MEDIA RELEASE

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INDUSTRY-LED BOARD FINDS TAFE “BEDROCK OF NATIONAL VET SYSTEM”

Quality leadership essential, and support for funding to ensure TAFE nurtured and maintained

The new industry-led Board of the Australian Workforce Productivity Agency (AWPA) has handed the Tertiary Education and Skills Minister a decisive report on how to tackle Australia’s stalled national productivity, and declared TAFE as the “bedrock” of the national VET system.

The report, Future focus: 2013 National Workforce Development Strategy, was released by the Agency’s Chair Philip Bullock, at the University of Western Sydney Parramatta campus on Friday -- the final day of Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s visit to western Sydney electorates.

The 2013 Workforce Development Strategy nominated TAFE as the bedrock of the national VET system, and labelled quality as a key challenge facing Australia’s competitive model of vocational education, which opened registrations to large numbers of private colleges and providers. Among the recommendations were:

- Increase overall funding by 3 per cent per year to 2025, costing approximately $1.2 billion per annum. The funding boost would support the massive increases in industry demands for a skilled workforce and higher level qualifications.

- That the Australian Government extend Commonwealth-Supported Places to degrees offered by TAFE and vocational colleges, citing a lack of progress in support for higher and specialist degrees delivered by technical and vocational education providers.

- The Job Service Australia contract to require closer collaboration with registered training organisations, to better support training strategies.

- Extend to the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) wider responsibilities for tertiary education professional development, with emphasis on VET teaching, learning and assessment.
- Co-funding for regional employment and workforce development partnerships

The industry-led Board, under Chair, Philip Bullock, a former regional director of IBM, issued more than 12 recommendations supporting the increase in funding, and also called for a federal inquiry into VET strategies and funding.

Martin Riordan, CEO of TAFE Directors Australia, said the AWPA Workforce Development Strategy was an important reference and deserved a response in the upcoming 2013-14 Federal Budget.

“Funding has become critical across the TAFE sector, and this report will begin to correct the imbalance currently in tertiary education policy,” Martin Riordan said.

Mr Riordan also said the Workforce Development Strategy aligns with principles in the newly-endorsed TDA Strategic Plan 2013-15, to be launched at the TDA AGM on 24 May.

Mr Riordan said it was disappointing that AWPA made no specific recommendations to address what it described as confusing and duplicated regulation of the apprenticeship system.

The detailed 2013 Workforce Development Strategy, which included four economic modelling scenarios, said the Agency was disturbed that 2.9 million adult Australians do not have a post-school qualification, with 153,000 annually unemployed and 1.1 million not in the labour force. Using 2006 data, it revealed that 7 million adult Australians scored below Level III for literacy, and 7.9 million below Level III for numeracy.

Returning to quality, AWPA declared that funding, at times, can promote completion rates at the expense of quality, and urged the government to focus on strengthening TAFE’s role in the national VET system.

AWPA also included special mention of the recently launched TDA National Scholarships Foundation under innovative funding for the sector.

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