institutions, schools, TAFE colleges and universities, as well as between education and work and non-work roles including familial and caring activities.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Giving Children the Best Start in Life

5. All children should be given the best possible start in life. Every child deserves to grow up to be all that they can be, no matter what their parents earn. This can be achieved through equitable access to quality early education delivered by qualified teachers and educators who are appropriately remunerated in accordance with the value of the work they undertake. Universal quality early learning is the key to ensuring every child has the best start in life. For the full benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC) to be realized, children should be at the centre of all policy initiatives
6. Universal access to high quality maternal and child health and early childhood education is the starting point of equal opportunity for all Australians. Valuing ECEC as an integral part of the education system recognizes the immense contribution of early education in the life of a child. Policy initiatives should prioritise ECEC programs to maximise participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged children, for example those living in rural or remote communities, children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
7. Congress notes that valuing children means valuing those that work with them in ECEC settings. Children's access to the high-quality education and care they need is threatened by a worsening workforce shortage. It is estimated that an additional 39,000 educators and teachers will be required to meet demand by 2023. This shortage is exacerbated by continuing failures to properly value and support the work of early childhood teachers and educators. Modern, high quality ECEC is a complex field that requires teachers and educators to have undertaken qualifications and possess significant professional skill and knowledge to assist children to develop emotionally, cognitively and socially. Valuing all workers in the ECEC sector means according

them the professional pay and conditions they deserve for the challenging work they perform. Teachers and educators voices and experience should also be at the centre of decisions about the sector and their work. A qualified, supported and professionally paid workforce is key to a world-class ECEC system and Australian children deserve nothing less.

8. Access to high quality early childhood education and care is under threat by a worsening workforce shortage. The 2019 Labour Market Projections indicate that 30000 more educators and 7000 more early childhood teachers are needed by 2024. Attraction, supply and retention of educators and teachers must be a priority for governments. In responding to this increased demand in the sector, the quality of the workforce must be upheld.

Supporting Workforce Participation of Parents

9. Along with lifelong improved developmental outcomes for children, access to free, high quality, ECEC delivered by qualified and skilled early childhood teachers and educators not only ensures the best outcomes for children, it is central to enabling the workforce participation of parents..
10. Congress notes that Australia's employment rate for mothers is the lowest of all countries in the OECD at 62%. Congress calls on the Government to set a target that is in line with the OECD average of 66%. Free and high quality ECEC with an adequate number of hours per week contribute to an increase in the participation of women in the labour force. The OECD notes the relationship between a mother's labour market participation and enrolment rates in formal ECEC is strong.
11. Equally, parents must also have access to workplace rights that provide secure and predictable working patterns that match the availability of care. Barriers in the workplace to suitable working patterns and arrangements severely impact on the participation of carer's, and in particular women, in the labour force and also lead to poor participation in ECEC, particularly for children in low-income households.
12. Delivering universal access to quality play base early learning achieves the dual objective of supporting children's equal development and the workforce participation of parents.
13. Congress calls on Government to:
 - a) Guarantee increased and ongoing Universal Access funding of high-quality play based and developmentally age appropriate early childhood education delivered by qualified teachers and educators for at least 15 hours per week in the two years prior to school. Thus ensuring all children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances, have access to quality inclusive early childhood education;
 - b) provide additional baseline funding to the sector to ensure families with children aged 0-3 also have access to 24 hours per week of high quality education and care; and
 - c) provide an industrial relations system that provides secure and predictable working patterns that enable working parents equal access to formal ECEC, particularly for those who work in industries with non-standard hours.

Ensuring Quality Early Childhood Education and Care

14. Unions have a role in being vigilant about the promotion of quality standards and parental awareness of changes to the system, given access to quality care and education for children is critical to many workers' continued employment and the health and wellbeing of their families and community
15. Congress notes the complex regulatory frameworks that govern the ECEC sector The implementation and monitoring of the regulatory framework must be appropriately funded by government and resourced

to ensure that the requirements can be met and the relevant industrial conditions are recognised in the awards. All governments, children and families benefit from the jointly governed National Quality Framework. In partnership with the states and territories, the Federal Government must maintain a responsibility for preschool education, including significant contribution to funding. To ensure high quality ECEC, congress calls on the Federal Government to provide adequate funding to guarantee:

- a) provision of appropriate learning and teaching conditions such as group sizes, staff-children ratios and other agreed national standards;
- b) purpose built facilities for the achievement of an optimum learning environment and to meet the standards of Workplace Occupational Health and Safety regulations;
- c) indexation of funding to cover the salaries and professional development of workers and to meet the requirements of supporting children with additional needs.

