



## **Australian Education Union - Federal Office**

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April 12, 2005

### **HOWARD LEAVES LEGACY OF FAILURE ON SKILLS SHORTAGES**

**“The Prime Minister’s continued attacks on the public TAFE system are an attempt to divert attention away from the government’s own failure,” said Pat Forward, the Federal TAFE Secretary of the AEU. “The union calls on the Howard government to stop playing political games with the future of the Australian economy and with young people’s prospects.”**

**“Despite repeated warnings from industry and unions, the Howard government is responsible for the current skills crisis in the Australian economy. Since 1997, Commonwealth funding for TAFE has fallen by 10.6% in real terms leaving a legacy of failure to address skills shortages in the traditional trades.”**

“In the last five years, the Australian Education Union has warned the Howard government that its refusal to provide adequate funds for the public TAFE system has resulted in students being turned away from TAFE. Many of these students have been attempting to work in areas currently affected by the skills shortages”, Ms Forward said.

The Government has sat on its hands while the TAFE system has doubled in size in the last ten years. It is a system noted for its connection with the community and industry, and for its role in promoting social cohesion in regional and rural communities. It is held in high regard by industry and by the communities it serves.

“The proposed Australian Technical Colleges will provide only 7,000 student places, when 100,000 skilled workers are required. The high-cost of this ideological experiment could provide the public TAFE system with badly needed resources to provide many more skilled workers in a much shorter period of time.”

Ms Forward said that “TAFE has the facilities to commence training immediately, if industry employs more apprentices and if the Commonwealth provides additional funds.”

Instead, the Commonwealth has placed its ideologically-driven funding offer on the table to the state governments, requiring them to offer TAFE teachers individual contracts (AWAs) and performance pay in return for no additional Commonwealth funds.

“AWAs and performance pay for TAFE teachers will not address the skills crisis,” said Pat Forward. “A common sense, collaborative approach between all levels of government and industry, with the unions and the community, will.”

**For further information, please contact:**

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