



Australian Education Union - Federal Office

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TAFE ALERT TO FEDERAL BUDGET ATTACK

The prospect of a university style HECS fee on TAFE has put the education community on high alert for this Tuesday's federal budget.

Australian Education Union Federal President Pat Byrne says such a scheme would be a significant disincentive for many thousands of potential students.

"The extension of HECS-type schemes to TAFE would increase the number of youth at risk least able to afford to pay education fees. We are going to fight this as fiercely as any campaign we've ever tackled" Ms Byrne said.

"Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson has failed to rule out the imposition of HECS on TAFE courses. This failure is symptomatic of his more general failure to defend and nurture the vital component of public education in his portfolio."

"I am particularly concerned by speculation that students who use their TAFE qualifications to assist them to enter university could be hit with a retrospective fee."

"This would be a sneaky attack on those who can least afford it, and would cause many students to think twice about furthering their skills and learning" she said.

"In the face of growing demand for TAFE courses the Howard Government should have used the opportunity to prioritise and increase funding to TAFE to reduce the waiting 35,000 languishing on TAFE waiting lists. The Howard Government might expect students to foot the bill for its abrogation of funding responsibilities."

Ms Byrne says since taking office in 1996, the Howard Government has cut some \$380 million in growth funding to TAFE. This has resulted in over 35,000 potential students a year being denied access to courses.

"Not everyone can afford, or requires, university study. TAFE is an absolutely essential element of our education system, providing valuable skills across a range of disciplines and trades."

"Its cost effectiveness is critical to its learning effectiveness – especially at a time when trades are crying out for skilled workers. To fail to invest in TAFE would be economic and political insanity" Ms Byrne said.

"We're demanding more money to address unmet demand."

"The AEU will be watching this budget closely. We'll be looking for *substantial* increases. If they're not forthcoming, or worse, if TAFE faces cuts, the federal government can expect a massive backlash both from the education sector and undoubtedly the wider community."

TAFE FACTS

- Annual budget of \$3.7b
- Growth funding has fallen from \$79m in 1996 to \$25m in 2002
- TAFE last year catered for 1.4m students. A further 35,000 were unable to secure places.
- \$75m is required to create those places.

For further information, please contact:

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