Workforce Crisis

16. Congress recognises the highly feminised nature of the ECEC workforce and the systemic undervaluation of ECEC work as evident by a gender wage gap of approximately twice the national average. Congress recognises the role of the overlapping and interlocking markers of feminisation in the sector in forming barriers to genuine enterprise bargaining. These include: a mostly female workforce; a decentralised industry; a lack of targeted government funding or industry strategy; increasing casualization; the vocational nature of the work; high turnover; and an historical lack of community understanding of the content and value of early childhood education work.
17. Low wages in the ECEC sector have contributed to a workforce crisis. Congress notes that over the past decade, staff turnover has been extremely high as experienced and dedicated early childhood education and care professionals have been forced to leave to look for better paid and properly recognised roles elsewhere. Workforce shortages have also seen a rise in the number of services relying on staffing waivers under the National Quality Standards. The national proportion of services with a temporary waiver for staffing requirements in 2019 was 4.5% up by 3.9% on the previous year. The national proportion of long day care services with a temporary staffing waiver is 8.4%, compared to 2.7% of preschools/kindergartens¹.
18. Congress recognizes that the quality of early learning children experience is negatively impacted by high turnover and workforce shortages. Safety and quality outcomes for children is directly linked to the qualifications and experience of staff as well as the ability of staff to form secure and consistent relationships with children, Research shows that teachers and educators are leaving the sector because of low pay, poor conditions and the lack of professional recognition. High turnover is also increasing recruitment and training costs of services.
19. To ensure early childhood teachers and educators are properly valued for the important work they do, and to ensure they are attracted to and stay in this essential education sector, wages in the sector must reflect the value of their work. Congress calls on Government to recognise the endemic low pay that characterises the gender-segregated industry of ECEC and assume responsibility for addressing this inequity.
20. Congress notes that it is not possible for parents and providers to provide resources sufficient to achieve appropriate and comparable levels of remuneration without government funded support. Additionally, Congress notes that children's equity of access to early learning is impacted by high fees. Given that the majority of funding to the sector originates with the Federal Government, Congress believes that Government must acknowledge its responsibility for ensuring that the sector is funded adequately to allow early childhood educators and teachers be paid wages commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

1 Progressing a national approach to the children's education and care workforce: workforce report 2019, ACECQA. Pg 22

21. Congress calls on government to work together with unions and employers to ensure that early childhood education and care teachers and educators receive appropriate and comparable levels of pay. Congress calls on the Federal Government to commit to the provision of funding appropriate and comparable levels of pay for early childhood teachers and educators in recognition of the important and skilled work they do.
22. Congress calls on Government to fund a new national ECEC workforce strategy to ensure and guarantee the ongoing professionalism of the ECEC workforce, improve service quality and get the best outcomes for children. Improving qualifications, training and working conditions is an essential quality ECEC policy lever. Quality ECEC is absolutely dependent on quality educators and teachers. A national ECEC workforce strategy needs to support – not replace – achieving professional pay. A national ECEC workforce strategy should at a minimum include policy levers around:
 - a) ensuring a high-quality vocational education and training (VET) sector with greater oversight of registered training organisations' ECEC programs to ensure that they are producing educators with the requisite skills;
 - b) establishing paid professional development and meaningful career pathways
 - c) investigating and addressing the impact of remuneration and conditions on workforce recruitment, stability, retention and quality;
 - d) setting minimum benchmarks on the percentage of revenue services should allocate to workforce costs to support high quality;
 - e) providing resources including funded programming to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to ensure culturally appropriate ECEC services are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children; and lastly
 - f) appropriate ECEC workforce data collection to drive the world's best practice in early education.

Supporting quality through the National Quality Framework

23. Congress notes general support for the National Quality Framework (NQF) including the Early Years Learning Framework, National Quality Standards, Quality Rating System and Quality Improvement Plan. Congress calls on the Federal Government to commit to long term funding for ACECQA and the National Partnership on the National Quality Agenda in order to maintain the consistent application of the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations. All governments, children and families benefit from the jointly governed National Quality Framework.
24. Congress acknowledges workforce shortages and cost pressures create challenges in implementing and building on the NQF. However, addressing these pressures requires government to address funding arrangements and the workforce crisis, not altering the standards. Watering down standards, especially those related to ratios and qualifications requirements, will result in reduced quality for children and results in poorer conditions for teachers and educators.
25. The National Quality Framework (NQF) contains a number of specific requirements regarding the level of skills and qualifications of the ECEC workforce. Congress supports these requirements, as they reflect the professional standing and role of early childhood education and care professionals.
26. Congress believes it is the responsibility of governments to ensure there are sufficient funds and appropriate working conditions to facilitate the realistic implementation of the NQF, including:
 - a) access to genuinely fee-free courses;
 - b) recognised prior learning programs;

- c) access to paid study leave;
 - d) access to adequate/sufficient paid non contact time for planning and evaluating educational programs and documenting children’s learning and development
 - e) addressing workforce shortages to ensure services meet minimum staff ratio and qualification requirements; and
 - f) ensuring safe staffing and access to breaks are addressed through appropriate regulatory arrangements and/or industrial agreements negotiated with unions.
27. Congress urges the Government to ensure that, commensurate with the National Quality Framework, funding is allocated to ensure that classification structures, wages and conditions properly value these higher qualifications.
28. Congress advocates for skills and training policies explicitly directed towards enabling early childhood teachers and educators to develop a career path in this important educator sector.
29. It is essential that any current or future ‘fee-free’ programs are genuinely free of fees. In low paid industries such as ECEC, hidden fees in the form of amenity or course fees can provide a major disincentive to further study. Congress calls on the Federal Government to monitor TAFE and other training organisations fee structures to ensure the provision of genuinely fee-free places.

