

Skills Australia: Workforce Futures Submission

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About Education.au Limited

Education.au is Australia's leading Information and Communications Technology (ICT) agency for educators and delivers a range of web services to clients in the higher education, schools education and vocational education and training sectors.

Established in 1996, Education.au is a not-for-profit ministerially owned company, governed through a Board by nominees from the Australian Government, higher education, school education, and vocational education and training sectors.

Education.au provides:

- innovative technology solutions for education and training
- online education and career services
- access to international networks and alliances
- shared online services such as learning resources, news items and events
- consultancy services in technology
- workshops and seminars with renowned education and technology leaders.

Further information

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1 Introduction

Workforce development issues and strategies are of special interest to Education.au as we are highly committed to providing high quality services to student and adults, workers and potential workforce participants, to assist them in making effective career decisions.

Since 2000, Education.au has been involved in coordinating, commissioning and developing extensive online national career information for students and adults, including international jobseekers and students. On behalf of Australian, state and territory governments, we are responsible for the management, development and hosting of Australia's national career information service, myfuture.edu.au. The service, launched in 2002, was conceptualised as a one-stop-shop for career information and to provide access to ongoing career exploration tools and plans to aid in skills development and career management. The traffic of myfuture grows every year and will exceed 35 million page views in 2009.

2 Meeting Australia's skills needs

The three scenarios provide a sound foundation to consider the future demand for career information, skills development assistance and professional development support in education and training, industry and enterprises. The scenarios and issues outlined provide confidence in Skills Australia's predictions for future workforce development.

From our experience in the management of data for the Australian career information management system, including collection, interpretation, moderation and publication, the following issues have been identified with regard to supporting planning, predictions and the useful application of that data:

- Regional labour market information needs to be provided to career intermediaries such as teachers, parents, career guidance officers and individual users at a much more granular level. For example, myfuture.edu.au provides regional labour market information for 204 Australian Bureau of Statistics regions. Frequently, we receive feedback from state and territory transition workers assisting youth, that more regional specific information would be useful for those researching work and career pathways.
- Skills outlook information and associated regional labour market information available for the public needs to be more accessible to people making occupation and industry choices. Whilst a wealth of information, including graphs and tables, are provided online, much of the data is not able to easily be interpreted by general users. The provision of easy to use information, tailored for young people and/or those with literacy issues could be developed for, and published, on existing infrastructure, such as www.myfuture.edu.au.

- To gain synchronicity in projections and participation in occupations and industries in demand in the future, young people and existing workers need longer lead times to consider emerging occupations and the implications for their future skill development and education and training pathways. Therefore, we recommend establishing initiatives to provide highly engaging information about emerging skills requirements (i.e. Green Skills), occupations of the future and industry projections to the public, via www.myfuture.edu.au. This could be assisted by the establishment of a National Career Information Advisory Group, represented by career information providers, practitioners, industry and employer associations to advise on the strategic direction and promotion of this information.
- The Job Guide is published and distributed to all Year 10 students every year. We recommend that the program of review which determines which 200 of the 600 occupations in the publication is undertaken in consultation with industry and Education.au to ensure emerging occupations are adequately represented so they can be considered by students and parents.

Factors missing from our projections?

- *How can we take the realities of the labour market into better account?*

The interpretation of skill needs is largely prefaced on the extension of current industries. Over the period suggested for long term planning there would be advantages in including a prediction of future industry needs and occupations. This could be extrapolated from international developments, industry forecasts and areas of emerging needs. As an example the focus on preparing people for work in the area of "green skills" or biotechnology were able to be predicted as these industries began to develop, but the need to adapt courses, or develop whole new programs, and to recruit qualified teaching staff or retrain existing educators often results in a time lag between need and availability of suitable employees.

From a career development perspective, people need unbiased reliable career information to assist them in making school subject choices, further education and training choices and employment pathway choices.

- *What else should/could we consider?*

In order to prepare people for careers that will inevitably change it would be worthwhile to investigate those early career choices that prepare people for varying work roles over their employment life, e.g. trade training that leads to the creation of new small business. What are the subsequent re-training requirements? What is the average period before these are required and can education providers and industry associations or skills councils assist in these career transitions?

In a similar way are there predictions, or evidence of the kinds of training that is most beneficial in preparing people for careers which lead to the creation of new industries and occupations? While it is critical to prepare adequate numbers of qualified workers, some attention to how successful employers / business people create new employment opportunities would be very valuable.

One area that has not been addressed is the growing requirement for para-professional skills to support high technology, specialist industries. Adequately trained support staff can increase the effectiveness of professional and highly skilled staff by providing necessary support services or undertaking roles which require skills at a lower but complementary level, for example, biomedical.

Best use of investments?

- *How can we best use current investments to support our emerging workforce demands?*

Australia's national career information and career exploration service was established as a one-stop-shop for Australians requiring information about occupations, industries, education, training and support. Over the years, government initiatives at all levels have resulted in some duplication of effort in the research and publication of career information and fragmentation of data collections. Further, some commercial sites are providing inconsistent non-quality assured career information to the public.

myfuture provides the obvious base for continued development and upgrading to meet the career information distribution needs of all levels of government. All currently contribute to its funding and can increase their return on investment in the service by better integration and interoperability of career data sets and publications. Further, myfuture can be endorsed as a quality assured site, potentially using the Career Industry Council of Australia's guidelines for career services and information.

