

Education at the core of jobs-led virus recovery

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More than a million secure jobs would flow into the Australian workplace under a comprehensive five-point economic reconstruction plan developed by the ACTU to steer the nation through a COVID-19 recovery.

The ACTU is calling on the Federal Government to adopt a jobs-led recovery through a National Economic Reconstruction Plan and has identified five concrete ideas designed to create and save jobs, protect and nurture whole industries, support public and private sector jobs, invest in future skills and training and strengthen Australia's physical and social infrastructure.

Among the plan's far-reaching concept is a focus on education with a national commitment to free early child education and care and a massive investment in training that would include 150,000 free TAFE places.

ACTU President Michele O'Neil said the government has no plan to rebuild the economy and steer the country through the next stages of the pandemic crisis.

"Government must help build ongoing local jobs, more training and education opportunities to get people into jobs and provide support for people who are making things here in Australia," Ms O'Neil said.



The ACTU, with economist Dr Jim Stanford and the Centre for Future Work, developed the National Economic Reconstruction Plan to counter "unprecedented economic contraction" that has occurred during disruptions and shutdowns to business and industry.

Other aspects of the strategy include a "Rediscover Australia" initiative to help the travel and hospitality sectors survive, a large and sustained increase in infrastructure investment and a comprehensive plan to expand sustainable manufacturing.

"Whether it is free and universal childcare, the expansion of public infrastructure investment with locally-made materials, free TAFE courses focussed on rebuilding our skills and training sector, support to revitalise our travel and hospitality sectors and regional communities or building a sustainable manufacturing capacity, this plan delivers jobs, community infrastructure and a future for Australia," Ms O'Neil said.

The ACTU's 23-page report on the reconstruction plan, while commending the cooperation between governments in the National Cabinet, warns against the Morrison Government's "side hustles" that have little relevance to the genuine macroeconomic and structural challenges now facing Australia's economy.

"An example is the Government's far-fetched \$688 million scheme to subsidise expensive home renovations undertaken by a narrow and affluent group of home-owners," the report stated. "Politically motivated

measures like this one fail all of the tests for effective fiscal policy that we defined ... this program is small, ineffective in creating new jobs, and fails to deliver support to those Australians who need it most.”

ACTU’s education recovery plans

The Early Childhood Education and Care Strategy has several components including:

- the provision of permanently free childcare
- capital investment to construct new high-quality, publicly funded, not-for-profit facilities
- the funding of universal access to 15 hours of preschool for three- and four-years-olds
- an extension and improvement of the current wage subsidy to support the ongoing employment of staff in this sector.

The Training for Reconstruction includes:

- a new nationwide Free TAFE program supporting 150,000 places, which would also support 10,000 jobs in the TAFE system
- TAFE put back at the centre of Commonwealth and state governments’ training funding with 70 per cent of all government VET funding directed to TAFE
- a Rebuilding TAFE fund to update and modernise facilities with a focus on regional areas
- Commonwealth wage subsidies for up to 100,000 apprentices and trainees for the life of their apprenticeship/traineeship and a guaranteed job at the end
- to assist our higher education sector, the Commonwealth government must extend JobKeeper wage subsidies to universities (which are currently excluded from the program) through the 2020 academic year, thus helping to protect another 20,000 higher education jobs at risk from the current crisis in international education.