

2 December 2016

ACPET welcomes end of VET FEE HELP

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) has welcomed the formal end of the disastrous VET FEE HELP program but remains concerned about future impact on students.

The suite of VET Student Loans bills were finally passed by the Senate last night and will be implemented from 1 January 2017.

ACPET CEO Rod Camm said private providers had made a hugely valuable contribution under VET FEE HELP and he remained disappointed that the vast majority of high quality providers were punished for the excesses of a few.

“Minister Birmingham does deserve congratulations for bringing the scheme to a close, and the private sector looks forward to meeting the higher benchmarks in such an important sector,” he said.

Mr Camm said that while private providers were pleased to see the end of the VET FEE HELP scheme, and the many associated problems, they remain concerned about several aspects of its replacement, VET Student Loans and the impact it may have.

“We maintain that an approved course list and loan caps are flawed policy approaches which will impede the flexibility the sector needs to respond to changing workforce needs and unfairly limits student choice. Both elements will hold back the development of quality, student-centric programs,” he said.

“We hope the instruments put in place will, through genuine consultation and collaboration, allow these issues to be appropriately addressed.”

Mr Camm noted that Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) Senators had secured an undertaking from the Minister that he would consider, on a case by case basis, requests from TAFEs and not-for-profit providers to continue to deliver some courses not on the eligible list, if they could demonstrate strong employment outcomes.

“This is very pleasing for our high quality not-for-profit providers, however it has not yet addressed the low caps in high skill and cost programs,” he said.

“Senators Xenophon and Griff told the Senate that this undertaking should be extended to other good quality, ethical private providers. We thank them for their support and will continue to pursue this option. It should always be about the evidence of employer support and outcomes, not the ownership structures.”

Mr Camm said ACPET and members were now focused on the implementation of the VET Student Loans program by 1 January 2017.

“We are very concerned that the implementation timetable that the Department of Education and Training has set itself is highly ambitious and will make for a turbulent start to the academic year for current and future students,” he said.

“ACPET and its members will work closely with the Department to facilitate as smooth a transition as is possible and minimise disruption to students.

“We hope this new era will see a line drawn under the VET FEE HELP fiasco and allow everyone in the sector to work together and focus on delivering high quality education and training that meets student aspirations, industry needs and, ultimately, supports economic growth.”

[ENDS] Rod Camm is available for interview on 0409 484 051.