



Australian Technical Colleges

AEU FEDERAL ELECTION FACT SHEET

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By September, 2007 the Howard Government had announced:

- 28 Australian Technical Colleges
- More than \$550M in funding

So far only 1,800 students are enrolled. The Government claims that by 2009 there will be 10,000 students enrolled in ATCs.

In October, 2007 Howard announces 100 additional Australian Technical Colleges.

These include:

- 30 “brand new” Commonwealth-funded Australian Technical Colleges, including two Defence Technical Colleges (Ipswich and Adelaide)
- 70 specialist technical colleges “converted” from existing state and independent secondary schools at a cost of up to \$10M each

The cost of the first 19 of these new Australian Technical Colleges will be \$271M from 2010-11.

Australian Technical Colleges:

- are a knee-jerk populist response to a serious economic and political problem;
- are a wasteful duplication of existing facilities in schools and TAFE institutes across the country
- have less than 1800 students enrolled nationally, with the vast majority of these students unable to get a school-based apprenticeship
- have not produced a single graduate since they were first announced in 2004

- are much more expensive than any of the existing school and TAFE alternatives. The cost of an average TAFE student is \$2,235 annually. On the governments own figures, the cost of a student at an ATC is many times more than this
- will go nowhere towards addressing the estimated hundreds of thousands of skill shortages in the Australian economy
- have been widely condemned by state and territory governments, industry and training experts and students themselves
- are another ideological attempt by the Howard government to impose its industrial relations agenda on teachers through the imposition of AWAs

In March this year, Andrew Robb said that over the next five years Australia would have 200,000 vacancies which could not be filled.¹ In 2004, the ACTU estimated shortages in the skilled trades alone of more than 130,000 workers up until 2009². The Howard government has had eleven years to address the skills crisis, and all they could come up with was Australian Technical Colleges.

What is needed:

The solution to skills shortages in the Australian economy depends on the development of concerted and collaborative action of industry, governments at all levels, and education and training institutions, including schools and TAFE.

¹ Andrew Robb, Address to National Press Club, March 14 2007

² Australia’s Looming Skills Shortage, ACTU Background Paper – July 2004



Training institutions cannot train young people if employers are not employing them as apprentices.

Skills shortages do not occur overnight. The Howard government was warned throughout the latter part of the 1990s that an impending crisis in the traditional trades could be expected as employers failed to engage young people in training in these areas, and governments failed to invest in TAFE infrastructure and strategies to encourage industry to employ young apprentices.

Immediate additional investment in existing school and TAFE programs would address waiting lists in trades training across the country. TAFE and schools could enroll additional students immediately if they were provided with funding. The existing workforce could be offered encouragement and incentives to retrain in their workplaces.

In summary, skills shortages can only be addressed through sustained and collaborative efforts of government, industry and education institutions by:

- lifting investment in education and training
- improving protection and support for apprentices to encourage take up and improved completion rates
- improving wages and conditions for young apprentices
- encouraging and supporting an increased proportion of the existing workforce to gain higher level qualifications

TAFE SNAPSHOT

In 2006, the public TAFE system enrolled a total of 1.33m students. These included 705,000 young people aged between 15 and 24.

In 2005, total Commonwealth Government funding to the operation of the public TAFE system was about \$1.09B. State and Territory government funding was \$2.758B.