



VET Reforms

Joint Statement National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) and Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

On the final evening of Federal Parliament 2016, very important policy changes to student loans for vocational educational and training (VET) were enacted, through the VET Student Loans Bill 2016.

Given the importance of vocational and technical education to an economy and workforce undergoing significant changes, matters of such importance needed more consideration and public consultation. Quality vocational education and good outcomes for students ought to be the prime objective of national policy.

NFAW and WAVE welcome the improvements to the previous system and acknowledge the work undertaken by a range of Federal MPs and Senators to improve the Bills. However it is unfortunate that these three Bills needed to be rushed through Parliament at the last minute so that they could be implemented from 1 January 2017.

Both organisations remain concerned that the outcomes of previous arrangements for VET FEE-HELP have been disastrous for many students, among them many women and girls. Many of these students remain stranded today and will need to attempt to have their debts nullified.

Whilst the Bills attempt to address some of the previous problems, many issues remain:

- The rush to implement the new Bill without proper time for consultation:
- The construction of the course list for which loans apply and whether this list reflects courses which should be covered:
- The pressure now placed on all RTOs delivering these courses to make changes for 2017 enrolments:
- All RTOs being subject to additional work provided under the Bill, even though many including TAFE in particular, did not abuse VET FEE-HELP;
- Whether the penalties are sufficient to deter those RTOs that want to make money out of the system, and whether they will operate quickly enough

Our main concern remains however that fees for VET courses are now so high, that many prospective students are not able to afford them, and many do not want to take on these loans. The accessible VET system that Australia used to be so proud of no longer exists, and the economy and society in general will be poorer for it.

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