

Skills Australia - Australian Workforce Development Strategy

Submission on Workforce Futures

To better realise the productive potential of the workforce, making changes and improving outcomes from education and skills development are just the start to a whole set of fundamental changes that need to be made in Australia. This submission will highlight my personal thoughts and opinions based on working in employment, training and careers development for the past 10 years.

My thoughts outlined are in response to both the Workforce Futures paper to promote discussion towards an Australian Workforce Development Strategy, and the Sydney meeting as part of the national series of meetings held, which I attended on the 4th of November, 2009.

My area of experience has been in career education, career training and career development. Over the past 10 years, my work has centred on the engagement of young people, school leavers and those aged 15 to 19 mostly. I have experience working with people of mature age in career change education, and with seeking employment and staff recruitment for industry.

Transitions of Young People into Workforce and further Education

I intend to concentrate much of my feedback and comment on the important area of transitions for young people from education and into the workforce. This is an area that has seen continuous change in policy and program development over the past 10 years, and continues to do so, whilst the fundamental needs of the 15 to 24 year cohort and gaps in service availability have not changed in this time.

For a Workforce Strategy to make a difference, and move towards positive outcomes for Australia, there needs to continue to be a strong focus on youth and to ensure there is support for all young Australians in their education and skills development, accounting for their fundamental preparation for the workforce. This is paramount on for a number of essential reasons:

- Young people are presented with growing numbers of options, well in excess to the options those of previous generations had available, at the same stage in their lives. Creating a transitions service available to all young Australian's to enable young people to sift through this ever increasing choice of options around education, training pathways and skills development needs to be a priority of Governments. Just as the national employment framework delivered through Job Services Australia has become. The choice of Government funded and privately funded options are broad, however the on the ground service delivery to help young people make right choices and become better informed does not match the growing levels of information.
- Young people are raw, influential and yet to make a real difference to the Australian Workforce. If young people are not a priority, and a focus for future program service delivery, this cohort could effectively pull the rug out of the best intentions aimed at workforce development in the future. Just as 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation unemployed people who chew away at the system, with little or no intention of ever working or becoming part of the Australian workforce, a strong focus needs to be made to ensure the 4th generation does not continue the rot in terms of future workforce development. Previous generations were not given priority as they made their transitions from education to the workforce. The same mistakes should not be made again; 'Fresh Thinking' is required to ensure the next generation is not missed.

Transitions of Young People into Workforce and further Education - Continued

- Young people particularly in rural and regional areas are not given the same opportunities to enhance their eventual transitions as their metropolitan counterparts. This is largely caused by isolation and the lack of proximity to where the bulk of the programs and events are staged, of which are designed to support young people through their transitions into the workforce. With simple consideration to mobile infrastructure through Government seed funding that can become industry funded once established, is a simple response to narrowing this gap. Young people in isolated communities across Australia, receive no assistance or help what so ever, once they leave school, are just starting to think about the direction that may suit them, putting them at risk of dropping out of the system altogether and becoming long term unemployed by the time they reach age 21. Job Services Australia has been established across Australia, and should be an important part of future strategy development. However, there are limitations, for a young person who has just finished school, and may not like to register through Centrelink as a jobseeker, they will not be eligible to receive any assistance in the first 13 weeks, this is enough time for a young person who has failed to reach any decision on a desired pathway post school, to become non focused and drift away into an area of uncertainty, and become yet another statistic of an unemployed or under employed individual. With greater assistance prior to leaving school or other education, they can become an effective and long term participant in the workforce.
- The overall population of Australia is ageing, and the number of people actively engaged in the workforce reduces (due to greater numbers leaving than those entering, this trend may peak in approximately 2015). Those entering the workforce for the first time will be held in greater regard than ever before, with or without skills, they will need to be encouraged to trained and learn new skills and build qualifications in areas of most need. Tertiary placements will need to reflect the need for appropriately qualified workers, where this may occur at the present time, there is still enormous wastage of resources being thrown at areas where skills needs are very low, and in some instances, an over supply exists. This only provides those who study in these areas, a pathway to failure and disappointment.
- Increase in School Leaving Age to 17 in NSW from 2010. This increase in school leaving age represents a prime opportunity to deliver on improved educational outcomes across all NSW, and therefore a greater resource from which to build the workforce of tomorrow. Although it remains to be seen how this change will impact on the schools and other equivalent secondary education providers, it is clear however that there sill need to be changes to school programs, and there needs to be careful consideration to designing school programs that are both dynamic and well structured to cater for the sharp increase in numbers of students who do not want to be in the classroom. Skills Australia in their Workforce Development Strategy should engage Education providers in NSW, including DET, Catholic Schools and Independents along with relevant Government Departments including DEEWR and DEEWR funded services such as Partnership Brokers to help shape policy that can further engage industry in curriculum centred programs. A growth of programs that are outside the current curriculum, will further add pressure and strain to an already over worked timetable and teacher workload.
 - Consideration to changes in timetabling of school excursions that are non academic related, such as Central Australia trips, etc, should be made, suggested that these trips be made available to students no later than year 8.
 - Altering extra curricular activities such as school sports ensuring these activities are staged on weekends where ever possible, thus allowing students who are commonly out of school up to a day a week, sometimes several days a week during peak times, the opportunity to concentrate on school work. Often the case, it is those students who are out on sport during the week, that have greater need to improve literacy and numeracy education.

