

The Victorian government's budget announcement on May 1 included a significant reinvestment in TAFE. Courses in [30 key skill priority areas](#) will be free from the beginning of 2019.

This bold move signals a shift away from the [market approach](#) to technical and vocational education. This approach saw many people caught up in [fees debacles](#)

who received low quality training through the dodgy market practices of predatory education providers pursuing financial advantage and profit. This policy puts TAFE squarely back at the centre of a trusted technical and vocational education and training system.

What's changing?

The market approach treated TAFEs as no different from private providers, putting them in direct competition with each other. Yet, TAFE institutions are not able to just target profitable courses and are required to offer the social support in ways private providers do not.

The Victorian government's new [budget policy for TAFE](#) represents a measured shift away from an over focus on how easily bodies can move in and out of education markets. TAFE institutions across the state can now consolidate their role as key public education institutions. These institutions are part of the critical infrastructure that builds community and individual abilities to cope with and adjust to changing social and economic circumstances.

TAFE has occupied that middle institutional role of attending to local, community and industry and employment needs in ways that universities and school don't and can't.

State governments, as the owners of TAFE institutions, have a vital role in ensuring skills and education infrastructure is sustainable. This budget investment moves a significant way toward ensuring just that.

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The TAFE teaching workforce in Victoria recently reached [a new enterprise agreement](#) that will also improve teaching conditions. This will ensure TAFE has a workforce that can ensure quality education.

Who benefits?

The [free courses](#) being made available from 2019 will significantly contribute to skills mix required for the Australian state with the [fastest growing population](#). Many of the pre-apprenticeship, Certificate II level courses will open options for senior school aged students not seeking a path to university, and provide them with the opportunities to learn skills for work.

Certificate III courses in agriculture, aged care, civil construction and concreting will ensure Victoria develops the right skills mix for the growing population. It will also ensure skilled workers can participate in the road and [rail infrastructure projects](#) that have already started.

Metropolitan and rural communities around Victoria will also benefit immensely. In some rural settings, where school [completion rates are lower](#) than those in metropolitan areas, Certificate II, III and IV courses will provide a way for young people to stay connected to education and ensure transitions to employment.

The abolition of fees for diploma level courses in nursing, building and construction, community services and accounting is a game changer. It will ensure TAFEs in Victoria are full service education institutions. This means pre-tertiary and tertiary level education options will be freely available to people who will make their future through going to TAFE. Tertiary education in the form of diplomas has been a tradition for many individuals, families and communities.

Private providers say the policy isn't equitable

The peak member organisation representing private providers, [ACPET](#), was quick to [express concern](#) about this budget initiative. This bold move by the Victorian government to fund publicly-owned TAFE institutions is being lambasted as not equitable. This notion of equity is curious, as it's more concerned with equity as revenue and capital, rather than access and participation for those who are often left behind as a consequence of social changes.

Private providers will not be funded by the state government as part of this initiative, so they have argued students will be limited in their choice of providers.

Re-centring TAFE as a key institution

The Victorian government's commitment to TAFE through the provision of free courses will re-instill trust in a technical and vocational education and training system. The sector badly let down the Australian public when the VET FEE HELP loans scandals got out of hand and did much to undermine TAFE and the wider VET system.

As Professor Leesa Wheeahan, from the University of Toronto, [has eloquently argued](#) :

we've got to move back from the disastrous policies of the last 10 years and start reinvesting in TAFE as the key anchor institutions of communities and regions.

The opportunities that will be afforded through free TAFE will build the basis for a more equitable Victoria. Those who are sufficiently prepared will now be able to access education options that will have personal and economic benefits.

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The policy misadventures that saw TAFE emaciated, and the community lose faith in the vocational education and training sector, caused considerable individual and social damage.

The Andrews labor government was elected on platform to [rescue TAFE](#) . The progress has been slow, and it would be premature to say this has been fully achieved. But this reinvestment in TAFE in Victoria resets the course of TAFE as a key public education institution for the

Free TAFE in Victoria: who benefits and why other states should consider it

Written by John Pardy, Education Lecturer and Researcher, Monash University

community, industry and individuals. This represents long awaited signs for cautious optimism about TAFE's future in Victoria.

Other states and territories could follow suit and similarly reinvest in their TAFE systems through a comparable policy initiative.

John Pardy ne travaille pas, ne conseille pas, ne possède pas de parts, ne reçoit pas de fonds d'une organisation qui pourrait tirer profit de cet article, et n'a déclaré aucune autre affiliation que son poste universitaire.

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