"Enough is enough on rogue training providers" says ACPET CEO

Responding today to allegations about the quality of private training in Victoria made last night on the ABC’s 730 program ACPET CEO, Claire Field, said she was deeply disappointed by the response of the national quality regulator and called on them to lift their game.

"It is completely unacceptable to see one of the Commissioners of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) appear on national television and claim that the regulator does not have sufficient resources to regulate quality in the industry. Equally galling is the statement that it will take time to get on top of the quality problem. It is for the regulator to prioritise their activities, and complaints investigations must be a priority," Ms Field said.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) this year celebrates twenty years as an industry association for private tertiary providers. At its national conference last week it celebrated the best independent tertiary education providers at the inaugural ACPET Awards for Excellence. Judged by panels of independent experts in the sector, including industry representatives and other educational peak bodies, the Awards showcase the outstanding results achieved by the best private providers.

"Sadly there is a real gap between the best independent providers in the sector and a rogue element that has developed, particularly in Victoria in recent years", Ms Field said.

"Lax regulation by the former State regulator, the VRQA, has left ASQA with a real task to clean out a rogue element. Students, employers and taxpayers deserve better and the investigation of serious complaints about unethical or fraudulent conduct needs to be dealt with as a priority," urged Ms Field.

As a result of the damage being done to the sector by poorly focussed and poorly resourced regulatory practices, two years ago ACPET took it upon itself to lift standards in the sector.

"As an industry association we don't have the resources of government but we recognise the urgent need to ensure students and employers continue to have confidence in the integrity of independent tertiary providers. As such we have devoted considerable time and efforts to 'lifting the quality bar'. What this means is that it is now harder to become an ACPET member with a stringent Code of Ethics applying to all members, as well as increased scrutiny of members and potential members," Ms Field said.

ACPET’s 2012 annual report documents its efforts to lift quality in the sector. In the 2011-12 financial year ACPET received 49 complaints, this represented approximately 4% of its membership of 1,100. More than half of these complaints related to Victorian providers. The membership of twenty-nine ACPET members was terminated in 2011-12 for a range of reasons. Four members were terminated for breaches of ACPET’s Code of Ethics and membership was refused to one applicant.

"One ACPET member, Trade Institute of Victoria, has been named by the 7.30 Report as engaging in fraudulent practices. The ACPET Board is undertaking a review of the claims made on the 7.30 Report but notes that Trade Institute of Victoria has lodged a complaint with the ABC in relation to the claims made, that the claims have been made by a former staff member, and that ACPET has
undertaken its own visit to the provider and held discussions with existing staff and students. The matter will be considered by the ACPET Board at its September meeting", advised Ms Field.

"If ACPET, with its small team and lack of formal investigative powers, can lift quality in the sector and terminate the membership of providers who do not adhere to the highest quality standards, so can government regulatory bodies. Not only can they, but they must. Students, employers and the community deserve better".

Ms Field noted the support of the New South Wales, Queensland and Commonwealth governments for the work ACPET was doing to lift quality in the sector. "I particularly thank the Minister for Tertiary Education and Skills, Senator Chris Evans, for his comments last week about the leadership ACPET has taken on quality in the sector".

"I urge the regulatory agencies to follow ACPET's lead and give complaints investigations the time and resources they require. It is a small minority of providers who are damaging the reputation of the sector as a whole. In doing so they devalue the importance of vocational education and training and they diminish the learning opportunities for a range of learners. This is completely unacceptable."

"ACPET has a Complaint and Dispute Resolution Framework which works. If anyone has a complaint about the education and training being delivered by an ACPET member they should notify us immediately. We will not tolerate rogues in the industry, and we will not have them associated with ACPET and its members. ACPET represents the best private training providers and students and employers can have confidence in the work ACPET has done and continues to do - to lift the quality bar", Ms Field concluded.

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Claire Field is available for comment
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