

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY – BETTER SKILLING AND JOB CAPABILITY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

It is essential that young people and workers in Australia strengthen their skills and that people who lose their jobs have access to opportunities to improve their skills to enable an early return into the workforce. Moreover, our future productivity and social cohesion will be enhanced by giving all Australian children the best start in life.

Youth Attainment and Transitions

COAG today agreed the [National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions](#) which will deliver the Youth Compact. The Youth Compact will support young people to gain skills through stronger engagement in education and training. It requires young people to complete Year 10 and then to be in full-time education, training or employment; offers a training entitlement to all 15 to 24 years olds; and provides improved support through career advice and better assistance with the transition through school to further training and work.

The NP will implement strategies for increased numbers of young people attaining Year 12 or higher qualifications; more young people engaged in education and training; and young people having the skills required to participate in the labour market as the economy recovers.

The NP is supported by \$100 million in reward funding for increased participation and Year 12 attainment rates and \$623 million over five years for youth careers and transitions programs.

Responsibility for youth careers and transitions programs will be progressively transferred to the States and Territories.

A Compact with Retrenched Workers

The Compact with Retrenched Workers agreed by COAG today complements the Compact with Young Australians agreed by COAG on 30 April 2009, under which 15-19 years old are guaranteed an education or training place and 20-24 year olds are guaranteed a training place for up-skilling.

COAG recognised the significant investment made by all jurisdictions to support retrenched workers and agreed to provide retrenched workers with an entitlement to a training place.

From 1 July 2009, retrenched workers aged 25 years and over will be entitled to a training place for a government subsidised vocational education and training qualification, which would result in the individual achieving a higher qualification.

As part of the Compact:

- Job Services Australia providers will assist retrenched workers to identify their skills and training needs and will work with the States and Territories to implement the training entitlement; and
- States and Territories will prioritise training places to support the Compact.

Today's announcement builds on the Commonwealth's investment of \$300 million to provide retrenched workers with immediate access to employment support.

The training entitlement will be available to all workers retrenched since 1 January 2009 who hold a letter of redundancy from their employer and who are registered with a Job Services Australia provider. The entitlement will be offered from 1 July 2009 and until 31 December 2011.

Australian Apprentices Taskforce

COAG agreed that when contracting for government stimulus and infrastructure projects, the States and Territories will aim to secure at least 10 per cent of the total contract labour hours to be undertaken by apprentices and trainees and those seeking to up-skill, where this does not result in unreasonable costs to business. COAG also agreed that all States and Territories will establish an out-of-trade register, and provide targeted job matching and mentoring services for apprentices and trainees. COAG requested that the Taskforce report back on implementation and further urgent actions to support apprentices during the downturn at its next meeting.

Vocational Education and Training Reform

COAG agreed to a workplan for further reforms to the Vocational Education and Training system. The workplan will address a number of major reform areas including:

- developing models for a national regulatory body for vocational education and training;
- ensuring the Australian Apprenticeship system is responsive to the needs of individuals and enterprises, especially during the downturn and into recovery;
- increasing the level of investment in nationally-accredited training;
- providing timely, relevant and easy to navigate information to individuals and enterprises; and
- ensuring the training system, and the products of the training system, are responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and industry.

Early Childhood Development

COAG agreed to a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood, building on initial investment in universal access to early childhood education. The national strategy [Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy](#) will guide consideration of investment in future reforms to support around two million children aged under eight and their families.

As an immediate action under the national strategy, implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework will begin in July 2009 to provide guidance to parents and early childhood educators to support early learning.

COAG has also agreed to commence a formal consultation process on quality reforms to early childhood education and care, representing a major step towards a genuinely national system. COAG has agreed to a jointly governed unified national system to replace current licensing and quality assurance processes. Under the proposed approach, individual services will need to deal with only one organisation for quality assessment, reducing the regulatory burden on over 10,000 services.

A single set of improved national quality standards that integrate education and care will promote good developmental outcomes for more than one million children attending child care and preschool. The Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms, prepared for public consultation, proposes lower staff to child ratios and higher staff qualification requirements. The proposed new ratings will provide better information about service quality to help parents to choose a service and promote quality improvements amongst services. COAG will seek views through the consultation process on how quality reforms could be implemented in the most efficient and sustainable manner, having regard to other early childhood priorities and the current economic environment.