

# Australian Education Union

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## IS NELSON PLANNING A "HEX" ON TAFE?

The Australian Education Union's Federal TAFE conference in Adelaide will address concerns that Federal Further Education Minister Dr Brendan Nelson is planning to "hex" TAFE by applying HECS fees to a range of courses.

AEU Federal TAFE President Pat Forward says the union has received a letter from Minister Nelson (attached) ostensibly 'ruling out' the Higher Education Contribution Scheme for vocational education. However upon careful reading the letter states that "not all" TAFE courses will be subjected to HECS.

"That can only mean that some courses will be subjected to HECS" she said.

"We're also very worried there may be plans to retrospectively apply HECS to TAFE courses which are credited towards university study."

"It means someone who's completed a TAFE course and then later decides to use that qualification towards a university degree could be hit with a surprise bill, perhaps years after their TAFE study."

"If that's not a disincentive towards gaining skills and employment, then what is?" she said

Ms Forward says this sneaky plan to charge those who can least afford it for their efforts to improve their skills and employability comes at the same time as the federal government is reducing its commitment to tertiary education.

She says funding cuts are denying 40,000 Australians the chance to study in TAFE each year.

Ms Forward says some \$380 million in funding for increased enrollments has been lost since the Howard government came to power in 1996.

"It's little wonder that trades across Australia are having trouble finding skilled staff, because the Commonwealth isn't funding the means to train them" Ms Forward says.

Ms Forward says the Federal TAFE conference will devise a coordinated national campaign to oppose the possibility of HECS in TAFE and to win back Commonwealth funds for this vital sector.

**The AEU Federal TAFE conference begins today (1.30pm) at AEU Headquarters 163 Greenhill Road Parkside. Media welcome. Pat Forward and Denis Fitzgerald are available for interview during the afternoon tea break (3pm), or evening reception (6pm).**

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