



Australian Education Union - Federal Office

Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, Victoria, 3006
Phone : +61 (0)3 9693 1800 Fax : +61 (0)3 9693 1805
Email : aeu@aeufederal.org.au Website : www.aeufederal.org.au

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HOWARD CONTINUES WASTE AND DUPLICATION WITH ATC ANNOUNCEMENT

Today's announcement by the Howard Government to fund 100 more Australian Technical Colleges around the country is a grossly inefficient duplication of existing resources, said the Australian Education Union.

AEU Federal President, Ms Pat Byrne said the money would have been better spent providing urgently needed funding for students in the TAFE and public secondary school systems.

"AWAs are compulsory in Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) and this policy is a massively expensive way for Howard to push his harsh IR laws onto schools.

"Not a single student has graduated from existing ATCs which have struggled to attract enrolments and have barely 1800 students nationally.

"Funding more ATCs won't help with Year 12 retention when evidence shows that very few are actually retaining school-based apprenticeships.

"Instead they are acting as hugely expensive pre-apprenticeship centres from which employers poach students into full-time apprenticeships.

"They are costing taxpayers an average of \$55,000 per student compared with an average of \$2235 per student in the TAFE system.

"At the same time, the Howard Government has reduced funding to the TAFE system by 26%.

"TAFE Institutes across the country have waiting lists in key skilled trade areas now and are turning students away because of lack of funding.

"The AEU is arguing for an additional \$470m in 2008 for TAFE Institutes across Australia to allow them to meet the increased demand for vocational education and training places to address the skills shortages.

"This funding would provide additional places for many thousands of students, and would deliver hundreds of thousands of graduates well before the ATCs produce even one skilled and trained graduate.

For further information, please contact:

Pat Byrne
AEU Federal President
0411 693 244

Pat Forward
AEU Federal TAFE Secretary
0425 743 954

Erin Farley
Media
0409 510 879