

Press Release: When will the real education debate begin?

ACDE attacks Kemp/Lee debate

Today's National Press Club debate between Federal Minister for Education, Dr David Kemp, and Shadow Minister, Mr Michael Lee, failed to address the most important issues confronting education, according to the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

“Sadly, the two major parties obviously still view education as a cost rather than an investment”, said ACDE President, Professor Mary Kalantzis. “Despite listing the need to build our national investment in education as a top priority, Dr Kemp has presided over a government which now spends just 4.3% of public investment on education as a proportion of GDP, significantly less than the OECD average of 5%”.

And despite describing the reduction in the HECS repayment threshold as “the most unfair change” to education brought in under the Coalition, Mr Lee refused to commit the ALP to increasing this threshold, pending discussion of the budget figures. “Both parties remain obsessed with the costs of education, when the reality is that education produces economic growth to the nation and demonstrable economic benefits to individuals”, said Professor Kalantzis. “Educated individuals have lower unemployment rates, higher earnings, and better chances of social mobility. We all know this but the major parties are still refusing to act on it.”

The debate between Mr Lee and Dr Kemp also focussed on the ALP's plan for an online university. Yet ACDE figures suggest that the digital divide is widening, the regional divide is severe, and inequity in Australian education is entrenched. “An online university is not a substitute for redressing the regional and digital divide through targeted investment”, said Professor Kalantzis.

According to Professor Kalantzis, “the obsession of both parties with literacy, numeracy and the ‘old basics’ of the three RRRs is also of great concern.”

“The knowledge economy requires IT skills, language and cultural skills, navigational skills and broad capabilities. A knowledge nation must look beyond reading and writing and focus on teaching and measuring the ‘new basics’”. Professor Kalantzis argued that these new basics were clearly outlined in the ACDEs *New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education*, and that the Charter provided a more comprehensive plan than presented by either Dr Kemp or Mr Lee.

Professor Kalantzis is available for interview, and *New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education* is available from www.acde.edu.au (Charter for Change).

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