TAFE essential for a strong economy

The Morrison Government's policy objectives which strip funding from TAFE and privatise vocational education is causing lasting damage to the Australian economy which will take decades to fix.

A Mitchell Institute analysis of vocational education funding has shown that investment in the sector has dropped to its lowest level since 2008, leaving Australia short of qualified workers in fields including aged care, childcare, mental health, nursing workers

Since being in government the Federal Coalition has:

- overseen 140,000 fewer apprentices now than when it was elected, and cut $3 billion from vocational education funding
- In October the Morrison Government slashed $3.9 billion from the Education Investment Fund, money intended to be invested in desperately-needed infrastructure improvements in the TAFE and Higher Education sector.
- Earlier this year it was revealed that the Federal Coalition failed to spend nearly $1 billion budgeted for a series of TAFE apprenticeship, skills and training initiatives between 2014-15 and 2018-19.

Australian Education Union Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that the Morrison Government's political agenda and funding cuts to TAFE was directly responsible for this pressure on the sector.

"The Morrison Government has been nothing short of a disaster for TAFE and for vocational education. TAFE funding cuts have had a devastating impact on our students, our communities and our TAFE staff," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Recently we have seen the Prime Minister strip $4 billion from the Education Investment Fund, and fail to spend nearly $1 billion in funding allocated for TAFE and training programs."

"Last year Mr Morrison cut $325.8 million in funding from TAFE budgets, equivalent to almost 11 per cent of total federal funding to the sector. The Morrison Government is determined to execute its agenda which deprioritises TAFE," Ms Haythorpe said.

"This is a shameful record of neglect of TAFE, the public vocational training institution which has proudly given generations of Australians their chance at a career or an opportunity to retrain."

"Despite the clear and undisputed benefits that a fully funded high quality public TAFE sector provides our economy and our society, there has been a concerted and continual drive from the Morrison Government to marginalise vocational education and deprioritise TAFE," Ms Haythorpe said.

"The Australian economy needs all the help it can get to break out of its current doldrums. The road back to economic prosperity and opportunity is dependent on TAFE being at the heart of a strong, public vocational education sector."

"Mr Morrison must immediately reverse course and invest in TAFE as the primary public provider of high-quality vocational education in Australia," Ms Haythorpe said.

Ms Haythorpe said that TAFE must remain a strong public provider of vocational education in Australia. She called upon the Morrison Government to:

- 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.
- Restore funding and rebuild the TAFE system, to restore confidence in the quality of the courses and qualifications and the institution.
- Abandon the failed student loans experiment, and cancel the debts of all students caught up in private for-profit provider scams.
- Re-invest in the TAFE teaching workforce and develop a future-focused TAFE workforce development strategy in collaboration with the profession and unions.

- Develop a capital investment strategy in consultation with state governments, to address the deplorable state of TAFE facilities around the country.
- Support a comprehensive independent inquiry into TAFE.

“All governments have a fundamental responsibility to Australian students to ensure that TAFE remains public, strong, vibrant and fully funded,” Ms Haythorpe said.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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