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SHADOW MINISTER FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
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MEDIA RELEASE

QUALITY IN THE VET SECTOR MUST BE PROTECTED

Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane has foreshadowed weakening the protections in place that safeguard the reputation and quality of the VET sector. In recent years serious issues were raised about the practices of some providers in the sector that were undermining the quality of training being provided, in particular to apprentices.

Shadow Minister for Vocational Education, Sharon Bird, outlined that one of the important actions taken by the former Labor Government to strengthen the system was to establish the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) as a national regulator.

“I am concerned that the Minister’s comments this week in The Australian on regulation of the sector seems to dismiss some of the problems that have emerged in the open training market as simply 'less optimised', which seriously underestimates what the evidence indicated in the ASQA reports,” Ms Bird said.

“I am also very concerned that the Minister’s comments suggest he plans to seriously water down the role of the regulator.”

"...we’re looking at a more streamlined approach with a self-regulation perspective. There’s far too much regulation in the system.”

He would not say what the plans meant for the national training regulator, the ASQA, which is being reviewed by consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"I don’t want to get into speculation about what bodies might stay and what might go,” he said.

The Australian, 19 February 2014
“Recent ASQA reports indicate that too many providers are seeking to recruit students through incorrect and sometimes unscrupulous marketing and enrolment procedures. As this most often involves quite vulnerable learners, the impact, financially and educationally, can be devastating for the individuals.

“As I have previously pointed out, the quality and reliability of qualifications achieved by workers in industries such as construction and aged care are of significant importance to the health, safety and well-being of workers and clients in both these sectors.

“Whilst it may be useful to use a risk assessment approach to the level of intervention a provider engages in with the national regulator it is clear that the problem is a serious one.

“Our vocational education sector is critical to improving participation and productivity across all industry sectors. The training must be reliable in its quality of delivery and value of outcomes for students and employers.”

When Labor formed Government in 2007, we faced skills shortages in vital industries and there were no plans to help vulnerable job seekers, mature-aged Australians or students struggling to get a training qualification. In six years we reformed and rebuilt the skills and training sector. We delivered record investment of over $19 billion and created a dynamic environment that positions Australia so we can compete in the Asian Century.

The Labor Government also established the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA) to directly and constructively engage with industry on current and future skills demands and how best to meet them.

We also established the ASQA as a national regulator to maintain the quality and reputation of our vocational sector. It is crucial that that the Minister ensures that ASQA’s role in maintaining the quality of the training that students and employers receive is sustained.

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