

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Tertiary education budget policies offer more disappointment or wrong direction**

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) has expressed concern that both the Coalition and Opposition budget policies offer little to encourage a vibrant, diverse and effective tertiary education sector.

Following the release of the Budget and the Opposition's Budget-in-Reply, ACPET CEO Rod Camm said both major parties have failed to offer a credible way forward for tertiary education in Australia. "The Government's key policy for the higher education sector is to put it 'on hold', with no measures to support students who enroll with independent providers. Nothing to support greater diversity and student choice."

"For the VET sector that is recording the lowest government-funded enrolments in more than a decade the Government's only significant response is to persist with the Skilling Australians Fund. While some funding has been allocated to encourage States and Territories to sign up, there hasn't been a single student or job seeker trained since the fund was announced in last year's budget. This is disappointing to say the least." Mr Camm said.

While ACPET welcomed the modest investment in supporting mature age workers to reskill in response to the growing impact of digital technologies, Mr Camm said the long-term decay of the VET sector is being ignored.

"The apparent indifference to the needs of the sector have been complemented by a range of new and expanded fees and charges on higher education and VET providers that will raise more than \$100 million as they ramp-up over the forward estimates." Without addressing the funding demise, moving the regulators to full cost recovery will see more college closures and disruption for students. For higher education providers they have already been locked out of access to government funded places and their students are required to pay a 25% fee. University students don't have to pay, so increased fees will shift more costs to students.

The Opposition's philosophical support for TAFE, confirmed in the Budget-in Reply, would see a retreat from policies that support diversity and choice for industry and students. "With the growing impact of demographic and digital factors, Australian students and industry need a tertiary education sector that offers greater innovation and flexibility - not less."

While the proposal to increase apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships as part of a \$470 million skills package is much needed, restricting access to TAFEs only will deny students the choice that best meets their and industry needs. The commitment to cut fees for 100,000 student places in its first term still leaves more than a million students in government-funded

programs per year still required to pay student fees.

“Given graduates of independent providers enjoy stronger outcomes than their public provider counterparts, it’s hard to see how quarantining TAFE funding is in the interests of students” Mr Camm said. “This is a retrograde step back into the past.”

“In South Australia we saw what can happen when governments start quarantining programs and funding to prop-up TAFEs. It certainly hasn’t been in the interests of students, or industry, in that state. Nor ultimately, in the interests of TAFE.

It’s the wrong direction to take the VET sector”.

Mr Camm said ACPET, welcomed Labor’s intent to commission a review of post-secondary education should it be elected to government. “The Opposition policy acknowledges some fundamental problems and the need for a whole of sector view of necessary reforms.”

**Media contact:            Rod Camm**  
**0409 484 051**