

Future of Work

Vocational Education and Training Policy

1. Congress re-affirms its support for a strong vocational education and training (VET) system that provides for effective union representation, has effective industry advisory structures, and provides nationally recognised and portable qualification outcomes that are linked to appropriately remunerated jobs and career paths. A strong, properly funded training system plays a positive role in industry development, provision of quality employment and helps meet labour market and social needs of the community.
2. Congress recognises that Australia faces new skills challenges which require effective, industry-driven responses. The current economic downturn poses challenges for industry to continue to train new and existing workers as well as to retain apprentices and trainees. The country must also face the challenge of identifying opportunities for new emerging jobs and changes required to many existing jobs in transitioning to a lower carbon future.
3. Congress recognises that the cyclical skill shortages, particularly in the last decade, were a direct result of market failure and therefore Congress opposes a market-driven approach to the organisation and delivery of VET. These policies have resulted in serious underinvestment in training by employers, skills shortages, reduced productivity and competitiveness, and a system in which short term demands are prioritised over longer term strategic needs and narrow based skills over strong vocational education and training. Such an approach will only lead to further fragmentation of training, serious undermining of public VET provision, loss of national standards and recognition and loss of portability of skills and qualifications. In conjunction with a lack of reliable forecast data on further skill need, this will result in Australia being unable to meet its own basic workforce needs.

4. Congress identifies the following four priority areas for ACTU and affiliates over the next three years.

National qualifications system

5. Australia's vocational education and training system should:
 - a) Be nationally consistent. National recognition and portability of qualifications is essential if VET effort and outcomes are to be of value to workers and the national economy. Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) must work with relevant state authorities and state industry advisory bodies (IABs) to ensure national support for amendments to, and implementation of, training packages. All workers undertaking vocational education and training must have access to the most recent national training packages, competencies and qualifications;
 - b) Be industry-led so as to ensure national quality and relevancy.
6. To achieve these objectives, the ACTU and affiliates undertake to:
 - a) Support ongoing strong industry advice through a strengthened role of ISC and form a relationship between Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) and State Industry Advisory Boards (IABs) with membership of these bodies drawn from relevant unions and employer representatives;
 - b) Seek the adoption of agreed standards that ensure equity and parity of qualifications and provide greater consistency of training effort and quality for the same qualification and between different qualifications at the same AQF level;
 - c) Support the ongoing development of a national audit and regulatory agency with emphasis on the VET sector and promote nationally consistent outcomes-based auditing against training package standards;
 - d) Ensure unions are effectively represented on ISCs and that ISCs are funded to deliver high quality, industry driven products and advice;
 - e) Support the development of training packages and training products by ISCs in conjunction with industry (and providers where relevant) that are of a high quality, relevant to industry, nationally recognised and that contribute to effective workforce planning and development;
 - f) Support the development and incorporation of learning strategies and modes of delivery and assessment where specified by industry in training packages;

- g) Argue for the maintenance of integrity in qualifications by opposing duplication, fragmentation and provider driven development of qualifications.

Linking vocational education and training to labour market needs

7. Australia's VET system should:

- a) Be responsive to the needs of industry and the community;
- b) Be informed by effective forecasting of skill needs to ensure that training effort, including financial investment, is expended in a way that meets future workforce development needs. The measurement of skill needs and shortages must be developed within a nationally agreed framework;
- c) Provide decent and improved wages and conditions for apprentices and trainees; and
- d) Provide workers with timely access to advice on training for future skills needs, support in making training choices and paid time off to undertake training;
- e) Provide for sound articulation with and linkages to the higher education sector.

8. To achieve these objectives, the ACTU and affiliates undertake to:

- a) Seek through Skills Australia a nationally agreed consistent definition on skill and labour shortages to be used in all aspects of workforce planning including vocational education and training and related migration matters;
- b) Seek increased government investment in vocational education and training in areas of high skill need, that recognises period and intensity of effort, that supports both new entrant and existing worker training requirements and that supports new industries and areas of potential future economic and jobs growth. In particular the Government should be lobbied for a substantial proportion of places within the Commonwealth's Productivity Places Program to be allocated to green skills development;
- c) Support the establishment of workplace learner representatives in the workplace or provided through ISCs. These workplace learner representatives will be responsible for assisting workers understand the need for skills development, for undertaking skills analysis for workers and groups of workers, and for accessing RPL and training.

