

MEDIA RELEASE

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ATN is strong contributor to a sustainable tertiary education sector

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** has expressed concern at the Government's decision not to fund diplomas, advanced diplomas, associate degrees and enabling courses offered by universities unless they have been allocated by the Minister.

Whilst recognising that the cost of the demand driven system had escalated, ATN Chair and Vice Chancellor of Curtin University, Professor Jeanette Hackett said the decision will close down options for those seeking to enter university through enabling and foundation courses and associate degrees. Professor Hackett said the ATN was also concerned that the measure would impact upon the capacity to address skills shortages.

"We have concerns on several fronts. ATN universities enrol 19% of the nation's students, 19% of low SES students, 14% of disabled students and 17% of indigenous students. We have responded to the Government's push to increase the number of these students – particularly from low SES backgrounds. Many of these students, together with mature age students who aspire to a university education want to prepare themselves and test their capabilities in a university context. Foundation Studies and enabling courses meet this need.

"The timing of the announcement is of concern with students making decisions about their future and applying for courses and offers being made by universities – it simply creates uncertainty for universities and potentially for students. Professor Hackett said ATN universities have a strong track record of collaboration with TAFE, in developing pathways from VET to university education with articulation above the national average.

"None of the ATN universities have been expanding their courses below degree level in ways that would disadvantage VET providers. If there are some instances that have created concern for the Minister then there are means of addressing this that do not entail immediately placing restrictions on the whole university sector," Professor Hackett said.

"The other major concern is the impact upon our capacity to address national skills shortages – particularly in critical areas such as engineering. Indeed the ATN received Government funding to establish Associate Degrees in Engineering to ensure pathways for those wanting to study engineering. This specifically addressed a gap in the market."

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