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MEDIA RELEASE

EDUCATION INVESTMENT FUND IS NOT A SLUSH FUND

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** says the Coalition's plans to gut the Education Investment Fund (EIF) by more than \$1 billion to fund non-related university infrastructure projects is a retrograde step which will impact upon the future economic and social development of our nation.

ATN Chair and Vice Chancellor of UTS, Professor Ross Milbourne, said the EIF was specifically set up by the **former Liberal Government** to fund the infrastructure requirements of the nation's universities – not as a slush fund to be raided at the whim of a political party in an election campaign.

Coalition costings released this week reveal that the national network of 30 Australian Technical Colleges will be funded from the EIF, together with the extension of the Youth Allowance Scheme. The ATN has previously welcomed the Coalition's announcement on changes to the work test for youth allowance. However we cautioned at the time against any cuts to existing funding to support this initiative.

"Now it's been revealed that this recurrent line of expenditure will be sourced from the EIF," Professor Milbourne said.

According to the Coalition's own 'Expenditure and Savings' documents, in total the EIF will be raided by \$1.162 billion over 4 years. This is at a time when the nation's universities face a massive maintenance backlog and comes on top of funding cuts announced by the Coalition to equity student loading for universities.

"We also seek clarification of where the money will come from to fund the Coalition's \$1 billion Regional Education Fund, which at the time it was announced (June 2010) was to be sourced from within the existing budget.

"If it is to come out of the EIF it will be a raid of more than \$1.8 billion and the EIF can simply not afford to be raided in this way. It's also ironic that the very fund set up by the former Liberal Government is now the same fund they are using to support other non-university related initiatives."

"It's also worth noting that a survey commissioned by Universities Australia and conducted by Nielson on the attitudes of Australian voters towards universities found that 86 percent viewed educating Australian undergraduate students as either a very important or important core function of the sector. Almost 30 percent indicated that how universities are treated would influence their final vote.

"We need this level of support in the community matched by the same commitment from the Coalition on the future of our universities. We don't need our sector to be a whipping horse for the Coalition to fund other initiatives."

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