

The Senate

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Employment, Workplace Relations  
and Education Legislation Committee

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Provisions of the Australian Technical Colleges  
(Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs)  
Bill 2005

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# Chapter 1

## Government Senators' Report

1.1 On 15 June 2005, the Senate referred to the Legislation Committee the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs) Bill 2005 for inquiry and report by 18 August. A total of eight submissions were received.

### Background and purpose of the bill

1.2 In September 2004, the Government announced an election commitment to establish Australian Technical Colleges in 24 identified regions as part of a broader strategy to address skills needs. The election commitment reflects the view that the Government should target regional and metropolitan areas which have experienced skills shortages in certain trades and which are supported by a strong industry base. It is expected that each college will provide tuition for up to 300 students each year.

1.3 The purpose of the Australian Technical Colleges Bill is to implement the Government's election commitment. It appropriates \$343.6 million over five years for their establishment and operation. This funding is in addition to recurrent funding by the Commonwealth that the colleges will be eligible for under the Schools Assistance Act (2004), and recurrent funding that states and territories also provide for schools. The additional funding provided under the bill will be allocated to colleges on the basis of need, to cover establishment and operational costs.

1.4 Students attending the colleges will have the opportunity to combine academic studies relevant to the trades, leading to a senior secondary certificate of education. Combined with a Schools-Based New Apprenticeship in a trade, students will end up with a nationally recognised training package qualification.<sup>1</sup> The Government believes that the colleges will provide high quality education and training facilities, and an integrated program of academic and vocational education that is relevant to a trade career. According to the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, The Hon Gary Hardgrave MP:

The Colleges will promote pride and excellence in trade training skills by creating a distinct culture and ethos. Attracting talented and committed staff to the colleges will be a high priority as well as offering appealing and flexible working conditions, including rewards linked to excellent performance, and by giving staff the option of an Australian Workplace Agreement.<sup>2</sup>

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1 DEST, *Submission 7*, p.3

2 *New Bill Supports Australian Technical Colleges*, Media Release, The Hon Gary Hardgrave MP, Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, 11 May 2005

## Addressing skills shortages

1.5 We have heard much from the Opposition and other critics to the effect that the technical colleges initiative amounted to policy making on the run and that the Government was allocating Commonwealth funds for a proposal very short on detail. This ignores the fact that establishment of the colleges is part of the Government's overall strategy to tackle the skills shortage problem and consolidate work that has already been done with industry to develop practical solutions to current and future industry skills needs. This legislation is fundamental to the Government's reform of the vocational and education training system. As Minister Nelson told a conference at the University of Melbourne in March 2005, the Government's reform is underpinned by three key objectives:

- that industry and business needs to drive training policies, priorities and delivery;
- that better quality training and outcomes for clients, through flexible and accelerated pathways, be achieved; and
- that all processes be simplified and streamlined.<sup>3</sup>

1.6 There is nothing new about the problem of labour and skill shortages. The Government acknowledges that some trades have experienced skills shortages for the better part of 25 years. It is widely accepted that labour and skills shortages are exacerbated during times of economic growth and low unemployment, both of which are hallmarks of this Government's record of economic management. Government members on the committee agree with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that skill shortages is a complex labour market problem for which there are no easy solutions.<sup>4</sup> For over nine years, the Coalition Government has been active in working with industry to address shortages through a mix of initiatives and strategies of which this proposal is arguably the most important.

1.7 The colleges will play an important role in expanding the School-Based New Apprenticeships. The DEST submission makes the important point that of the 12,500 School-Based New Apprenticeships offered in the 12 months to December 2004, approximately 65 per cent were in sales and personal services, tourism and hospitality, and business whereas only 14 per cent were in trade related areas (six per cent in automotive, four per cent in building, three per cent in engineering and mining, and one per cent in food processing). It is expected that the colleges will address this imbalance by requiring that students are offered a Schools-Based New Apprenticeship in a trade, wherever possible.<sup>5</sup>

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3 *Underpinning Prosperity: Our Agenda in Education, Science and Training*, Speech by Dr Brendan Nelson, 'Sustaining Prosperity' conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March 2005

4 *Australian Technical Colleges – Raising the status of the traditional trades*, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2005

5 DEST, *Submission 7*, p.7

1.8 Government senators believe that the Prime Minister's election-campaign initiative is an instance of creative and innovative policy-making that takes the vocation and training system in a new direction. Uncoordinated VET in schools policies adopted in different states have not proven to be successful overall in addressing the national skills shortage. The technical colleges will breathe new life into the national training system by focusing on those trades identified by the 2004 National and State Skill Shortage List as currently having high skill needs. The five priority industries include:

