

MEDIA RELEASE
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**RELEASE OF TAFE DIRECTORS SKILLS AND TRAINING WHITE
PAPER**

Labor welcomes the release today of the TAFE Directors Australia *Investing in Productivity* Report, a submission to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Labor will closely examine the recommendations made by TAFE Directors Australia, including:

- Streamlining vocational courses and qualifications; and
- Widening research and development and innovation to Australia's TAFE Institutes.

By the Government's own admission, Australia faces a shortage of 200,000 skilled workers over the next five years. By ignoring and neglecting the importance of TAFE to skills and training, the Howard Government has exacerbated this crisis and shortage.

Labor recognises that in order to ensure Australia's future economic prosperity, we must lift our productivity by investing in the education, skills and training of our people and our workforce.

Today's Report goes to the very heart of this issue and puts the responsibility for today's skills crisis squarely at the feet of John Howard.

The Report focuses on:

- Accelerating skills development;
- Building the overall level skill level of the workforce; and
- Improving the accessibility of training and education.

Furthermore, it underlines the fact that vocational education can be a great career choice for our children, as not every young Australian can, wants to, or should go to University.

The Report is recognition that after 11 long years in office, the Howard Government has comprehensively failed Australia's vocational education and training sector, most particularly our TAFE's institutions.

TAFE's are responsible for the substantial majority of vocational education and training in Australia. Despite this,

- In 1997 the Howard Government cut funding to TAFEs, reducing Commonwealth investment in vocational education by 13 per cent in the three years to 2000;
- Between 2000-04, Commonwealth investment subsequently only increased by 1 per cent;
- Since 1997, according to data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), real expenditure per hour of TAFE curriculum has fallen by nearly 24 per cent.

The Howard Government ignores this reality and has been doing and saying anything to avoid its responsibility for these appalling statistics.

John Howard and Andrew Robb duck and weave on their responsibility for this skills crisis by referring to the more than 400,000 so-called "apprentices" in training today. What they fail to mention is that only 150,000 of these are actually in traditional trade apprenticeship areas.

Similarly, of the 142,000 apprentice completions last year, only about 16 per cent, or just 23,000 were traditional trade apprenticeships, the areas where we face particularly acute skills shortages.

John Howard and Andrew Robb certainly don't advertise the fact that over their 11 long years in office, the average annual number of traditional trade apprenticeships has been about 120,000, compared to the 137,000 annual average traditional trade apprenticeships under the previous Labor Government, a 13 per cent better record by Labor.

In addition, completion rates for traditional trade apprenticeships over the term of the Howard Government have fallen from 64 per cent in 1998 to only 57 per cent in 2005 – much less than Labor's last year in office, when Australia had an apprenticeship completion rate of more than 70 per cent.

The Howard Government's solution to this problem – Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) – which Andrew Robb at the National Press Club recently called 'beacons of excellence' will not resolve this problem.

ATCs will only produce their first qualified tradesperson in another three years, and even then will only produce approximately 7,500 students by 2009. This at a time when 325,000 Australians have been turned away from skills training at TAFEs since 1998.

The TAFE Directors Report again underlines the fact that Australia's skills and training crisis has been signed, sealed and delivered by the complacency and neglect of the Howard Government over more than a decade.

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