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Coalition defends giving former Liberal staffer \$500,000 job through limited tender

Michaelia Cash says Adam Boyton, the interim national skills commissioner, has an 'impressive CV'

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The Morrison government appointed the former Liberal staffer Adam Boyton to the \$500,000-a-year job of interim national skills commissioner through a limited tender, according to the official contract notice.

The employment and skills minister, Michaelia Cash, has defended the appointment, telling Guardian Australia that Boyton has an “impressive CV” and was appointed by cabinet after an “open merit-driven, competitive process”.

But according to procurement rules, limited tender allows the government to approach a particular supplier to apply and the regular rules of open tenders do

not apply. Those rules include a 25-day period for applications, a guarantee of fairness and impartiality, and that submissions are treated in confidence.

Boyton is a former policy director and chief of staff to the former New South Wales Liberal leader John Brogden.

The appointment, announced in October by the education minister, Dan Tehan, and Cash, will last from September 2019 to October 2020, with Boyton to be paid \$550,500.

According to the original Austender contract notice, accessed on Thursday morning, Boyton won the job through limited tender “due to an absence of competition for technical reasons”.

But after Guardian Australia contacted Tehan, Cash and the employment department, the Austender entry was corrected to state he was hired under a limited tender because of the exception for labour hire contracts.

Labor’s education spokeswoman, Tanya Plibersek, said that “at the same time Scott Morrison has shortchanged Tafe and training by nearly \$1bn, he’s giving his Liberal mate a half-a-million-dollar-a-year job - his priorities are all wrong”.

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The Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary, Sally McManus, said the government had “paid a former staffer more than half a million dollars a year to oversee the sector which has been devastated by their cuts”.

Cash said: “Boyton was selected as the interim national skills commissioner through an open merit-driven, competitive process and was appointed by cabinet.

“Mr Boyton will lead the design of the National Skills Commission to ensure that it is fit for purpose to meet Australia’s current and future skills needs.

“He has an impressive CV, with his most recent role being chief economist at the Business Council of Australia and was previously the Australian chief economist at Deutsche Bank.”

Boyton was also a member of the the federal government’s workplace relations consultative council.

In April, the then assistant treasurer Stuart Robert appointed Boyton a part-time member of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council, one of 14 Liberal or National MPs, party executives or senior advisers to Coalition ministers appointed in the weeks before the 2019 election was called.

The national skills commissioner position was advertised in the Australian Financial Review, Canberra Times and The Australian on Friday 2 August and two

consecutive weekends in August, with applications due by 16 August.

In October, Boyton's appointment was welcomed by the business community but blasted by the ACTU, which accused the government of handing control of vocational education to big business.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive, James Pearson, said Boyton "has relevant experience in the vocational education and training sector as a member of the NSW Skills Board as well as a strong grasp of the economy through his previous economist roles at Deutsche Bank, the BCA and treasury".

"He is well positioned to take on this vital role, and we encourage him to engage early with business on the reform tasks the government has set," Pearson said.

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