

Apprenticeship overhaul 'hurting women'

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JOB and training groups say the Gillard government's overhaul of the apprenticeship system is sexist and hurts women.

The changes made by the federal government restrict financial support for traineeships in favour of apprenticeships and steers away from part-time work financial incentives.

The Australian Council of Private Education and Training has put a memo out to its members accusing the Gillard government of designing a policy that hurts women.

Chief executive Claire Field wrote in it that restricting financial support for traineeships in favour of apprenticeships "would push many women out of training altogether because women more commonly undertake traineeships, often part-time, and are especially prevalent in retail traineeships".

"In the current political climate, this is a very disappointing decision," she said. "This measure also punishes people undertaking training on a part-time or casual basis, running against the grain of governments' calls for a more flexible workforce, and unfairly targets women and younger people."

Kathleen Newcombe, head of education at Sarina Russo Job

Access, one of the biggest job service providers in Australia, said the policy would hurt women the most.

"The significance of education and training for women cannot be underestimated, particularly when it comes to entry-level roles and women returning to the workforce after having a family," she said.

"Women are more likely to move in and out of the workforce based on family circumstances, and therefore require additional support to access relevant skills for the changing labour market.

"With the fast-changing nature of the workforce, old jobs disappearing and new industries emerging, there is a need to include supported work placements and pre-employment (taster courses) for women re-entering training.

"Training is one of the key drivers of economic wellbeing through improved labour market outcomes for women, which in turn supports our society as a whole."

A spokesman for the Minister for Skills, Chris Evans, said the measures announced this week in the government's Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook were designed to prioritise the skills needs of the economy.

"The government reforms prioritise support for skills in high demand, which is why we have continued to support employer subsidies for diploma-level courses in aged care, childcare and health services. These are occupations dominated by female workers," he said.

"The government provides a wide range of programs which support training for employees and students in the services sector.

"Employers in the service sectors, including retail, care services and hospitality, remain eligible for \$4000 in support from the commonwealth for new full-time trainees, which make up the majority of trainees.

"The changes to employer subsidies announced this week are designed to better balance the incentives paid to part-time and casual trainees as a proportion of the incentive paid for a full-time trainee."