MEDIA RELEASE
Monday 19th March 2012

ACPET Welcomes “Skills for All Australians” Package
Good Reforms must not be undermined at implementation

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) today congratulated the Prime Minister on the release of the “Skills for All Australians” paper, with the peak body saying the proposed reforms are comprehensive and well designed.

ACPET CEO, Claire Field, said the Prime Minister and Senator Chris Evans are to be congratulated for their genuine consultation with the vocational education and training (VET) sector, adding that the evidence of those consultations is clear in the package of reforms that will improve quality, choice and transparency in the sector.

“Overall this is a very good package of reforms that will benefit students, institutions and employers alike,” Ms Field said.

“Howeover, it is critical that the Federal Government acts quickly to implement these measures, and fixes emerging problems within the national regulator, ASQA, so that good policy is not let down by poor or tardy implementation.”

“The Australian economy cannot afford to wait for vital skills reforms, so I urge State Governments to sign up to these measures at the upcoming April COAG meeting.”

ACPET Response to Specific Reforms

Student Entitlement
ACPET supports strongly the introduction of guaranteed government subsidised training to certificate 3 level.

“Encouraging more students to embark on a vocational learning pathway is essential for the health of Australia’s economy, but moreover, it will improve the life chances and employment prospects of thousands of Australians each year. This is highly important, fundamental reform,” Ms Field said.

VET FEE HELP
ACPET is pleased that VET FEE HELP will continue to be available to Diploma and Advanced Diploma students in both private and public institutions. However, applying a 20% administration fee to students in private institutions but not public institutions is an inconsistent and unhelpful barrier to student choice.

“The Federal Government can’t have an ‘each way bet’ on fee help for vocational students. If students are to be treated fairly and encouraged to exercise choice in their education, then the administrative fee waiver should be extended to all students in Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses, not just those in public institutions, Ms Field said.”
Quality and Transparency Reforms
ACPET welcomes measures to improve quality and transparency in the vocational education sector, particularly the emphasis on external verification of assessments, improvements to teacher quality and improved data collection. These are all areas in which the private sector has demonstrated leadership in recent years.

“External validation of assessments is fundamental to building community confidence in the VET sector. ACPET has been externally verifying assessments in South Australia and Victoria since 2011, and will roll out those reforms nationwide this year,” Ms Field said.

“We also wholeheartedly support efforts to improve teacher quality. ACPET’s national development framework, introduced this year, provides opportunities for VET teaching professionals to improve the quality of their work and better match quality standards in the sector.”

“Finally, we welcome the Government’s focus on greater transparency and data collection to assess student and employer decision making. Sound, targeted data is essential to meeting the needs of students and employers. ACPET has led the sector in this regard through the introduction of business benchmarking tools for VET providers and we encourage the Government to work with us to ensure data collection is effective and targeted, without creating undue bureaucratic burden for providers.”

Regulation and Implementation
ACPET is concerned that these important and well-thought-out reforms risk being undermined by delayed or poor implementation, and we urge the Federal Government to work quickly and in close consultation with industry to avoid that occurring.

“Establishing an expert panel to examine future VET funding in 2015 is far too late. Many of these reforms will need to be in place by then, making it vital for the panel to convened by next year,” Ms Field said.

“Furthermore, in order to get these reforms right, improvements to the performance of the national regulator, ASQA, will be critical. ACPET has long supported the introduction of a national regulator for VET, but ASQA’s performance to date has been inconsistent. This needs to be addressed in order to do justice to this well-designed skills package.”

Claire Field is available for comment.
Media Contact: Ben Eade, 0406 641 881