MEDIA RELEASE
Monday, March 21st, 2011

Apprenticeship Changes Could Keep Women out of Training and Employment

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) said today that apprenticeship and traineeship reforms recommended to the Australian Government by an external panel would damage the employment and training prospects of Australia women.

The Final Report of the Expert Panel, “A shared responsibility: Apprenticeships for the 21st Century”, recommends that new criteria should be introduced to financial subsidies for apprentices and trainees, and the report goes on to criticise financial support for traineeships because they are not seen to serve the nation’s skill shortage objectives.

ACPET CEO, Claire Field, said restricting financial support for traineeships in favour of apprenticeships in industries facing skills shortages would do nothing to address the stated issue of low rates of women enrolled in traditional trade apprenticeships, and would instead push many women out of training altogether.

“This Expert Panel’s recommendations would make it harder for women to learn skills and gain employment in a range of industries via traineeships in retail, aged care, child care, health and welfare support workers, and in general business administration/clerical work,” Ms Field said.

“At a time when one in five unemployed people have been out of work for more than a year, it is irrational that the criteria for government support for traineeships should be substantially narrowed.”

“These recommendations would see the Australian Government giving with one hand, while taking away with the other, and those losing out would be women aspiring to improve their career opportunities by undertaking a traineeship.”

ACPET has already questioned the Panel’s use inaccurate apprenticeship and traineeship completion data to inform its study, but Ms Field said the peak body now holds serious concerns about the potential consequences of the Panel’s recommendations and the damage they would do to the prospects of women in the workforce.

“Reforming Australia’s training system will have wide-ranging ramifications – often unintended – for training institutions around the country; on trainees and apprentices themselves; on industry and small business, so it is critical that Government and industry work together on this,” Ms Field said.

“But critically, reform efforts should focus on removing barriers to education, training and employment for those Australians most beset by them, not introducing new barriers that undermine access and equity for people to improve their own circumstances.”

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