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SKILLS CRISIS – RIGHT TARGET WRONG SOLUTION

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has welcomed the Howard Government's acknowledgement of a skills crisis and the provision of additional funding for vocational education and training, especially to assist people over 25 to gain literacy, numeracy and vocational training as a pathway to employment.

AEU Federal TAFE President, Ms Linda Simon said the \$837 million package was, however, misdirected and that the voucher system announced today by the Prime Minister failed to provide Australia with a long-term plan to help address the skills crisis or to provide additional funding for our high quality TAFE system.

"The Howard Government has failed to adequately fund skills training through TAFE over the last ten years. This failure to invest in TAFE has exacerbated issues in relation to the shortage of skilled workers that Howard's stop-gap measures are attempting to address.

"This under-funding is a deliberate strategy to undermine a successful TAFE system, and is another poorly thought out government measure that includes the Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) - a waste of taxpayers money.

"TAFE has been forced to turn away over 40,000 students a year at the same time that employers are desperate for skilled workers. This is totally unacceptable.

"What the Howard Government should be doing is investing in TAFE, in order to ensure the system continues to deliver results, rather than offering bandaid measures such as vouchers and ATCs, which divert much needed funding from the TAFE sector through unnecessary duplication.

The AEU commissioned a national independent inquiry into the future of TAFE in May this year which was designed to examine the future direction and role of TAFE in the VET system and to provide real solutions.

"What we need from this government is adequate funding and a commitment to TAFE which will help address the skills shortage crisis not reinforce it," Ms Simon said.

The TAFE Futures Inquiry findings are to be launched next week at Parliament House in Canberra.

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