



VICTORIAN TAFE ASSOCIATION (VTA) SUBMISSION TO SKILLS AUSTRALIA – WORKFORCE FUTURES

Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the papers to promote discussion towards an Australian Workforce Development Strategy.

VTA is the employer body for TAFE in Victoria with members including four multi-sector Universities and fourteen stand-alone public TAFE Institutes. It is in this context that this response is provided.

VTA appreciates the opportunity to comment in detail at the consultations in Melbourne on October 23, 2009 and congratulates Skills Australia on providing a summary to participants at that consultation session.

VTA in this response reflects on the key points of feedback following the Melbourne Consultation and on the views of Victorian TAFE providers attending a focus group convened on October 27, 2009.

VTA members may respond individually to the Overview Paper, Background Paper 1 and Background Paper 2 to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations.

This response is intentionally brief. Please do not hesitate to contact Nita Schultz (nschultz@vta.vic.edu.au) for points of clarification.

KEY RESPONSES:

- VTA supports in-principle the risk minimisation approach advanced in the consultation papers.
- VTA strongly supports a national approach to workforce development.
- VTA strongly recommends that in framing a national workforce development strategy, socio as well as economic factors needs to be taken into consideration.
- The unique features of working and living in regional centres, compared to urban settings, need to be considered in the risk focus. Occupations that may not have a high risk profile based on highly aggregated national data may be exposed to risk in regional and remote areas. There are regional skill variations across occupational sectors.
- The critical importance of foundation skills needed prior to occupationally specific vocational education and training cannot be overlooked. This does not simply relate to literacy, language and numeracy (LL&N) skills to enter Certificate II or III programs but higher level LL&N to prepare for para-professional and professional occupations. VTA endorses the sentiments that there is an immediate need to strengthen core literacy skills.

- The Skills Planning methodology described at the consultation on October 23 is generally endorsed by VTA. It was noted during the consultations that comments focussed on the occupations described in the indicative list of occupations at risk rather than focussing on the methodology. Skills Australia must take responsibility for ensuring the focus at this stage is on the methodology and not on hypothetical outcomes.
- VTA strongly endorses a planning approach that relies on some intervention while allowing for some VET activities to be determined by the market. What the relative proportions will be are yet to be determined but the principle is sound. Such an approach will ensure targeted investment in occupations that do not feature in high demand yet are critical to economic prosperity.
- VTA remains unconvinced that Certificate III needs to be seen as the minimum entry requirement (as raised at the Melbourne Consultation October 23). VTA recommends that Skills Australia wait for the outcomes of the AQF Council review of the AQF to inform their thinking in this area.
- Workforce development is a horizontal process as well as a vertical process. The importance of processes to enable horizontal development of employees must be considered. This is a weakness in the Victorian model where up-skilling is presumed to only occur if each qualification acquired is at a level higher than the previous qualification. All too frequently there is a need to 'go sideways', to participate more fully in employment and to boost personal productivity whether for reasons of retrenchment, changed skills in a particular occupation or for career progression. Business management skills are a case in point.
- VTA supports a co-ordinated approach to tapping into skills underutilised/not utilised in the workforce. De-motivation and disenchantment are outcomes of underutilisation of skills. Recruitment, retention and workplace relations strategies that involve re-designing jobs, where this is based on changed markets, may contribute to better skills utilisation. It is likely additional resources, including expert advice, will be required by employers to design and implement such strategies at the local level. Enterprises will look to the TAFE sector to provide such services and governments will need to consider the allocation of additional funds for this purpose.
- The returns on investment in education need to be emphasised to employers and governments have responsibilities to promote this message.
- Employers, apart from being responsible for managing their workforce better, should also be accountable for public resources allocated to training the workforce.
- The focus of policy initiatives between individual states and the Australian Government may differ putting in jeopardy the achievement of employment and skills targets. COAG has a role to provide leadership.
- VTA members suggest that the Australian Government provides incentives for workforce development outcomes in federal infrastructure project contracts, for which results are audited and published.
- The development of a strategic national workforce development approach provides the ideal opportunity to ensure consistency of terminology between governments (State and Australian) and to avoid creating new language.
- VTA encourages Skills Australia to recognise the value of skill sets as well as the completion of full qualifications as contributing to the development of the Australian workforce.

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