

13 May 2014

ACPET commends the government on crucial reforms for tertiary education

Speaking tonight in Canberra the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, Claire Field, commended the government on its investment in tertiary education and creation of a level playing field for all tertiary students.

“In what is clearly a difficult budget environment, the government is to be commended for its commitment to significant reforms to the tertiary sector to provide more support to more students and enhance Australia’s productivity”, Ms Field said.

“The government’s higher education reforms are a major milestone, and deliver equity and fairness for the growing number of higher education students choosing to undertake their degree or sub-degree program at a non-university institution. Currently students outside the university system are significantly disadvantaged with additional administrative costs on top of their income contingent loans and they are currently ruled out from receiving any government support.”

“The changes the government has announced tonight offer all students funding support from the Commonwealth. They will support genuine student choice and competition amongst all of Australia’s 173 higher education providers.”

With all higher education providers subject to the same national standards regulated by the Federal government’s Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Ms Field declared she was “more than confident that these reforms will expand student choice and enhance competition without diminishing quality.”

Reflecting on the changes announced in the vocational education and training sector, Ms Field indicated her relief that the drastic measures suggested by the Audit Commission had been avoided.

“While it is never good news to see funding reduced in any portfolio area that adds to national productivity like VET does, overall the government is to be commended for the judicious changes it has made. Providing apprentices with access to a generous income contingent loan scheme provides them with significantly more support while they learn their trade, but also recognises that those who earn a good salary as a result of their education are in a position to later on repay the investment the government has made in their education”, said Ms Field.

The streamlining of funding support for employers and their training provider partners through the new Industry Skills Fund is welcomed even though ACPET recognises the reduction in overall funding with the wind-up of the National Workforce Development Fund.

“Removal of the administration fee on VET FEE-HELP loans is a huge step forward in terms of equity for VET students and something ACPET has argued at length for. This change recognises that higher education is not for everyone and for those students who want to undertake a VET Diploma or Advanced Diploma they will no longer be discriminated against with prohibitive and unjustified additional administrative charges”, said Ms Field.

ACPET notes the reduction in funding for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency but considers efficiencies can be found in TEQSA’s operations and these efficiencies should not result in higher costs for providers or diminished quality in the higher education sector. ACPET continues to advocate that the VET sector regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, should not be forced

to operate on a full cost recovery basis. ACPET was disappointed not to see an ongoing commitment from the government to fund ASQA in the budget statements and will continue to press for greater equity in funding (and streamlining of operations) for ASQA.

ACPET is pleased that Austrade will continue to operate (after recommendations from the Commission of Audit to close Austrade and wind up the Export Market Development Grants). ACPET is also pleased that the government has recognised the vital role its Export Market Development Grants play in assisting small and medium businesses (including those in the tertiary sector) to open up new markets and will therefore continue to operate them.

Ms Field is available for comment: 0411 240 671.