

Media Release —

Urgent Steps Needed To Protect Our Independent Tertiary Education Sector

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For Immediate Release

As the response to the Covid-19 virus outbreak causes students to stay at home, classes to be suspended and the total evaporation of forward international student enrolments, the independent tertiary education system is facing a challenge to its sustainability. To support independent providers in the higher education, vocational education, training and skills sectors, a series of measures have been put to government by the sector's peak body, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA).

"Independent providers enrol around 80% of the 4.1 million students in vocational education and training. These providers do the heavy lifting in delivering the quality education and training that makes people job ready. This is the time for government to step-up and support the sector that will play a lead role in the economic recovery effort," said Mr Troy Williams, ITECA Chief Executive.

Independent higher education providers support around 10% of the 1.5 million students in higher education and ITECA's recommendations are also directed at ensuring the sustainability of the independent higher education sector.

"Removing the fees and charges that government places on independent higher education providers, plus suspending routine reporting and audit activity and removing taxes on student loans would allow the sector to get on with the job of supporting students," Mr Williams said.

ITECA has given government a series of reforms that will support the independent tertiary education sector. The measures seek to cut unnecessary red-tape and delay the introduction of proposed new fees and charges. Put together following extensive consultation with ITECA's members, the measures include:

- Delaying by twelve months, the move towards full cost recovery by the two regulators, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA);
- ASQA and TEQSA suspending routine reporting and audit activity by three months;
- Suspending by twelve months the tax on student loans;
- New funding to allow independent providers ramp-up delivery of online courses; and
- Allowing independent providers to access underutilised TAFE facilities.

"In total there are twenty-two different measures that will ensure that the independent tertiary education system operates sustainably in the short term, positioning it to strengthen the coming economic recovery," Mr Williams said.

According to ITECA, although the public TAFE sector plays an important secondary role in skilling Australia, the public sector lacks the capacity, expertise or capability to play the same lead role that independent providers play.

"Independent providers support more apprentices and trainees than public TAFE colleges, indeed independent providers support around four times more students in vocational training. It's the independent tertiary education system that will play the lead role in delivering the skills that people need to get back to work," Mr Williams said.

ITECA's immediate focus is on advocacy that will cut the red-tape that independent tertiary education providers face, freeing-up time to transition to online training and other ways to keep students in their courses.

"ITECA is asking for a moratorium on all routine reporting and auditing activity, plus suspension of charges levied on the independent tertiary education system, so that our members can focus on supporting their students and employees in these challenging times," Mr Williams concluded.

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