- metal and engineering (machinists, fabricators, toolmakers, welders, sheet metal workers);
- automotive (mechanics, auto electricians, panel beaters, vehicle painters);
- building and construction (bricklayers, plumbers, carpenters);
- electrotechnology (refrigeration, air-conditioning, electricians); and
- commercial cookery.<sup>6</sup>

1.9 On the supply side of the equation, there is some concern from business and industry that people in the VET system are being educated and trained in ways that do not always fulfil the needs of employers. The technical colleges will give substance to the Government's belief that the VET system should send a powerful signal to young people that trade skills offer a proven path to a rewarding career. These will be 'lighthouse' institutions to be emulated by other schools. They will provide an incentive for more students to stay on at school and encourage more students to pursue a trade qualification. Providing a high quality technical education and promoting pride and excellence in the acquisition of trade skills is essentially what the colleges are about. On the demand side of the equation, industry will have an opportunity to drive the VET options available to students who attend the new colleges by the provision of training that is relevant to industry needs. Government senators believe that the legislation will enable industry demand, rather than supply-side factors, to drive the VET options which the colleges will make available to students.

1.10 The initiative to establish new technical colleges is consistent with spending initiatives by the Government to encourage skills growth across a range of trades. The Government, for instance, has provided direct assistance to New Apprentices through extension of income support payment eligibility, an \$800 tool kit and \$1000 tax exempt trade learning scholarships. The Government has also created additional training places and has trialled new approaches, such as accelerated New Apprenticeships.<sup>7</sup> This is in addition to the current VET in Schools funding which is part of the \$8 billion in general recurrent funding provided in 2005 for government

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6 *ibid.*, p.9

7 *ibid.*, p.4

and non-government schools under the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century declaration.<sup>8</sup>

1.11 The committee majority notes the strong interest which has been shown in the colleges so far. More than 160 expressions of interest were received in the six months to July 2004. The establishment of the colleges also has the strong backing of business and employer bodies such as the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>9</sup> The level of interest shown in the colleges is partly a response to the extensive community consultation forums which Minister Hardgrave undertook in all 24 regions during February and March of this year. These forums, which were attended by representatives from business, employer and industry associations, followed the release of a discussion paper by DEST in January 2005.<sup>10</sup> In late March, the request for proposal documentation was released, seeking proposals to establish the colleges and setting out the selection criteria against which proposals would be assessed. A total of 73 proposals for the colleges were received.

1.12 The Government has recently announced that it will commence negotiations with successful applicants to establish the first 12 colleges in 2006 and 2007 for the following regions: Illawarra, Port Macquarie, Bairnsdale-Sale, Bendigo, Eastern Melbourne, Geelong, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Townsville, Adelaide and Darwin.<sup>11</sup> Information on the DEST website shows that a number of successful applications, including for the Gladstone, Gold Coast, Townsville and Darwin regions were initiated by consortiums of industry, employer and community interests. Taking Darwin as an example, the successful application from the Territory Construction Association, on behalf of the Darwin Industry Consortium, comprised all major industry associations, Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory, Motor Trades Association, Australian Hotels Association Northern Territory and Group Training Northern Territory. The consortium also has the support of the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Charles Darwin University and local public and non-government schools. The committee majority believes that the speed with which these collaborative relationships involving parents, employers, young people, schools and industry have been formed is an encouraging development in first phase of the Government's initiative to reform the VET sector. The high level of interest already shown in the technical colleges from a broad range of industry sectors provides a strong foundation upon which the colleges can develop into

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8 *ibid.*, p.8

9 *VECCI supports Australian Technical Colleges Discussion Paper*, media release, 13 January 2005; *Australian Technical Colleges – Raising the status of the traditional trades*, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2005

10 *Australian Technical Colleges: A Discussion Paper*, Department of Education, Science and Training, January 2005

11 *Australian Technical Colleges – the First Tranche*, Media Release, The Hon Gary Hardgrave MP, Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, 15 July 2005

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educational and training centres of excellence to meet the needs of employers and young people wishing to undertake a trade career.

