

26 September 2023

## **EMPLOYMENT WHITE PAPER HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR FOCUS ON PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

The region's peak business organisation, Business Illawarra, has said that the Employment White Paper released yesterday by the Federal Government is a necessary step towards getting the settings right for the workforce of the future – and that it highlights the need to continue supporting practical, outcomes-driven projects like [IllawarraYES](#).

Executive Director of Business Illawarra, Adam Zarth, said as businesses continue to recover from the impacts of skills shortages caused by the pandemic, it's critical that immediate steps are taken to help businesses find the skilled workers they need.

"We are pleased to see the report's focus on skilling the workforce for future jobs that have significance for the Illawarra – particularly in the net zero economy, care, tech and cyber sectors," said Mr Zarth.

"Our recent [Business Conditions Survey](#) shows just how difficult it is for businesses to get the staff they need – with business owners resorting to staff hoarding despite cutting deep into their profit margins."

"We need employers to have access to the skills they need when they need them and look forward to seeing more details of how the National Skills Passport can build trust that prospective employees will be able to do the job."

"The White Paper underscores the need for new models to support apprentices to complete their training, although we are keen to see more detail. The global pandemic and its aftermath caused a period of great uncertainty for local young people and a high youth unemployment rate which remains twice that of the mainstream rate."

Since 2016 the IllawarraYES program has been funded by the NSW Government to run work readiness programs and create pathways to real jobs for local young people with Business Illawarra members – while addressing the skill shortages faced by local businesses across the region.

"Over the past two years, IllawarraYES has delivered or supported 40 programs assisting hundreds of young people across the Illawarra region. These programs have been delivered throughout the challenging COVID period which caused significant uncertainty for young people leaving school and or returning to the workforce."

"Given the concerns our members have expressed about TAFE in NSW, we hope to see further information on how the quality of teaching and availability of places can be improved across the state, beyond the new Centre of Excellence."

"It's time for governments, business and unions to work together to help people of all ages and career stages build and maintain the skills they need."

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We are pleased to see in the White Paper:

- A focus on productivity growth;

- Steps to address structural sources of underutilisation of labour, especially looking at youth participation rates and older workers;
- Steps to improve workforce planning, especially in key focus areas of net zero economy, care sectors and tech/cyber; and
- The establishment of six TAFE Centres of Excellence with \$41 million of funding.

“Business Illawarra will work with the government over the coming months as it looks to translate the intentions set out in the White Paper into implementable policy.”

The report can be found here: <https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report>

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#### **About Business Illawarra**

Formerly the Illawarra Business Chamber, *Business Illawarra* is the region’s peak business organisation; a not-for-profit advocacy group dedicated to the economic development of the Illawarra.