10 November 2015

**New data reveals TAFE’s strong position in the training sector as funding to private colleges soars**

New figures released today by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) demonstrate what students, industry and the community know – TAFE is Australia’s preferred provider network for government-funded training.

Australia’s 57 TAFE Institutes, which includes six universities with TAFE divisions, account for over 50% of delivery of government funded programs, nationally.

The NCVER ‘Total VET students and courses 2014’ figures have been released under the Council of Australian Government (COAG) requirement for full data on Australian training activity.

Martin Riordan, Chief Executive of TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), said the COAG-approved full disclosure on vocational education operations has wide-reaching implications.

“This data actually shows that more than half of the federal funding for VET and VET FEE-HELP student loans – totalling $9.1 billion a year – has been allocated to providers without the scrutiny and data disclosures required for other Commonwealth programs.

“The current controversy regarding the massive allocations of VET FEE-HELP loans – many to risky providers, using outrageous marketing and recruitment practices – in an environment of poor regulatory oversight, has plagued the sector and its reputation, including that of TAFE. The data is welcome, but surely overdue when we see the unacceptable outcomes and billions of dollars wasted when policy decisions are made with insufficient data,” Mr Riordan said.

The NCVER data reveals the huge growth in the VET sector to 3.9 million students – almost three times the number in the higher education sector. Further,

- TAFE and private providers deliver roughly the same number of training hours nationally (41% by TAFE and 45% by private providers) but TAFE remains the dominant provider of Commonwealth/state government funded training;
- TAFE training is the preferred delivery for the trades, engineering and related fields, management and commerce and community and personal services – all areas vital to the economy;
- The high average number of students in each TAFE institute relative to private providers demonstrates TAFE’s capacity to outstrip private providers in providing quality services for students;
- TAFE remains the dominant provider of international trans-national VET delivery.
“What is most revealing in today’s NCVER release is how ill-informed Australian policy makers have remained until now, on the operations of half of Australia’s training market,” Mr Riordan said.

“Under this open market, private, for-profit providers have collectively exploded as an industry, with the data showing they now deliver to two-thirds of the VET student population.

“While Parliament voted down the higher education deregulation legislation under former Education and Training Minister Pyne, the Commonwealth proceeded with VET FEE-HELP loans, in a deregulated open market, on an unprecedented scale.”

Mr Riordan reminded that this occurred even after the federal regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), continually published warnings about the high risks of many private providers and their questionable marketing practices.

The ongoing risk raises a number of questions:

1. What financial disclosures by training providers should be required in order to obtain access to public training funds and student loans?
2. Why has it taken so long for lobby groups for private, for-profit colleges to come forward and support such information sharing?
3. What critical decisions about VET reform have been made by governments without access to the data, and what changes should be made to governance of this massive tertiary education sector?

While TAFE has been held to account by rigorous reporting to respective state and territory governments, and has been transparent in contributing to NCVER’s national data collection, governments and communities have had very little information about the quality, credentials and motives of the majority of training providers, many of whom are for-profit.

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