Colleges discount fees to beat cuts

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VICTORIAN colleges are slashing fees to beat state government funding cuts due in July.

Stott's Colleges have offered a double business and management diploma, which normally costs $8000, for just $187 to students who start by June 30.

The offer through the discount website Spreets was due to expire at midnight last night, with 48 customers having "bought" by 3pm yesterday.

Stott's business development co-ordinator Robert Fitkau said the offer was effectively an advertisement for its intakes on June 2 and 30. He said Stott's intended to continue offering business diplomas at its regular price of $4000, but students starting after July 1 would "not have the same benefit of government funding".

Bendigo TAFE is offering a certificate IV in aged care for $250 to students who start before July 1. It normally charges about $1500 for the qualification. The course, which is delivered by assessment, is for people already working in aged care.

The Australian Education Union said other colleges were offering quick enrolment deals after the government slashed funding rates for 80 per cent of courses as part of the May 1 budget. "There's a mad rush to get in before the rates change," TAFE secretary Pat Forward said.

There has also been a slight increase in applications to run new courses, possibly flagging a shift to more profitable areas under the new arrangements.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority said it had received 75 applications to run new courses from Victorian providers in the two weeks following the funding change announcement. It normally receives 100 to 125 such applications a month.

Meanwhile, industrial relations is shaping as a battleground as TAFEs and the state government trade blows. Skills Minister Peter Hall said TAFEs could save millions by reforming workplace conditions. He highlighted a requirement for teachers to attend campus just 30 hours a week.

Mr Hall told the HES this equated to a four-day week. He said TAFEs could also slash costs by pooling backroom services.

TAFE and union leaders have dismissed the criticism, saying the 30-hour agreement compensates teachers for irregular hours and preparation and assessment at home. However, some TAFE directors would like to make teachers more accountable for their working hours and to increase their teaching time.

Approved salary rises are also in doubt, after the government axed a $170 million funding stream covering pay rises it had imposed on TAFEs. TAFE chief executives claim the cuts undermine federal workplace laws.

TAFE directors are also meeting Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans today over claims the budget cuts undermine last month's national funding agreement for vocational training.