



# BUDGET 2008 - 2009 READY FOR THE FUTURE MEDIA RELEASE

No. 4

## OVER \$50 MILLION TO ADDRESS SKILLS CHALLENGE

The ACT Government will invest \$51 million over four years on a range of new initiatives to address the local impacts of the national skills shortage to ensure that Canberra's workforce and economy is ready for the future, Chief Minister Jon Stanhope announced today.

"The ACT Government will be introducing a range of new skills enhancement and development programs with existing programs to be provided with additional resources to attract skilled workers from interstate and abroad," Mr Stanhope said. "The ACT economy has virtually been running at full employment, with the unemployment rate at or below 3 per cent for the last eighteen months, putting pressure on the growth of our economy because we have simply not had enough skilled workers in the ACT.

"In response to this skills shortage, the ACT Government appointed the ACT Skills Commission to provide real solutions to the skills challenges facing the Territory. This Budget provides \$51 million in funding for a range of initiatives to address these challenges.

"These initiatives range from vocational training programs with the Canberra Institute of Technology through to improving the skills of workers, to programs to attract and retain more skilled workers in Canberra.

"The ACT Government will invest in a number of vocational education and training programs over the next four years to train more skilled workers. This Budget provides \$3.4 million over four years for Moving Forward, a program that provides targeted support for each ACT secondary college student to develop and expand careers education and vocational learning programs in colleges.

"The Government will also invest \$4.2 million over four years to meet skills shortages through User Choice. This funding will support vocational education and training through Australian Apprenticeships in the ACT.

"The 2008-09 Budget will also invest \$2.5 million over four years to increase the level of vocational education and training offered at the Canberra Institute of Technology. An additional \$1 million over four years will also be provided to the CIT Vocational College to provide customised student support programs for students at risk of not completing their studies to ensure that they can become skilled workers.

"CIT will also receive funding for new capital infrastructure to upgrade facilities so that students can learn and practice their skills with new state-of-the-art facilities. This includes \$9 million for a new horticulture facility at the Bruce Campus. The Government will also invest \$500,000 for the feasibility and design of a new Trade Skills Centre at Fyshwick.

"The ACT Government will also provide \$1.178 million to support skilled migration programs. This funding will include a boost for the Skilled and Business Migration Program in the ACT,

which assists Canberra employers to sponsor skilled workers from overseas. An increase in funding for this program will put Canberra on a stronger footing to compete for skilled migrants, as we will be able to provide greater assistance with settlement services and the abolition of application fees.

International students will also be encouraged to seek employment locally with the introduction of an international student intern pilot program.

"Around 6,000 international students are currently studying in the Territory, however relatively few seek employment locally after they finish their studies. The pilot program will look to connect final-year and graduating students to local employers," Mr Stanhope said.

With an additional \$2.7 million over 4 years, the number of trainees in the ACTPS will be increased through the InTACT ICT traineeship program which is aimed at college students and will deliver up to 16 ICT Trainees at the end of Stage 1 and up to 10 ITO-1s at the end of Stage 2.

"The successful *Live in Canberra* campaign will also be continued with \$838,000 over four years provided for the program to continue to raise awareness around Australia and the world that Canberra as a great place to live and work in an effort to attract skilled workers to the ACT.

"The 2008-09 Budget will also provide \$5.5 million to strengthen the ACT's health workforce. This includes \$4.2 million to provide training opportunities for new and expanded roles to strengthen the health workforce against shortages in nursing, midwifery and allied health services, and \$1.3 million in 2008-09 for the design of a new Health Skills Centre in The Canberra Hospital precinct. This centre will provide specialised skills training for medical, nursing, midwifery, allied health and technical staff within the health industry. The GP Work in Canberra campaign announced last year, will also continue to be funded.

"While working to maintain our skilled health workforce, these initiatives will also ensure that health services in the ACT continue to remain some of the best in the country.

"To further strengthen the ACT Public Service capacity, the Government will be investing \$2.5 million over 4 years to enhance leadership skills and the overall capacity of the public service. We will also be promoting the ACTPS as an employer of choice.

Statement ends

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