

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACPET calls for more consultation on VET Student Loan scheme

The brief window for consultation on limited components of the VET Student Loan scheme is likely to lead to another poorly-designed scheme that is not fit for purpose, according to the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET).

ACPET CEO Rod Camm said that reform of the magnitude proposed for the vocational education and training sector could have profound and long-lasting negative consequences if not well considered.

“We are disappointed that the Government did not see fit to engage in meaningful consultation with the sector on the detail of the reforms before they were proposed and I note that the TAFE peak body, TAFE Directors Australia, has expressed similar concerns,” he said.

“As funders of TAFE, State Governments are critical stakeholders in this process and we have not seen any evidence that they were adequately consulted about VET Student Loan reforms either.”

Mr Camm said the sector had been advised they had until 23 October to provide feedback about the list of eligible courses and their allocated cost band.

“Despite our willingness and repeated attempts to engage, representatives of the sector were not actively engaged to sense-test the proposed reforms and prevent unintended negative consequences,” he said.

“The future of Australia’s vocational education training sector deserves far more than a cursory consultation restricted to eligible courses and caps.”

Mr Camm said slashing the list of courses eligible for the VET Student Loan program by more than half was a key concern.

“The eligible course list released on Monday is based upon State preferred skills lists which are designed for an entirely different purpose and often deliberately exclude VET FEE HELP courses. This makes no sense and, for such an important program, you would expect the Commonwealth to conduct its own analysis,” he said.

Mr Camm said there was overwhelming support from private providers for many of the proposed reforms, particularly around higher barriers to entry and improved quality standards.

“Reform was needed but, make no mistake, the reforms as they currently stand will result in job losses, restrict access to VET for many students and erode the quality of the remaining courses available to those who can afford them,” he said.

“I don’t believe these outcomes were desired, nor even anticipated, by the Government but it is not too late to address these short-comings.”

Mr Camm called on Federal Education Minister, Senator Simon Birmingham, to avoid a rushed implementation.

“It is true that after the past few turbulent years, the sector, industry and our students need certainty and stability but we’d all prefer a system that delivers high quality outcomes for all Australians,” he said.

“With negotiations for a new skills national partnership agreement due soon, this is a great opportunity to bring all parties to the table and conduct a genuinely comprehensive and consultative process and take the time to get it right.”

Ends.

Rod Camm is available for interview - 0409 484 051.