



Workforce Futures:

Towards an Australian Workforce Development Strategy

Skills Australia would like to hear your views on *Workforce Futures* and welcomes your written submission by **6 November 2009**.

To assist with the analysis of submissions received, we request that feedback is provided using this template. Your co-operation is appreciated.

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Please email submissions to secretariat@skillsaustralia.gov.au

Submission information

Organisation	Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council
Contact	Amanda Thomas – Director Research & Policy, Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council
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6 November 2009



Submissions - Skills Australia
GPO Box 9880 (loc C14MT2)
Canberra City ACT 2601



Re: Australia's Workforce Futures Discussion Paper

The Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council is pleased to submit our 2009/10 research project: ***The Future of Skills in the Australian Port Industry*** in response to Skills Australia's call for submission in response to its most recent discussion paper.

This research project is an initiative of the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council and will use the services of RMIT University to complete the study. A copy of the project outline is attached to this submission.

This research project combines many of the elements that are outlined in the Skills Australia discussion paper including:

- a coordinated approach across industry, government and education sectors through the operation of the steering committee and the Delphi group
- a methodology that seeks to identify the answers to the following questions:
 - What is the current situation regarding the demand and supply of skills in the ports?
 - What is the nature of on-going and planned expansion in the ports and what does such expansion mean for port labour and skills?
 - How do the port authorities and management intend to meet any increased skills demands resulting from the expansion activities?
 - What recruitment and retention mechanisms are in place to ensure skills and workforce sustainability?
- a targeted case study process that will allow important inferences to be drawn across the sector, regarding current skills issues, and also about the implication of certain kinds of changes in port infrastructure and facility expansion for essential or critical skills.

The project is underway and is due for completion in October 2010. For more information about the project please contact Amanda Thomas, Director Research and Policy on 02 6163 7227.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Gwilym'.

Geoff Gwilym
CEO

Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council

PROJECT OUTLINE



The Future of Skills in the Australian Port Industry; a case study of four selected ports

Introduction

For an industrialised economy, such as Australia, with significant potential for further GDP growth, a strong skills base is essential. However, like many other industrialised economies, there are concerns about a declining and ageing skills profile in many sectors which poses a threat to any projected growth (The Senate 2007). Recent studies have revealed that, in the absence of urgent and comprehensive measures to boost skills formation and replenishment, many industrialised countries will be unable to achieve their future development goals (e.g. Leitch Review, 2006; Thompson Clarke Shipping, 2002).

A sector of the Australian economy that faces a skills shortage is ports, and for an island nation, which depends on shipping for over 95% of her trade, ports occupy a particularly critical position. In addition to being important economic gateways, ports form important logistical hubs whose value adding processes drive economic growth. The optimisation of these benefits is, however, constantly threatened by skill shortages which leads us to the important question about how to secure the future of port skills in order to realise effective growth and expansion. There are concerns about the inability of the ports and the wider maritime sector to attract young people who are presented with a multitude of career options emanating from a developing economy. The result is an increasingly ageing and shrinking workforce in the ports and increasing pressure on future planning relating to expansion and productivity.

Study Aims

The aim of this study is to determine the implications of projected port expansion on skills capacity and needs in Australia. It will identify key jobs in the port industry, with respect to their centrality to the sector's effective operations, determine the demographic structure of the current workforce, map out the areas of skills shortage at present and determine future needs in consideration of projected growth and expansion. The ultimate objective is to set the basis for policy decisions on ways of recruitment and skills capacity building for the industry in order to ensure that facility expansion within the ports can translate into higher efficiency and greater productivity.

Research Questions

Based on current concerns about skills in many sectors of the economy and predictions of further decline in skills availability in the future the study seeks to understand the current skills profile in the ports sector and examine future demands based on projected expansion in the various ports. The study will be guided by the following broad questions:

1. What is the current situation regarding the demand and supply of skills in the ports?
2. What is the nature of on-going and planned expansion in the ports and what does such expansion mean for port labour and skills?
3. How do the port authorities and management intend to meet any increased skills demands resulting from the expansion activities?
4. What recruitment and retention mechanisms are in place to ensure skills and workforce sustainability?

Methodologies

The study will involve data collection in four Australian ports: Sydney, Dampier, Adelaide and Gladstone. The selection of these ports takes into consideration a number of factors which include level of commercial activity, current and projected facility growth and expansion, current through-put and type of cargo(es) handled. The selection has also been done so as to achieve a reasonable representation of Australia's import export activity and the frontiers, i.e., East, West, South and North.

Data will be collected through a qualitative instrumental case-study methodology (Stake 1995; Yin 2003), which has previously been found to be most appropriate for research projects that, primarily aim to develop an in-depth understanding of organisational structures, their change processes and the implications (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, 1991). As noted earlier, the study focuses on four ports. This is out of a possible total of 69 ports; 28 major ones and 41 smaller, though not necessarily insignificant, ones. Whereas this selection is neither meant to be representative nor to make a definitive statement on the national picture with regard to port workforce and skills, it is intended that important inferences may be drawn about current skills issues and about the implication of certain kinds of changes in port infrastructure and facility expansion for essential skills. The primary emphasis is, therefore, in the depth of the study rather than the scope of representation.

The study will rely on three main data sources, including a Delphi group (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004; Skulmoski et al 2007), in-depth interviews (Arskey, and Knight 1999) and secondary data analysis. The Delphi will comprise of six participants selected on the basis of their expertise in various aspects of the ports industry, including port operations, port regulation, port work organisation, port management and human resource management within the ports. The primary tasks for the Delphi group will be to:

- (1) establish a definition of the port area for the purposes of determining skills profile and demands
- (2) identify essential jobs within the port, as defined in (1) above, for the purposes of determining areas of critical skills requirements
- (3) establish a criteria for identifying essential jobs in the port and
- (4) Identify the various forms of expansion going on in the ports industry.

Interviews will be conducted primarily with port workers and port work managers in different sections, particularly those areas perceived to be key and critical to the port labour process. Additionally, interview data will be collected from those officials involved in the areas of port regulation, human resource management and port work organisation, i.e. union officials. The number of interviews conducted in each port will therefore vary depending on the structure of the port but it is envisaged that no less than six people will be interviewed in each port. The selection of interviewees will reflect the complexity and diversity of port work so that, although primary attention will be focussed on inner port circle, i.e. the point of sea land interface, references will also be made to some of the key associated peripheral functions. Furthermore, any available data on port workforce both nationally, and in the specific ports, will be analysed to form the basis for comparison and to complement the qualitative data generated.

Data collection will be done subject to approval by the RMIT research ethics committee and will be guided by the standard ethical guidelines for the conduct of human research.

For more information about the project please contact Amanda Thomas, Director Research and Policy, TLISC on 02 6163 7227.