



Federal Election Manifesto

Students At The Heart Of Tertiary Education

A Blueprint For The Next Australian Parliament

“ Reforms to put students at the heart of a high performing tertiary education system that’s underpinned by independent providers ”

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To support a growing economy, Australia needs a highly productive, skilled and educated workforce. The key to achieving this will be to put students at the heart of a high performing tertiary education system that's underpinned by independent Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and higher education institutions.

The next Australian Parliament needs to adopt a student-centric approach to tertiary education reform, with a focus on allowing students to study with the provider that's best able to help them achieve their life and career goals. This approach will improve access and equity to skills training and higher education.

This document sets forth a comprehensive blueprint for the next Australian Parliament, underscoring the urgent need for policy recalibration that places students at the heart of the skills training and higher education sectors.

Historically, Australian Government policy has been marred by barriers that significantly restrict student access to tertiary education, largely due to a disproportionate emphasis on supporting institutions rather than learners themselves. This ongoing and systemic oversight has disenfranchised those wishing to pursue studies quality independent RTOs or higher education institutions, often leaving them without access to government support to help them in their studies.

The next Australian Parliament needs to dismantle these barriers and improve access and equity to tertiary education. As the nation faces a prolonged skills shortage, now is the time to eradicate the discrimination faced by students who choose to study with independent tertiary education providers – a choice driven by their aspirations for personal and professional growth. Regrettably, these students encounter substantial hurdles put in place by government, including lack of access to funding and punitive levies associated with government student loans.

The reforms championed by the members of the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA) are designed to put students at the heart of the skills training and higher education systems. The reforms will actively support a student's informed decision to study with the provider of their choice, whether it be a quality independent provider or a public institution.

Troy R Williams FIML MAICD
ITECA Chief Executive Officer

Official Data

Independent RTOs support 89% of the
4.5 million student enrolments in skills training



Official Data

Independent institutions support 10% of the
1.6 million students in higher education



Official Data

Independent institutions support 57.3% of the
975,200 international student enrolments



Reforms To Put Students At The Heart Of

Skills Training

The skills training system is the key to Australia's long-term economic sustainability. The system needs to be transformed so that it reflects the requirements of a dynamic economy where students can undertake lifelong learning without being encumbered by unnecessary and systemic barriers. This transformation needs to put students at the heart of the skills training system.

As technology continues to reshape industries and automation becomes more prevalent, the demand for adaptable and future-proof skills intensifies. Australia's skills training system must rise to the challenge by empowering students with the knowledge and expertise needed to select both the program and the provider that will allow them to thrive in a time of constant change.

When governments embark on policy reform, it is imperative that they put students at the heart of the skills training system. Reforms should be student centric and actively support the informed decisions of students to study with the provider of their choice; whether this be an independent RTO or public provider.

It will be Australia's independent RTOs that will do the heavy lifting in delivering the skills training that helps students achieve their life and career goals. Official data shows independent providers support 89.4% of all students in skills training, including 73.6% of students at Diploma (and higher), 72.0% of students at Certificate IV, as well as more than half of all apprentices and trainees.

Government reform to skills training should be agnostic with respect to provider type, as supporting students to study with independent or public skills training providers ensures a diverse and innovative economy that's adaptive to the needs of the nation.

- Place student choice at the heart of skills training funding policy, allowing a student to access a government-funded place in a priority skills area with the quality provider of their choice.
- Within the context of the National Skills Agreement, implement a three-year cycle for state / territory government skills funding contracts, promoting competition and allowing new quality RTOs to deliver in underserved skills areas and regions.
- Streamline mandatory compliance and activity reporting in skills training based on the 'report once, use many times' principle, allowing RTOs to focus on student outcomes and not government red tape.
- End the student loan tax on VET Student Loans, relieving the financial burden on students and promoting equitable access to skills training.
- Support an integrated tertiary education system, in which the skills training and higher education systems operate as one but retain their separate strengths and identities.



Reforms To Put Students At The Heart Of

Higher Education

Higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping Australia's future, empowering individuals with knowledge, fostering innovation, and nurturing critical thinking. To be its best, it needs reform that positions it as a catalyst for progress and a beacon of hope for a prosperous future. This transformation needs to put students at the heart of the higher education system.