Investment to ensure access and quality – an investment in our children’s future

30. Congress notes that Australia has one of the lowest expenditures on early childhood education and care of all OECD countries spending 0.49% of GDP compared to the OECD average of 0.8%. Congress will campaign for an increase in public spending in line with international best practice of 1% per cent of GDP.
31. Congress acknowledges the federal budget 2021-22) ongoing funding commitment for the Universal Access to Preschool National Partnership for all four year olds and recognises the campaigning from the ECEC sector to achieve this vital program. However Congress recognises that public investment still continues to fall short of levels needed to ensure free and high quality education and care for Australia’s next generation. Affordability of early childhood education and care both impacts children’s ability to access the learning they need and workforce participations of parents. Government policies must ensure that funding arrangements are appropriate for supporting affordable high quality ECEC for all families, especially for those children who stand to benefit the most, for example, low income, disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
32. Further, government policies must ensure that participation in early childhood education and care is not impacted by increasing costs.. In particular, capacity to pay must not be a barrier to access to early childhood education programs. Congress notes that increases in the Child Care Subsidies has failed to reduce the costs incurred by many families accessing ECEC. At the introduction of the CCS in 2018 it was estimated families would have average out of pocket costs reduced by 11.8%. With childcare fees rising at rates higher than inflation, by October 2020 estimated saving were reduced to only 3.2% and expected to be eroded all together by 2021. ²
33. Any policies that seek to reduce out of pocket costs to families by compromising quality standards are unacceptable. Best practice quality education and care must be actively encouraged and rewarded, and Government should continue its commitment to improving quality standards in the sector not only through greater monitoring and assessment of services but also by ensuring that funding arrangements are appropriate to support these objectives.

² <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/childcare-savings-eaten-up-as-fees-rise-faster-than-subsidies-20210108-p56stc.html>

34. The current funding arrangements are both insufficient and inefficient and are not adequately targeted at delivering resources to ECEC professionals or children in early education and care. Government is currently paying a large share of ECEC costs in subsidies to parents, however, the actual price of fees is determined by ECEC providers. A complex market with majority small for-profit operators results in funding inefficiencies including taxpayer money directed away from education and care towards private profit and corporate rents. Congress continues to advocate for direct service based funding which is tied to appropriate wages for staff and support for training and development and quality outcomes for children and families.
35. Congress reasserts the need for government regulation requiring ECEC providers to provide greater transparency of financial practices to ensure resources are used appropriately to benefit children, employees and parents. Ongoing financial regulations are required to monitor the status of operators, ensuring that sound accounting practices are in place, including transparency around internal allocation of resources, ownership of fixed assets and disclosure of private equity interests.
36. Congress urges Government to work to maintain a diversity of services available to parents, in particular the ongoing supply of ECEC delivered through Government agencies or the not-for profit sector. Since 1991 the for-profit market share in long day care has increased from 48% to over 70%³. Private for-profits represent the highest proportion of services not meeting all of the National Quality Standards. Almost a third (27%) of private for-profit services were rated as "Working Towards" the National Quality Standards, compared to 15% of services in not-for-profit community managed and 10% government or state/ territory managed services.⁴ For profit services also have higher rates of educator turn over than the community / not-for-profit sector, with only one third of teachers or educators with greater than three years of service in a for-profit centre compared to two thirds of teachers or educators in the not for profit sector⁵. The continued shifting of Local Government provided ECEC into the private sector reduces the sector's diversity and capacity.
37. Commonwealth and state and territory governments should fund the integration or colocation of early childhood education services which are school based and/or other public or community/not for profit services through the provision of capital funding for facilities and infrastructure and qualification upgrades for early education centres.

Programs to Support Children with Additional Needs

38. Congress asserts that the lack of adequate funding, resources and supports for early childhood education and care for children with additional needs, such as geographic location, socio-economic circumstances, workplace rights that provide secure and predictable working patten cultural diversity or disability, are a significant barrier to equity and access.
39. Congress urges government to provide an immediate and significant increase in funding to ensure children with additional needs are provided with equitable access to high quality, properly resourced early childhood education which meets the needs of every child to participate.
40. Federal, State and Territory governments must work in partnership to ensure that programs, resources and funding address the needs of children with additional needs.

