PM calls for unity in fixing vocational education training

Scott Morrison will today urge state and territory leaders to back policy changes to make the vocational education training sector "far less bureaucratic" and more focused on the needs of businesses wanting trained workers to address skills shortages.

Ahead of the Council of Australian Governments meeting in Cairns today, resource and energy sector employers warned that they were facing skills shortages at levels not seen since the last investment and construction peak period in 2011-12.

Unions sought to blame the Coalition for the shortages, saying its proposed crackdown on worker entitlement funds would cut apprenticeship numbers as unions and employers would no longer be able to use interest earned from the funds to hire apprentices.

Declaring "TAFE education is as good as uni", the Prime Minister said the vocational system was an area of frustration for all states and territories, and he believed there was an appetite for progress. "It is a particular frustration, more importantly, for businesses who employ people, and people who want to get trained so they can get employed. And the system at the moment is letting us down on that front," he said.

"So it is important that the commonwealth and states come together to ensure that it is a far less bureaucratic, a far less public service-driven sector, and it is actually about the needs of businesses who want to employ people and people who want to get trained."

The Australian reported yesterday that Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox had written to Mr Morrison declaring the nation's training system was "bedevilled by inconsistency" and urgently needed "bolder reforms" to tackle growing skills shortages.

Tara Diamond, director of operations at the Australian Mines and Metals Association, said industry needed to be better at long-term skills planning, mobility between sectors and not have projects cannibalising each other for critical trades and semi-skilled roles.

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