

## **Opposition Senators' Report**

2.1 Opposition Senators support the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skill Needs) Bill 2006. Investing in trades and technical education in our schools is important, and Opposition Senators welcome the additional investment for these Australian Technical Colleges. The Opposition supports the provisions of this Bill which will enable the funding previously appropriated to be spent more quickly.

2.2 Opposition Senators remained concerned about slow progress implementing this program. Twenty five Colleges were promised in 24 regions across Australia. To date, only four Technical Colleges are open, in Port Macquarie, Gladstone, Eastern Melbourne, and the Gold Coast, with fewer than 300 students currently enrolled. The Government had promised 300 students in each college. Of the remaining sites, only 7 funding agreements have been signed, with 11 regions still in negotiation with the Government on their contracts. Three regions have still no announcement on the preferred tenderer, more than a year after the request for proposal process closed.

2.3 A lack of financial transparency surrounding these Colleges is of concern. The Government has, at two Senate Estimates hearings, refused to provide details of the 11 funding contracts signed with individual Colleges. Advice from the Department given to this Committee at the Budget Estimates in June 2006 showed that as of 30 May 2006 whilst \$185 million has been committed to the Australian Technical Colleges only \$18 million has been spent. This is out of a total Budget of \$343 million over five years.

2.4 The Opposition notes the provisions of the Bill which seek to introduce a regulation making power to allow for funding changes between program years without the need for further resource to legislation. This proposed section would reduce the extent of Parliamentary oversight of this program which is regrettable. Spending to date indicates that current expenditure and training targets may not be met and Opposition Senators look forward to the opportunity to scrutinise any future regulations made under this new power.

### **Conclusion**

2.5 Opposition Senators recommend the Bill be passed without amendment.

**Senator Gavin Marshall**  
**Deputy Chairman**