1.13 It is especially significant that some state governments have shown interest in this initiative. The Victorian Government support has been acknowledged in the success of Ringwood Secondary College as lead partner with St Joseph's College, Ferntree Gully and mixture of public, private and community organisations. In Bendigo, the local senior secondary college is also an important partner in the local venture. This answers criticism about uncoordinated implementation of Government policy. Where state governments have permitted, there has been considerable collaboration in establishing a facility which will harmoniously complement existing local training facilities.

1.14 A decision as to the location of the remaining colleges will be made in late 2005. According to DEST, the first colleges will begin accepting students in 2006 with all 24 regions operational by 2008.

### **Technical colleges and their operation**

1.15 Each of the colleges will enable students to undertake academic studies and trades-related vocational courses, as well as the opportunity for each student to commence a Certificate III School-Based New Apprenticeship. However, the bill before Parliament does not provide a single model for the operation of the colleges. The Government believes that each of the colleges will need flexible and innovative delivery arrangements and timetables in order to fulfil a combination of academic tuition, vocational and technical training and School-Based New Apprenticeship training.

1.16 In the drafting of its legislation, the Government has been careful not to prescribe any particular model of operation for the colleges. The Government believes that each college should be able to operate in a manner which best suits the needs of industry and students in each of the 24 regions. It will therefore consider any model which has the backing of the local community, business and industry groups and which meets the broad requirements for the colleges as set out in the department's discussion paper and request for proposal documentation. According to Minister Hardgrave:

The flexibility to tailor arrangements to local needs will be especially important in the initial years of each college. Colleges may commence operations by offering training in a specialised trade that is of particular relevance to the local region and is one of the industry groups which have been identified by the Australian Government as a priority. Over time the college could be expected to broaden the range of trade training offered, based on the needs of the local community.<sup>12</sup>

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12 Hon Gary Hardgrave MP, *Hansard* (House of Representatives), 11 May 2005, p.3

1.17 Be that as it may, the colleges will be required to meet some minimum requirements. According to DEST, each college will have to enter into a funding agreement with the Government which will set out key requirements, performance measures and reporting and monitoring arrangements. They will also be required to have an access and equity strategy in place to ensure that there are no barriers to students from different backgrounds who wish to pursue the opportunities the colleges offer.

1.18 A consistent criticism of the Government's proposal is that the new colleges will duplicate training already provided by schools and other registered training organisations, including TAFEs. This argument, however, shows a complete failure to understand how the colleges will be fundamentally different from existing training organisations. Unlike TAFEs, local industry and community representatives will play an important role in ensuring that the colleges teach relevant skills to students. According to the DEST submissions:

Local industry and community representatives, through their leadership role in the governance of each of the Australian Technical Colleges, will have an important role to play in ensuring that the Colleges teach relevant skills to students – that the training provided matches the skills required by local businesses to redress existing and projected skill needs.<sup>13</sup>

1.19 The colleges will be specialist schools with high quality facilities providing tuition for years 11 and 12 students. As the Minister has stated: 'The TAFE system is for what you do after school, the Australian technical college approach is for what you do while you're still at school'.<sup>14</sup> The colleges will be endorsed and led by industry. They will also be run autonomously by principals who will be able to offer employment to teaching staff under Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs), including a performance pay element to attract and retain the best available staff. The discussion paper released by DEST states that the colleges will offer '...attractive work conditions emphasising flexibility, high quality facilities, strong professional learning and ongoing support for teachers'.<sup>15</sup> This reflects the Government's commitment to creating working environments which provide both flexible employment arrangements and rewards linked to excellent performance.

1.20 The issue of AWAs continues to be raised by Opposition senators. To argue that the Government has embarked on an ideological crusade by linking industrial relations reforms, including AWAs, indicates that Opposition senators are unaware of what flexibility in the workforce means. AWAs are the means by which teachers and other staff may be rewarded for time and effort which is beyond the standard hours of schooling. The militant opposition to AWA's by unions and the Opposition likewise

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13 DEST, *Submission 7*, p.9

14 *Meet the Press*, Sunday 17 July 2005, transcript

15 *Australian Technical Colleges: A Discussion Paper*, Department of Education, Science and Training, January 2005, p.15

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could be described as 'ideological'. Government senators believe that staff employed by the technical colleges should be given a choice in their working arrangements. Given that the new colleges are not linked to any system, AWAs offer the best way to proper remuneration in circumstances where a certified agreement is not likely to be practical. AWAs are fully consistent with the intention of the legislation. As Minister Hardgrave has explained:

There is no compulsion about people taking on individual agreements, but we allow people the opportunity to actually gain one. In other words, if you want to work for the base wage, then that's your business and that's your agreement. But if because you're a person of quality and a teacher of quality, we think a teacher of quality should be able to negotiate a higher wage and a better wage. I think teachers around Australia want to do that.<sup>16</sup>

### **Changing the culture of vocational education**

1.21 The committee notes the Government's determination that students in years 11 and 12 who complete apprenticeships should have their achievements valued as much as students who attain a university degree. Government senators believe that a cultural shift is required, away from the view that trade occupations and vocation training are less attractive than university. It is important that a high quality technical education comes to be valued as much as a university degree. This bill provides a practical way through to establishing this principle in formal schooling.

