As teachers in public TAFE institutions across the country, we are committed to supporting every person who needs access to high quality vocational, adult and further education.

In the last few decades, governments have attempted to privatisate the TAFE sector, directing government funding to voracious private for-profit providers. Increasingly, the cost of TAFE and vocational education has been shifted from governments onto students through loans schemes and a failure to adequately resource TAFE.

TAFE and vocational education remain the worst funded education sectors in the country, with funding having been cut by more than 15% between 2007 and 2016. Government expenditure has declined by 31.5% over the past 10 years.

The damage inflicted on the sector, particularly as a result of underfunding and attempts to privatise have eroded the viability of colleges and undermined confidence in the system. In Australia overall, TAFE’s share of publicly funded hours declined from 81% in 2009 to 54% in 2016. Enrolments in the sector have declined alarmingly in the last four years.

The Turnbull Government has overseen the debacle of the VET FEE-HELP scheme, allowing it to escalate so badly that experts estimate more than $7 billion has been expended on the scheme, a significant proportion of which will never be recovered. Under the Turnbull government, funding has been slashed and support for the system has collapsed.

TAFE is a highly regarded educational institution which has supported individuals, communities and employers for decades. It has developed partnerships with employers and communities to provide pathways for students to employment, further education and university. It provides support for those seeking retraining and further education throughout their lives.

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Australia needs a high quality, well-resourced and trusted TAFE sector. Public vocational education is every person’s right, and TAFE holds a particularly important role in the lives of people throughout their working lives.

Successive cuts, underfunding and the student loans debacle have damaged the sector, undermined the teaching workforce, and slashed funding and support where it is needed most.

The Australian Education Union calls on the Federal Government to:

1. ** Guarantee a minimum 70% government funding to the public TAFE system.**
   - No public funding should go to private for-profit providers, consistent with other education sectors.

2. ** Restore funding and rebuild the system,**
   - which will restore confidence in the quality of the courses and qualifications and the institution.

3. ** Abandon the failed student loans experiment,**
   - and cancel the debts of all students caught up in private for-profit provider scams.

4. ** Re-invest in the TAFE teaching workforce**
   - and develop a future-focused TAFE workforce development strategy in collaboration with the profession and the union, based on degree-level teaching qualifications to augment the industry qualifications required to prepare people for work and for participation in society.

5. ** Develop a capital investment strategy,**
   - in consultation with state governments to address the deplorable state of TAFE facilities around the country. TAFE students should have access to high quality learning facilities, commensurate at least with those enjoyed by their university cousins. This would address the issue of parity of esteem, and rebuild confidence in the sector.

6. ** Support a comprehensive independent inquiry into TAFE**
   - to consider a broad range of issues including: the collapse in confidence and support for competency based training and training packages; the lack of overall investment, and the development of curriculum and courses.

Unless governments address the crisis in the TAFE and vocational education sector as a matter of urgency, the consequences for society and the economy – and for the next generation of young people, will be dire.