Programs to Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

41. Congress believes that early childhood education and care must recognise and affirm the cultural knowledge, language and values of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

³ Pg 350 -351 Volume 2 - Inquiry report - Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity commission

⁴ pg 14 NQF Snapshot quarter 2 2019 ACECQA august 2019

⁵ NOT-FOR-PROFIT EDUCATION AND CARE: high quality, accessible and resilient Findings of the 2019 Trends in Community Children's Services Survey November 2020, ACCS. Pg 13

42. Congress calls on government to give priority access to two years of high quality, culturally appropriate, free early learning education to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
43. Congress believes that all providers of ECEC have an ongoing obligation to provide for the intellectual, cultural, social and emotional development of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and must recognise that central to learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a focus on identity and self-determination and belonging and that the delivery of care and education must be culturally inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies.
44. Congress urges government to ensure that providers of ECEC services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:
 - a) Provide professional development opportunities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and training to counter racism for all staff;
 - b) Adopt teaching practices which recognise, value and utilise the student's first languages and Aboriginal English/Kriol and Torres Strait Islander Kriol;
 - c) Provide environments in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents feel welcome and encouraged to be involved in the education program;
 - d) Increase employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Early Childhood Education settings; and
 - e) Adopt practices which maximise the co-ordination of early childhood education and care programs with wrap-around services, such as health services and nutrition education programs.
45. Congress also urges government to ensure that appropriate and sensitive cultural orientation to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a prerequisite for all workers in all children's services.

Access to ECEC for families working non-standard hours

46. Congress advocates the following principles to ensure accessible and free early childhood education and care is provided to all families, including those who work non-standard hours:
 - a) Access to ECEC has the best interests of the development of children and quality of learning and care as the primary objective;
 - b) Parents working non-standard hours and those in irregular employment have equal access to ECEC options which are in the best interest of their children;
 - c) Financial assistance is appropriately targeted to those parents who need it and supports parents to participate in the paid labour market;
 - d) Government funded assistance to parents who work non-standard hours or are in irregular employment should not be a substitute for access to quality ECEC for all children;
 - e) Congress recommends that ECEC services should be co-ordinated in a manner which improves access for parents who work non-standard hours or are in irregular employment; and
 - f) Congress calls on the government to pilot co-location of different ECEC services such as long day care and occasional care with maternal and child health services, preschools, playgroups, early interventions professionals and specialists and other related services in regional 'hubs' that enable families to utilise a range of ECEC services in a complementary manner.
 - g) Services developed to cater for children outside of standard hours will be appropriately regulated to ensure the safety, care and developmental needs of children are met.

Out of School Hours and Vacation Care

47. Congress is aware that many parents do not have access to quality out of school hours care (OSHC), including vacation care. In particular, many OSHC programmes are not extended to young children attending secondary schools. Congress believes that as a minimum, all school children up until fourteen years of age should have access to quality, affordable and age appropriate OSCH programs and vacation care.

Schools

School funding

48. Governments have a prime obligation to adequately and properly fund government schools in order to provide high quality public schooling that is accessible to all children and young people. Public funding for schooling supports the right of families to choose non-government schooling and supports non-government schools on the basis of need, within the context of promoting a socially and culturally cohesive society and the effective use of public funds.
49. Congress asserts that only needs-based funding will provide a fair and equitable system that will deliver results and close the achievement gaps between students of different backgrounds.
50. There must be increased public investment in education and distribution of public funds to ensure that
 - a) the total level of resources available for schooling ensures that a high-quality education is accessible for all students;
 - b) public funding across different schools and sectors is distributed fairly and equitably through a consistent approach to assessing student needs and through having regard to the total level of resources available for students;
 - c) the total level of funding for government schooling is adequate to ensure access to high quality government schooling for all, and all governments' funding policies recognise this as a national priority;
51. Congress notes that in 2017, the Federal Government amended the Australian Education ACT 2013 and changed the way that funding is delivered by capping the Commonwealth's contribution to public school funding at 20% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This amended legislation and the subsequent bilateral agreements signed between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments leaves 99% of public schools below the SRS by 2023, denying much needed resources and entrenching funding inequality.
52. Congress calls upon the Government to:
 - a) remove the legislated 20% cap on the Commonwealth share of the Schooling Resource Standard for public schools.
 - b) Ensure that all schools are operating at a minimum of 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) which is recognised as the minimum funding requirement to give every child, regardless of their background, the greatest opportunity to achieve their full potential; including fully funded loadings for students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students, students from low-SES backgrounds, rural and remote students, and students requiring English language support;
 - c) Remove the 4% capital depreciation tax in school funding bilateral agreements.
 - d) Establish a capital fund for public schools to help meet rising enrolments, undertake important upgrades and to develop modern learning environments.

53. Congress calls on governments to ensure the process for developing new funding agreements is transparent and involves consultation with all stakeholders, including education unions.

