



MEDIA RELEASE

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Productivity Commission report exposes the cost of an uneven tertiary education playing field

The needs of students should be uppermost in dealing with the unequal playing field between TAFE and universities that has been exposed in the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the demand-driven system for university entry.

The Chief Executive of TAFE Directors Australia, Craig Robertson, said that the demand-driven system that operated from 2010 until last year, saw many students channelled into university pathways who could have equivalent employment outcomes through the TAFE model, if the playing field was level.

"The inquiry is clear that the demand-driven system certainly increased the numbers attending universities, but it diverted many away from the TAFE sector where their prospects may have been better, particularly when the difference in foregone earnings and the level of student debt are taken into account," he said.

The Productivity Commission said that the additional students who attended universities under the demand-driven system had, on average, lower ATAR scores, commenced at an older age, while about 30 per cent had some previous VET experience.

"While we must look at raising access and improving equity, it's clear that this cannot be achieved by prioritising one sector over another.

"Students wanting to undertake a VET option face significant disadvantages compared with their university counterparts in terms of access, funding and student loan arrangements.

"Numerous inquiries and studies have identified this inequity, and the fact that the unequal playing field is anathema to the integrated and complementary tertiary education environment that is essential for the workforce of the future.

"New entrants to the workforce and existing workers will increasingly move between VET and higher education over a lifetime as they acquire new learning, qualifications and skillsets that meet the needs of individuals and industry, especially in an era of automation and digital disruption.

“It is apparent that the false demarcation between VET and higher education funding is holding back our ability to produce a workforce that is capable, competitive and nimble. We should be aiming to examine and break down these barriers.

“The Bradley Review identified the problem of tertiary education silos and the recent Joyce review of VET has urged action to put VET at the heart of contemporary skills development.

“TAFEs, including dual sector institutes, continue to do the heavy lifting in the VET sector, providing the bulk of high-level skills and qualifications, trades training and apprenticeships, and have an unmatched level of public confidence in their integrity and capability,” Mr Robertson said.

“This should be a wake-up call that a blinkered and uneven approach to skills and learning is not only bad policy for the nation, but is leaving some individuals vulnerable and disadvantaged as they cope with a rapidly changing workplace.”

Media contact: Bob Bowden, Foresight Communications, bbowden@bowmac.com.au 0412 753 298

TAFE Directors Australia is the peak national body representing 28 TAFE institutes, including six dual sector universities with TAFE divisions.