

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACPET urges Ministers to maintain student choice

Australia's peak body for independent training providers has today welcomed the new Ministerial pairing for training and vocational education and urged them to put student choice and accessibility at the forefront of their agenda.

Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) CEO Rod Camm congratulated Senator Simon Birmingham on his reappointment as Minister for Education and Training, and MP Karen Andrews on her promotion to Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills.

The training and skills sector is pleased to have two Ministers with a strong understanding of the needs of the sector and – importantly – the needs of employers," Mr Camm said.

"The challenge now is to ensure that students' interests are always at the top of the agenda.

"And the best way to achieve that is to maximise opportunities for choice – ensuring a level playing field so only quality providers can provide publicly funded training.

"The skills and training sector has come a long way in Australia over the last 20 years, driven by the premise that students are best placed to choose the best course and best training options for themselves.

"More than half of Australia's students now choose private providers to set them on the right careers paths.

"Minister Birmingham is well versed in the issues in the sector and played a leading role in implementing changes that have made a real difference. We look forward to continuing our respective work in building a sector with integrity and to ensure student choice is paramount.

Mr Camm also called on the Government to rule out arbitrary caps on student loans in the training sector – an idea floated by the Opposition during the recent Federal Election campaign.

"Caps only serve to create higher, out of pocket up-front costs for students and serve as a barrier to entry into vocational education for many people. If only quality industry recognised providers are allowed to participate in the program, many of these issues go away. We are committed to working with Government to help in designing the selection criteria."

Mr Camm said ACPET was also calling on the Government to commit to removing the unfair loan fee imposed on students who study at private higher education institutes.

"Forcing students to pay back an extra 25 per cent of their course FEE-HELP loan fees just because they chose to study at a private provider is unfair and indefensible.

"There is no reason why students who chose a private over a public university to get their degree should be treated as a second class student."

He said ACPET looked forward to meeting with the Ministers in the near future, and was keen to establish a very warm and productive relationship with both, and particularly Ms Andrews as she entered the portfolio.

"We have worked very well with Senator Birmingham, and we are looking forward to having the same positive relationship with Ms Andrews. ACPET wishes them both well in their challenging but very important roles."

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