MEDIA RELEASE
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Not the time to pick winners and losers in vocational training

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) said today that the Federal Government’s Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook sends mixed messages about the importance of vocational education and training by increasing support for some industries while pulling the rug out from underneath others.

ACPET CEO, Claire Field, said new incentives for apprentices in the construction sector were a welcome measure that should help to target skills shortages in building and construction that remain a burden on the Australian economy.

But Ms Field questioned the wisdom of removing commencement and completion incentives for students undertaking Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications in a range of other qualifications, including retail, which were also experiencing acute skills shortages.

“Removing incentives for retail trainees at a time when retail conditions are depressed and the broader economy remains substantially imbalanced in favour of a slowing mining boom simply doesn’t make sense. The impact on small businesses, which commonly use these incentive payments to fund staff training, will be substantial.” Ms Field said.

“This measure also punishes people undertaking training on a part time or casual basis, running against the grain of government’s calls for a more flexible workforce, and unfairly targeting women and younger people.”

“The Australian Government should be providing incentives for trainees and apprentices in the broadest range of industries possible, and keeping pace with a training sector that offers diverse ways of learning. Instead, they’re saying to women in particular ‘if you don’t want to study the courses we want you to study, we won’t support you.’ In the current political climate this is a very disappointing decision.”

Ms Field said restricting financial support for traineeships in favour of apprenticeships would push many women out of training altogether because women more commonly undertake traineeships, often part time, and are especially prevalent in retail traineeships.

“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.”

“Reforming Australia’s training system 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
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