### **Conclusion**

1.22 The significant funding measures contained in the Australian Technical Colleges bill underpin the Government's bold new approach to Australia's skills shortage problem. The Government's main objective with this legislation is to maintain and further strengthen the vocational education and training sector by building an industry-led system that delivers what Australian businesses, communities and individuals need. The establishment of technical colleges in the 24 regions which have been identified by the Government will promote a career path in trade occupations in key industries as a valuable and rewarding option for young people. Passage of this legislation will ensure that the new colleges will be able to play a pivotal role in raising the profile and status of vocational educational and training.

**Recommendation**

**The committee majority commends this bill to the Senate and recommends its passage without amendment.**

**Senator Judith Troeth  
Chair**

## Chapter 2

### Opposition Senators' Report

2.1 The introduction of the Australian Technical Colleges Bill illustrates the incoherence of the Government's education and training policy. Its most obvious characteristic is a disregard for an open planning process.

2.2 The concept of Commonwealth funded year 11-12 technical schools appears to have been developed without any consideration of current initiatives or without consultation. The initiative has little connectedness with the activity that is already occurring in the designated regions where colleges are to be established, although in some cases the colleges may borrow from successful innovations already running in those regions, such as in Gladstone. The educational and training rationale represented in this policy has less to do with skills 'outcomes' and more to do with injecting confusion and uncertainty. This has been the rationale of other recent training legislation as well. It is as if the Government, in contemplating the broad operation of training, had tired of improving what currently exists and what currently works, and of funding it appropriately.

#### **Speculating on the new technical colleges**

2.3 Australian Technical Colleges first saw the light of day with an announcement made during the federal election campaign in October 2004. The Government announced that it would fund 24 Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) in specified regions in every state and territory, except the ACT. Little detail was provided initially on how the colleges would operate, which is always to be expected when policy is being made 'on the run'. By the time the bill was introduced in March 2005, enough work had been done to allow press releases. Funding of \$343.6 million would be provided over five years. Each institution would run programs allowing for completion of a secondary school certificate as well as a School-Based New Apprenticeship leading to a nationally recognised training package qualification.

2.4 The technical colleges will be linked to local industries for the purposes of trades training; they will be run in association with local industries to ensure that they meet the local business priorities; and they will be 'flexibly' staffed by teachers remunerated according to performance

2.5 As this report is tabled, 12 applications for funding to run the new colleges have been approved by Minister Hardgrave. Consortium partners have been announced for a number of successful bids. The committee has had no time, and no terms of reference, to find out from these consortia how they will go about their tasks. Opposition members of the committee expect that there will be an opportunity to evaluate the progress or otherwise of the colleges at some appropriate time.

2.6 The earliest approved colleges are not expected to commence until the beginning of 2006, and those colleges will be hard-pressed to find principals and suitable staff in time for their commencement. In an answer to a question asked by this committee during Estimates, the Department of Education Science and Training admitted it expected only five of these Colleges will be ready to commence operations in 2006. Therefore, at best, the Australian Technical Colleges announced in October 2004 will only produce 750 qualified tradespeople by 2010. This is less than one per cent of the estimated 100,000 skilled tradespeople the Australian Industry Group says will be needed by that time.