Transitions of Young People into Workforce and further Education - Continued

- The two points mentioned above, together can open up timetabling in senior high school years 11 and 12, to ensure a greater opportunity for students to interact with industry and the time to provide many students who need to be more industry focused in their studies, the opportunity to do so. This is particularly of value to those areas such as trades, engineering, health and science related occupations, the chance to forge stronger links with students, and therefore helping students to make better informed decisions that may impact positively on the drop out rates of tertiary and trade students post school.

Literacy, Numeracy and Communication

Although this is not an issue related to young people only, it does deserve a focus on its own, as it is the corner stone for any national workforce, and should be a major focus when developing strategies for a national workforce of the future. There is strong evidence that suggests young people who are in education to be a means towards further and future progress will be inclined to remain interested in education, without drifting along at risk of falling away. This alone contributes to the high uptake in recent years of VET Education in high schools, as young people see this stream of education as a means to an end, related to their future objectives. Therefore young people, who do not have future aspirations, goals, etc, are at greater risk of falling behind in school and becoming disengaged. The levels of literacy and numeracy suffer and the consequences of lower levels of L&N are devastating to the future aspirations of any young person.

Steps must be taken to ensure young people must be of a minimum standard in L&N before being able to make the transition from Primary School to High School, and if steps are taken in year 4, to ensure further resources are provided in this area, young people who are potentially at risk or failing in High School, must be given the extra assistance to ensure they can lift their individual L&N levels. Early intervention at this stage, will greatly improve the transition of a young person through High School, and then onto post school education across the Vocational or Tertiary landscape.

It was mentioned at the Sydney meeting, that middle aged males are a focus as they account for high numbers of those either not engaged or disengaged from the workforce. This may be correct; however I question the reasoning behind this. Could it be this group of people who potentially could become part of the workforce are those who make up the 2nd and 3rd generation of unemployed people, relying totally on the welfare system, with little or no intention to work in the future? It can be argued, that with the welfare system structured as it is, this group are far better off staying at home rather than going out and risking a reduction in benefits if they found work. In addition to this financial disincentive, in regional Australia, they would simply spend their entire wage on travel just getting to and from work, adding to the list of reasons why they are not in the workforce.

The Productivity Places Program, will work towards skilling Australians who need a change or an addition to their skills sets, however, it is argued that at a minimum of Certificate III training level, a large proportion of Australians out of work for an extended period of time, and accessing Job Services Australia services, may not be in the position to equip themselves mentally to the challenges training from a Certificate III level creates. Training commencements may number well and look healthy on paper; however completions will look decidedly unhealthy as large numbers of people can not complete this standard of training for varying reasons, one of which being the entry level is too high for those who commence to cope with.

