

## **Why VET hardly rates a mention**

**The VET sector is largely ignored by political parties of all persuasions. GILLIAN SHADWICK wants that to change**

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The program for the National TAFE Congress, being held in Sydney this week, looks set to raise some of the critical issues current in the VET sector. Even at a time when education is seen as a key "vote winner", the election campaign seems dominated (on both sides of politics) by the school - and to a lesser extent the university - sectors. It seems VET hardly rates a serious mention.

This is shortsighted policy making. There could hardly be a more pressing and critical issue facing the Australian community than meeting the challenge to develop the skills needed for industry, particularly in the traditional trades areas. Studies and reports from major industry and trade union groups have drawn attention to the crisis in skilled employment that Australia is now confronting. It is grim now and will get worse.

It is clear from the Government's Intergenerational Report that as Australia's population and workforce ages, economic growth will be dependent on increasing productivity and increasing labour force participation. Both will require a substantial and sustained investment in the training of our young people and older workers. Unless this is done, significant numbers of people without the skills to participate in the workforce will add to the burden on others in their own generation and the younger generations who follow them.

Around 70 per cent of Australians do not go to university. These people rely on TAFE and other non-university bodies to train them in the skills they will need in the future and much better provision needs to be made for them.

Significantly more attention needs to be given to identifying and meeting the structural and financial needs of the VET sector. It is extraordinarily shortsighted and in fact quite irresponsible in a time of vast government surpluses, identified skills gaps and an ageing workforce and still too many unemployed young people for us not as a nation to be investing strongly in VET. This shortsightedness will start bite harder in the manufacturing and traditional trades as well as new skills areas over the next five years.

The urgent need for action to address the crisis that has now emerged in skilled employment is clear. An important part of the solution will be to provide all Australians with at least two years post-school education and training, including vocational education and training qualifications. Better provision also needs to be made to up-skill and re-skill those already in the workforce.

TAFE institutes must be much better resourced so that additional places can be provided and the TAFE sector can play its part in overcoming current skills shortages. TDA is calling for a minimum of 5 per cent additional annual growth funding in real terms under a renegotiated ANTA agreement.

TDA also believes that there would be merit in an independent review of Australia's future vocational education and training needs and how these should best be met.

Gillian Shadwick is Chair of TAFE Directors Australia.

### **TDA congress highlights**

- The theme for the congress, Realising Australia's Potential, focuses on the new national VET strategy. Sub-themes will pick up on the three strategy visions of working for communities, business and individuals. Jack Dusseldorp, chair of Dusseldorp Skills Forum will deliver the first keynote address on the contribution of TAFE and VET to Australia's social and economic well being.

- Dr Laurie Bassi from the US will synthesise a growing body of rigorous research that points to human capital management as the most important driver of business results. Her address 'What CEOs and CFOs Need to Know About HR Stuff' will focus on what constitutes superior human capital management, its returns, what this means for training and performance improvement and implications for government policy in promoting workplace education and training.

- Bill Wilson, Co-Chair of the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC) will discuss the contribution TAFE makes to our communities. Elaine Henry of the Smith Family will speak about the powerful impact of education and training impact on the lives of individuals.