

IHEA: Policy Reform Needed to Support Lifelong Learning and Workforce Growth

As part of its 2025 Federal Election Platform, Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) is calling on the next government to deliver targeted and practical reforms that support lifelong learning and skills development across both the higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors.

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report highlights the urgent need to boost participation and attainment in tertiary education, warning that Australia will not meet current or future skills needs without significantly increasing the number of graduates across both higher education and VET.

“The policy framework must strengthen connections between vocational and higher education, enabling flexible learning pathways and improved student outcomes. This includes advancing the development of stackable microcredentials, short courses, and a modernised funding model,” said IHEA Chief Executive Officer, the Hon Dr Peter Hendy.

IHEA strongly supports the introduction of a Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), modelled on the United Kingdom’s approach, which would enable students to access a single income-contingent loan throughout their careers.

“We need to break down the barriers between VET and higher education. Lifelong learning depends on supported, transparent pathways and access to flexible, modular learning options,” Dr Hendy said.

To realise this vision, IHEA recommends the establishment of a unified student loan system across the entire tertiary education sector, ensuring equitable access for all learners, especially those in independent higher education.

“It is essential that students have the ability and incentive to upskill and re-skill at every stage of their lives, accessing education that aligns with their personal and professional needs,” Dr Hendy added.

“A unified loan system would give learners greater control over their educational journeys and support the development of skills critical to navigating an ever-evolving job market,” Dr Hendy said.

“Ensuring competitive neutrality both between and within the entire education sector to create a seamless learning experience for Australians across their whole lives is key to achieving the future workforce we need,” Dr Hendy said.

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