The table below shows total workforce numbers based on 2006 ABS Census Data and shows numbers and variations of qualifications reached across the workforce. Figures are also broken down into industry sectors, across the Statistical Subdivisions of:

Tamworth
Northern Slopes
Hunter SD and Balance
Northern Tablelands
North Central Plains

(The regions listed above are all rural and regional areas of NSW)

Industry	Post graduate degree	Graduate Dipl & Graduate Certificate	Bachelor Degree	Advanced Diploma & Diploma	Certificate	Difference between total qualifications and total in industry	Total
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	112	99	1099	1286	3234	10180	16010
Mining	46	24	329	194	1774	1809	4176
Manufacturing	43	33	235	290	3078	4288	7967
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	30	7	82	125	833	616	1693
Construction	6	6	138	220	3880	3409	7659
Wholesale Trade	7	9	151	144	958	1976	3245
Retail Trade	21	36	380	487	2523	8983	12430
Accommodation & Food Services	14	19	203	294	1486	5675	7691
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	6	11	106	157	1123	3240	4643
Information Media and Telecommunications	17	27	115	70	290	504	1023
Financial and Insurance Services	34	6	235	262	377	1090	2004
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	3	13	86	203	507	733	1545
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	218	122	1136	457	909	1457	4299
Administrative and Support Services	9	10	102	141	611	1611	2484
Public Administration and Safety	187	132	838	735	1651	2695	6238
Education and Training	909	757	3248	1394	1080	1992	9380
Health Care and Social Assistance	265	282	2202	1433	2671	4076	10929
Arts and Recreation Services	23	13	80	69	291	576	1052
Other Services	35	23	191	221	2331	1769	4570
Totals	1985	1629	10956	7961	29607	56679	109038

As is evident in the above figures, over half of the workforce does not have any mentioned qualifications, a figure that undermines the potential strength of the workforce currently, if continued, would definitely undermine the strength of the workforce of the future.

Therefore, it is essential, for any Workforce Development Strategy, there must be a focus on the younger cohort of 15 to 24 year olds to ensure this cohort can change the trend that has produced the figures of today, undermining the strength and potential of the Australian Workforce.

Governments and Departments talking and communicating more effectively

The classic example where resources are not being utilised to their maximum benefit for communities are in areas including:

- Government Departments are funding programs with synergies to help promote workforce development.

For Example: In countless instances, DEEWR would be in the best position to provide service providers with lists of programs funded, materials funded, and other relevant cross over funded initiatives so as those service providers who are on the ground making a difference, can create even greater outcomes through partnering with like minded service providers funded through the same Government Department.

- Government Departments are funding resources that are being duplicated by other funding streams.

For Example: The Mining Skills Centre was funded by DEEWR to produce a visual presentation on mining called 'Skilling for the Future', a production showcasing mining. The same Government Department also funded a resource created through Career Advice Australia to produce resources to showcase mining and producing the same outcome, a visual guide for young people and people looking to find out more about the mining industry.

- Government Departments funding materials and resources that can be used for greatest potential and benefit if accessible to relevant stakeholders

For Example: Government school to work transitions programs funded to assist young people, including those with disabilities and who are at risk of making a poor transition from school to work or further education, are not made aware of the resources that the same Government Department funded another like minded funded program to assist in the transition of young people with disabilities to make the transition from school to further education.

With careful planning and consideration of the outcomes each Government funded initiative is funded to provide, there should be the opportunity for a sharp rise in connectivity of programs from the Government Department providing the funding, through to the organisations or providers who are funded to deliver the outcomes for the communities. Greater connectivity will deliver massive benefits in helping to shape Australia's workforce of the future, ensuring any strategy will be able to provide maximum benefit across all Australia.

Accurate and relevant Skills Needs Data

The previous Australian Government established a national network in part designed to provide accurate existing skills needs and emerging skills needs data, from the ground up, representative of all communities throughout Australia. This network unfortunately will soon close, and unfortunately this network will not be replaced with a similar network to provide this data. Independent surveys are not able to provide an accurate record as to what skills needs exist or will emerge, and consequently large parts of Australia are not truly represented under existing surveys used to define such data. This will ultimately mean that future strategy to tackle skill needs nationally will be made on inaccurate and blinkered data.

Thankyou for viewing this submission, any further contact on any points raised can be made by contacting Charles Impey (Regional Industry Career Adviser for the Great Lakes, Upper Hunter, North West, Northern Slopes, North Central Plains, Northern Tablelands and New England Regions) of Rural Skills Australia on:

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