

## Chapter 3

### Democrat Senators' Report

3.1 Despite the evidence to this inquiry about the potential problems with this bill, it is not practicable to now oppose the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs) Bill 2005 because, in the Government's arrogance, the majority of the 24 technical colleges proposed have been agreed and are underway before the bill has even passed the parliament.

3.2 This criticism is particularly valid given that there was little if any consultation about this policy with state governments, schools and TAFE colleges.

3.3 I note that there is support for the Australian Technical Colleges (ATC) by some states and many industry groups and there has been strong interest shown in the colleges so far, with more than 160 expressions of interest received in the six months to July 2004. However interest in the colleges does not mean that the colleges will be in the best interests of students.

3.4 The problem with implementing a policy before legislation has passed parliament is obvious. The parliament does not get the opportunity to properly scrutinise and offer amendments which could improve outcomes for students.

3.5 For example, the Queensland Government's submission proposed 'a more flexible model whereby students from "feeder schools", both state and non-state, would maintain an enrolment in their respective school and enrol and attend the ATC to access high quality specialised training. This dual enrolment arrangement would enable a greater number of feeder schools to participate and thereby deliver a broader range of options for a greater number of students and their parents'.<sup>1</sup>

3.6 One of the concerns the Democrats have is the extent to which local industry will determine the education of young people. We are concerned that the curriculum focus will be narrow and will not provide broad base education to which all students should be exposed.

3.7 While we support students moving into trades and participating in vocational education and training we believe that all students should be encouraged to complete secondary education and go on to participate in post secondary education.

3.8 It is useful to remember that stand alone technical colleges used to be a feature of schooling in Australia, yet after extensive reviews of educational policy, were integrated back into mainstream schooling.

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1 Queensland Government, *Submission 8*, p.3

3.9 We are also opposed to the Government bypassing the current education system to implement its ideological industrial relations agenda in these schools. We have rejected similar methods to implement their ideological IR agenda in the education sector via the Skilling Australia's Workforce Bill 2005 and the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

3.10 The Government has so far not delivered an adequate response to the funding needs of schools in providing comprehensive vocational education and training opportunities for students. The funding under this bill could have been spent more effectively in collaboration with schools and TAFE colleges and by integrating existing VET and training arrangements.

**Senator Lyn Allison**