

Too many announcements, no results



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The 2020 federal Budget confirms again that the Morrison Government has no credibility with vocational education and TAFE policies.

Coalition governments since 2013 have made many announcements, but the results don't match the rhetoric.

When Tony Abbott was elected Prime Minister on 7 September, 2013, Australia had 412,787 apprentices and trainees in training.

Mr Abbott's big vocational education pre-election announcement was to scrap the Tools for Trade direct payment to apprentices and replace it with Trade Support Loans, where apprentices could borrow up to \$20,000, contingent on their income. The loans scheme, legislated on 4 June, 2014, was aimed at increasing the number of apprenticeship completions and discouraging apprentices from dropping out of their training.

In September 2014, Mr Abbott announced his government would invest \$200 million each year to establish a new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network to lift apprenticeship completion rates. The scheme came into effect on the 1 July, 2015.

Abbott was replaced by Malcom Turnbull as Prime Minister in September 2015.

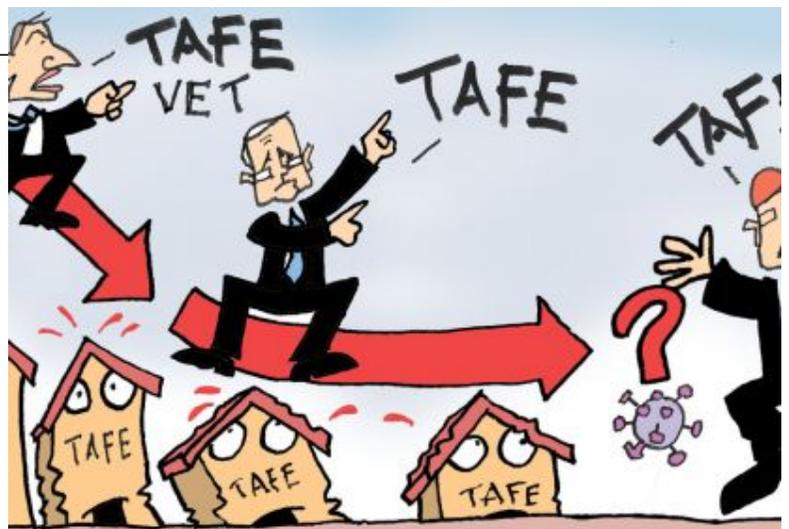
National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) reported in December 2015 that the number of in-training apprentices and trainees had fallen by 139,152, from 412,787 in 2013 to 273,635 in December 2015.

In 2016, an election year, Mr Turnbull talked about innovation and interns paid at \$4 per hour, but the Coalition did not announce any apprentice-specific policies during the July 2016 election.

The Turnbull government was narrowly re-elected on 2 July, 2016, and announcements began in earnest.

In November 2016, Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Training Karen Andrews stated TV celebrity Scott Cam would showcase the importance and value of Australian Apprenticeships.

In 2016, the total number of in-training apprentices and trainees fell another 9260. That year also recorded



the fewest commencements since 1998 and fewest completions since 2002. (NCVER 2016)

In June 2018, the Government announced the rollout of the Skilling Australian Fund, committing an estimated \$1.5 billion to create up to 300,000 additional apprenticeships and traineeships throughout Australia.

Scott Morrison replaced Turnbull as Prime Minister in August 2018.

Minister Michaelia Cash announced a \$27.7 million initiative to encourage businesses to take on an apprentice between the age of 21 and 24 years, called Support for Adult Australian Apprentices in December 2018. According to Senator Cash, the incentive would support 12,500 apprentices over three years from 2019-20.

Total in-training apprentices and trainees flat-lined: 264,375 in December 2016 and 264,045 in December 2018. (2018 NCVER)

In April 2019, the Government promised to create up to 80,000 new apprenticeships through a \$525 million skills package, a mixture of \$2000 cash payments for apprentices on completion of their training and double the employer incentive to employ apprentices or trainee. Yet again it was another rebranding of the usual old ideas.

Mr Turnbull and Senator Cash announced Scott Cam as Australia's first national careers ambassador in October 2019. (Just two months later Morrison was forced to defend paying Cam \$347,000 for 15 months. He resigned in April 2020 after taking \$175,000 for four social media posts and three videos, relinquishing \$172,000.)

Jumping back to November 2019, Senator Cash announced the Federal Government would again be offering local businesses a wage subsidy to take on new apprentices.

Total in-training apprentices and trainees increased by 16,555 in 2019 (NCVER, 2019). Is this a start to the 380,000 promised?

In April this year, Senator Cash announced a \$1.3 billion Supporting Apprentices and Trainees package, to help businesses retain their existing apprentices and trainees through this difficult COVID-19 pandemic period. The details are not clear, however, it includes \$1.3 billion in support of payments to keep almost 120,000 apprentices employed based on another wage subsidy scheme.

A second COVID-19 announcement followed in July 2020: almost 200,000 apprentices will have their pay covered by the Morrison Government and school leavers offered free training under a \$2 billion investment to help support Australia's COVID-19 recovery.

So what was the result of seven years of announcements? Australia has lost 140,282 apprentices and trainees in training from 2013 to 2020 (pre COVID data).

The Federal Government has made many announcements to increase the number of in-training apprentices and trainees but continues to fail to deliver.

Federation will continue to expose these failed announcements and campaign for guaranteed funding for TAFE.