Quality teaching

54. Congress calls upon the federal and state and territory governments to improve the status and value of the teaching profession by:
- a) Addressing workforce supply and demand by ensuring the adequate supply of fully qualified teachers and skilled education support staff for every school in Australia;
 - b) Recruiting the top 30 per cent of students into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from other points/pathways.
 - c) Protecting the quality of teaching and learning by the rejection of “fast-tracked” teacher education programs such as Teach for Australia or similar.
 - d) Investing in appropriate salary, employment conditions and job security
 - e) Removing the salary caps imposed by state and territory governments
 - f) Increasing support and mentoring opportunities for early career teachers to reduce the number of new teachers leaving the profession;
 - g) Building trust in and respect for the professional autonomy of the teaching workforce.
 - h) Ensuring that all teachers have access to ongoing, funded quality professional development opportunities, with a priority given to professional development on the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
 - i) Addressing escalating workloads and enhancing the value of teachers work
 - j) Addressing gender inequity in the workforce, including the gender pay gap, better career pathways, wages and conditions for women in the education workforce.
55. Congress calls on governments to ensure that all education workplaces are safe, inclusive and representative with a diverse workforce reflective of our communities. This includes the provision of:
- a) family and domestic violence paid leave for those impacted by this type of violence;
 - b) accessible workplaces and practices;
 - c) Cultural leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees;
 - d) programs and practices to counter all types of discrimination with a priority focus on the elimination of racism in all education settings;
 - e) gender neutral language in policy and industrial instruments; and
 - f) programs and practices to counter occupational violence, including the establishment of trained Anti-Racism Contact Officer positions in all education settings.

Vocational education and training

56. Congress reaffirms its support for the operation of a high quality, well resourced, nationally consistent, equitable and affordable vocational education and training system with public TAFE institutions at its centre. The skills and capabilities, national qualifications and broad education that TAFEs and the vocational

education and training system deliver are vital for workers facing a changing workplace. As the economy shifts following a world changing pandemic, and the need to respond to climate change and the growth in automation and digitisation, our members are and should be entitled to be skilled for jobs that meet the future skill needs of industry and the nation and to participate in for a fair and equitable society that provides opportunities to all.

57. The TAFE and vocational education and training system allows students and workers to get the critical skills and capabilities they need to enter the workforce, move into higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs, return to the workforce, or transition to a new field of work.
58. The TAFE and vocational education and training system provides a strong vocational focus on 'skills for jobs' and occupational outcomes based on standards determined by industry (including unions). At the same time, it is critical that the TAFE and vocational education and training system provides general and further education, including foundation skills and 'second chance' learning. This type of education empowers people to participate more fully in Australian society, particularly the vulnerable, marginalised, and disadvantaged and those individuals with different abilities.
59. The TAFE and vocational education and training system should also offer the opportunity for students to transfer to and from the higher education sector, without the system losing its focus on the development of vocational skills and capabilities and labour market outcomes.
60. The key, enduring characteristics and strengths of the TAFE and vocational education and training system that unions will continue to promote and defend include:
 - a) A dynamic and well-resourced TAFE system as the public provider of quality vocational education and training across the country, especially in regional areas;
 - b) A system focused on delivering quality vocational education and training, which meets industry and community needs, rather than profits to private providers;
 - c) A national system based on nationally recognised, portable qualifications that give workers the transferable skills to work across an industry or occupation, rather than simply narrow enterprise-specific skill sets;
 - d) The industry leadership of the vocational education and training system by unions (including teacher unions and unions representing workers who utilise the VET system) and employers, including through genuinely tripartite bodies established by industry such as the previously extant network of Industry Skills Councils or an equivalent structure that allow for genuine industry leadership, engagement and collaboration on skills matters;
 - e) The primacy of national training products developed and endorsed by industry as the vocational standards required for effective performance in the workplace, supported by such foundation, second chance necessary to empower people to participate fully in Australian society;
 - f) Vocational education and training and skills development as an integral part of workplace bargaining, with qualifications linked to job roles and award classification structures; and
 - g) An apprenticeship and traineeship system that combines work with vocational education on and off-the job under nationally consistent Training Contract arrangements that support the rights of apprentices and trainees.

Issues in the VET System

61. **The marketisation of VET has failed to deliver on its promises.** The decision to leave the provision of quality VET to the market has resulted in a system where many students do not receive the training they are paying for and where graduates are often not sufficiently skilled.

62. **The destruction of TAFE.** Due to steady declines in funding, and the loss of students to private providers, TAFE is no longer the centrepiece of VET in many areas. TAFE campuses have been closed and much TAFE infrastructure has degraded.
63. **Government funding for VET is insufficient.** Australia's total investment in the VET sector is now at its lowest level in real terms since at least 2008.
64. **Employer investment in vocational education & training is grossly inadequate.** As the ultimate consumers of vocational skills employers need to substantially lift their contribution to funding the development of the skills that they profit from.
65. **The steady erosion of industry leadership of the VET system.** Unions have been steadily shut out of VET bodies while bureaucrats and the states have significantly expanded their influence. As a result, training is now unable to respond effectively to industry need. The subordination of industry input to state and bureaucratic interests has prevented training from adapting to industry need.
66. **Significant drops in apprentice and trainee numbers.** Since 2013, over 140,000 apprentice and traineeships have disappeared from the Australian economy, resulting in tens of thousands fewer skilled workers entering the workforce each year and worsening the skills shortages faced in some industries.
67. **The high cost of VET courses to students and the second-class nature of the VET system.** VET courses have increased in cost to students as cost-shifting from government has occurred. VET also struggles to attract students due to a cultural bias towards university education.

