

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

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

Submission no: 5

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Submitter: Ms Lynne Rolley
Federal Secretary

Organisation: Independent Education Union of Australia

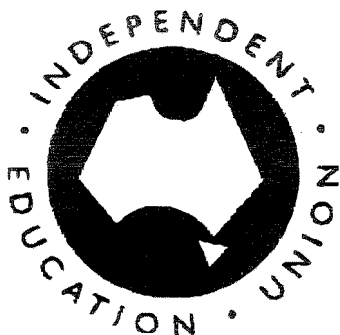
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22 July 2005

Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations,
and Education References Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: eet.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

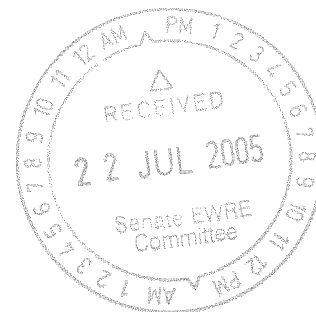
Please find attached the Independent Education Union of Australia's submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs) Bill 2005.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lynne Rolley".

Lynne Rolley
Federal Secretary



**IEU SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE
EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE
RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL COLLEGES
(FLEXIBILITY IN ACHIEVING AUSTRALIA'S SKILLS
NEEDS) BILL 2005**

JULY 2005

1. The Independent Education of Australia (the IEU) has prepared this submission for the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee's Inquiry into the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills needs) Bill 2005.
2. Having had the opportunity of reading the ACTU submission to this Inquiry, the IEU supports and endorses the ACTU's submission and its opposition to the Bill.
3. In short, the IEU wishes to place on record its concerns that the federal government's establishment of Australian Technical Colleges is:
 - I. An initiative that has not been developed with adequate consultation from all stakeholders, particularly schools and TAFEs.
 - II. An inadequate response to the funding needs of schools in providing comprehensive vocational education and training opportunities for students¹
 - III. Not properly integrated with any existing VET and training arrangements that are occurring in the schooling sector already
 - IV. An imposition of the government's conservative industrial relations agenda into the schooling sector
 - V. A short term and precipitate solution to the skills shortage that may actually weaken other school based VET initiatives
4. The IEU acknowledges that vocational education and training is a critical issue for Australia. It has been the subject of exhaustive policy work at both the state and federal levels, and there has been a consistent consensus that our students need a seamless transition between school and work, informed choices and opportunities in both academic and vocational pathways, and an education system that can allow them to

¹ Refer IEU Submission, Section 7, to the Standing Committee on Education and Training – Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools.

move between or change pathways to optimise their post schooling choices.

5. The funding that will be targeted towards the establishment of ATCs is considerable and will of course be welcomed by many teachers who have struggled for a long time to try and deliver VET programs without enough infrastructure support. The IEU welcomes proper levels of funding for new programs as a matter of principle. It is disappointing however that at the same time no real increase has been made to VET in Schools programs or TAFE pathways or consideration given to integrate such funding to support existing initiatives. It is probable that many school based initiatives, for want of comparative funding, will not be able to compete with the offerings at ATCs, and will have to reduce their programs accordingly. In particular schools may have to actually cut programs where student numbers are now too small to be viable, further limiting students' opportunities. This will have considerable impact on the educational outcomes of students who do not attend ATCs, but who still wish to pursue a vocational pathway.
6. Of relevance also is the fact that the ATCS are being introduced at a time when there is comprehensive consensus across federal and state governments, all business sectors, unions and the community that there is a critical skills shortage in this country. Yet such a consensus is informed by the knowledge that the solution, as outlined in the ACTU submission would more effectively be found in additional funding from governments to create more vacancies in TAFE and a better matching of apprenticeships to industry vacancies. These solutions do not require duplication of resources or high infrastructure costs.
7. The report of the Prime Minister's Youth Action Plan Taskforce 2001 (*The Eldridge Report*) concluded that based on the evidence put before the Taskforce and through its consultations "*many of our current approaches to community support, education, training and work need to change to respond more effectively to the needs of young people and their families*"

