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MINISTER CONFIRMS HOWARD GOVERNMENT HOSTILE TOWARDS TAFE

Federal Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, Gary Hardgrave has been caught out fiddling the figures as a result of a report on the future of TAFE released yesterday.

The TAFE Futures Inquiry report stated that the Howard Government had under-funded TAFE and gave preferential support to the private sector.

In response to the report, Minister Hardgrave said that Commonwealth funding of vocational education and training (VET) to states and territories had increased by 4.1 percent over 3 years. However he failed to say that between 1997 and 2004, Commonwealth funding for VET fell by 24 percent.

Australian Education Union Federal TAFE President, Ms Linda Simon, said the Howard Government had stripped funding from the TAFE system over the last decade, fundamentally undermining the backbone of the vocational education and training system in Australia.

“Minister Hardgrave’s comments today confirm one of the TAFE Futures Inquiry’s key findings that: ‘The Federal Government remains largely hostile to TAFE and has continued to favour policy responses to skills shortages that marginalise the public provider... and provides funding opportunities that favour private providers.’

“The systematic under-funding by the Howard Government of the TAFE system is nothing more than an ideologically driven agenda by a government determined to privatise education and training,” she said.

“The Howard Government’s response to the skills shortage is a case of too little, too late. They have presided over 10 years of anti-TAFE policy and now try to fix the crisis that they have created with stop-gap solutions, such as the failed Australian Technical Colleges. So far the Howard Government has committed \$343million for ATCs but at June this year these colleges had only 280 enrolments.

“The Minister is hoping to attract 2000 students to ATCs in 2007 whilst his Government’s policy of neglect of the public provider has seen over 40, 000 students turned away from TAFE in a twelve month period.

“This is simply a waste of taxpayers’ funds which would have been better allocated supporting education and training through the TAFE system. The TAFE Futures report has found that TAFE is the life-blood of many Australian communities, particularly in regional and remote areas, where a number of these failed ATCs are located.

“If Minister Hardgrave thinks that fiddling figures will cover up his Government’s neglect of the TAFE system, he is mistaken.

“It is time that the Howard Government made public education a priority and invested in the TAFE system to provide a future for Australian kids,” Ms Simon said.

“In spite of repeated attempts, the Minister refuses to meet with the AEU to discuss TAFE issues. If indeed he is happy to have a discussion, AEU members are in Canberra today, and would be happy to re-schedule their timetables in order to meet with the Minister.”

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