



Restoring the TAFE system

Building our skills future

Prioritising TAFE | Accessible, affordable education

The Greens are the only party who will take strong action to fix our broken VET sector. The Greens will cease pouring taxpayer funds into for-profit VET providers, and will instead boost TAFE funding by \$400 million a year, to help provide Australians with the opportunity to further their education and increase their skills in the workforce.

TAFE is a critical part of the Australian education system with more than a million students enrolled across hundreds of campuses throughout the country. From the desert town of Coober Pedy to Thursday Island in far North Queensland off the Cape York Peninsula, TAFE provides an invaluable opportunity for Australians to further their education and increase their skills in the workforce. TAFE has been a leading provider of vocational education and training for more than a century and the Greens understand that we must have a well-funded TAFE system to continue to provide these opportunities for Australians into the future.

The challenges currently faced by TAFE are unprecedented. The slash and burn approach by the Liberals along with commercialising the sector has forced down TAFE's market share of VET students, plunging from 74% a decade ago to 52% in 2014. Not only have these changes reduced the number of students attending TAFE but it has resulted in fees skyrocketing and campuses being forced to abandon many courses deemed unsuitable due to this commercialised approach. Where previously a loan would not be necessary to attend TAFE we are now finding students forced to take out a HELP loan just to further their education.

> REFORMING THE VET SECTOR

The Greens are proud defenders of a strong TAFE system. To help provide the high-level skills and workforce development that is vital to our economic future the Greens will:

- **Cease providing federal government funds to for-profit VET providers.**
- **Implement a TAFE federal rescue package** which boosts funding by \$400 million a year.
- **Establish a VET Ombudsman** with \$10 million in seed funding.

> BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The TAFE federal rescue package and VET Ombudsman will cost \$1.61 billion over the forward estimates.

Analysis from the Parliamentary Budget Office has found that reforming the VET sector and ceasing the provision of public funds to for-profit VET providers will save \$6.72 billion over the forward estimates.

> VET SECTOR SHAMBLES

Both the Liberal and Labor parties have made poor policy decisions leading to the government writing off billions of taxpayer dollars due to bad debts associated with the for-profit VET sector. When you have a system that allows one for-profit provider to receive \$111 million of federal funding in a year while handing out just 117 diplomas, everyone should be able to agree the current model is broken.¹ Unlike TAFE, the for-profit VET sector has failed to put students first with widespread rorting of the system, deplorable completion rates and poor quality courses.

While reforms passed by the Parliament last year provide some safeguards, the for-profit model will never guarantee high quality courses for students. It is time to start looking for genuine solutions rather than tinkering around the edges.

The government must go further than banning training colleges from telling students they could access the taxpayer-funded VET FEE-HELP scheme. The ALP's counter offer of capping the government-funded component of for-profit VET courses at \$8000 also fails to show leadership on this issue. To have a real effect on the education outcomes of students and the budget bottom line, fundamental change is required.

> MAKING TAFE A PRIORITY

TAFE institutions around the country are vital in providing people with access to tertiary education, a pathway to a career change or a specialist course in a field they are passionate about. Chronic underfunding by both federal and state governments have led to campuses closing, courses cut, rising fees, and teachers losing their jobs.

Our federal rescue package will boost funding by \$400 million a year, providing critical funds to revitalise TAFE and ensure its sustainability as Australia's leading VET provider. By implementing the Greens rescue package we can increase TAFE's future capability to deliver high quality qualifications in the key skills shortage areas identified by government.

> ESTABLISHING A VET OMBUDSMAN

The Greens will establish a VET Ombudsman to oversee the investigation of complaints of improper activity by VET providers. The Ombudsman will play a critical role given the widespread issues within the VET sector caused by for-profit providers. We must ensure that students are protected from unethical and manipulative behaviour by for-profit providers, including the ban of commission-based sales of courses by brokers.

The need to establish an Ombudsman could not be clearer. This commitment will help clean up the sector, better protect students and have disputes resolved in a timely manner.

The VET Ombudsman will be funded for \$10 million over its first two years and will establish a VET provider contribution scheme to be industry-funded into the future.

> LIFETIME OF LEARNING

The Greens believe that investment in public education is essential to ensure a fair Australia and to support the transition to a sustainable new economy. Restoring the TAFE system and building our skills future forms a part of our Lifetime of Learning policy that includes support for schools, students with a disability and the tertiary sector.

ⁱ <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/federal-government-shakes-up-vocational-education-20160429-gohyww.html>