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MEDIA RELEASE

TAFE OVERLOOKED AGAIN

TAFE Directors Australia today deplored the fact that Australia's largest provider of vocational education and training had yet again been overlooked in the latest funding round.

TDA's Chair, Gillian Shadwick, said that yesterday's announcement of \$31.3 billion of Commonwealth funding for schools, in the wake of recent strong increases in funding for universities, had clearly highlighted yet again the neglect suffered by the TAFE sector.

"This has been compounded by the fact that the new ANTA Agreement was not signed late last year," Ms Shadwick said. "TAFE is therefore getting less funding, at a time when there is significant unmet demand.

This directly impacts on TAFE's ability to make a significant contribution to the economic and social well-being of Australians. TAFE meets the skill needs of individuals over their working lifetimes, as well as meeting the skills needs of business and industry. TAFE has a critical role in building community capacity and contributing to social cohesion.

TAFE helps people get jobs; this is especially important in times of growing unemployment (the ABS recently announced an increase in the jobless rate to 5.9 per cent in February). TAFE assists young people find employment and trains them for their career – for example, through New Apprenticeships, programs for youth at risk, or as a real alternative to university. A 2002 survey of TAFE graduates showed that, within 6 months of graduation, 87% of TAFE graduates were either employed or in further study.

TAFE is not just for school leavers. The average age of a TAFE student is 28. The Federal Treasurer is calling on Australians to postpone retirement and stay in the workforce. Australian workers will be ill-equipped to do so, unless funding is provided to TAFE to support them to gain new skills or change jobs.

Skill shortages are widespread, particularly in the traditional trades. We will not be able to support innovative and flexible world class industries unless the TAFE sector is better resourced. From a national perspective, there needs to be increased funding for TAFE as well as schools and universities."

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