### **Planning difficulties for states**

2.7 The Queensland Government's submission identified that around 60 000 students in Queensland public schools are participating in VET, and nearly half of the national total of school-based apprenticeships are run in Queensland. Although the submission states that there is a 'clear synergy' between aspects of the new technical colleges and Queensland's education reform agenda, there is criticism that more flexibility is needed whereby students from schools near to the colleges could maintain their enrolments at an existing school and attend the new college to access specialised trade training. It is argued that a dual enrolment arrangement would enable other local schools to develop a wider range of skills training programs. As the submission states, this model is particularly viable in regional areas of the state, such as Gladstone, where the introduction of an ATC has the potential to create a competitor in a relatively small market.<sup>1</sup>

2.8 The Queensland submission also expresses regret that the ATC model provides no scope for the Queensland Government's preferred model of ATC establishment in the state. The ATCs will need to be established under accreditation rules of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB). Opposition members of the committee believe that had the Minister negotiated with his Queensland State counterpart, in recognition of the relative strength of school-based VET in that state, agreement may have been speedily achieved. However, this is to disregard the fact that the Government's policy is intended to confront the policies and practices of the states, rather than to accommodate them. It does this by setting up its own institutions in competition with state-run schools and colleges, regardless of whether the state is running quality vocational programs, including school based apprenticeships, with strong local industry backing, as is certainly the case in parts of Queensland and across Australia.

### **Management and staffing issues**

2.9 Establishing a new school 'from scratch' is a major challenge. It must be assumed that there is a receptive catchment area of potential students, and of suitably qualified teachers with an interest and background in trades teaching. Presumably,

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

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successful local businesses and industry will be identified as having potential to run schools, if necessary by having DEST officials broker deals to create local consortia. In many cases partnerships between schools and local industry are already successful and likely to resist competition from the new colleges. The absence of any Commonwealth guarantee of funding beyond five years appears not to have deterred applicants, but if success is to be achieved it will need to be realised through substantial enrolments from the beginning.

### ***Industry involvement in school management***

2.10 There is no argument that the involvement of local industry in the design of a skills training or VET in schools program is essential. Industry involvement is more effective when it forms a genuine partnership with all other stakeholders. Opposition senators note the observation of the Independent Education Union in relation to this matter:

Of concern also to the IEU is the rationale underpinning most of the Bill of an industry led initiative as opposed to the language of partnership. Industry partnerships have traditionally encompassed equal partnerships between schools, industry and other stakeholders such as employees and representative organisations. They have been successful because they recognise the experience and skills that each has to offer and because each partner has an equal role. In addition, partnerships between schools and industry need to be fostered and supported across the board. It is certainly not clear at this stage how much ownership of the ATC process will actually be afforded to each partner.<sup>2</sup>

2.11 The submission from the ACTU points out that the bill fails to clarify the governance arrangements for Australian Technical Colleges, or the accountabilities of their governing councils as employers. Some doubt must exist as to how the rights of teachers and other employees are to be protected.<sup>3</sup> Opposition members of the committee speculate that such elements in the governance discussions may have been omitted for the sake of securing firm commitments of industry support, with the fine details to be worked out later. If industry players are to be partners in the college councils they need to assume these responsibilities, and it remains to be seen how many of them will balk at the fine print.

### ***Industrial relations and remuneration***

2.12 On industrial relations, the Government's submission emphasises a concern for both 'flexibility' and 'quality' as important teacher attributes. These are terms which may mean different things according to context. The Government promotes Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) because of claims that they offer

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2 Independent Education Union, *Submission 5*, para.9

3 ACTU, *Submission 4*, paras. 13-14

flexibility. The Opposition does not support any suggestion that all staff in the new Technical Colleges must be offered AWAs.

2.13 It is far too simplistic to argue that the measure of achievement of a staff member is the success-rate of students in passing exams or reaching a particular level of competence. Every student is different, and performances vary regardless of the quality of teacher 'input'. The skill and effort to have a student reach a 'C' grade level may far exceed that of preparing an 'A' grade student. One teacher may coast along with talented students, and another perform heroically with failures. The current collegial arrangement of remuneration recognises such variations, and unless the school is poorly administered, ensures that all teachers share the variations of student aptitude and success, leading to overall professional satisfaction.

2.14 Performance measures can be blunt instruments when not used properly in determining rewards for teachers, and the practice is open to abuse in a school context, where it may not be in other professions or trades. It is a certain way to break down collegiality, without which an Australian Technical Colleges may not perform effectively.

2.15 In the absence of information about the planning arrangements for colleges that are expected to start operations next year, Opposition senators can only speculate on the availability of 'quality' teachers to staff the Colleges, or indeed their enrolment prospects.

### **Education and training programs in the new ATCs**

2.16 The Government has great expectations for its Australian Technical Colleges, notwithstanding that there are only 24 of them planned, and with the meagre first fruits of the harvest not expected until 2010. It is as though the Government has just discovered the link between quality training and filling vacancies in the technical skilled workforce. This is a problem which this Committee, in a number of reports, and many industry and professional bodies have been expounding for years.

