Federal Skills Minister Chris Evans has hit back at Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu, who blamed the federal government on Monday for cost blowouts in the state’s budget after a surge in low-quality vocational training courses.

Mr Baillieu told *The Australian Financial Review* on Monday that a $500 million budget blowout and the rise of low-quality courses could be blamed on reforms introduced in 2009 by then Labor premier John Brumby and federal minister Julia Gillard.

But Senator Evans said the blowouts could have been avoided, and students, teachers and industries were being forced to pay the price for Mr Baillieu’s mistakes through cuts to TAFE funding.

“Premier Baillieu can’t blame others for his failure to control the growth of poor-quality courses in Victoria,” Senator Evans said. “Through no fault of their own, students, teachers and industries in Victoria are now being forced to pay the price for his mistakes.”

Victoria was the first state to introduce reforms to training in 2009. They were aimed at boosting access to courses by establishing a voucher system, so that taxpayer funding followed students wherever they chose to study, in the public or private sectors.

But Senator Evans said the Victorian government had not ensured oversight of registered training organisations was in place. “Despite repeated warnings from the Commonwealth, the Baillieu government allowed unfettered growth of poor-quality training courses while refusing to join the national regulation scheme under the Australian Skills Quality Agency,” he said.

Victoria and Western Australia have refused to sign up to a national regulator that would monitor quality of training course providers. Senator Evans said enrolments at private training providers had surged by 300 per cent since the reforms, while TAFEs had grown by 4 per cent over the same time.

Other states are introducing reforms to improve access to training. “The South Australian model is a good example of how states are learning from some of the problems experienced in Victoria,” Senator Evans said. “The South Australian system puts caps on courses to ensure they are training in the areas industry wants and only allows quality providers to conduct training.

“While the particular details of each of the state-based training systems are a matter for state governments, the Australian government is working to provide better links between employers and the training system to ensure we’re not training for training’s sake; we’re training for jobs.”

Pip Freebairn