3 Realising Australia's skill potential

Education.au highly supports a shared Australian national workforce development approach that engages with all levels of government, industry, education and training bodies and workforce representatives.

Realising Australia's skill potential will be influenced by the population's level of understanding of how to best manage their careers, particularly in light of the changes that will occur in a rapidly changing global market, innovative technologies being utilised by industries at an increasing rate and the continuing impact of demographics on workforce participation rates.

The Australian Government has invested in a range of career development initiatives, making significant progress over the past ten years in establishing infrastructure, resources, practitioners' professional development and standards. Further, in early 2009, MCEETYA endorsed the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD). The Australian Blueprint for Career Development is a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating career development programs for young people and adults. At its core, the Blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to effectively manage their careers.

Therefore, it is imperative that all Australians, no matter their age/life stage, be provided with career development competencies that will enable them to realise their skill potential, and in turn, that of the country.

Need for a national approach?

- *Are there factors we haven't considered here?*

A shared national workforce development approach will require a co-ordinated approach, involving all states and territories and the Australian Government. The recent National Partnerships for Youth Participation and Attainment will assist states and territories to specifically tailor their responses to meet improved outcome targets, with regard to increased rates of retention to Year 12 and participation of youth in education and training. Ultimately, it is hoped that this will provide a solid foundation for building a higher skills base in Australia in the longer term.

To ensure young people are equipped to respond to the skill needs of Australia's future it will be important that they all receive adequate access to career advice and guidance, that is underpinned by professionals meeting industry standards, and access to current and timely career information. To facilitate this, it will be essential that career practitioners and career information providers are supported by national programs and frameworks to guarantee young people with equal access to quality career information and advice.

The impact of a workforce development response?

- *What might the impact be of this new proposal on your organisation and/or industry?*

A national approach to workforce development that addresses the issues outlined in both papers one and two requires supporting career information to be made available to industry, employers, students, teachers, adults, parents etc. If a national approach is adopted there will need to be increased coordination in the identification and provision of accurate, reliable and current occupation, industry and course information.

- *How might we take this into account?*

This will require a more strategic approach to career information development, more closely aligned with models adopted in other countries such as New Zealand. Occupation and industry research is conducted by a team of professional researchers and journalists on a continuous basis, is integrated (unlike in Australia) with the main providers of career information.

Therefore, all stakeholders will need to consider improvements to the process for researching and publishing career information, particularly that which is forward looking. Appropriate models and funding levels for creating occupation profiles and industry information will be required to ensure www.myfuture.edu.au continues to support the information demands of stakeholders.

4 Skills Australia's proposal for workforce development

The increasing mobility of the population and rapid technology changes demand a national approach to workforce development. If a national approach to workforce

development is going to increase the capacity of Australia to positively respond to the economic and social impacts of globalisation and other environmental factors it is highly supported.

Improving participation?

- *What do we need to include as key elements for best practice to improve participation?*

Many countries have introduced a national and coordinated approach to providing 24 hour access to career advice, including: information about courses and programs that provide a pathway, both directly and indirectly, back into the workforce; and career guidance to encourage ongoing participating in the workforce.

We understand a national call centre has been funded to provide Australians with information about employment services and some career guidance. It is imperative that information about career opportunities is promoted effectively to people in different age/life stages to encourage workforce participation. This will require adequate marketing and promotional support to raise awareness of the benefits of contacting the service.

Literacy and numeracy issues have been mentioned in the *Workforce Futures* papers as a critical issue impacting on workforce participation. It is recommended that governments consider increasing the information provided on career sites, such as myfuture.edu.au, to include advice about the literacy requirements of occupations and how increasing literacy improves career self management and resilience in the workforce.

Promoting demand?

- *How can we ensure more enterprises develop workplace strategies that encourage the use/development of people's skills to improve performance?*

To support workplace strategies that encourage the use and development of people's skills to improve performance requires ease of access to tools that support workers and their employers to identify, record and plan for skill development and career progression.

Providing Australian workers with online tools such as e-portfolios to record and identify their skills, experience and knowledge will assist enterprises in skills needs analysis, better utilisation of training and development, and conducting professional development reviews aimed at increasing skills and performance.

In 2008-2009, Education.au was engaged by DEEWR to produce several reports under the Strategic ICT Advisory Service. From our investigations we believe the use of ICT will play an increasingly important role in workforce development.

It is our belief that economies which support lifelong learning and career development through widely available e-portfolio and related ICT services are positioning themselves to perform better than those economies that do not recognise the benefits that having a population comfortable with, and able to exploit the use of ICT throughout their careers. Individuals as well as regions that understand how to use technologies to plan, reflect and promote themselves will do better than those that do not.

- *Is a focus on skills use one way to increase employee engagement in work?*

Skills are one facet of an employee, a person. A focus on skills use may in fact be one way to increase employee engagement by achieving higher levels of job satisfaction through skill utilisation; and recognition and rewards for using skills for higher organisational performance. However, effectively engaging employees requires a multi-faceted approach. *Career: more than just a job* (downloaded from www.myfuture.edu.au), commissioned during the design of Australia's national career information and exploration service, emphasises effective career management involves a set of non-occupational attitudes, skills and knowledge. With the diversity of the workforce, employee engagement will also depend on flexibility around work/life balance, education and training opportunities assisting in lifelong career development and other conditions of employment. Therefore, whilst skills are one way, a wholistic approach to employee engagement may be a successful approach.

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