

MEDIA RELEASE

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Thousands of students left in limbo

School leavers, and thousands of other students across Australia, are facing significant uncertainty as reforms to the VET Student Loan program remain unresolved six weeks before new arrangements are due to kick in.

Australian Council for Private Education and Training CEO Rod Camm said the Federal Department of Education and Training had failed to design and implement the replacement for the VET FEE HELP program in time for the new academic year.

“No private training providers are currently approved to deliver VET Student Loan-supported courses in 2017, leaving the education and training plans of tens of thousands of students in limbo,” he said.

“Providers, both public and private, should be finalising and presenting their programs to students, and making offers to students to start early in the new year.

“Not this year. Students don’t know what courses are on offer, whether their local provider will be approved to offer loan-supported programs or what the cost of the courses will be.”

Mr Camm said this uncertainty extended to existing students.

“Providers cannot give a clear indication to their current students about whether the courses they are part way through will continue in the 2017 and beyond,” he said.

“The impact on students, both current and future, is absolutely unacceptable and inflicts further damage on the reputation of our sector.”

The uncertainty has been caused by the Federal Government’s attempt to reform VET FEE HELP with the VET Student Loans (VSL) program. The VET FEE HELP scheme expires at the end of 2016 but debate about the new Bills was adjourned in the Senate last week.

“Our elected representatives in both Houses were given an unreasonably short time frame to review the VSL legislation and they are, quite rightly, asking questions,” Mr Camm said.

“This scrutiny, while important, has delayed passing of the legislation, making the Department’s planned implementation by 1 January 2017 now simply impossible.”

Mr Camm said a broad range of industry leaders, employer groups, teachers, unions and training providers pointed out the serious flaws with the proposed VSL when it was announced in early October.

“However, the Government sought to rush through the legislation rather than take the time to address these legitimate concerns and ensure we have a system that is fair, equitable and fit-for-purpose. That haste has brought them, and the plans of thousands of students, unstuck,” he said.

Mr Camm said while the design of the new VSL remains very poor, the implementation has proved disastrous.

“There is simply no way this program can be up and running in time for courses to start next year without a marked impact on students,” he said.

Mr Camm said the government must immediately grant provisional approval to providers currently delivering under the VET FEE HELP program.

“While this does not address many of the problems, it would go some way towards minimising the impact on students and allow some providers to plan their 2017 programs,” he said.

“Punishing private providers might be good politics but it is very poor policy and ultimately impacts thousands of innocent students.”

Rod Camm is available for interview - 0409 484 051.