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MEDIA RELEASE

Time to lift the stigma that impedes skills development

Australia's National Apprentice Employment Network (NAEN) today welcomed a new report that gives much-needed recognition to the value of vocational choices for students as part of a sweeping program of reform to education and training.

The report from the Business Council of Australia, 'Future Proof: Protecting Australians through education and skills', sets a vision for lifelong learning, built upon a seamless vocational education and training (VET), and higher education system.

The National Executive Officer of NAEN, Ms Lauren Tiltman said the report champions a model of education and training that produces work-ready students, capable of adapting to a changing labour market, and which rewards students who pursue vocational choices.

"For too long the VET system has been viewed as an alternative to university, and this is creating a generation who are being funnelled into ill-suited university courses and career paths," Ms Tiltman said.

"It is time we recognised the need for a world class training system that prizes the skills acquired through vocational education, apprenticeships and traineeships," she said.

"We welcome the need to break down the silos between VET and higher education and lift the stigma that is often attached to VET choices.

"The findings reflect the emerging reality about work and skills development – that young people will have multiple careers and employers, and will be expected to upskill and reskill many times.

"The fact is that in many occupations, work is being transformed, and tertiary qualifications will become outdated and require constant renewal," Ms Tiltman said

The apprenticeship system has gone through many changes over the decades and has remained remarkably resilient.

This is highlighted by the example of Germany's dual training scheme, which shares some aspects of Australia's apprenticeship system.

As the BCA report says: *"Vocational training is a highly respected career path in Germany, reflected by the fact that 50 per cent of all students choose it. The system is successful at*

producing well-trained workers with technical skills, as well as work-ready values and behaviours; German youth have both high skill levels and low unemployment rates.”

The BCA report highlights the systemic flaws that perpetuate the myth that VET is a second-class citizen to university, including career counselling that often sets university as the pinnacle of success for students and parents.

It notes efforts to broaden the school curriculum to cater to the needs of different learners with programs, such as VET in Schools, however it notes that “these initiatives have often been seen as add-ons or optional, rather than the core business of schooling.”

Group training organisations recognise the importance of new models of skills development in response to changes such as artificial intelligence and industry 4.0

“This will take a landmark shift in attitudes, supported by government and stakeholders to raise the priority on new approaches to education and training that support a highly skilled country,” Ms Tiltman said.

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The National Apprentice Employment Network is the national peak body representing the network of over 100 Group Training Organisations (GTOs) employing apprentices and trainees throughout Australia.
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