Systemic solutions to the issues in the VET system

68. Congress believes increased investment in vocational education and training and skills development is critical to:
 - a) improving Australia's productivity performance,
 - b) meeting the skill needs of Australian businesses,
 - c) providing Australians with access to higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs, more fulfilling work and expanded future career opportunities, and
 - d) the creation of an equitable and sustainable society.
69. This investment is a shared responsibility.
70. The TAFE and vocational education and training sector is the worst funded of all education sectors, lagging behind schools and universities. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research's 2019 Financial Information confirms that vocational education remains underfunded. Commonwealth financing of the VET sector fell 4.5% to \$2.6 billion while the number of students enrolled in VET increased by 3.2% to 4.2 million. Overall commonwealth government funding for the sector has plunged from over \$3 billion in 2017 to \$2.6 billion in 2019 – a 15% reduction.
71. The latest figures indicate that while the Government has succeeded in raising the recurrent expenditure per annual hour rate, from its rock-bottom rate of 11.40 in 2014, this has been done through reductions in funding alongside reductions in hours. While this has meant that in 2018 the recurrent funding per annual hour was \$17,90, this has been achieved at the expense of the delivery of training. This figure must continue to increase but through the mechanism of increased funding, not through cuts to annual hours. Congress notes that the Commonwealth is proposing a single unified payment structure for all training units. In the absence of a guarantee of improved funding, such a program will become a race to the bottom.

72. The importance of vocational education and training to workers and students, employers, communities and the wider economy should be matched by a level of public investment that reflects the true cost of delivering quality training and support services to students, including support for disadvantaged learners and training delivery in rural and remote areas.
- a) Congress calls for government investment in vocational education and training to be focused on full, nationally recognised qualifications, aligned to realistic job prospects that give workers the best opportunity to use and transfer their skills across an industry or occupation.
 - b) Congress calls for an overhaul of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment as the minimum qualification for VET teachers. A high-quality education can only be achieved if VET teachers have expertise in the subject matter being taught, including industry practise, as well as a strong foundation in teaching and learning practice, not just compliance.
 - c) Congress asserts that the minimum qualification for TAFE teachers should be a degree plus experience.
 - d) Congress affirms that employers must also assume responsibility, including financial responsibility, for developing the skills that their business then benefits from. Co-contribution mechanisms and industry training levies associated with nationally recognised training are among the options that should be utilised, as well as measures to improve business capability in identifying their skill needs.
 - e) Congress calls for a national inquiry into funding for the TAFE and vocational education and training sector to establish an adequate funding rate to ensure high quality delivery. Public funding for vocational education and training should be commensurate with funding directed to other sectors of education, and be informed by rigorous analysis and forecasting of current and future skill needs and priorities endorsed by industry.
 - f) Congress calls for a national discussion between unions, employers and TAFE about the need to develop model National Industry Framework Curriculum, aligned to industry standards.
73. Government policies to divert public funding to private for-profit providers of VET have funnelled scarce public funds and resources from the sector into the pockets of individuals, and reduced the quality of education and trust in the vocational education and training system. In response, Congress demands that governments guarantee funding and resources to TAFE institutions, strengthen regulation of private providers, and guarantee a minimum seventy per cent public funding for the TAFE system. Public funding should not be available to for-profit training providers at all - as is the case with respect to school funding.
74. The interests of students and workers who undertake vocational education and training are paramount. However this has not always been practiced as demonstrated by the recent experience of the operation of a competitive training market with instances of poor quality training that did little or nothing to help them in the job market, and fraudulent recruitment practices used in the promotion and marketing of VET courses by shonky for-profit providers and third-party brokers. Registered Training Organisations must have, as a condition of their registration, the provision of high-quality vocational education as their primary purpose, and the best interests of students as their key focus, not profit.
75. Congress will continue to campaign for strong regulatory and compliance measures to ensure the reliability and quality of VET qualifications. It must ensure that students receive the vocational education and training for which they are paying, that the vocational education and training being offered matches students' interests, skills and aptitude, and aligns with identified job opportunities, and that on completion, students have the skills the qualification they hold is designed to deliver. These regulatory and compliance measures should mandate a minimum duration of learning, consistent with requirements in the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) to ensure that Registered Training Organisations deliver the amount of training they have been paid for, either through government subsidy or directly by students, and should prohibit providers from sub-contracting training delivery to unregistered providers.

