

MEDIA RELEASE
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Trade skills shortages reaching crisis point in Australia

74% of Employers unable to secure skilled staff

Dr John Keniry, the Chairman of the Board at the Institute of Trade Skills Excellence (ITSE), spoke today at the TAFE Directors Australia National Conference in Adelaide. Keniry explained in detail the genesis of the initiative, the key activities of the Institute, and its integration both with TAFE and other skills initiatives

"Essentially, this initiative is about giving industry a voice in identifying excellence in vocational and technical education. It's about addressing skill shortages and it's about elevating the status of trades and trades education" said Dr Keniry.

"The Australian Industry Group (AiG) recently asked, 'Will the inability to secure skilled staff be a barrier to your company's success over the next three years?' and the answer was "YES" from 74% of those responding" explained Dr Keniry.

"So, we recognise that trade skills shortages in many industries are reaching crisis point in Australia."

Institute of Trade Skills Excellence goals

Dr Keniry defined the three main purposes of ITSE as:

- To improve the profile and status of trades.
- To recognise high performing RTOs with preferred provider status.
- To foster and recognise excellent standards and teaching in trades' education and training

These purposes will be the goals for the eight Industry Reference Groups (IRGs) that have been established within ITSE to meet the problems of skill shortage. Those groups represent the following sectors:

- Automotive
- Building and construction

- Electrical
- Manufacturing
- Metals & engineering
- Hospitality and personal services
- Rural
- Mineral resources

Each reference group has a chair who is also a member of the Board of Directors. Of each group's 8-10 members, the majority are employers, as are the 12 Directors of the Institute.

"This emphasis on direct representation by employers makes the Institute quite unique and it's vital to ensuring true industry ownership of the Institute's work. The role of the IRGs is to carry out the Institute's work under each of its purposes" said Dr Keniry

Image of Trade Skills

Dr Keniry emphasises that "research in 2000 showed that of the 90% of students who wanted to go on to further education, only 25% had ambitions of studying through TAFE. All the rest wanted to go to university. Clearly we need to help turn the profile of trades around. We want to see more people undergoing Apprenticeships, especially in skill shortage trades.

"We also want people to stay in the trades as a long-term career. We want existing tradespeople 'talking up' their work and we want to find ways to support people going into trades.

"We will be delighted if in a few years' time we were able to say that trades had lost their stigma and had become the career of choice for many Australians, that the quality of training provision had improved to such an extent that employers assumed that any provider of education and training would provide them with the highest quality service, and that trades teaching had become a highly esteemed and well recognized career option."

Institute of Trade Skills Excellence Structure and Management

The ITSE has received Federal government investment of \$22 million over three years.

The ITSE is made up of members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the Australian Industry Group (AIG) and the National Farmers' Federation (NFF). Each member has nominated a Director to the Institute's Board.

ITSE also announced its inaugural CEO this week, naming Mr Brian Wexham, former Chief Executive of both Lonhro Media Group PLC East Africa and Chief Executive of APN Educational Media (Australia and New Zealand). Mr Wexham, who has also previously held executive roles with The Times and The Sunday Times in London, and board positions with The Observer and the Today newspaper, London, pertinently, has been a Director of WorldSkills Australia Inc since 2002.

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