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**WAVE NEWSLETTER**

TAFE is a national asset that should form the centrepiece of our national training system.

TAFE plays a vital role in training women for our future workforce and retraining women returning to the workforce. It also plays an important role in providing second chance education for women.

Despite its importance to Australia's social and economic future, Australia's VET sector is at a crossroads. Costs are increasing but quality is declining, particularly in private courses and states which have experienced funding reductions.

The Liberals have cut \$2.75 billion from the skills portfolio, including \$1 billion in cuts to apprentices including the *Tools for Your Trade* program and access and mentoring programs.

Unfortunately, around the country in a number of states, TAFE is fighting to survive.

Conservative governments have decimated our TAFEs by cutting funding, sacking teachers and support staff, cutting courses and imposing sky-high fees.

While there were protections for TAFE under the National Partnership Agreement, the Federal Government has refused to use these tools to protect funding for TAFE under the Agreement. Instead, the pendulum has swung too far towards the private sector in many states.

The Liberals have also mismanaged the VET FEE-HELP system – allowing taxpayer funds to fly out the door to shonky training providers who have preyed upon and exploited vulnerable people.

Labor is committed to a strong and viable TAFE system.

Bill Shorten has made it clear that the system has swung too far towards the private sector. For this reason we will work with the states and territories to put the balance right between the contestable and non-contestable funding model to ensure it delivers the outcomes that are intended.

Last year, on National TAFE Day, Bill Shorten and I announced Labor's plan to back TAFE into the future by developing a [National Priority Plan](#) to place TAFE squarely as the public provider within the VET sector and ensure TAFE's viability and strength into the future.



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For the first time there will be a clear description at the national level on the role and purpose of public provision – it will describe what government expects from TAFE as the public provider and will make clear the aspects of TAFE that define its purpose and describes specifically how it is different from being just “another provider”.

Having defined the unique role of TAFE as our public provider, the negotiation with the states and territories will work to deliver on this by providing quarantined and guaranteed funding to TAFE.

Labor will establish a VET ombudsman – a place for students to go when disputes cannot be resolved so that legal representation is not their only option.

Labor will [conduct a full, evidence based review](#) of the vocational education and training system to build a stronger VET sector and weed out dodgy providers and student rip-offs.

The vocational education and training sector deserves a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to policy-making to ensure it is fit for the critical task of preparing Australians for the jobs of the future.

In 2014 the most recent data shows that 47.7% of VET students in government funded programs were women – the system is critically important to women and must be a quality-based system that delivers for them. It is also interesting to note that women do outnumber men in the completions statistics for VET and they are also slightly more likely to have gone on to further education while men are slightly more likely to improve employment circumstances.

In this year's Budget Address in Reply, Bill Shorten [announced that Labor would introduce a loan cap of \\$8,000 a year](#) in the VET FEE-HELP program as part of an integrity package to stop the massive waste of taxpayers' money, to prevent price gouging of students and improve training outcomes.

Under the Liberals, the VET FEE-HELP loans scheme has escalated from \$699 million in 2013 to \$1.7 billion in 2014 and is expected to have blown out to over \$3 billion for 2015.

The Abbott-Turnbull Government had the data from early 2014 on emerging threats to the integrity of the VET system and the wellbeing of students. But it elected to ignore that advice, effectively declaring open season on the VET FEE-HELP system by profiteers masquerading as trainers.

While Minister after Minister spent their days blaming Labor for their own mismanagement, billions of taxpayer dollars flew out the door to line the pockets of unscrupulous operators.

Training the workers of the future is a critical issue for our economy, for productivity and for communities. We need to put in place the next generation of skilled trades people to



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take on the jobs that are emerging and to ensure that we can meet future workforce needs.

Before the election, Tony Abbott promised that the Coalition would provide better support for Australia's apprentices – sadly they have cut funding and defaulted to their fall-back position of relying heavily on 457 visas without also investing in skills and training.

The Liberals have cut \$1 billion in funding to apprenticeship programs. These cuts have had a devastating impact on apprentices in training.

In September 2013 there were 417,700 apprentices in training across Australia. Because of the Liberal Government's savage cuts there are now only 295,300 apprentices in training (September 2015).

That is 122,400 fewer apprentices in training across the country.

Their \$1 billion of savage cuts include:

- Abolishing apprenticeship programs such as mentoring, access and the Apprentice to Business Owner program;
- Replaced apprentice support with apprentice debt by abolishing the Tools for Your Trade Program;
- Rebadged and cut funding to Australian Apprenticeship Centres;
- Cutting Joint Group Training funding;
- Cutting support for adult apprentices

It is vital that we train and retrain our workforce to deliver on improving the participation, productivity, innovation and growth efforts required for the nation.

With the future of our TAFEs under threat, there is a very clear choice at the upcoming election – only Labor is committed to ensuring TAFE's strength and viability into the future.