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## **TAFE welcomes call for a national inquiry into post-school education**

Australians deserve access to a modern, well-funded TAFE system, TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) said today, while welcoming the federal opposition's plan for a national inquiry into the tertiary education sector.

TDA Chief Executive Craig Robertson said any inquiry would need to examine ways of placing TAFE and universities on a more equal footing.

"The Commonwealth and states share responsibility for vocational education and training but we don't see signs of a joint commitment to modernising the system," Mr Robertson said.

He said a looming skills shortfall over coming decades meant that more focus needed to be placed on how the post-secondary education system could adapt and meet rapidly changing workforce needs.

"The VET system will carry a great deal of the load in skilling and retraining the next generation with the capabilities needed in competitive global economy.

"Industry is on the cusp of a revolution, driven by artificial intelligence, big data and robotics, and we need a landmark and visionary approach to training for the future.

"Our training system needs to offer a wider range of skills than present qualifications allow, and we need to ensure that VET graduates are equipped for the new world of work. We need support to help students enhance core skills such as working with others, problem-solving in the workplace, and starting a business.

"It's not about favouring one pathway over another. Both universities and VET have enormous opportunities and need to operate in a coherent way if we are to deliver the best outcomes for students, workers and enterprises," he said.

Mr Robertson said that the university sector was the predominant focus of the 2008 Bradley Review of Higher Education, but that it was time for a comprehensive look at how VET and universities could work more closely in a dynamic global environment.

"With VET and universities so critical to national productivity, we certainly need to look at a national approach to skills development, higher education and research, and consider how both can contribute to Australia's ongoing economic success.

“The current demarcation between VET and university that persists across schools, employers and parts of the community does not serve us well and is at odds with the best international practice.

“World-class technical and STEM skills are required from TAFEs, and the VET sector more broadly. We need flexible modes of learning, better support for teachers and trainers and recognition that TAFEs can be key agents in helping businesses engage in innovation and adaptation to new technologies.

“Importantly, there needs to be better articulation between the VET and universities to maximise lifelong learning and to demolish the ‘either-or’ attitude that forces many students to choose between the two,” Mr Robertson said.

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