

## Media Statement

27 October 2016

### Response to Senator Birmingham's comments in ArtsHub

From the outset, let me say that I wholeheartedly agree that there must be action to tackle the poor performance of the VET FEE-HELP program and the behaviours of a small number of providers. Of course action needed to be taken to stop the rampant growth in enrolments and student fees associated with VET FEE-HELP.

However, the risk of the Federal Government's approach with its proposed VET Student Loans program is that very necessary skilling for the creative arts sector will suffer as a result of the process of selecting courses for funding.

While the Education Minister Senator Birmingham is correct to highlight that a number of courses will still be able to be accessed under his new VET Student Loan scheme, there are also some important omissions. For example, the Diploma in Screen Acting that provides very specialised training will not be supported. This course provides the skills for future actors in Australia's screen industry that extends to advertising, television commercials, theatre, television production shows, musical theatre, corporate entertainment and more. Surely we want Australian actors to have the opportunities available through this diverse sector.

Of course, the needs of this industry are very specialised, and tailored courses are specifically developed. So it's hardly surprising that the Diploma in Screen Acting doesn't appear on two state or territory government skills lists. Their priorities and funding focus will always be on more traditional occupational areas where the skill needs and employment outcomes are easier to identify and measure.

It's also a reality that some states have excluded programs like this, and broadcast technology, journalism, professional screenwriting and many others, precisely because they were funded by the Federal Government. Well, up till now.

The other major concern raised by many in the sector is that even when courses are on the eligible courses list developed in Canberra, the proposed loan caps will not support students to undertake the high quality programs necessary to develop the professionalism required to nurture and grow this important sector.

The Minister didn't mention that the student loan cap will be set at \$10,000 across for all creative arts courses. It doesn't matter about the content, quality or reputation of the course or provider – that's it.

The advice I've received from many in the sector is that this will not support the delivery of courses of the standard required by industry. This, of course, means students may not access the skills necessary to gain employment and we will see a 'race to the bottom' in terms of course quality.

We need the Federal Government to engage with the industry to determine what its skills priorities are - if the new VET Student Loan program is training students for the industry, then surely it should have a voice.

The industry also should be consulted on what loan funding is required to enable students to undertake high quality courses that maximise their employment outcomes.

The industry is absolutely justified in its right to be concerned about the government's cuts to the creative arts sector under the new VET Student Loans program, and we all will be poorer for it.

***Rod Camm is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training.***

Rod Camm is available for interview - 0409 484 051.