

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACPET calls for a national review of the quality standards for vocational education and training

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) has called for a national review of the quality standards for vocational education and training (VET) in response to the 2017-18 Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) Annual Report released last week.

“ACPET is completely committed to maintaining the highest standards of quality in post school education in Australia. However, maintaining quality is a difficult challenge in a national education system, one requiring the attention of Australia’s best educators”, the Chairman Bruce Callaghan said.

Education is in the top rank of Australia’s export income generating industries, and the federal government must protect this internationally rated economic asset. While it is now common to critique the VET sector on the basis of often minor non-compliance, this does very little for the quality of VET education or for the reputation of Australia’s internationally recognised VET sector. It is time for a thorough review of this sector and for the government to commit to investment in VET. This sector requires government commitment to support innovation, training package redevelopment and research to more likely guarantee its relevance in the context of skills and technologies of the future.

ACPET is confident that independent providers are delivering innovative and high-quality training across Australia. ACPET’s former CEO, Mr Rod Camm, recently reaffirmed that objective analysis of the NCVET data confirms this.

While the Council supports the national audit approach, it also believes that excessive attention to detailed regulatory issues in the current audit model is diverting focus and energy from quality education to legalistic compliance. The ASQA audit model came apart because of major misuse of government contracts by a few providers under VET FEE HELP (VFH) scheme. However, there remains a question of whether the current approach would prevent similar behaviour occurring again. The current model continues the approach that failed to detect the systemic abuse that occurred under the VFH scheme.

“The national compliance rate at the conclusion of the audit which was reported by ASQA demonstrates the disconnect between the regulator and providers, both public and private.” Peter McDonald the Acting CEO of ACPET said today. The Government’s NVETR Review, which highlighted the need for a regulatory partnership between ASQA and training providers, must now be effected to modernise Australia’s VET framework, and to ensure quality and innovation are recognised and rewarded.

The disconnect between performance and the audit process is illustrated by national data. Employers and students respectively report 82.2% and 87.3% satisfaction with independently delivered training.

A revealing majority of students – 89.4% – say they would recommend their private training provider to others, challenging what is actually being considered in the audit regime. “Students who have completed a course and succeeded have to be given some credibility”, Mr McDonald said.

It would be regrettable if the reporting model actually undermined confidence in the independent sector. The facts are that 80.8% of students were in a job after training with an independent provider, compared to 73.1% for TAFE.

Negativity emanating from government bodies can damage one of Australia's great assets.

What is a concern for TAFE, the independent training sector and Government is that employers are increasingly turning to non-accredited training and are more satisfied with this approach (88.5%). ACPET believes accredited training is critical for students, and government must take care to protect the Australian system from becoming irrelevant due to red tape.

In the current regime it is possible that small administrative errors and gross deliberate acts of misconduct technically result in the same reporting: non-compliance. "Serious compliance breaches lead to de-registration, and the fact that the number of incidents in this category is in actuality contextually small is being overlooked", Mr McDonald said.

ACPET called for a full review of Australia's world class VET system and for quality-based reporting on its achievement. ACPET is committed to working with government, ASQA and industry to improve regulation and reporting on the sector.

"It is commonly thought among providers and sector experts that training packages are well and truly out of date with the fast-changing intelligence economy" Mr Callaghan said. He added "ACPET champions quality in the education and training sector. Our Industry Certification Program and VET Practitioner Register evidence a long-term commitment to quality education. ACPET will continue to work with ASQA to recognise excellence and industry led programs".

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