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Howard's IR laws will compromise the quality of Australia's education, says AEU

The Australian Education Union today said that the Howard Government's attempt to gratuitously blackmail and bully the states and territories into forcing Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) onto TAFE teachers and increase privatisation of the TAFE system would compromise the quality of Australia's education.

Pat Forward, AEU Federal TAFE Secretary, said that the Federal Government's decision to force TAFE teachers onto AWAs failed to address the needs of a TAFE system that is chronically under-funded.

"The fact is that the Federal Government only contributes 30% of the total funding to these Institutes but it is insisting on having total control of the type of employment opportunities that operate in this sector.

"For nine years the TAFE sector has been under-funded by the Federal Government and as a result Australia is now faced with a skills shortage. Further, this new requirement of the Federal Government will not improve quality in the VET system, nor will it address the skills shortage and certainly will not increase the quality and resources in TAFE.

"TAFE employers do not have sufficient funds to adequately reward their teaching staff, nor to provide appropriate employment arrangements to encourage more teachers into TAFE.

"In some TAFEs, more than 70% of the staff are casually employed. It is a nonsense to say that there is not enough employment "flexibility" in TAFE.

"TAFE is one of the most casualised education sectors in the country. There is no doubt that the aim of AWAs is to further erode TAFE teachers' working conditions and wages.

"AWAs and individual contracts are an overtly ideological attempt by the Howard Government to use the TAFE system as a stalking horse for its highly unpopular industrial relations agenda," Ms Forward said

Funding for TAFE colleges will now be tied to the offer of AWAs.

"The Howard Government is attempting to bully and cajole the states and territories into implementing its unpopular industrial relations agenda by threatening to withhold funds from an already under resourced system.

"It has nothing to do with choice – TAFE teachers and their employers already have a range of flexible employment options open to them that they have successfully and collaboratively negotiated over time," Ms Forward said.

The AEU is calling on the Howard Government to abandon its attempt to bully states and territories into submission, and seriously and collaboratively address the lack of funds for TAFE courses, particularly in areas of skills shortages.

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