VICTORIA has slashed the number of training colleges eligible for government funds by more than half, following a renewed effort to drive out shonky providers.

The approved providers’ list, which featured over 600 training organisations in 2011, now stands at just 281.

A spokesman said he expected more to be added in the coming weeks, as the Education Department worked through applications. He said the criteria for delivering government-subsidised training in Victoria had been strengthened.

Private college peak body ACPET said some providers had been asked to submit additional information. CEO Claire Field said she understood they had until next Friday.

“We’ll have a better understanding of the size of the market when that additional documentation is analysed and the final 2013 list is available,” she said.

However the Victorian TAFE Association said it only expected the department to add another 60 or so names.

“They've been much more vigilant this year in knocking off providers who don't reach reasonable quality and financial viability standards,” said CEO David Williams.

“We've been advocating that the government, as a purchaser, had a responsibility to not just rely on the regulator for quality control but had to police it more diligently up-front.”

Early last year, Training Minister Peter Hall told Parliament he expected tighter contract management to reduce the list to 500 providers at the most.

Ms Field said ACPET supported the government’s efforts to set “more appropriate criteria”. But she said some colleges had raised concerns about the new contractual arrangements, including delays and confusing documentation.

While the state government’s widely criticised budget cuts last year are having a major impact on TAFEs, private colleges have also been affected by vastly reduced funding rates for many courses. ACPET has predicted they could shed as many as 4800 staff.

Mr Williams said TAFE directors had reported far less promotion of private courses. “They monitor it for their competition,” he said.

But he said colleges could be using social media to promote their courses instead of traditional newspaper and radio advertisements.

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