Equitable, fully funded education critical for Australia’s productivity



At the Albanese Government’s Tertiary Productivity Roundtable last month, the AEU highlighted the critical role of fully funded high-quality public education in driving national productivity and long-term economic growth.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe outlined a comprehensive set of recommendations focused on lifting Year 12 attainment, strengthening pathways from school to tertiary education and the workforce, and addressing deep-seated inequities in funding, outcomes and access across the education system.

“If the Albanese Government is serious about improving productivity and ensuring no student is left behind, we must invest properly in Australia’s teachers and education support staff, preschools, public schools and TAFE,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“We must urgently address teacher shortages and the unsustainable workloads facing the teaching profession and back Australia’s teachers with the resources that they need.

“Every student, no matter where they live or what their background, deserves access to a full range of senior secondary academic and vocational subjects that can open up their future work pathways.”

An urgent reset is needed in the relationship between universities and vocational education, with recognition of TAFE’s primacy role in VET delivery, and an end to market-based funding models.

Further, the deregulation of higher education has resulted in lower academic standards for entry into teaching and falling Initial Teacher Education completion rates. The AEU reaffirms its support for a five-year minimum teaching qualification and a postgraduate two-year master’s degree.

“Governments cannot fix a teacher workforce shortage crisis by lowering the qualifications of the teaching profession. They must invest in decent pay and conditions of work to attract and retain teachers,” Ms Haythorpe said.

This is clearly articulated in the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel Recommendations on the Teaching Profession which are premised on the need to provide financing and to value and respect the teaching profession - with decent working conditions, competitive wages, teacher voice in decision-making and opportunities for development and innovation.

"The AEU urges the Albanese Government to consider recommendation 5, which calls for the establishment of a National Commission for the teaching profession. It is time to look at the national education architecture and make sure it is fit for the future needs of the profession and Australia's students," Ms Haythorpe said.

Free TAFE is a cornerstone of the national skills agenda but decades of underfunding and privatisation has impacted on TAFE's capacity to meet the growing demand.

"Free TAFE has been transformative, but TAFE must be fully funded to succeed, that means investing in the TAFE teaching workforce and providing high quality teaching and learning facilities at TAFE," Ms Haythorpe said.

With housing affordability a major issue for teachers across the country, the AEU supports the ACTU's call for housing reform and a fairer tax system.

"The lack of affordable housing is undermining living standards and quality of life for teachers, especially new graduates, who often have to relocate to regional communities to begin their teaching careers," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Many teachers are struggling to afford to live near their work, and we see young teachers especially facing high rents and being priced out of buying homes.

"We have the ludicrous situation where teachers pay a higher percentage of tax than big business and the very wealthy. Everyone should pay their fair share of tax, not dodge it by setting up schemes and manipulating loopholes.

"By having a fair tax system, there will be more funding available to invest in Australia's preschools, schools, TAFE and the teaching profession."

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