

Jill Rowbotham – Higher Education Reporter
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A 70 per cent decline in enrolments at more than a quarter of independent registered training organisations in the past year because of the COVID-19 crisis has left them in danger of failing.

The Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia's survey of 3600 active RTOs, to which about 440 responded, showed members were "doing it tough", ITECA chief executive Troy Williams said. "They are struggling to assist students, support their staff and keep their doors open. There are real concerns for those providers unable to deliver courses due to isolation constraints."

Mr Williams said the COAG Skills Council responsible for vocational education and training would be "sleepwalking into a disaster" unless it offered support to the sector, which covers about 80 per cent of VET students and creates 200,000 jobs.

Among the problems were that many students were not able to complete studies because, with COVID-19 restrictions, they couldn't get practical experience in fields of study such as human services, tourism and hospitality. Some state governments – notably NSW and Victoria – were competing with the independent sector via taxpayer-subsidised free TAFE courses.

"As a result, job losses in independent providers are imminent," Mr Williams said.

"ITECA is calling on state governments to provide the funding that allows them to offer free online courses in the same way that it supports independent providers to support apprentices and trainees."

The COAG Skills Council meets again on Friday.

Ends.