



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 30 July 2010

SKILLS AND WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY TOP OF MIND FOR BUSINESS

Statement by Mr Peter Anderson, Chief Executive

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australia's largest and most representative business organisation, has called for an integrated suite of skills and workplace measures focused on lifting firm productivity and employee career prospects to be part of the next Australian Government's national reform agenda.

Releasing details of ACCI's Pre-Election Survey of 1,100 businesses on workplace issues, Chief Executive Peter Anderson said that "based on these survey results the next Australian Government will have business alongside them if they support skills development through well-designed vocational education and training, and foster workplace arrangements that drive productivity, reward and fair dealing."

"Excellent foundations have been laid by successive governments on skills development, through education and training, the Australian Apprenticeships system and literacy and numeracy programmes in schools and the workplace. Given the re-emergence of skills shortages and projections that they will deepen, this is a crucial area of domestic policy worthy of further public and private investment."

82% of businesses had either "major or moderate concerns" with recruitment of employees with appropriate skills, while a worryingly high 70% - nearly three out of four employers - were concerned about employees having "good" levels of numeracy and literacy. Australian employers have confirmed that issues around literacy and numeracy reduce the productive capacity of some employees to perform workplace tasks.

While costs of training were a major concern to 36% of businesses, there was also wide recognition (45%) of government funding, and strong support for training of apprentices to be focused on skills competency (60%).

The ACCI Survey also revealed that three of the top four workplace issues were associated with the introduction of the 'fair work' industrial relations laws (limits on dealing with employees (77%), transition to the new awards (79%) and compliance (78%)).

"Aside from workers' compensation costs, the new industrial relations system is top of mind amongst employers. The Survey suggests that employers are bringing their businesses into compliance, but equally doubtful whether the government has got the balance right, especially the limits on direct dealings with employees over wages and conditions."

77% of businesses are also concerned about whether the new IR laws help or hinder achieving productivity through workplace change.

ACCI represents over 350,000 businesses in every State and Territory and all industries. Our network employs around 4 million employees, ranging from the top 100 companies to tens of thousands of small and medium businesses.

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“The Survey demonstrates a willingness to give the new IR system a go, but high levels of concern with aspects of these laws send a clear message to Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott that they any government they lead must make necessary changes as the system evolves, especially if the laws inhibit workplace productivity or direct dealings with staff.”

The high value business are placing on workplace reform and skills development is central to the ACCI *Jobs and Growth Reform Agenda* released last Friday, and sets a pathway ahead for the next Australian Government.

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