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**TAFE Institutes say higher education legislation should be supported**

Today’s tabling of the *Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014* which would extend Commonwealth Supported Place funding to TAFE students enrolled in higher level qualifications, deserves support in the Australian Parliament.

Martin Riordan, Chief Executive of TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), said the package of higher education legislation would finally deliver improved equity for TAFE students, and would support industry demands for more ‘work-ready’ skills.

Action was initiated by TDA more than four years ago to overhaul Commonwealth course funding contributions toward students enrolling in higher education courses.

TAFE higher education students should be included and their aspirations recognised and valued as part of deregulation plans for higher education.

Universities will now also access funding for higher education Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree courses. Additional revenue raised by all higher education providers will fund contributions to the Commonwealth Scholarships for low income students at a rate of $1 for every $5 raised.

The Budget predicts that the extension of Commonwealth Supported Place funding (to non-universities) will cost $448.9 million over three years. The funding of higher education diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree courses will cost $371.5 million over three years.

Martin Riordan said: “For the first time, TAFE higher education students will receive Commonwealth financial support when studying higher education diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees, as well as bachelor degrees.

“While the proposed 70% funding rate for non-universities is a significant advance for our higher education students who traditionally have paid full fees for their higher education study in TAFE, this rate does not reflect the real costs of quality higher education provision.

“Many of our students have chosen not to attend a university and to pursue TAFE’s industry-focused, applied and employer supported qualifications instead.”

The new Commonwealth Scholarship scheme will also provide support for TAFE students, many who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or are the first in their family to study higher education.

TDA also welcomes the simplification of the loans systems to one HECS-HELP system. TDA, however, does not support high interest rate on HELP, particularly for disadvantaged and rural and regional students.

Martin Riordan said TDA would be closely reviewing the more detailed legislation, especially related to higher interest required for students taking HELP loans, the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme, and extension of CSPs to sub-bachelor degree programmes.
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