TAFE facing dismal future under Morrison Govt

Media Release

Australia's TAFE system faces a dismal future if the years of neglect, underfunding and privatisation by federal Coalition governments continues under the Morrison Government's discredited contestable funding model.

Today is National TAFE Day, with colleges and students across the country recognising the day with morning teas and BBQs. Australian Education Union (AEU) Deputy Federal President Maurie Mulheron said the entire TAFE system is at risk unless radical action is taken to restore funding and confidence in the system.

"TAFE has served faithfully for decades, having provided vocational education for millions of Australian plumbers, nurses, child care staff and other workers. However, under the Morrison Government the very future of TAFE itself is under threat," Mr Mulheron said.

"Despite the clear and undisputed benefits that a robustly funded and administered public TAFE and vocational education sector provides our economy and our society, there has been a concerted and continual drive from successive Coalition governments to marginalise vocational education and deprioritise TAFE."

"The almost complete surrender by the Morrison Government of the provision of vocational education to market forces has resulted in a massive decline of vocational education in Australia," Mr Mulheron said.

"There was not a single mention of TAFE in the Morrison Government's first Budget, while the recent Joyce Review of vocational education was clear in its aims of deprioritising TAFE as a keystone of the vocational education sector in Australia."

Mr Mulheron said that in 2009, TAFE institutions taught 81% of all publicly-funded full-time-equivalent students in Australia. Five years later, this figure had reduced to 57%. Over the same period, private for-profit providers increased their share of publicly-funded full-time-equivalent students from 15% to 40% and increased their total student numbers by 286%.

"According to new research, in 2016 there were over 4600 active registered training providers, but only 96 of those providers have more than 100 full time students," Mr Mulheron said.

"It is plainly evident that quality cannot be consistently maintained at a system level when that system is populated by thousands of tiny individual private providers, some of whom have participated in recruitment and enrolment practices that have been described as 'skirting the edge of legality'."

"The continued attempts by successive state, territory and federal governments to shift this sector towards privatisation have severely eroded the viability of many public TAFE institutions and undermined public confidence in the system," Mr Mulheron said.

Mr Mulheron called upon the Morrison Government to:

1. Guarantee a minimum of 70% government funding to the public TAFE system. In addition, no public funding should

go to private for-profit providers, consistent with other education sectors.
2. Restore funding and rebuild the TAFE system, to restore confidence in the quality of the courses and qualifications and the institution.
3. Abandon the failed student loans experiment, and cancel the debts of all students caught up in private for-profit provider scams.
4. Re-invest in the TAFE teaching workforce and develop a future-focused TAFE workforce development strategy in collaboration with the profession and unions.
5. Develop a capital investment strategy in consultation with state governments, to address the deplorable state of TAFE facilities around the country.
6. Support a comprehensive independent inquiry into TAFE.

“TAFE is the bedrock of Australia’s vocational education system and TAFE institutions have a history of providing high quality technical, further and general education at a level of quality or consistency that the relatively recently -conceived private vocational education sector has been unable to match,” Mr Mulheron said.

“The Morrison Government must immediately pledge support to restore TAFE to the heart of vocational education in Australia. Anything less than this risks losing an educational gem which is the envy of the rest of the world.”

Ideas on how to celebrate National TAFE Day can be found at *http://www.stoptafecuts.com.au/*

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