2.17 It may be generally observed that since 1996 the Government has neglected to maintain the skills base for Australian industry, particularly the construction and fabricating trades. For example, there has long been an acute shortage of welders and skilled metal workers and mechanical trades people, and semi-professional engineering specialists generally. These are the hard and sharp end skills which require not only longer periods of training but more dedication, more expert tuition and work supervision, more expensive capital equipment and, most significantly, much more industry support through apprenticeships. The task of maintaining and building this reserve of skills has been far beyond the capacity of the Government.

2.18 Effective policy would have required far more investment in training than the Government was prepared to provide. Instead, it spent its training dollars on New Apprenticeships in areas without significant skill shortages,. This put impressive growth figures for so-called 'New Apprenticeships', but did not address the need for

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trade skills, and masks the real numbers of traditional apprenticeships, particularly the worsening completion rates.

2.19 The TAFE sector has been subjected to severe financial pressures during this period because of the Commonwealth funding neglect. It remains the backbone of Australia's vocational education and training system in what is high skill training endeavour. While TAFE is restricted by the absence of growth funding from the Commonwealth, the Government is able to find funds for its new technical colleges.

2.20 Australian Technical Colleges are each intended to enrol 300 students across years 11 and 12. The Australian Education Union observes that this enrolment is much lower than the normal senior secondary school enrolment, and necessitates a more restricted curriculum.<sup>4</sup> There will be few options for course changes in the event that students find that they are not suited to their initial choice. The committee can only assume that the colleges will be for students who have settled on a firm career choice at the end of year 10, although it is unusual for many to have made that decision by then. If course options are limited it is likely that there will be a considerable drop-out rate, and students will have to enrol at the school they would have attended if the college had not existed. This will result in some disruption to the programs of existing schools.

2.21 The concern about lack of choice in such a small school is compounded by the announcement that students are also expected to be able to find a pathway to matriculation if that is their desire. That suggests that the colleges will have to offer a full academic program as well as a VET stream. In some states, VET courses cannot be used for matriculation purposes.

### **Effects on local schools**

2.22 It is unlikely that the effect of the colleges on existing schools has been taken into account. After all, the ATCs have been set up as competitors to schools already there. For schools in areas where there is already close cooperation with local industry, and where well-developed partnerships exist, the question of whether these relationships will be supplanted by new arrangements between industry and the ATC has yet to be seen.

### **Imagining a conventional policy framework**

2.23 In 2000 the Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee tabled its report on the quality of VET, which included a chapter on VET in schools. The committee saw a number of successful programs which followed the early skills acquisition model.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of this report Opposition senators pointed to the absence of a proper policy rationale for the establishment of

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4 AEU, *Submission 2*, p.12

5 Senate EWRE References Committee, *Striving for Excellence*, November 2000, Chapter 10

Commonwealth funded technical colleges. It would have been more constructive for the Government to have identified collaborative models, based on variations of current good practice around the states.

2.24 As noted earlier, the submission from the Queensland Government stated that there would have been a welcome response from the state to a proposal to strengthen local education links with industry through a technical college that offered added value to what was happening currently in local schools. There is no room for competition in most areas, where there is a generally downward pressure on enrolments. The thin market for both students and teachers is likely to result in very slow growth in ATC enrolments and subsequent loss of interest by industry backers.

## **Conclusion**

2.25 Opposition senators will not oppose the passage of the Australian Technical Colleges Bill 2005 however there are a number of concerns. It unnecessarily duplicates current institutions and offers uncertain prospects of success in the long-term. The appropriations tagged for the ATCs would have been more effectively spent in the TAFE sector, used to promote more school-based apprenticeships in targeted trades which are experiencing skill shortages, or a range of other innovative vocational education programs already being developed in our schools.

## **Recommendation**

**That the Government expand support to current VET in Schools programs, school based apprenticeships as well as providing other schools undertaking similar innovation the level of additional support commensurate with the support given to the Australian Technical Colleges.**

**Senator Gavin Marshall  
Deputy Chair**

**Senator George Campbell**

## 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**

# Appendix

## List of submissions

<b>Sub No:</b>	<b>From:</b>
1	Mr Karl Tietze, Qld
2	Australian Education Union
3	The Smith Family
4	Australian Council of Trade Unions
5	Independent Education Union of Australia
6	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
7	Department of Education, Science and Training
8	Queensland Government

