Time for focus and action on tertiary education

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) congratulates the Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries that have been appointed today. In particular ACPET congratulates The Hon Christopher Pyne, Minister for Education, The Hon Andrew Robb AO Minister for Trade and Investment, the Hon Sussan Ley, Assistant Minister for Education and Senator Scott Ryan the Parliamentary Secretary for Education on their appointments to portfolios that will be pivotal to the tertiary education sector and urges them to work collectively to address four urgent priorities for tertiary education in Australia.

ACPET also congratulates Senator Brett Mason on his appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Senator Mason has worked closely with ACPET for many years to address issues relating to tertiary education and he will bring to his role a deep understanding of how international education aids in broadening and deepening Australia’s international reputation, particularly within the region.

In the lead-up to the election, the government outlined its vision for the future of Australia and now that the cabinet and portfolio positions have been announced ACPET and its members are keen to see the new Government turn its attention to the issues confronting Australia’s tertiary education sector.

The new Minister for Trade and Investment, the Hon Andrew Robb AO with his previous Ministerial experience in tertiary education is well placed to work with Minister Pyne, Assistant Minister Ley and Parliamentary Secretary Ryan on rebuilding Australia’s reputation as a primary destination for international students. Crucial reforms, commenced but left unfinished by the Rudd-Gillard government, are required to kickstart one of Australia’s strongest trade sectors. Australia’s arrangements for student visas are too difficult and cumbersome – there is a need to extend streamlined visa processing to low risk providers beyond the university sector and to urgently review the Genuine Temporary Entrant test.

“ACPET is calling on the incoming Abbott government to swiftly endorse the principles and recommendations of the Chaney Report and actively support, strengthen and foster the development of the Australian international education industry. This includes student visa reform through expediting the extension of streamlined visa processing to all low risk providers and reviewing the Genuine Temporary Entrant test. These modest actions are crucial steps in rebuilding an industry which can and should make the optimum contribution to Australia’s future economic prosperity, enhance Australia’s global competitiveness and contribute to Australia’s intellectual, social and cultural wellbeing” said Claire Field, ACPET Chief Executive Officer.

“ACPET also urges the new Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, not to delay in implementing the reforms to higher education regulation recommended by Professors Kwong Lee Dow and Valerie Braithwaite.

“We heard many times during the course of the election campaign the Coalition’s deep commitment to reducing unnecessary red-tape. The higher education sector has just been reviewed by two of Australia’s leading academics. They’ve identified the red tape that needs to go. Now is the time to put the sensible recommendations of the review panel into action, so that higher education providers can devote more time to their students and less time to meaningless red tape” urged Ms Field.

In keeping with the Coalition government’s commitment to reducing unnecessary regulations stymying business, ACPET is also calling for the commencement of a review of ASQA that was agreed to by the then Commonwealth Ministers and his State and Territory counterparts back in June 2013.

“The Commonwealth and States have agreed to undertake a review of ASQA. There should be no reason why this review should not happen as a matter of priority, and in fact should be part of a broader review which also looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of government funding for VET. Reviews into higher
education and schools have happened; the VET sector should not be forgotten or ignored. Skill development is critical to our national prosperity. We need a well functioning VET system that is not boggled down by unnecessary and burdensome regulation. We need a regulatory framework in place that allows high quality, low risk providers to get on with their core business of skilling the nation without a heavy hand of regulation disrupting their operations. And crucially we need a regulatory system which does not place such significant burdens on small businesses that they are forced out of the industry altogether.”

“ACPET urges the government to consult with the sector on the devastating impact of multiple funding cuts and rule changes on Australia’s once proud and vibrant apprenticeship system.

“The incoming Government expressed concern in opposition about the dramatic drop in apprenticeship and traineeship commencements during the past 12 months. While it has announced new interest-free trade support loans of up to $20,000 for apprentices, and has referred to a need to review the apprenticeship system, it has not committed to reinstating previous incentive payments - or to extend existing support - to employers for new entrant or existing workers.”

“Over the last two years of the Rudd-Gillard government, there was a series of ad hoc changes to policy, funding and financial support for the apprenticeship system. Collectively these changes have devastated the apprenticeship and traineeship system and had a dramatic and destabilising impact on the number of people signing up to an apprenticeship or traineeship.”

“At a time of rising unemployment, a modest amount of support to the apprenticeship system is an immediate imperative to allow it to once again attract new starters and retain those already in the system. We call on the government to genuinely engage with all parts of the sector so the apprenticeship system can continue to produce the highly skilled workers that our economy desperately needs.”

“ACPET acknowledges that the incoming government intends to prudently manage the budget. In doing so though, the need to continue to invest in skills and learning must not be ignored. An investment in tertiary education is an investment in Australia’s future. The sector stands ready to work with the government on ensuring funds are well targeted and unnecessary regulation is reduced. ACPET had a long and productive relationship with the new Ministers during their time in Opposition. We welcome their appointment to their new roles and to working with them to secure Australia’s future,” said Ms Field.

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