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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Vocational Education and Training**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 15 May 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Andrews, Karen, MP

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**Mrs ANDREWS** (McPherson) (11:17): I take the opportunity today to outline the action that the government is taking to address skills shortages and to provide more education and training options through the VET sector.

Successive governments have talked about Australia's skill shortage, but this government is actively working to address the gap that has existed for many years now between supply and demand. To do this we need a demand-driven vocational education and training system, one that is responsive to the needs of the labour market. And we need to pursue reforms to ensure that the VET sector is delivering the training and skills that are needed, giving people skills so that they can enter the workforce, fostering development in regional Australia and providing valuable access and education for the disadvantaged in our community, for whom education can truly be a life changer.

The government came to office last year with a plan to improve outcomes in the skills and training system. The minister appointed a VET reform task force to commence that task and together we have set about actively engaging with stakeholders in this process right around the country. I have been very pleased to work very closely with the Minister for Industry throughout this process.

The training system has an important role to play in meeting the skill needs of industry today and into the future. These priorities for reform must include a central role for industry, greater focus on student outcomes and quality, less red tape and unnecessary regulation whilst supporting quality and, in tight budget circumstances, targeted funding and better value for money.

Our national competitiveness, productivity and ongoing wealth depend upon an efficient VET system delivering these skills, training and job-ready workers that employers want. This means putting employers in the driving seat and encouraging greater industry investment. It means better, not more, regulation and, amongst all this, it means delivering higher quality outcomes for students. To achieve this we need everyone—states and territories, TAFEs, adult education providers, agricultural colleges, private providers, community organisations, industry skills centres and commercial and enterprise providers—working together with a common purpose.

Based on the goodwill that exists and the acknowledgement that reform is required, I am sure we can deliver the system that Australia wants and needs. At the inaugural Council of Australian Governments Industries and Skills Council meeting on 3 April 2014, state and territory training ministers and Minister Macfarlane agreed on objectives for reform and identified three key priorities for action: examining the standards for providers and regulators to ensure they better recognise the different levels of risk posed by different providers, enabling the regulators to deal more effectively with poor quality in the sector to improve confidence and meet the government's deregulation objectives; reducing the burden on the VET sector that arises from the constant updates to training packages; and ensuring that industry is involved in policy development and oversight of the performance of the VET sector and that governance arrangements and committees are streamlined.

The government will now develop an action plan for reform from 1 July 2014 and will continue to engage with stakeholders over this time. Of course, as part of building of VET system, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment is reviewing the TAFE system. Workshops are underway across the country to hear firsthand how to improve TAFE's work. Students, teachers, administrators and industry all want a TAFE system that is simple to access, efficient and effective. Consultations have started and will be going on right through to March next year. I certainly encourage my colleagues to urge their stakeholders in the VET sector to make submissions.

In the brief time I have left I also want to acknowledge the investment in training that was made in the federal budget this week. The industry minister announced a new \$476 million industry skills fund to streamline training and deliver close to 200,000 targeted training places and training support services over four years. The fund will complement our trade support loans which offer assistance to those who are completing an

apprenticeship and will target occupations on the National Skills Needs List, such as plumbers, diesel mechanics, electricians and fitters. This emphasis on training and skills is also reflected in the government's historic extension of Commonwealth funding for diplomas and a range of pathway courses that really open up educational opportunities for the many young people who may not want to pursue a university degree. This is a fundamental shift in our approach to higher education and an equity measure that I applaud. I am very pleased that training and vocational education are being given the priority they deserve by this government and I look forward to continuing to work with the minister to ensure we improve the sector with the practical aim of addressing Australia's skill shortage.