



# **AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL COLLEGES**

## **Not the Solution to the Skills Shortage**

### **Briefing Paper**

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### What does the Howard Government say about Australian Technical Colleges?

- The Howard government has allocated \$289 million over the next four years to establish 24 Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs). The government has called for expressions of interest in establishing an Australian Technical College to be lodged by 18 February, 2005.
- The first college is to be accepting students in 2006 and the government says all will be operational by 2008.
- It is proposed that the colleges will provide up to 7,200 select-entry students places in only the following 24 region which have been identified as suffering skills shortages:

NSW	The Hunter, the Illawarra, Queanbeyan, Port Macquarie, Lismore/Ballina, Dubbo, Gosford, Western Sydney.
Victoria	Geelong, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Sunshine, Bairnsdale/Sale, Eastern Melbourne.
Queensland	Townsville, Gladstone, North Brisbane, Gold Coast.
South Australia	Adelaide, Whyalla/ Port Augusta
Western Australia	Perth South, Pilbara
Tasmania	Northern Tasmania
Northern Territory	Darwin.

### What are they?

- The Australian Technical Colleges **will**:
  - Be clearly identified and badged as ATCs with students formally enrolled
  - Distinguished as Australian Government initiatives
  - Be industry driven.
  - Have college governing councils and principals who will “establish a distinct ATC culture and ethos”.
  - Be linked with and endorsed by local industry
  - Demonstrate a level of commitment and engagement from local industry especially in relation to School-based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs)
  - The Colleges will be ‘autonomously run’ by a principal appointed by a College Governing Council which must be chaired by a local business or industry representative and include other members of the local business community.
  - ‘The emphasis will be on flexibility and a number of different governance arrangements could emerge depending on local needs.’

- The colleges **may**:
  - Operate as specialist senior high schools supported by government and non-government education authorities
  - Be based on existing schools, RTOs (including TAFE institutions), universities or industry infrastructure
  - Be new institutions established from scratch where existing facilities are not available
  - Be located on new or shared campuses or cooperative clusters of education and industry infrastructure

### **What will they do?**

- The government is describing ATCs as ‘specialist schools with high quality facilities for Year 11 and 12 students.’
- Students will undertake academic studies and trade related vocational courses. Employability and entrepreneurial skills will be “embedded” in the curriculum, and all students will be expected to commence a Certificate III School-based New Apprenticeship in a Trade while attending the College.
- Each ATC will specialise in a particular trade, and will offer a trade or trades from at least four industries including metal and engineering, automotive, building and construction, electro technology and commercial cookery. The ATC will be a centre of excellence (undefined) in training for their field. They can offer training in trades other than those identified but they will need to be in an area identified as one of skill shortage and important to the local industry base.
- Colleges will need to be registered as schools and as Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).
- All academic courses offered will be accredited with the relevant school authorities (keeping open the option of going to university) and all vocational courses will be nationally endorsed Training Package qualifications.
- ATCs will embed employability, enterprise and small business skills throughout their curriculum so that students acquire the skills and knowledge to succeed in a competitive business environment.
- Students will have access to a qualified careers advisor.

### **Who will run them?**

- Tenders can be submitted by consortia of local businesses, industry representatives, local government, community organisations, schools – government or non-government – TAFEs and other RTOs and universities. One assumes therefore that they could also have a role on the governing councils.
- The Australian government’s material makes it clear that government and non-government schools can be **part** of consortia bids, but is very explicit that non-government schools can tender in their own right.
- The government says that private schools cannot charge any additional fees “over and above existing fees”. This assumes a direct relationship, almost ownership, between an existing private school and an ATC. However, it is far from clear how this is established.

- It is thus as yet unclear whether public schools can tender to provide an ATC. Whilst the material on funding (see below) implies there will be public ATCs, it is far from clear in the material provided by the Australian government how this might occur.
- It is also unclear because the attitudes of the various state and territory governments are also unknown at this stage. There is no doubt that permission of the state/territory governments would be required in order for public schools to tender either to provide an ATC, or to be part of a consortium to establish an ATC, or to be a contractor of services to an ATC.

### **How will they be funded?**

- The Australian government will fund each student at an ATC at the same rate “as existing government and non-government secondary schools students.”
- What this seems to mean is that where the ATCs are registered as private schools, they will attract the same level of funding from the Australian Government as private schools currently do, based on their SES.
- It also implies that there could be public ATCs funded at public school rates, though it is not clear how public ATCs will be created.
- The Australian government says that it expects the state and territory governments to similarly fund each College at current public and private school per-student rates.
- They will also, unlike existing schools, receive capital and other additional funding on the basis of need “in recognition of the high cost of specialised vocational training”.
- In most states and Territories, Schools-based New Apprenticeships attract User Choice funding for training. Employers of School-based New Apprentices could also get employer incentives, including a special incentive to commence and retain SBNAs.

### **How will the principal and teachers be employed?**

- ATCs will be run autonomously by principals who would “attract performance pay and a competitive remuneration package”.
- The principal will be able to engage teaching staff on AWAs including performance pay.
- Colleges will offer “attractive working conditions emphasising flexibility, high quality facilities, strong professional learning and ongoing support for teachers.”
- The governing Board will need to include an employing authority legally entitled to receive government grants.

