TAFE funding boost must be at heart of post-COVID-19 VET response



Restoration of the billions of dollars of funding cut from TAFE over the past decade must be at the heart of any Commonwealth response to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector post-COVID-19.

In his Press Club speech today Prime Minister Scott Morrison proposed an overhaul of the nation's skills and training sector as part of the Commonwealth's response post COVID-19.

However Mr Morrison made no mention of providing additional Commonwealth funding to implement this reform, continuing a concerted drive from successive governments over the last decade to privatise vocational education and defund and marginalise TAFE. Mr Morrison in fact made no direct reference to TAFE in his speech whatsoever.

Figures from the latest Commonwealth Report on Government Services (RoGS) show that total annual government VET expenditure has fallen by $1.6 billion (21.3 per cent) from the 2012 peak of $7.65 billion[1].

Since being in government the Federal Coalition has overseen:

- 140,000 fewer apprentices now than when it was elected in 2013.
- $3 billion cut from vocational education.
- A decline in enrolments in vocational education and training.
- A decline in TAFE enrolments in particular, which have plummeted by 24.5 per cent.
- Commonwealth government contributions to public VET delivery fall by 23.2 per cent in 2018 alone.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the Morrison Government must urgently restore funding and status to TAFE as an essential first step in the post COVID-19 recovery for the VET sector.

"TAFE must be the centrepiece of government policy to rebuild Australia's economy once the COVID-19 pandemic has passed," Ms Haythorpe said.

"However the fact that the Prime Minister did not mention TAFE by name once during his speech today is a clear indication that TAFE is not part of his agenda."

"It is crystal clear there is an urgent need to invest in a strong TAFE to replace the billions of dollars of funding that governments have cut from TAFE in recent years. TAFE is going to be vital for Australia's future and for tackling the big challenges to come," Ms Haythorpe said.

"TAFE teachers and education support staff across the country stand ready to help Australia get back on its feet. TAFE offers the highest standard of vocational education at all levels, with nationally accredited programs and a highly qualified and experienced workforce."

According to the Commonwealth's Jobs Outlook data[2] two out of every three post-COVID jobs will come in the health care and social assistance, construction, education and science/technical fields - all sectors where Australia's world-leading TAFE institutions provide high-quality vocational education.

Ms Haythorpe said that any attempt to subjugate TAFE to the demands of big business or to private training providers must be strongly resisted.

"Right now TAFE is the only institution ready to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. Australia's TAFE system must be the government's preferred solution for providing high-quality vocational education, helping people to get back to work and getting the economy moving again," Ms Haythorpe said.

"The introduction of private for-profit education providers has been a disaster for Australia's vocational education system. History has shown that private providers are not fit for purpose for leading Australia's economic recovery from COVID-19."

"Questionable course quality and the aftermath of the billion-dollar VET-FEE HELP rorts make private for-profit vocational education providers unsuitable for this vital task," Ms Haythorpe said.

"By contrast, TAFE has a sterling public reputation, has campuses all over Australia, and is trusted and respected by employers and community."

Media Contact: Nick Buchan, AEU Federal - 0418 288 104

[1] Commonwealth Report on Government Services (RoGS) 2020
[2] Australian Government Job Outlook https://joboutlook.gov.au/future-outlook.aspx

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026