- (pp.94). In addition the report considered that *"in order to create opportunities for real and measurable change in the lives of young Australians, governments, the corporate sector, educational institutions, the community at large, families and young people must move beyond the comfort and familiarity of existing operational paradigms"* (pp94).
8. The report advanced the concept of an 'integrated youth pathways action plan' *"that engages all relevant agencies together in partnership to achieve real change and strong futures for all young Australians"* (pp 95). Recommendations of the report focused on the need to provide young people with a range of opportunities which require, for example **"all levels of government to work together"** and **"integrated support networks which create opportunities and respond to the diversity of challenges faced by young people"**. As stated, the IEU believes that the rushed approach to the establishment of ATCs does not demonstrate effective and adequate consultation with all stakeholders, including state governments, school employing authorities and unions.
9. 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.
10. The IEU reminds the Committee 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. Whilst there may be expressed commitments to ensuring that students who attend ATCs will not have non-trade options closed off to them, it is

highly probable that one long term effect will be an emergence of the same issues that confronted technical colleges in the 1970s and 1980s – challenging social questions about the streaming of students from an early level of schooling into a "trade" who were not considered "bright" enough to complete mainstream schooling. Whilst the IEU acknowledges that community perceptions have shifted and that more value is currently being placed on technical and trades skills, there is still a danger of once again creating a two-tiered system, with less choice for students in one tier.

11. Principles such as equity have not been strongly enough expressed in the Bill. The focus on mainly male dominated trade areas such as metals and engineering, automotive, building and construction, and electro technologies will inevitably lead to failures by ATCs to address gender participation, or more broadly, to offer courses that young women may be interested in pursuing.
12. Leaving aside the question of whether technical colleges will actually be the solution for the complex issues surrounding Australia's skills shortage, and the inevitable answer that in isolation they can not be, of serious concern also to the IEU is the way that the colleges will be established in an infrastructure that is at odds with the rest of schooling in Australia. From their inception they will receive a level of funding much higher than any other school. The expressed rationale is that such funding will enable the colleges to attract the best staff, pay them better salaries, market themselves effectively, attract more business partnerships, and in essence lead the way in the area of VET.
13. Principals of ATCs will be contracted under performance pay arrangements and performance pay must be offered to staff along with Australian Workplace Agreements. The ATCs will have a separately badged identity, even if they sit within existing institutions yet their governing body will also be separate from the school's governing body, being chaired by a business or industry representative and as yet

unknown other stakeholders. This again fosters a piecemeal approach to VET provision and does not lead to an integrated system of vocational education and training for young Australians.

14. The governance arrangements of ATCs are not totally clear, yet the ideological motives are transparent. Where the government can do so it will tie funding to ensuring that employees are offered Australian Workplace Agreements. Employees who staff these colleges will come from both the government and non-government sectors. Successful tenders to date include a number of non-government schools either as stand alone or as part of consortia. Australian school teachers, with rare exceptions, have been covered by system wide collective agreements or state based awards for many years with their employing authorities. The IEU is philosophically opposed to Australian Workplace Agreements as undermining the principles of collective bargaining, principles which we understand the Catholic and other major employing authorities in the non-government sector to be also strongly supportive of.
15. It is a false assumption that AWAs will somehow achieve higher rates of pay for teachers employed in ATCs. As indicated in the above paragraph, teachers are already covered by collective certified agreements, with rates of pay and conditions well above award standards. Most of the IEU's agreements with employers already allow for experienced teacher categories, with criteria that must be demonstrated for access to such higher rates of pay. However the notion of "performance pay" is simplistic and outdated. Some of the best teachers work in disadvantaged communities where learning outcomes may be less due to a range of cultural, social and family factors. Performance pay implies that teachers will be paid according to narrow outcome based measures and ignores the varied contexts in which teachers work.
16. In conclusion, there seems to have been scant consideration given to how the establishment of ATCs will affect existing programs and already

overstretched resources in the schools' VET sector. The IEU has serious industrial and educational concerns about their governance, their impact on other schools in the regions, and their long term sustainability if they are promoted without accompanying consideration, integration with, and support of, existing programs. The Bill fails to address in enough detail issues such as equity, genuine partnerships, planned provision, governance arrangements and long term real capacity to redress the skills shortage.

17. The IEU urges the Committee to reject the Bill.