### **What do ATCs mean for students?**

- The Colleges will be highly selective, and the propaganda asserts that only the best and brightest will be selected for the Colleges.
- They will do a normal leaving certificate course, though the options available may be limited to more vocationally relevant courses.

- In addition, they will begin (but not complete) a School Based New Apprenticeship. This means students will undertake their secondary school certificate while being in part-time employment and undertaking a nationally recognised VET qualification.
- This may involve students in some employment during term and school holidays.

### **What do ATCs mean for teachers and members?**

- It is intended that teachers be employed on AWAs, including performance pay.
- The Government is trying to ensure the Colleges will not be unionised.
- Salaries may be higher in return for “flexibility” over hours of work and school holidays.
- Academic teachers will have to be registered as required in the respective state or territory. Trades or vocational teachers would be required to hold the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or equivalent.

### **Summary of problems with ATCs**

#### **Bad for public schools and TAFE**

1. They are intended to do in the VET area what the Howard Government’s funding policies are doing in the more traditional academic areas – hollow out the public system by creating selective, better funded alternatives which leave the public system residualised.
2. TAFEs have already suffered a run down in trade facilities sparked by lack of funding. This will only be exacerbated.
3. They are designed as elitist institutes – selective VET schools. They will have selective entry and preferential funding. They are intended to head hunt the best VET teachers from existing schools and TAFE through higher pay.
4. They undermine the concept of comprehensive schooling and are a throwback to the old system of channelling students into specialist schools offering limited educational opportunities.
5. Whilst they may succeed, they will undermine existing schools and TAFEs. They are designed both to “succeed” and ensure that other schools fail. This is especially so as many are located in regional areas where schools already struggle to find critical mass in Years 11 and 12, particularly in the VET area.

#### **Too closely connected to business**

6. They will be closely connected to one or two local businesses, providing what they want but limiting the capacity of students to move to other jobs.

It has even been suggested that employment by the local firm and selection for the ATC will be linked. It is providing local business with their own private school. While the involvement of industry in preparing young people for a future in the workforce is clearly important, it is critical that such preparation is balanced in such a way as to ensure that students maintain their autonomy, and their capacity to make informed decisions about their rights and their responsibilities.

7. Students not in ATCs will find it harder to get the jobs particularly in regional areas.

### **Problems for Students**

8. Because of their size (only 300 students) ATCs will offer extremely limited choice of subjects with restricted opportunities to change direction.
9. Students will be expected to do a full leaving certificate and an SBNA, ie be in part time employment. They will probably have to work during holiday periods.
10. ATCs may have the latest equipment and good resourcing, but for those students who are not selected things will be even worse. They are not intended to cater for all who want that type of education, but only the select few, leaving the others worse off.
11. Other students will find it even more difficult to get work experience opportunities, and the capacity for schools other than ATCs to offer SBNA in conjunction with local industry may be undermined.

### **Gender Biased**

12. The trades selected by the Australian government are traditionally male dominated, and given this government's approach to issues around boy's education, no mention has been made of these issues. It appears that these colleges will be essentially boys' schools. Areas of skills shortage such as child care are not even mentioned in any of the material.

### **Unfair Funding**

13. They will not only receive all the funding that other public or private schools do, they will get extra from the Australian Government and probably from business. Meanwhile, ordinary schools will continue to struggle to find adequate funding for their VET courses.
14. It will further encourage competition between education and training sectors for already scarce resources while creating unnecessary and wasteful duplication of existing school and TAFE facilities.

### **Problems for teachers, unions and their members**

15. They are intended to offer AWAs, and higher salaries through “performance pay”, and not be unionised. However, experience has shown this will come at the cost of conditions, especially loss of holidays and other “flexibility” arrangements. Teachers may find it difficult to get back into the public education system. Levels of casual employment are likely to be unregulated and high given the small number of students over a number of trades.
16. TAFEs are already experiencing shortages of trained trades teachers in many areas. Duplication of courses and facilities is likely to exacerbate this problem.

### **Governance arrangements**

17. The Chair of the Board must be from business or industry. The principal may not be a qualified teacher. Teacher professional judgement will be secondary to business interests.
18. It could produce some unusual governance arrangements, including the possibility of the odd situation of public schools being partners in private joint enterprises. Non-government schools may be partners on the same Board!
19. Because ATCs must be separately “badged”, the opportunity for real collaborative work with existing school programs has been missed despite the emphasis on flexibility.

### **Based on Fallacies About Skills Shortage**

20. The ATC proposal is based on the fallacy that skills shortages are due to lack of training opportunities when, in fact, they are due to a complexity of issues, including poor pay and conditions in some entry level traditional trades, lack of investment by industry in apprenticeships, the failure of Australian industry to develop a training culture all lead to a lack of demand for training by young people.
21. The ATCs will duplicate existing facilities, waste taxpayers money, and provide no solutions to the existing shortages for five years.

### **Improvement in the Delivery of VET in schools could be done better**

22. What is needed is a positive and collaborative partnership between all levels of government, and relevant community and industry stakeholders.
23. Improvement should include all schools and students involved with VET through more funding and support for existing schools and VET courses.

24. Supporting strategies and resource models should be developed to enable schools, TAFEs, industry and all levels of government to work cooperatively to meet community needs.
25. Provision of regional/cluster VET coordinators for all VET students would provide closer links between existing courses and business and industry.
26. All students would benefit from more careers advisors.

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