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MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition's Skills Institute Fails Test of Excellence

The Australian Education Union has warned that the Government's \$18 million so-called 'Institute for Trade Skill Excellence' could undermine the national qualifications system.

AEU Federal TAFE Secretary Pat Forward said that the policy would create two classes of certificates based not on what a student has learned but on whether the provider has managed to gain favour with employers.

"The policy leaves unclear what will happen to the students who gain their certificates through providers that have not been given 'preferred' status."

"The Coalition's proposal is aimed at putting the control in the hands of the employer peak bodies at the expense of the wide range of employers and unions which currently provide the industry input into the system."

"The proposed Industry Reference Groups will be an unnecessary duplication of Industry Skills Councils through which industry develops and endorses trade and other qualifications. The Councils are still in the process of being established following an industry-based restructure and already the Government is planning to undermine their role," Ms. Forward said.

Ms Forward condemned the exclusion of the ACTU and unions which represent the relevant professions and trades, and the teachers who actually provide the vocational education and training.

"The vocational education and training system has always recognised that industry involves both employers and employees and that the input must come from industry as a whole. Skills shortages can only be addressed if all stakeholders are involved," she said.

"The Institute is a bureaucratic furphy which would add further and unnecessary confusion and duplication to the vocational education and training system. It is ill-conceived and a waste of money which could be better directed into vocational education and training and the existing industry advice structures."

Ms Forward said, "The Howard Government has been seriously under-funding the vocational education and training system, especially TAFE."

"TAFE needs an additional \$1.1 billion over the next three years to address unmet demand, tackle skills shortage areas and ensure quality provision. These needs are more important than establishing a new bureaucratic structure for peak employer bodies."

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