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## New year delivers a boost to thousands of apprentices

More than 60,000 apprentices around Australia will get a little extra help to finish their apprenticeships under new rules that come into force today.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said apprentices across all industries will now be reimbursed for the cost of course fees, text books and travel and accommodation costs if they have to travel long distances to attend TAFE training.

“This is a huge win by unions for young Australians studying a trade, which will help boost the number of apprentices who finish their training and go on to enter the workforce,” said Ms Kearney.

“Only 47 per cent of apprentices who started their training in 2009 went on to finish their apprenticeship – we know that low wages and extra training costs are a big factor in this.

“Ensuring all apprentices can be reimbursed for their training costs will make it easier for thousands of young Australians to finish their trade and get a job.”

Unions first won these conditions in 2013 for construction, manufacturing and electrical apprentices, which includes about 70 per cent of apprenticeships.”

The ACTU secured the entitlement for all apprentices under the Fair Work Commission’s review of the award system last month, with the changes coming into effect on January 1, 2015.

Ms Kearney said the win will benefit about 62,000 apprentices currently in training, who were not previously covered.

“This includes apprentices such as hairdressers, beauty therapists and chefs, who can now also be reimbursed for their study costs.

“The apprenticeship system plays a vital role in ensuring the current and future supply of skilled workers to meet the needs of industry and wider economy.

“It’s also critical in providing access to well-paid, highly skilled jobs for young, as well as older, Australians.

“This win by Australian Unions to have apprentices reimbursed for training costs is the sort of initiative the Abbott Government should be taking to help cut unemployment and get more young Australians into the workforce.

“Yet instead of investing in the future of young Australian workers, the Abbott Government cut \$914 million dollars from support programs for apprentices in the Federal Budget and introduced a loan scheme that will saddle apprentices with thousands of dollars in debt.

“And just this week we learnt of a further \$66 million cut in support for adult apprentices and a \$43 million cut from the Skills for Education and Employment program, which is aimed at providing jobseekers with basic skills to help get and retain a job.

“Youth unemployment is at 14.5 per cent – Australians want a Government with a plan for jobs, not just budget cuts,” Ms Kearney said.

**Media contact: Amy Gordon, 0410 631 404**