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Government Cuts to Skills Funding will Worsen Skills Crisis

ACTU President Sharan Burrow has condemned the Howard Government's decision to abolish the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), saying the Government was cutting its commitment to the skills and training agenda at the very time when skill shortages are becoming the biggest issue facing the Australian workforce and economy.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said:

"The decision by Prime Minister Howard to abolish ANTA is devastating and will affect nationally consistent training standards and result in confusion across the vocational education and training sectors.

"The decision also puts at risk the portability of qualifications across the nation. A corner stone of the VET system has been the national portability of qualifications which has assured young people that their qualifications would be recognised across the country.

"Australia's vocational education and training system is held in high regard across the world because of its capacity to span the states and territories and because at its best it represents the full range of industry and government partners.

"This is an atrocious decision by the Howard Government which will allow the skills crisis to deepen further.

"In July 2004 ACCI released their annual survey of investor confidence and found for the first time that the number one constraint for investment was the availability of suitable qualified employees.

"ANTA has played a critical role in establishing a national vocational education and training sector which has delivered qualifications to more than 1.7million Australian's of all ages.

"There is no doubt that Australian workers and young workers in particular will suffer if their qualifications are narrowed and recognition of their education and training is restricted to their immediate employer," said Sharan Burrow, ACTU President

Pat Forward, Federal TAFE Secretary of the AEU agreed saying:

"Howard's decision is a short sighted one which will do nothing to aid in the skill shortage crisis which is soon to hit its peak.

"Howard may have put money into skills and training as part of his election promise but he is ripping money out of the system through this decision. This is a disaster for the National Training System and undoes ten years of hard work.

"ANTA's job was made almost impossible under the Howard government as successive years of under funding leave the system struggling to meet high levels of demand.

"ANTA and the national VET system have played a significant role in developing career paths and opportunities in industries, which were previously ignored by the education system.

"Between 25% and 30% of the recurrent budgets across the states and territories are delivered through the current "rolled over" ANTA agreement, which will expire in December.

If other mechanisms for delivering these funds are not established, or if the commonwealth withdraws these funds, thousands of jobs are at risk."

Media Contact: Susannah Greenleaf mob: 0418 479 455