Workplace learner representatives should be encouraged to develop formal and informal links with VET teachers;

- d) Support upskilling programs that set priorities and expand programs for existing workers, including through funding arrangements to allow for cooperative ventures that promote basic literacy and numeracy education;
- e) Seek a review of employer incentives, directed at ensuring that direct government support to employers for vocational education and training is used to encourage training effort in areas of future skill needs and economic importance;
- f) Work with industry and employer bodies to improve industry advisory structures to take on the role of developing industry skills profiles, identifying vocational education needs, and developing VET products and interventions, directed at more effective delivery and skill development;
- g) Seek a comprehensive review of training arrangements for apprentices and trainees directed at determining a fair and reasonable mechanism for establishing rates of pay for apprentices and trainees that properly reflects their contribution to work, the costs of undertaking training and the need for a fair wage;
- h) Develop the skills and capabilities of union representatives on ISCs and IABs through regular ACTU sponsored training and professional development days;
- i) Lobby state and territory governments to introduce increased notice of potential redundancies by industry to government, unions and affected employees, as well as to provide publicly funded retraining opportunities through TAFE;
- j) Where employers in particular industries experience severe difficulties retaining apprentices and trainees due to circumstances beyond their control, negotiate arrangements that reflect industry requirements and enable the retention of existing apprentices and trainees. Such arrangements should only be implemented following the reaching of agreement between the Government, the ACTU and relevant unions;
- k) Engage with Skills Australia and the Commonwealth Government to negotiate appropriate implementation of outcomes of the Bradley review that impact on vocational education and training without undermining the integrity of training packages and standards.

A higher quality, responsive and accessible VET system.

9. Australia's VET system should:
 - a) Deliver high quality vocational education and training;
 - b) Ensure the maintenance and ongoing development of a well resourced and dynamic public provider;
 - c) Enable TAFE and other providers to identify and respond effectively to emerging skills needs; and
 - d) Provide opportunities for all people to engage in vocational education and training through accessible providers and flexible modes of delivery
 - e) Provide equity of access and stop the transferring of costs to students.

10. To achieve these objectives, the ACTU and affiliates undertake to:
 - a) Support a strong and increased funding base for capital works, maintenance, infrastructure, equipment and development and vocational education delivery for TAFE that recognises the important role of the public provider in providing access to VET in areas of both high and low demand and supports flexible modes of delivery;
 - b) Support a funding model for VET that provides funding to the training provider and that recognises training time and effort and the importance of workplace based assessment and the true cost of undertaking RPL;
 - c) Support a funding model that properly recognises the broad role TAFE plays in providing access to training and re-training in areas of high and low demand, and in particular in rural and remote areas.
 - d) Seek increased funding of VET places to increase access to for young people, people with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in higher level traineeships and apprenticeships;
 - e) Through work with Skills Australia and the NQC, and in collaboration with the AEU, seek a national workforce development strategy for the VET workforce that includes an allocation of adequate resources to enable teachers and institutes to develop and maintain close liaison between TAFE and industry and encourage appropriate relationships to assist industries to develop skills plans;

- f) In consultation with the AEU, support the development and promotion of appropriate high level vocational education qualifications and professional development for TAFE teachers; and support a strategy of reprofessionalising the teaching workforce;
- g) Campaign to encourage TAFE and VET employers to address unacceptably high level of casual employment within the VET sector;
- h) Ensure the engagement of TAFE and other RTOs with ISCs for the purpose of developing material necessary to support quality delivery of training;
- i) Identify and promote key emerging skills needs through national skills training bodies;
- j) Encourage the development of emerging skill needs through government funding for specific skills development programs aligned with industry planning and broader industry and innovation programs.

Ensure VET acts as an effective pathway between school & work

11. Australia's VET system should act as an effective pathway between school and work by:
 - a) Ensuring that vocational education in schools meets all national standards for VET. Vocational education in schools can provide an effective pathway for young people from school to work or further study. However this is only the case where VET undertaken by young people while still at school is recognised and accepted by industry: 'VET in schools' programs that fail to do this are misleading to students in terms of potential outcomes and should be rebadged to reflect exactly what they deliver; and
 - b) The establishment of a formal mechanism by which the skills gained by high school students through paid work can be recognised.
12. The ACTU and affiliates undertake to:
 - a) Lobby for reform so that all young people are able to access accredited VET while still at school;
 - b) Support the availability of pre-apprenticeships and pre-vocational training in schools where this is part of a national training package and will provide credit to a qualifications;
 - c) Support school-based apprenticeships (SBAs) and school-based traineeships (SBTs) where these can be delivered without undermining essential standards of the qualification or training;

- d) Seek a review of the 'VET in schools' system so as to ensure that these courses are properly funded, delivered by appropriately qualified teachers, have structured workplace learning and are directly linked to training package qualifications; and
- e) Support the development of a mechanism, to which all secondary schools have access, through which the broad workplace and career development skills gained through students' casual or part-time paid work can be formally recognised. This mechanism must be accompanied by initiatives directed at facilitating opportunities for students to obtain the required skills.