MEDIA RELEASE

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR THE FUTURE? CLARITY AND DIRECTION NEEDED.

Industry is calling on all political parties to respond, as a matter of urgency, to the dramatic drop in apprenticeship commencements.

The future of skills development and productivity growth in Australia hangs in the balance, waiting for policy clarity and clear commitment from all sides of politics.

Industry needs to know that the next Australian Government is committed to maintaining an industry led apprenticeship system; and, if so, can they show how they plan to work with industry groups to develop coherent policies promoting work which is integrated with training.

At a meeting today at the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, employer organisations, peak provider groups and Industry Skills Councils strongly stated their commitment to apprenticeships in the context of increasing concerns about productivity, global competitiveness, and rising unemployment particularly youth unemployment.

A series of ad hoc changes to policy, training funding and financial incentives which have cut support of apprenticeships at the Federal and State level have had a dramatic and destabilising impact on apprenticeship commencements, which are now at their lowest level since 1999. Government support for apprenticeships is narrowing such that major growth areas of the economy, including the service sector industries of retail, transport, finance and hospitality are bearing the brunt of the changes, but with all occupations in apprenticeships detrimentally affected.

Employers are losing confidence in the apprenticeship system, not because of a lack of commitment to a long-standing model of training delivered in a work context, but because they cannot rely on consistency in the approach by both Federal and State Governments.

During this election campaign we call on the federal political parties to recognise the importance of apprenticeships to the economy and confirm their commitment to implementing industry driven training outcomes, and specifically to engage with industry post-election on a holistic review of the apprenticeship system with an immediate imperative to get commencements growing again.

The meeting today included ACCI and its member employer groups, together with the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, TAFE Directors Australia, National Association of Apprenticeship Centres and Industry Skills Councils including Innovation and Business Skills Australia, Transport & Logistics ISCs and Energy Skills Australia.