

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Government plan undermines staff rights & threatens universities & TAFEs

The Federal Government should abandon plans to force universities and TAFEs to adopt hardline employment policies that will drive down the wages and conditions of staff and lead to more casual jobs, bigger class sizes and a poorer quality of education for students.

Unions covering 60,000 university & TAFE staff today called on the Howard Government to scrap its plan to tie extra public funding to hard line industrial conditions ahead of tomorrow's National Higher Education Protest (Weds. 1 June).

**On behalf of unions representing TAFE & university staff, ACTU Secretary Greg Combet said:**

"The Howard Government plan will undermine the basic rights of university and TAFE staff and threatens to degrade the quality of Australia's education system.

The Government plans to cut public funding to universities by \$280 million and cut TAFE funding by \$1.2 billion unless they adopt hard line workplace relations policies that include offering all staff individual contracts with inferior conditions and introducing more casual employment.

Thousands of long-serving education staff including porters, cleaners, gardeners, teachers and lecturers face the prospect of being made a casual worker and losing their job security.

Already, there are huge numbers of people working in our education system who are effectively 'laid off' over the Christmas break period – receiving no pay until the next teaching semester starts.

The Government's changes are not about providing employees with greater choice, they are about driving down pay and conditions and reducing job security for large numbers of hard working people.

The new funding arrangements will give the Federal Education Minister the ability to reach into our universities and TAFE system and dictate the details of individual job contracts regardless of the fact that most staff and management in these institutions want to negotiate collectively.

This is unwanted and unnecessary government interference that is driven by ideology and will lead to more bureaucratic red tape, not less. The Government plan threatens academic freedom, the independence of public universities and the integrity of our TAFE system.

It does nothing to deal with the real problems facing universities and TAFEs including higher student fees, bigger classes, reduced job security and a decline in the quality of facilities.

The Government's plan is a distraction from more important national goals of boosting investment in research and lifting the number of places in TAFE to help solve the national skills shortage.

Decent jobs for higher education workers will also mean a better education system for our children and those of us seeking a university or TAFE qualification. The Government's plans are a dangerous step backwards for staff and students."

### **National Day of Protest for Higher Education – Weds. 1 June 2005**

Protest activities including rallies and public meetings will take place in all major metropolitan and regional centres. Strike action will take place at eight universities.

For more details, see media contacts below:

#### **Media Contacts:**

**Greg Combet**, ACTU: c/- Ian Wilson, ACTU Media Officer: 0408 513 849

**David Carey**, Fed. Secretary, SPSF Group, Community & Public Sector Union:

0418233923. And Bernadette Keeffe, National Media Officer: 0437 370 008.

**Dr Carolyn Allport**, President, National Tertiary Education Union: 0438 026277. And

Andrew Nette, NTEU National Policy Coordinator: 0438 026 277

**Pat Forward**, Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union: 0425 743 954

