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FOR MEDIA

GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES ON TRAINING DO NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESS AUSTRALIA'S SKILLS NEEDS

TAFE Directors Australia said today "While it is pleasing to see recognition by the Government of the challenges posed by skills shortages and the importance of vocational education and training, the policies announced fall well short of what is required to address Australia's future skills needs."

TDA Chair Gillian Shadwick said "TDA agrees that more emphasis needs to be put on apprenticeships in the traditional trades as well as higher level skills qualifications in other areas. There has been too much emphasis on short term traineeships at the expense of medium and higher level skills training.

Ms Shadwick said that more information is needed on how the Institute for Trade Skill Excellence will work. "TDA is concerned that the new system may be introducing another and unnecessary layer of bureaucracy into the system. The Prime Minister's policy statement did not make it clear how the Institute for Trade Skill Excellence will relate to the existing system for registering training organisations and recognising qualifications. Nor is it clear how it will relate to the new Industry Skills Councils that have just been set up. It is certainly not clear how the new system will attract greater numbers into apprenticeships and how additional training places are to be funded. These issues are really the crux of the problem.

"It is also very disappointing that the Prime Minister's statement makes no reference to the needs for a much greater national investment in skills development generally. 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. Substantially increased funding is urgently needed so that TAFE can train Australia's technicians and paraprofessionals of the future.

"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. The latest figures show that there are over 42,000 students wanting to study in TAFE but for whom places cannot be found

" We need to provide properly for Australia's longer term skills needs. We need a comprehensive approach designed to provide skills rich, high value training for all sectors of the economy where there is strong demand. Unless we do this, we will fail in our objective of developing a 'smarter economy'. We will fail in getting the improvements in productivity that we need and we will fail in resolving the nation's skills shortages problems."

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