

11 May 2005

FOR MEDIA

Budget Fails to Provide for Australia's Future Skills Needs

TAFE Directors Australia said today that the Budget had failed to make adequate provision for meeting Australia's future skills needs.

TDA's Chair Barry Peddle said "It is extremely disappointing that so little is being done to strengthen Australia's vocational education and training system at a time when it has become very apparent that it is critically important to invest in training if Australia's future skills needs to be met.

"The support being provided to help attract people into the traditional trades is very welcome, as is the funding for additional training places for people with a disability, and parents and older workers seeking to re-enter the workforce, although this is not being provided until 2006.

"But the training needs of most of the nation's workforce are being ignored. TAFE, the nation's major training provider, continues to be starved of funds. The facts are that Commonwealth Government funding for TAFE is now significantly less in real terms than it was in 1997 despite large increases in demand and in numbers of students. There are many thousands of students wanting to study in TAFE but for whom places cannot be found. Substantially increased funding is urgently needed so that TAFE can train Australia's tradespeople, technicians and paraprofessionals of the future.

"Government statements underline the need to plan for the future. Nothing is more important for the future than investing in education and training so that we have the highly skilled workforce required to ensure that Australian industries can compete successfully in international markets. This demands a much greater national investment in skills development and an investment that goes beyond the traditional trades. We need to put resources into all areas where demand for skills is growing strongly – our biotechnology, health sciences, food processing, business services and community and health care industries for example. We also need to ensure that people are encouraged to refresh and upgrade their skills to keep abreast of technological change so that they continue to participate in the workforce effectively as they get older.

"It is extraordinary that at a time when large Budget surpluses have been generated that the Government is not prepared to make the investment required for the nation's future skills development."

Contact: Barry Peddle 0419 578 536
Margaret Fanning 02 6281 7320 or 0402 090 035