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## *Communiqué*

### **‘TAFE meets Parliament - Skills Innovation 2020’**

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) hosted the inaugural ‘**TAFE meets Parliament**’ leaders’ forum at Parliament House Canberra on 16 and 17 September. More than 150 CEOs and senior staff from Australia’s 58 TAFE Institutes joined government, industry, media and educational leaders for the forum.

Hosting the event inside **Parliament House** symbolised a new era of TAFE’s more direct engagement with government and its stronger influence in shaping a national vision and future policy directions for workforce skills and innovation.

The event celebrated the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TAFE Directors Australia** and provided TAFE CEOs, directors and senior managers with opportunities to meet and discuss key policy issues with members of Federal Parliament and heads of national agencies.

High profile speakers, informed roundtable discussions and ample opportunity for delegates’ questions and comments were the hallmarks of a rich and varied two-day program.

#### **Highlights of ‘TAFE meets Parliament’**

Highlights of ‘TAFE meets Parliament’ included presentations by:

- ◆ **The Hon. Julia Gillard**, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion who delivered the Mick Young Oration, at the TDA Parliamentary Dinner.
- ◆ **The Hon. Brendan O’Connor**, MP, Minister for Employment Participation who launched the new TDA tuition assurance scheme (TAS).
- ◆ **Phillip Bullock**, Chair, **Skills Australia** who shared his vision of a flexible high quality national training system with a major role for the TAFE sector

- ◆ **Gary Banks AO, CEO, Productivity Commission** who emphasised the importance of VET in improving the skills match and skills utilisation as part of the productivity dynamic which must drive the future growth of Australian industry.
- ◆ **Geoff Hall, CEO, New College, Nottingham, UK** who drew on his UK experience to highlight the value and importance of further education in overcoming the cycle of intergenerational poverty.
- ◆ **Phillip Clark AM, Chair Higher Education Endowment Fund Advisory Board** who examined the opportunities for TAFE to win Education Infrastructure Funds from 2010, particularly for projects which were both innovative and collaborative.
- ◆ **Andrew Crapuchettes, American academic and CEO of Economic Modelling Solutions**, delivered a keynote lunch presentation on the value of community colleges, introducing socio economic modelling methodology now used in the USA, UK and Canada to measure and assess the value of colleges to local communities and to graduates.
- ◆ **Antoine Barnaart, General Manager Australian Pacific Technical College** set the scene for international managers, with a key note that challenged delegates to think about the future of international engagement.
- ◆ **Alan Olsen, Director Strategic Policy Research in Education** presented new benchmarking research on the performance of TAFE's in international marketing and recruitment.
- ◆ **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Members** who joined delegates for an open discussion session.
- ◆ **'TAFE meets Parliament'** also offered many opportunities for delegates to engage informally with individual Ministers, Senators and Members and with the heads and senior officers of national agencies.

## **Key Themes of 'TAFE meets Parliament'**

The following key themes emerged from the keynote presentations, roundtable discussions and response from TAFE directors and senior managers:

### ***Productivity and workforce development***

Participants emphasised Australia's future productivity growth as dependent on more workers with higher level skills *and* increased workforce participation *and* improved levels of skill utilisation.

### ***Social inclusion and equity***

It was maintained that disadvantaged and marginalised people need affordable access to appropriate education and training, but they also require the ongoing support necessary to successfully complete qualifications and utilise their skills in meaningful employment.

It was stressed that workforce participation brings social as well as economic benefits for both individuals and the community and is integral to productivity growth.

### ***Contestability and Competition***

A strong perspective was that a flexible TAFE system can respond positively to contestable public funding. It was agreed that contestability needs to be complemented with robust quality assurance arrangements and equity of access, participation and outcomes for all individuals.

### ***The changing architecture of Australian post-secondary education***

Participants claimed that the structural boundaries between VET and higher education are becoming increasingly blurred and competition is increasing within and between the sectors. In this emerging environment, the role of TAFE as a public provider of tertiary education may need to be further clarified and articulated.

### ***Innovation and capacity building***

TAFE was seen as a world leader in qualifications based on applied occupational knowledge. Participants agreed that TAFE needs to better value and capitalise on this considerable intellectual property.

From 2010, the Education Infrastructure Fund will provide opportunities for TAFE to further enhance its innovative capacity, particularly where Institutes collaborate with each other and/or with other educational organisations.

### ***Strengthening the international presence of Australian TAFE.***

Participants in the international stream of the forum considered a broad range of opportunities for growing TAFE's international education business and expanding its international education and research activities and networks.

The deliberations and conclusions of the forum have provided a sound basis for a targeted TDA strategy to re-position and strengthen Australian TAFE's national role.

## **The Next Steps**

The '**TAFE meets Parliament**' proceedings and papers will be published as a TDA Occasional Paper.

A TDA position statement and action agenda will be developed for each of the key themes. This will form the basis of TDA's 2008 submission to the Productivity Agenda Working Group and provide the policy framework for TDA's 2009-2012 Strategic Plans.

The Board is also cognisant of the need for periodic review and renewal of its priorities through ongoing engagement between TAFE Directors and key government and industry decision makers. This could be achieved by scheduling a two-yearly '**TAFE meets Parliament**' event, with the TDA Board also continuing its ongoing contact with Ministers, Parliamentary Committees, national agencies and peak industry bodies.

## **Feedback**

Members of Parliament and Chief Executive Officers of key national agencies responded enthusiastically to TDA's invitation to meet TAFE leaders and gain a greater understanding of key issues affecting the sector.

Demand for participation in the '**TAFE meets Parliament**' forum exceeded the number of places available. All respondents to the formal evaluation indicated that the forum met or exceeded their expectations. One delegate commented: "I came away with increased confidence that TDA is working hard to engage with points of influence"; another commented "it was by far the best conference so far".

The TDA Board joins delegates in thanking TDA staff for their hard work in ensuring the success of this major TDA event.