



*from the president*

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# Rhetoric and DEEDS

‘If governments believe in the public provider they need to resource TAFE so that it can provide education and training opportunities for the community.’

**G**OVERNMENTS in Australia regularly indicate that they believe TAFE plays a key role in our society. They continually insist that TAFE is a very important component of the education and training system. What they neglect to do is to fund it so that it can maintain this key role and remain an important component. It is as if there is no connection between the position they envisage TAFE taking and the resourcing that is required to maintain such a position. For some reason there seems to be an expectation that TAFE can fix its own funding problems, or a belief that there are no such problems and TAFE will have to adjust to the resourcing levels that are supplied.

What actually is taking place is this. Governments do not want to pay money so that TAFE can deliver the wide range of programs that they are tasked to provide. Governments do not want a public provider which they have to fund. There is ample evidence that governments are quite content to see the work previously undertaken by TAFE slide over to whichever private provider

is prepared to take on the work. If TAFE is unable to compete and win contestable funding due to its higher costs of delivery because of overheads, award salaries and the conditions of its teachers, then governments are more than happy for a move to private providers.

They either do not care about the untenable position they place TAFE in or they do not know. If it is the latter, and this is almost impossible to believe, then they are asleep at the wheel. All one can do then, is to assume that they have passed the responsibility for TAFE over to certain bureaucrats.

The Federal Government has a continuing obsession with competition and frustration that most states have not moved to fully competitive VET funding.

However, governments cannot continue to speak passionately about the role TAFE plays in contemporary Australian society and continue to ignore how they will provide the resourcing for that role.

State, Federal and Territory governments are as bad as one another. There is also no



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excuse that the different political parties, when in power, ignore the plight of TAFE. If they believe in the public provider, if they say this publicly, and they do, then they need to resource the organisation so that it can provide education and training opportunities for the community.

In her 2009 address at the National TAFE Day celebrations in Parliament House the current Prime Minister indicated that TAFE really is at the centre of Australian life and TAFE changes lives. However, despite this endorsement the AEU continues to be concerned.

The AEU Federal TAFE Secretary, Ms Pat Forward, in her June 2011 letter to the Prime Minister indicated that, "... the AEU continues to be concerned with the very real threat to the TAFE system represented by the relentless drive to reduce funding to the system by forcing TAFEs to compete, on cost alone, with private providers for government funds."

The Federal TAFE Secretary pointed out what the Federal Labor Government needed to do. "The most insidious impact of this relentless price competition model for government funds is the erosion of resources available to the TAFE system. This is

something your government can and must act to address before the TAFE system becomes atrophied."

As the months progress it is becoming more and more clear that governments want to use market reform of the sector as a means to wash their hands of the responsibility of employing qualified delivery staff. They can pass off the responsibility of employees' working conditions to others. If they don't employ people then they don't have to fund. This applies not only to salaries, but to long service leave entitlements, sick leave, holiday pay and responsibility for an individual's professional development. They can leave all these concerns to others. Above all they don't have to plan.

Governments are rushing to divest themselves of responsibilities. In this rush there has been a corresponding rapid growth in the private sector. States and territories have found it almost impossible to regulate and control what goes on in this environment. The international education market has been a blight on the landscape, and exactly what has taken place in the Productivity Places Programme (PPP) is anybody's guess. Criticism of the PPP has

been frequent and there are reports that the employment success rate for participants of the program has been somewhere between 12 and 33 percent. This is a terrible outcome. For a program that has run for more than three years and cost \$2 billion it is a clear indication of how far off target the Federal Government has been. There is no excuse for this.

So in most respects the Federal Government has failed in this initiative. It certainly could have taken the time to discuss with stakeholders what was needed in a program that has cost such a large amount of money.

The fact that four out of the five fields where there are critical skills shortages received little or no training from the PPP is unforgivable and alarming. What is also alarming is that the whole program has been so poorly established and conducted. It is as if that on the training front the government has really no idea what it is actually doing. They certainly have no idea of what the long term affects on the system are likely to be. If they do they should change their rhetoric to match their deeds. ❖

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