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**Focusing on the continuing perplexing spin from Government on higher education reform**

Group of Eight (Go8) Chief Executive Vicki Thomson says the Go8 is “disappointed but not surprised” at Education Minister Senator Simon Birmingham’s cynical use of figures and reports to attempt to hoodwink the Senate into supporting the Government’s Budget higher education funding cuts.

“That the Government continues to operate in this way should shock the public but not those of us in the sector who have seen this pattern of behavior for some time,” she says. “Clearly, the Senate is not buying it, with two dissenting reports from the inquiry into the Higher Education Bill recommending that the Bill not be supported. The Go8 would urge the Senate cross benchers to stick firm to this advice.

“The Government report itself claims that a “key policy rationale for the [legislative] amendments” is a report that was released on the day of the committee hearing despite sitting on the Minister’s desk since November 2016 – indicative of how the Government is playing fast and loose with proper policy development.

“This same committee heard that Senior education bureaucrats have no idea how to distribute over half a billion dollars in performance funding designated at risk by the Bill, except that “it is likely to be something around [student] attrition.

“This is bad news for a state like South Australia where student attrition (course drop out) rates are one third above the national average, and with the Government trying to introduce fees for enabling courses that help prepare students for success at university. All this in a restructuring economy dealing with the closure of Holden.

“Students must find it particularly galling to have the Minister claim that a modelled 23 per cent funding increase for universities – largely on the back of increased student fees - is actually “extra taxpayer money.

“Similarly, the Minister’s ongoing misrepresentation of a second Deloitte report to justify cuts to universities – against the advice of the report itself – is perplexing,” Ms Thomson said.

“The Go8 has implored the Senate to block the legislation in its entirety.

“It is only this approach that can ensure Australia’s students will be saved from paying far more for less,” Ms Thomson said.

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