

Poor job advice to students attacked

By Shane Green

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The Federal Government will overhaul the careers counselling system in schools, declaring that too many young people are being pressured to go to university instead of pursuing trades and other careers.

Citing high university drop-out rates and chronic industry problems in attracting apprentices, the Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, has questioned the quality of careers advice given to students.

Dr Nelson said he had discovered that careers counsellors fell into two categories. The first were committed, informed and enthusiastic. But the second were people who had "fallen into careers counselling by default" in some cases, former teachers, or those who had worked in TAFEs.

This category was "essentially lost and bordering on disinterested". He said: "I've had far too much experience dealing now with industry, with employers and with parents who feel that the advice that their children has been given has either been ill-informed or deliberately misleading.

"I've also had teachers who've told me that they've actually been criticised by principals for actually advising kids to think about going to do an apprenticeship at the end of year 11, rather than going on to university."

Under the overhaul planned by Dr Nelson, the Government will establish a national accreditation and training scheme for counsellors. A manual of best practice will also be released, and secondments to industry will be supported.

The Government will also urge all universities to offer diplomas of education in careers counselling.

Dr Nelson cited the high drop-out rate from university in support of his career counselling changes. By the end of this year, he said, 40,000 students who had got a place at university this year will have dropped out.

One reason for the level of demand for university courses and the high drop-out rate was because "many young people are not going to university because they want to be there, they are there because someone else wants them to be there, often parents".

He began forming his plans after asking six big Victorian home builders why they were employing fewer apprentices.

The industry association had told him that the careers counsellor from one of Melbourne's largest high schools was not sending students to an industry careers' expo "because there aren't any tertiary outcomes".