Time for government to get serious in engaging with the tertiary education sector

ACPET welcomes Prime Minister Rudd identifying the need for the Government to re-engage with business. This re-engagement is particular critical within the tertiary education sector as there is a growing concern that while the Government is willing to call on private business to play a critical role in delivering tertiary education programs, it also willing to walk away from these partners with little or no warning when there is a policy change.

“The appointment of a new Cabinet provides the opportune time for the government to genuinely focus on the business of education and training. The government relies increasingly on private providers to deliver on its tertiary education policy objectives and in doing so is able to leverage the efficiencies, innovation and business nous that the private sector offers” said ACPET Chief Executive, Claire Field.

“The tertiary education sector is tired of divisive politics and policies which are aimed at shoring up political survival rather than the future prosperity of the nation. The revolving door of tertiary education and small business ministers has significantly impacted on the operating environment of the tertiary education sector. Given a well functioning education sector is paramount to national productivity and prosperity, the political instability has been alarming.”

The business models of private tertiary education providers are put under considerable pressure by successive or rapid changes to government policy. Many providers are downsizing their businesses and some face closure as a direct result of changes to policies around which businesses were structured. In the short term this is resulting in job losses. Over the medium to long term it may result in the deterioration of the skills and experience base of the sector and affect the long term ability of the private sector to deliver on the government’s policy in an effective and efficient manner.

“ACPET acknowledges that in difficult economic times, governments need to carefully manage budgets. However it is vital that when the government intends making major decisions that it consults with those who know the industry best, to ensure that it can fully understand the likely outcomes” said Ms Field.

“ACPET is calling on the government to carefully consider both the economic and social impact of policy changes that will affect tertiary education providers. This can only be achieved by working in partnership with the sector and engaging in genuine consultation.”

“I am also concerned that the new Cabinet does not make clear which Minister has responsibility for international education. International education is one of Australia’s key planks for engaging in the Asian Century, it is vital that it is at the forefront of the new Cabinet as it makes its deliberations about Australia’s future” said Ms Field.

Claire Field is available for comment: 0411 240 671