76. Unions must be part of all decisions that affect the vocational education and training and skills development options available to workers, whether at a national level, industry level or in the workplace. These are matters that affect the cost, accessibility and quality of vocational education and training and ultimately impact on workers' livelihoods, quality of work and quality of life. Unions must be reinstated as equal representative stakeholders at every level of the VET system. A training system which makes no provision for the views of unions and workers is not a proper training system. Congress notes that the Morrison Govt's latest attempt to 'reform' training, the National Skills Commission, has no provision for union representation.
- a) The TAFE and vocational education and training system needs to work closely with industry and government around workforce development strategies across a broad range of industry areas. This would re-establish its role as an innovative and forward-looking sector which can work in partnership with employers and unions to develop and support the existing workforce and the workforce of the future.
77. Congress calls on governments to resource the TAFE and vocational education and training sector to establish a workforce development plan for itself, which includes:
- a) examining the skills, capabilities and expertise of the teaching and administrative workforce, and
 - b) supporting the development of industry and pedagogically sound qualifications to ensure that the workforce has the skills, capabilities, knowledge and expertise to support the broader workforce and to participate effectively in society.
78. This strategy must be underpinned with decent employment practices and standards, including a commitment to secure and dignified work for all those who work in the TAFE and vocational education and training sector.
79. Congress acknowledges that some Indigenous communities in particular those located in regional and remote areas have historically been unable to take full advantage of the VET system because of their remoteness from major centres and government policy settings and funding cuts which have impacted on the provision of VET. Public funding of TAFE in regional and remote areas should be a priority and allow:
- a) students to have the support they need from family, community, trainers and each other.
 - b) communities to own and be involved in the development and delivery of training;
 - c) cultural knowledge and language to be respected and integral to the training;
 - d) communities and students to be sure that training will lead to sustainable employment .

Work-based Training

80. Congress condemns the efforts by Government and some Registered Training Organisations to undermine work-based training using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse.
81. Work-based training, which includes apprenticeships, traineeships and other training such as work placements, is a critical element in skills acquisition for many industries and should not be watered down or reduced in scope. Additionally, where industry representatives agree that Training Contract and other forms of employment-based training should be mandated, this should occur without interference from Government or the AISC.
82. Work-based training is most successful when individuals have access to consistent and adequate supervision. Practical training of this nature is made possible when resources and workforce planning support one-on-one supervision. This is achieved through measures such as backfilling rosters, mentoring programs, and support provided to the existing workforce to assist and run trainee and student placements.

83. Congress recognises that work-based training is not possible in all industries or is unable to cover the full breadth of all workplace activities in some industries. In those cases Government must recognise the importance of workplace simulation and other measures, where they are designed and agreed to by employers and unions, to deliver critical workplace skills.

Responding to COVID-19

84. The VET sector, like all sectors of the economy, was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020/2021. This impact manifested as a loss of students and consequently revenue, but also as the worsening of the pre-existing issues the sector faced long before the advent of Coronavirus, as outlined above. Congress supports the following measures, some of which have been necessary for many years, to address these issues:
- a) **A \$3 billion fund, to be allocated over three years, to support capital improvements in the TAFE system**, including updating and modernizing existing facilities, and expanding TAFE facilities (with a particular focus in regional areas).
 - b) **A new Free TAFE program**, similar to programs already in place in Victoria and Queensland, to provide free TAFE courses in priority areas for any students who wish to take them.
 - c) To support the uptake of apprentices in employment, the Commonwealth government should offer a **50% wage subsidy for employed apprentices**, on condition they are still employed with their employer one year after completion. This program could be implemented in concert with an apprentice job security guarantee.
 - d) The Commonwealth government should also, as unions were calling for even prior to the pandemic, leverage its investments in public infrastructure and expanded public services, **establishing minimum apprentice and trainee ratios in publicly-funded construction projects, operation of public services, and administrative public service functions**. Complementary requirements should be established to hire apprentices from targeted sectors of the workforce (including targets for female apprentices/trainees, workers from Indigenous and immigrant communities, and workers with disability. The Code for Tendering and Performance of Building Work 2016 should also be abolished as some of its terms affect the employment of apprentices).
 - e) Apprentices have been significantly affected by the downturn resulting from Coronavirus. **We need to deliver security of learning and employment for Apprentices/Trainees through a guarantee or trust and, where necessary, the Commonwealth establishing an entity to take over the Training Contracts for at-risk apprentices.**
 - f) Covid-19 has exacerbated existing training gaps in many essential industries. For example, it has shown that retail staff need urgent skills development not only in infection control, but also in dealing with violence and abuse as well as e-commerce skills. **A process, involving government, employers and unions must begin to plan for industries post-Covid-19. This should form part of a National Workforce Strategy to respond to the crisis.**
 - g) A return to tripartite training package development with equal representation from unions and business.
 - h) If the AISC is to be retained, the composition of the AISC must be immediately restructured and returned to a tripartite model where unions have equal representation with business and government.
 - i) The creation of advisory and oversight bodies to both ASQA and the National Skills Commission with equal business and union representation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

85. Congress supports the vision for education articulated in the 2019 Mparntwe Alice Springs Declaration for the Australian education system as one which ensures:
 - a) all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; and
 - b) all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thrive in education and in life.
86. Congress calls on governments to commit to implementing a long-term vision for the education of First Nations students which provides policy stability, funding certainty and improves transparency and accountability to First Nations peoples and their communities.
87. Congress calls on all governments to ensure that all education systems and workplaces are free of racism and that the voices of First Nations educators, as experts in both systems knowledge and cultural knowledges, are centred in all aspects of policy-making and program development and provision.
88. Congress supports the call of First Nations educators to ensure that:
 - a) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories are embedded in all areas of the curriculum across all content areas and all sectors of the Australian education system;
 - b) the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is prioritised across all areas and sectors of the Australian education system; and
 - c) all employees in the Australian education sector are committed to the elimination of racism and discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are actively working towards this goal.

