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MEDIA RELEASE

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TDA asserts the value of the public provider in response to two Parliamentary Inquiries into TAFE

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) has given evidence on the first day of hearings of the newly established House of Representatives Inquiry into Technical and Further Education (TAFE), with a call for stricter criteria for the funding of high risk registered training organisations (RTOs).

TDA pointed out that there are more than 5,000 RTOs, with only about 100 delivering some 90 per cent of the qualifications that receive VET funding. The cost of compliance relates to the 90 per cent that deliver only 10 per cent of the training.

TDA highlighted the national role of the public provider, which enrolls 1.6 million public VET students a year, with a presence across city, suburban, rural, regional and remote Australia.

The submissions noted that it is exactly 40 years since the Commonwealth's Kangan inquiry into technical and vocational education, which laid the vision and the framework for a public provider network and the formal creation of the TAFE in Australia.

Appearing before the House of Representatives inquiry last week were TDA Chief Executive, Martin Riordan, TDA Board member for the ACT, Adrian Marron (CEO of Canberra Institute of Technology), and Pam Caven, TDA Director Policy and Stakeholder Engagement.

TDA argued that recent disclosures by the Australian Skills Quality Authority in relation to the activities of some private RTOs demonstrate the need for a rigorous oversight framework for those entrants, and tighter criteria for receipt of government funding.

TDA pointed out that there are more than 5,000 RTOs, with only about 100 delivering some 90 per cent of the qualifications that receive VET funding. The heavy cost of compliance relates to the 90 per cent that deliver only 10 per cent of the training, while there is still no enactment of a 'low risk' framework for those such as TAFEs that deliver high quality outcomes.

TDA also outlined its case in its submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, which under a Green and Opposition motion, is also conducting an Inquiry into TAFE.

TDA made four key points:

- RISK FRAMEWORK A PRIORITY – TDA made a strong case showing the delays in applying a risk framework for quality RTOs and TAFEs, created undue compliance costs and continued red tape in operations – especially affecting TAFE Institutes which already require high quality attention on compliance .
- LIMITS SHOULD APPLY TO ACCESS VET FUNDS -- The Commonwealth insist new rules on the flow of Australia’s \$9 billion a year VET tertiary funding be only accessed by accredited ‘low risk’ providers, including TAFE operating under long established state and territory legislation. This change is designed to limit the ‘roorting’ of public funds, and escalating compliance costs for new RTOs merely entering the VET market to access public funds.
- ‘CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA’ IN VET MARKETING – Revelations of wide-scale misleading marketing and rorts by private RTOs to attract students, made late last year by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), need urgent response. TDA supports ASQA being given powers to draw up criteria for VET marketing.
- REMOVE BLOCKAGES FOR QUALITY VET RTOS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION – TDA argued the risk framework issue had delayed Visa Streamlining for all TAFEs, and this was one example of discriminatory activity harming levels of inbound international students enrolling at TAFEs. TDA submitted that work rights for international students enrolled in VET courses should be the same as university students.

Martin Riordan said the Parliamentary Inquiries were important with the incoming Industry Minister, Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, to provide early ways to cut red tape, and bring integrity to Australia’s VET funding.

TAFE Institutes, industry clients of TAFE, TAFE students and communities involved with TAFE will be able to present evidence to the House of Representatives Committee on Education and Employment, during visits to city and regional locations in most states, during April 2014.

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