

MEDIA RELEASE

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Retrograde policy change threatens student choice

Australia's 2.2 million private education and training students are being urged to stand up for their right to choice during the Federal Election campaign.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET), the national industry association for independent providers of post-compulsory education and training, is mobilising member, employer and student networks to address policy changes that would limit student choice and undermine the viability of a competitive industry.

ACPET Chief Executive Officer Rod Camm said private education and training in Australia delivered jobs and growth, and provided nationally accredited and portable qualifications that delivered massive outcomes for the economy.

"Private colleges in Australia contribute \$5.8 billion per year to the national economy while supporting almost 100,000 students in higher education and 2.1 million students studying some form of vocational education and training," he said.

"The industry is highly innovative and responsive to the needs of industry and is the preferred choice for more than 50 per cent of all vocational education and training students."

However, the sector is under threat from reactionary policy changes that would punish both students and good quality private providers.

"Policy announcements including an intention to direct the vast majority of vocational training funding to Government-run TAFEs and an arbitrary \$8,000 cap on Help loans will strip students of their right to study at their college of choice," Mr Camm said.

"Suggestions that at least 70 per cent of funding will go to a Government-owned provider and that government will choose the courses that will be funded, and at what price, can only lead to another major public policy failure.

"It won't be long before the headlines are about a failure to meet growing demands, the high costs of training, a lack of innovation, flexibility and growth."

The Liberal and National parties and the Australian Labor Party have announced major reviews into loans for students in vocational education and training.

"We support the reviews but want to make sure that the outcomes do not penalise current or future students. We also want effective requirements to ensure only the best of providers can deliver publicly funded training," Mr Camm said.

"All political parties must ensure that students come first. Student choice of a preferred college is critical to Australia maintaining its international recognition for quality tertiary education. Supporting competition between quality providers will produce far better outcomes than Governments setting prices and caps."

Mr Camm said ACPET, which represents 1,100 members providing 75 per cent of all private education and training in Australia, would be mobilising its student body and industry networks in the **Student Choice Counts** campaign.

"We urge all Members of Parliament and candidates in this election to guarantee that Australia's future education and training system is well funded, continues to give students and employers the right to choose their preferred provider and secures the 100,000 jobs at risk in the private education and training sector," he said.

www.studentchoicecounts.com

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