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No union or TAFE representation on new skills and training board – no surprise from this Government

Minister Ian Macfarlane is letting down the industries he is meant to represent by failing to include anyone from unions or the TAFE sector on the new Vocational Education Training (VET) advisory board announced today.

“There is not one person chosen to represent the interests of students or workers – instead it is a board picked to push the interests of big business,” said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

“Instead of drawing on decades of experience from with the TAFE sector and unions, the Minister has chosen a Liberal party mate, John Hart, to chair the board,” said Ms Kearney.

“Not only is Mr Hart publicly campaigning to scrap penalty rates as head of the national hospitality industry lobby group - he’s also the chair of a controversial Liberal party fund-raising group who is due to give evidence before the Independent Commission Against Corruption in NSW next week.

“Yet this is who Minister Macfarlane believes is most qualified person to oversee the future development of vocational training and education in Australia – it beggars belief.”

The strength of the Australian VET system and the source of its strong international reputation is its industry focus and leadership – from both employers and unions.

“It is typical of this Government to pander to business groups while ignoring the interests of students and workers. Indeed, Minister McFarlane tried to exclude unions from the initial stakeholder consultations altogether in February,” said Ms Kearney.

Decisions made about the VET system have the potential to impact workers in very practical ways such as the cost of training, the accessibility of training and the quality of training.

“It is extremely disappointing and concerning that the future of the VET system will be decided without a voice for workers at the table,” said Ms Kearney.

“If Minister Macfarlane is serious about training skilled and productive workers for the future, he needs to re-think this board and start talking to unions and the TAFE sector.”

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