



# Contesting the contestability of tertiary education funding

One of the major questions that the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education, chaired by Professor Denise Bradley, was asked to examine was, whether the missions and objectives of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the higher education sectors were merging or becoming more distinctive? In its final report, the panel concluded that while maintaining the distinct natures of each sector's missions, pedagogy and assessment was desirable, there was also a critical need for better connections across tertiary education and training and a more coherent and flexible policy framework.

In drawing these conclusions the report noted that 'anomalies and inconsistencies ... between higher education and VET in areas such as funding and tuition financing ... potentially distort decisions about training and education.' (*Review of Australian Higher Education 2008*, p. 182).

While the NTEU agrees with these conclusions we would argue that recent policy initiatives towards a more market oriented framework which allows greater competition and contestability of funding between VET and higher education and between public and private providers is not necessarily in the best interest of students, governments or educational institutions. Student choices about what to study and where to study should be based on their aspirations and on merit.

These decisions should not be distorted by financial considerations such as ability to pay or manipulation of choices offered to students based on which courses provide the highest return to providers.

## Unwelcome competition

Competition that provides students with greater and more genuine choice in relation to the structure, quality and cost of education is welcomed. However, it appears that much of the 'competitive' behaviour induced by recent policy changes in tertiary education (such as in Victorian



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