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MEDIA RELEASE

CIT GOVERNANCE INQUIRY MUST NOT BECOME A RUBBER STAMP FOR A MERGER

The Australian Education Union ACT Branch says the ACT Government's inquiry into the governance arrangements of the Canberra Institute of Technology risks being compromised before it has even begun, with Chief Minister Andrew Barr already indicating his support for a merger between CIT and the University of Canberra.

AEU ACT Branch President Angela Burroughs said the future of Canberra's public TAFE deserved a genuine and open investigation, not a process designed around a predetermined outcome.

"If the Government has already decided that a merger is the answer, then this isn't an inquiry into CIT's future - it's a process for justifying a decision that has already been made."

"Any discussion about the future of CIT must be robust, fair and have integrity. Most importantly, the people who know CIT best - its teachers, support staff, students and industry partners - need to have a genuine voice in that discussion."

Ms Burroughs said the public debate was already being shaped by the University of Canberra's own agenda and the pressures facing the university sector.

"The future of CIT should not be determined by what is convenient for the University of Canberra or what fits the agenda of its leadership."

"CIT is a public TAFE with a distinct purpose. It exists to provide the vocational education and practical skills Canberra's communities and industries need. That purpose must be at the centre of any discussion about its future."

Ms Burroughs said merging TAFE and universities was not a new idea and should not be treated as the inevitable solution to the challenges facing vocational education.

"We have seen what happens when public education institutions are increasingly shaped by corporate and financial pressures. The experience of the university sector should make us very cautious about simply assuming that bigger institutions are better institutions."

AEU ACT Branch Vice President (TAFE) Karen Noble said CIT's distinct role as a public TAFE should be recognised and protected.

"CIT has its own pedagogy, workforce, facilities, industry relationships and purpose. Those things are assets, not problems that need to be absorbed into a larger institution."

The AEU said CIT should work closely with the University of Canberra, industry and other education providers, including through stronger pathways and recognition of qualifications, but that collaboration did not require CIT to lose its distinct identity.



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“Universities and TAFEs can collaborate without one absorbing the other. Students can move between sectors, qualifications can be recognised, and institutions can work together on Canberra’s skills needs while maintaining the distinct role of public TAFE,” Ms Noble said.

“Canberra needs skilled workers, apprentices and technicians. It needs a public institution whose job is to train them.”

The AEU said it would participate constructively in the inquiry and advocate for a future for CIT that protects its public purpose, distinct identity and ability to meet Canberra’s vocational education and training needs.

“The starting point must be no forgone conclusions. If the Government genuinely wants to investigate the future of CIT, it needs to be prepared to consider the possibility that the best answer is to invest in and rebuild CIT - not simply restructure it into something else,” Ms Noble said.

“Now is the time for the ACT to be Nation leading and truly rebuild TAFE.”

For further comment:

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