

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2017

## Rebalance and Relaunch, the Victorian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Taskforce Report: A report by the Victorian Skills Commissioner

The Minister for Training and Skills, the Hon Gayle Tierney MP, today launched the report of the Victorian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Taskforce at Kangan Institute's Automotive Centre of Excellence. Chaired by the Victorian Skills Commissioner, Mr Neil Coulson, the Taskforce brought together key government, education, industry, business and union representatives to identify and address barriers and opportunities to the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships in Victoria.

"It's time to rebalance and relaunch the system to recognise and promote the benefits of apprenticeships and traineeships," said Mr Coulson.

Speaking at the launch to more than a hundred representatives from industry, employers, unions and training providers as well as individual apprentices and trainees, Mr Coulson said "investment by Government in major infrastructure projects and decisions by private enterprise to establish or expand operations in Victoria highlights the need for a skilled workforce. The need for skilled tradespeople and paraprofessionals remains as strong as it ever was".

Mr Coulson explained that Australia's Vocational Education and Training system is facing a "perfect storm" with employers struggling to attract skilled apprentices and university graduates facing difficulties finding jobs.

With looming skill shortages, an ageing workforce, and variability in the quality of Vocational Education and Training graduates, the report draws attention to the priority that needs to be placed on growing the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

"One of the recommendations of the report is to strengthen engagement with employers on a sector-by-sector basis to better understand Victoria's labour market and validate training pathways via a range of pilot programs" said the Commissioner.

Whilst Mr Coulson noted that substantial improvements have been made via the Victorian Government's reforms to Skills First, he stressed that "more work needed to be done to deepen engagement with industry, understand skill requirements, and more effectively profile industry demand to guide investment in training provision".

"Now is the time to re-assert the value of apprenticeships and traineeships and emphasise the central role they can play in powering our economy and establishing our young people in vibrant careers," he said.

The Taskforce's six-month investigation found a disproportionate move to university education at the expense of skilled apprenticeships and traineeships coinciding with a sharp decline in traineeships in 2012 due to various structural issues.

The Commissioner believes that this mismatch of skills and workforce demand was exacerbated by lack of quality careers advice in schools and bias against some industries.

"Negative attitudes to 'earn and learn' workforce training, and alarmist predictions about technology replacing skilled labour, have over-valued higher education and lowered the prestige of apprenticeships, despite their far more certain path to employment than many university degrees" said Mr Coulson.

The report recommends a number of initiatives to improve the quality of training, better align training with industry demands and to promote the long-term value of trade occupations. These fall under three main themes:

- Build a culture of co-investment by supporting employers who invest in apprenticeships and traineeships;
- Renew the focus on quality by investing in quality training and assessment based on industry demand; and
- Elevate the status of apprenticeships and traineeships by promoting the benefits to employers, young people and the broader community

Mr Coulson said that he “looks forward to working with Minister Tierney to progress the recommendations of this important piece of work in order to rebalance and relaunch the apprenticeship and traineeship system in Victoria”.

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