

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 738

ADMISSION THAT PRIVATISED TAFE A FAILED EXPERIMENT IN MARKET-LED EDUCATION

Why not Admit the Same about Primary and Secondary Education?

In recent weeks Simon Birmingham attempted to make South Australian TAFE failures a political football in the South Australian Election. In the process he has made the TAFE crisis a Federal Election issue. The Labor Party has taken up the TAFE crisis – one created by privatisation of educational opportunities.

Failed experiments in market-led education –primary, secondary and tertiary, need to be buried once and for all.

Birmingham referred the South Australian mess — which had prompted the Australian Skills Quality Authority to suspend qualifications registrations by ten South Australian TAFE courses — to a Senate committee. The committee, with a Labor–Green majority, had no difficulty in shifting the focus from local failures to the nationwide problems of the vocational education system. It was aided by the fact that nearly all the submissions pointed to systemic failures caused not by individual wrongdoing but by underfunding and a blind faith in market forces.

At least one submission, from John Quiggin, Professor of Economics at the University of Queensland, made this point. See <http://insidestory.org.au/vocational-education-policy-is-failing-and-its-not-hard-to-see-why/> Quiggin wrote:

*Vocational education in Australia is in crisis. Traditional on-the-job training, through apprenticeships and traineeships, is in decline. Technical and further education funding has been slashed, leading to the closure of many TAFE colleges and large-scale loss of teaching staff. Billions of dollars have been wasted on ideologically driven experiments in market competition and commercial provision, most notoriously through the rorting of the FEE-HELP system. The most obvious problems have arisen in the commercial sector itself, where most of the leading large-scale providers have been exposed as essentially fraudulent, exploiting government subsidies and leaving students with worthless qualifications. But the pressure to respond to market competition has also had damaging effects among TAFE colleges. The problems reported in South Australia are consistent with this analysis. **This failed experiment in market-led education needs to be buried once and for all***

The Labor Party has finally got the message. A Shorten Labor Government, aware of underfunding and privatisation rorts, will undertake a comprehensive review of the National Vocational Education and Training sector.

But when will our politicians understand they must get rid of the shonky private operators, including religious providers, and de-privatise, i.e. nationalise the primary, secondary and tertiary systems of education ?

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