

# FEDERAL BUDGET 2004



## *Investment in Education Before Tax Cuts*

This year's budget provides a clear test of the Howard government's commitment to the future of Australia. Given the size of what is a very healthy surplus, there can be no excuse for continuing to neglect important public services.

The issue is will John Howard waste the surplus on buying his way back into government through tax cuts, or will he use it to invest in the future.

The community has shown a clear preference for putting "Services first" – for building high quality education and health systems before getting tax cuts.

Now is the time to invest in the education of our children and citizens to ensure Australia's future.

By any measure the Howard government has amply provided in previous Budgets for the education of the 30% of Australia's students who attend private schools. Nearly 70% of Australian schools funding now goes to private schools, including the very wealthy private schools. The resource gap between schools is getting wider.

Meanwhile the 1.3 million Australians who rely on TAFE to build a future have seen a rundown in Australian government support for TAFE at the very time we need as a nation the skills and quality that only TAFE can provide.

For families with very young children the issue of access to preschool education is both urgent and vital. No government can continue to disregard the opportunities that preschool education provides by giving children the foundation needed to become successful learners throughout their lives.

Over three and a half million Australians rely on public education to build their future. It is now time for the Coalition government to take their share of responsibility in resourcing and supporting public education.

- Children in public schools deserve their fair share of federal funds;
- TAFE needs support to build a highly skilled and inclusive Australia;
- All children deserve access to public preschool education.

Give public schools their fair share of federal funds



## *Funding to Public Schools must be increased*

- The first responsibility of the government to schools is to fully support public schools, the first choice of the majority of Australian families;
- resource levels in public schools are suffering by comparison with private schools and the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" in schools is increasing rapidly;
- this is largely due to Commonwealth government policies;
- the OECD-PISA results show that the way to improve Australian schooling is by spending money on those in the lower socioeconomic groups, most of whom are in public schools;
- the Australian Government funding proposals for the quadrennium 2005 – 2008 show they intend to spend only \$9.8 billion on the two million students in public schools, whilst private schools, with less than a third of the students, will receive \$21.5 billion (69%).
- it is time to reverse the trend and invest in public schools where it will do the most good for Australia and Australian children.

### *What is the money needed for?*

Public school systems need the money to create greater equity and a fair go for all Australian children, especially the most disadvantaged. The money would be used to provide:

- enhanced literacy and numeracy programs;
- reduced class sizes;
- an increased emphasis on educational disadvantage;
- the funding to tackle the huge inequities in Indigenous education outcomes;
- fee free public schooling;
- adequate levels of guidance and welfare services;
- modernisation of old school buildings;
- access to technology skills and understanding;
- professional development for all teachers.

**It is time to restore the balance.  
The 70% of students in public schools must receive  
their fair share of federal funding.**

## TAFE - for a high skilled and inclusive Australia



Australia's TAFE system helps build a highly skilled and competent workforce and fosters active citizenship for all. As a result all Australians benefit from a prosperous, economically sustainable and culturally diverse nation.

Commonwealth Government policies affect access to TAFE and the resources available to students. After years of Commonwealth funding freezes and neglect, the resource pressures on TAFE are at crisis point. Once again, the Commonwealth is providing no funding for new enrolment growth in 2004. As a result of the funding pressures:

- about 50,000 people are unable to enrol in a vocational education and training course each year;
- access to the full range of TAFE courses particularly in regional areas has been limited;
- low investment in staff training and development poses a threat to the quality of teaching and learning.

Inadequate Commonwealth funding reduces the capacity and capability of TAFE staff to meet industry and community needs. The Commonwealth needs to increase funding to TAFE by at least \$213m:

- for enrolment growth and to fund a 'youth guarantee' of at least a one year full time TAFE course for all school leavers unable to access university or a fulltime job;
- to increase access to education and training for job preparation and career advancement;
- to improve access and support for the disadvantaged, including people in rural and remote areas;
- to build consistent, high quality vocational education and training programs leading to portable national qualifications.

**The Federal Budget must allocate an additional \$213m for TAFE quality improvement programs and enrolment growth in 2004.**

## Fund access to public preschool education for all children



*Why the Commonwealth Government should contribute to funding preschool education:*

Early childhood education is vital to our children's development and life opportunities, but the Commonwealth Government takes no responsibility for preschool education.

Every Australian child must have the right to access a high quality, public preschool education irrespective of where they live or their family's circumstances.

*The Commonwealth Government must fund preschool education because:*

- a quality preschool education provides lasting benefits for children's development and futures;
- early childhood education provides the foundation for building Australia's future knowledge base;
- tens of thousands of Australian children cannot access preschool education and children who are disadvantaged are most likely to miss out;
- Australia needs a national approach and vision for preschool education.

*What is the money needed for?*

- to guarantee at least one year of high quality, free public preschool education for all Australian children;
- to fund a Preschool Equity Program, so that all children can have access to a high quality public preschool education and their special educational needs are addressed;
- to develop national structures and support on a joint basis with the states and territories;
- to establish a national centre for research in early childhood development, education and care.

**All Australian children must have access to public preschool education.  
The Commonwealth Government must play its part.**