States pouring money into non-TAFE training

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GOVERNMENTS have almost tripled their funding of private training since 2007, catapulting TAFEs towards minority provider status, a new report reveals.

Government funding of non-TAFE training providers snowballed from about $410 million in 2007 to over $1.1 billion last year.

Victoria led the pack, with payments to private colleges almost quadrupling to about $500m under the state’s open training market, according to the report from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

However, private payments also increased sharply in three other states, rising 196 per cent in Queensland, 181 per cent in Western Australia and 165 per cent in South Australia.

Nationally, non-TAFE funding has risen almost 120 per cent during the past two years alone.

University of Melbourne researcher Leesa Wheelahan said the vocational training landscape had shifted with TAFE’s share of publicly funded students declining from more than 72 per cent in 2009 to under 60 per cent last year.

She said vocational training was being transformed from a system dominated by public institutions serving public policy objectives.

"We haven't quite got to the tipping point, but we are close," Dr Wheelahan said.

"Blowouts in funding are happening in the private sector, not the public sector. They are happening in the big states where programs can be run cheaply in high volume."

Dr Wheelahan said TAFE was at risk of becoming "so residual that it loses the capacity to meet the needs of industry, communities and students”.

The NCVER report does not take account of this year’s funding cuts to vocational training, which have totalled about $400m in Victoria, $130m in NSW and $80m in Queensland.

TAFEs have borne the lion’s share of the cuts in all three states.

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