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TAFE welcomes Business Council's bold plan for tertiary education

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) has strongly welcomed the plan released today by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) for education in Australia.

The report, *Future Proof, Protecting Australians through Education and Skills*, released by BCA Chief Executive Jennifer Westacott, deserves serious attention.

TDA Chief Executive Craig Robertson said Australia's education system, the skills in the workforce and its research and development capabilities have helped it maintain a competitive advantage in global terms.

"However, we risk being overtaken by countries with more adventurous and forward-looking education policies, unless all governments come together and take this report seriously," he said.

"TAFEs strongly support the increased focus on vocational education and training as a key economic lever. TAFEs assist Australians to acquire the skills they'll need to navigate the world of work and enterprise.

"This is the core mission of TAFEs, but it seems to be lost in policy discourse," Mr Robertson said.

"Proposed reforms to higher education fly in the face of the BCAs recommendations. TDA has been advocating for some time for a coherent approach to tertiary education as the only way to solve the distortions in funding and regulation across the sectors," he said.

"Students in university have a guaranteed government subsidy and do not pay a fee on their student loan. If a student prefers a work-related applied learning approach, it's basically hit-and-miss. Some states and territories may provide support, but if the student wants a loan, it's restricted in value and course availability, while they pay a 20% or 25% loan fee," Mr Robertson said.

Future Proof's focus on empowering individuals to navigate their way through tertiary education, supported by a lifelong account for learning, could be the key to Australians adopting a lifelong approach to training and learning.

"Australians will need to enhance their skills for work on a regular basis, and TAFEs have open, adaptable programs to meet these needs" Mr Robertson said.

“But TAFEs need to be given greater autonomy in setting and accrediting courses so they can respond to the needs of these learners. TAFEs provide the ideal platform to offer opportunity for all Australians to pursue their career objectives,” he said.

TDA also welcomed the report’s focus on building the aspirations of school age young people.

“Governments should consider TAFEs as quality alternatives for senior school education. Too many young people leave school disillusioned about their ability to contribute in the labour market. An applied learning environment in a TAFE setting should be given serious consideration under this plan,” he said.

TDA said that the review of the Australian Qualifications Framework announced by the Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham provides the ideal platform to consider such bold moves.

“Our young people deserve the respect of being offered genuine opportunities in education and training. TAFEs look forward to working with BCA and governments on progressing these issues.”

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