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Libs chokehold on TAFE funding key driver in lack of tradies

The ACTU has welcomed the government's new Migration Strategy which will be instrumental to repairing the Coalition Government's legacy of damage and neglect, which has seen rampant migrant worker exploitation, and employers gaming the system to use temporary migration as a source of cheap labour, rather than training up and giving opportunities to local workers.

For nearly a decade the Liberals have hollowed out our TAFE system, leaving the training and skills of Australians behind and are directly responsible for the skills shortage we are now experiencing:

- Between 2013 and 2021, the Liberals cut \$3 billion from TAFE funding, only returning a fraction of these cuts when the sector was in crisis after Covid.
- TAFE funding under the Liberals has consistently lagged behind funding for schools and universities under the liberals, despite the numbers of students in the TAFE system rising year on year.
- TAFEs have also lost thousands of teaching jobs nationally over the last 10 years. Almost 10,000 full time TAFE teaching positions were lost across six states and territories, including almost 9,000 in New South Wales and Victoria alone, between 2012 and 2019.
- Lack of funding has also resulted in many TAFEs being forced to close or significantly downsize campuses over the last decade. While national data is difficult to obtain, and the fact that many TAFEs have chosen to significantly downsize campuses rather than close them completely hides the extent of the problem, the data that is available is deeply concerning. In NSW for example, 12 TAFE campus properties have been 'divested' (sold) since 2012 – making a total of 33 sold since 1995.

Funding cuts have also left those still working in the system under increased pressure, as AEU surveys have consistently shown. A 2020 AEU survey found that:

- More than two-thirds of respondents (68%) were aware that their institution had stopped providing particular courses in the last three years, with a lack of funding cited as the most common reason for course closure.
- Improved IT equipment (54%) and materials needed to deliver training (50%) were most frequently cited as requiring significant additional investment to bring up to standard.
- 81% of respondents said that the budget in their department had decreased in the last three years, while nearly half (49%) of those in teaching roles said class sizes had increased.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“Tradies contribute an enormous amount to our economy, their role is invaluable, their skills are core to our economy. For a decade, the Libs put a chokehold on investment in TAFE, leading to the shortages we are now seeing. A shortage in labour here is direct result of them not valuing the role our tradies play and investing in them.

“Unions believe where possible jobs should go to workers here in Australia, by developing good quality training pathways to fill these important roles. The Migration Strategy proposes a response to skill shortages that is integrated with our education and training system, to ensure that a response to a shortage is skilling up local workers, not just temporary migration.

“If Peter Dutton is serious about addressing our skills shortage, he would back the government in supporting funding for our TAFE system”.

ENDS

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