In an era of technological advancements and increasing automation, the imperative for versatile and future-ready skills is amplified. Australia's higher education system must empower individuals with the tools to choose the programs and providers that enable their success in a time of constant change.

Government reform to the higher education sector should be agnostic with respect to provider type, as supporting students to study with independent or public higher education providers ensures a diverse and innovative sector that's adaptive to the nation's needs. In this context, the 'Australian Universities Accord' fails students and the document needs to be recast.

Placing students at the heart of the higher education system is essential; empowering them to be the architects of their own future. By prioritising students' needs, aspirations, and success, Australia is better able to unlock the potential of its population. To do this, they need governments to back their decision to study with either a quality independent or public provider.

As the nation's employers seek staff with enhanced higher level skill and a fundamental analysis ability, independent higher education providers will play a critical role as they support around 10% of the 1.6 million students in a higher education awards program.

- Placing student choice at the centre of higher education funding, allowing a student to access a government-supported place at a quality provider of their choice, if institutions want to leverage this student funding mechanism.
- Reviewing and updating the higher education funding model to ensure sustainable and equitable funding arrangements, recognising the complementarity of the independent and public sectors.
- Streamline mandatory compliance and activity reporting in higher education based on the 'report once, use many times' principle, allowing higher education providers to focus on student outcomes and not government red tape.
- Ensure that the outcomes from the Australian Universities Accord recognise the complementarity of the independent and public higher education providers, with the adoption of recommendations in a way that are agnostic as to provider type.
- To deliver on genuine approaches to access and equity, end the student loan tax on FEE-HELP Loans, relieving the financial burden on students and promoting equitable access to higher education.
- Improving access to government research funding for independent higher education providers.



Reforms To Put Students At The Heart Of

International Education

International education enriches Australia by fostering global connections, diverse perspectives, and broader economic prosperity. With students coming to study in Australia from around 190 countries, it equips Australians to thrive in a globalised world. We need to ensure there is a closer focus on the students in the international education system to ensure we can better embrace cultural diversity, build inclusive communities and advance Australia's position in the region.

To ensure a sustainable and thriving international education sector, we must embrace change and prioritise diversification. By focusing on reforms that place a closer focus on students, we can enhance the experience for both domestic and international students, create growth opportunities, and solidify Australia's global leadership in education.

Placing a greater focus on students within the international education sector will ensure that more emphasis is placed on student wellbeing, source market diversity as well as strengthening academic support. Importantly, government reforms should respect a student's study choices and welcome them as students irrespective of their intended study discipline.

Promoting Australia globally as a study destination of choice is critical to the ongoing health of the industry and something that can only be achieved if governments acknowledge the high quality contribution made by the independent sector in delivering excellent outcomes for students.

Governments need to recognise the complementary role of independent public institutions that support international students, and the wishes of students to study with the provider of their choice. Independent tertiary education providers that are central to these reforms and to delivering for students. They support some 574% of the more than 975,200 international student enrolments in Australia in 2023.

- Supporting those wanting to study in Australia through a student visa processing framework that has timely, consistent and transparent outcomes.
- Strengthening the quality assurance of international education agents through a registration scheme that ensures high standards of education and student support.
- Align government strategies for international education and migration to ensure they are complementary and support the growth of high quality providers.
- Promoting Australia globally as the study destination of choice through unified national branding, targeted marketing, and ending confusion regional campaigns with a 'Team Australia' approach.
- Deliver an International Education Commissioner to provide a more efficient, streamlined and coordinated whole-of-government approach to international education promotion, data analysis and industry support, and the deployment of support services for overseas students studying in Australia.





The Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA) is the peak body representing independent providers in the skills training, higher education, and international education sectors. We progress reforms that put students at the heart of the skills training and higher education systems.

Independent RTOs cater to more than 89% of the 4.5 million students in skills training, and independent providers support around 10% of the 1.6 million students in a higher education awards program.

ITECA's members are united, informed and influential. They set our agenda, fund our activities, and directly benefit from the results.

ITECA Membership – It's a great time to get involved.

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