

TAFEs hope to boost support by capitalising on hung parliament

Andrew Trounson *The Australian* August 25, 2010

THE TAFE sector is set to capitalise on the hung parliament by advocating its role in delivering higher education in regional areas, both in partnership with universities and potentially in its own right.

It comes as Victorian TAFE colleges Holmesglen and Northern Melbourne Institute are pushing for commonwealth-supported places for their new bachelor degrees in early childhood and primary teaching.

NSW is also looking to develop degrees in niche areas, such as Sydney Institute's new degree in interior design.

TAFE NSW was registered as a higher education provider last month, opening the way for its institutes to develop degrees. A broad strategy will be considered by the board on Monday.

"I'm really encouraged by the election result and the opportunities it may present," TAFE Directors Australia chief Martin Riordan told the HES.

He said TAFE infrastructure would be needed as drivers or partners in regional higher education.

The emergence of three regional independents as powerbrokers in a minority government is set to make regional issues a key focus in the next government.

Last month, TDA launched a strategy for an integrated tertiary sector in which it called for commonwealth funding to be extended to those TAFEs that had the resources to offer quality degrees in areas of skills shortages.

The day after the election, TDA wrote to all three independent MPs seeking their support for funding a national training strategy.

But Leesa Wheelahan of the L. H. Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne cautioned that if TAFEs were to be part of the higher education expansion agenda, they would need extra funding to ensure they had the capacity to support quality programs. She said that was especially important for regional TAFEs.

"It is regional TAFEs that have the least capacity, in terms of scholarship and academic culture, to offer higher education in the first place," she said.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE chief executive Brian MacDonald said he wanted an even playing field between TAFEs and universities. .

TAFE higher education students face much higher fees than domestic university students. NMIT's early childhood education degree would cost students \$12,000 a year, compared with about \$5500 at university.

Holmesglen chief executive Bruce Mackenzie said he was confident that both TAFEs would get commonwealth-supported places for their early childhood degrees.

So far such funding has been limited to Holmesglen's nursing degree.