Higher education

89. Congress affirms that Australia must maintain and continue to improve our high quality and equitable public university system, where opportunities to complete higher education qualifications are available throughout the country.
90. Congress affirms that access to higher education must be equitable and merit based for Australia to become a strong, smart economy and society of the future.
91. Congress recognises and affirms that publicly funded universities must act in the public interest and for the public good.
92. Congress recognises that universities not only contribute economically to Australia's prosperity, but are a core social and cultural institution in providing education and research. Along with the CSIRO, universities are the site of basic research which is depended upon for the breakthroughs and innovations that address the big issues of our times.
93. Congress affirms resolute opposition to the Federal Coalition Government's higher education agenda of fee deregulation, funding cuts and public subsidisation of private higher education providers.
94. Congress condemns the Federal Coalition Government for persisting with unprincipled, unfair and unsustainable policies that shift the cost burden for university education onto the shoulders of students and their families.
95. Congress notes that Australia's public investment in higher education is still well below that of other industrialised economies and Australian students currently pay amongst the highest fees in the world to attend public universities.

96. Congress notes that, although universities are public institutions and are highly regulated by government, public grants only account for about one third of their income, with the remainder derived from international student fees (about one dollar in five), as well as domestic student income and research grants.
97. Congress supports an immediate increase in public investment in higher education to cover the costs of educating students from diverse backgrounds and regions across Australia. Public investment in Australia's public universities should be increased to the equivalent of 1 per cent of GDP, from the current 0.7 per cent. Such an increase will put Australia on a more even footing with other industrialised economies.
98. The federal Coalition government's repeated failed attempts to deregulate higher education have created a great deal of uncertainty for universities, their staff and students. Our public universities require a stable and sustainable funding model that gives both government and universities some certainty in planning, and that takes into account student, community, professional and industry demand and needs.
99. Congress notes that higher education is one of the most highly casualised industries in Australia. While the full time equivalent proportion of Casual employees account for one in five full time equivalent (FTE) employees, but in real headcount terms there are about 150,000 casual and contract employees working in our universities. Eight out of ten FTE teaching-only employees are employed on a casual basis. More than half of all teaching is carried out by academics employed by the hour for a few hours a week over a teaching period. Casualisation of university teaching adversely impacts upon the students, academics and the quality of education.
100. Congress also notes that whilst universities are relied upon to undertake basic and applied research, the funding remains inadequate to cover the costs of research. Of the significant increase in research-only staff over the past decade, eight out of ten are employed on fixed term contracts, which adversely impacts upon research careers and capacity.
101. Congress acknowledges that, as the third largest export industry in Australia, the tertiary education sector is integral to the economic wellbeing of the nation. Universities constitute the largest component of the sector generating in excess of \$20 billion annually in export income.
102. Congress acknowledges that reliance by universities and others in the tertiary sector on international student fee income exposes the sector to volatility in the market and fluctuations in currency rates. As shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, any downturns in the market will result in significant job losses, which, given the scope of the sector, will impact negatively on the Australian economy more broadly.
103. Congress condemns the decision by Government to exclude universities from support during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in thousands of job losses across the sector.
104. Congress recognises that expanding higher education opportunities across the population requires more than just enabling enrolment. To facilitate the successful completion of qualifications by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, Congress supports:
 - a) The abolition of tuition fees;
 - b) An increase and expansion of student income support;
 - c) A requirement that all institutions in receipt of government subsidies for teaching and learning to develop programs aimed at improving the participation rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including specifically targeting the increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and
 - d) A requirement that institutions levying the Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) ensure independent and democratic student representation and provide adequate funding to support student support, welfare and advocacy services.

105. Congress affirms support for staff and student representation on university governing bodies noting the UNESCO 1977 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Higher education personnel should have the right and opportunity, without discrimination of any kind to participate in governing bodies. They should be free to criticise the functioning of higher education institutions, including their own, while respecting the right of other sections of the academic community. They should also have the right to elect the majority of representatives to academic bodies within the higher education institution.
106. Congress notes that intellectual freedom and institutional autonomy are intrinsic to maintaining the quality and reputation of our world class universities, and recognises that these principles are enshrined in legislation. Congress, however is concerned that constraints on academic research either through a lack of funding, precarious employment or direction of management may operate as an impediment to the exercise of intellectual freedom.