Xenophon team Senators torpedo safeguards for TAFE and open a loophole for unscrupulous training colleges

An eleventh-hour compromise offer by the federal government to Senator Nick Xenophon and his fellow Senators has opened a loophole that could allow unscrupulous private colleges a chance to re-enter the student loan market.

In an extraordinary backflip late tonight, NXT Senators not only sabotaged an amendment that would have exempted TAFE from the crackdown aimed at poor quality private colleges, they have accepted a compromise that opens the way for poor quality training colleges to access the student market.

The Chief Executive of TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), Martin Riordan said the NXT senators accepted a letter from the Minister for Education and Training Senator Simon Birmingham (attached) that sought to play down concerns over restrictions on eligible courses under the student loan legislation.

"In fact the contents of the letter show that a minister has the flexibility to authorise courses and colleges that may have otherwise been restricted.

"It is breathtaking that NXT senators should be so gullible to accept such an undertaking.

"Only the previous evening in the Senate, Labor moved amendments proposed by TDA for a 12-month exemption for TAFE from the crackdown, and these were supported by the Greens and NXT.

"Less than a day later, the Xenophon Senators have performed a total backflip and capitulated on their earlier stand," Mr Riordan said.

He said the offer by Minister Birmingham looks too vague, and ultimately a poor excuse for the extraordinary Xenophon team’s Senate reversal.

"The ministerial letter to NXT Senators paves the way for potential large numbers of existing private college - which are the focus of the crackdown - to now apply for new or extended diploma course funding."
“It is hard to fathom the logic of NXT senators, and bewildering how they could be so easily conned into horse-trading away the national role of TAFE, and the sanctions that were intended to close rorts in the training system”.

ATTACHMENT
TABLED LETTER FROM MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING, SENATOR HON. SIMON BIRMINGHAM, TO NXT SENATOR STIRLING GRIFF, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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