

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to respond to the Workforce Futures consultation.

The key points noted in the Darwin forum underpin my response to this consultation.

Two issues come to mind in relation to workforce skill needs and workforce development.

The first is the related to our national capacity to respond to technological change in relation to the emergence of "clean" technology. The electronics industry and innovation in this field is at the forefront of the skills needs for the future. The development of battery, magnets and electric motor technologies using rare earth elements is emerging as the largest economic driver this century. Other countries such as China, Germany and Japan have already invested heavily in these technologies. The development of the skills needed for the rapidly evolving electric and electronics industry surrounding this "clean" technology will create a skills supply problem. This will be accentuated particularly in the 20% of the market place that the Skills Australia Chairperson Mr Bullock identified during his presentation as the focus for increasing labour market efficiency. This target area is not geared up in Australia to meet the emerging clean technology skills demand.

I would suggest that the Australia's migration policy be enhanced to include the requirement that businesses /enterprises that employ skilled migrant workers are required to facilitate the transfer of their skills to new / existing Australian workers under a partnership agreement with business, Government and education providers.

The second point that I want to remark on in further detail is the needs of those Indigenous members (and potential participants) in the NT labour market.

The National Agreement for workforce skills needs and workforce development needs appears to be predicated on the idea that participants have the capability to progress to higher levels of qualifications (ie Certificate IV through to Higher Education). However the acquisition of additional higher levels of qualifications through formal training, knowledge acquisition and workplace experience assumes a particular level of functional core communication skills and accompanying certification.

Thus for effective progression up the qualification ladder it is obvious that functional literacy and numeracy and communication skills at identified levels are an essential requirement for skills growth and personal empowerment in the workforce and the community.

However given the NT's particular demographic, the 20% target area presented at the discussion form needs to be reconsidered. The target group in the NT would more likely be 40%. In addition within this target group a paradox exists.

Entry into the workforce generally requires a specific level of communication, skill and certification either from the school system or school based VET courses. Trade level training at Certificate III assumes that participants have the capacity to read and write at a barest minimum level of middle school literacy and numeracy. The bar is set too high for many indigenous people to get a job under this regime.

A formal qualification excludes a large section of our NT population from the workplace as their core communication skills are below the benchmark for certification.

From my experience formal certification is not what is necessarily essential or needed in the first instance. Potential workforce participants actually want and need a job first. Progression into qualifications occurs after immersion in the workplace and experience with the world of work. Many young Indigenous men and women have expressed this desire to me.

Training in the skills that are necessary to be productive should be more accessible at work. Work place skills may already be held by potential workforce participants but the opportunity to demonstrate their skills are restricted by their lack of certification which in turn limits their job opportunities.

Special intervention is required. This means creating and providing a job first with on the job training to support the demand for improved workplace skills.

This dilemma facing Indigenous people needs a policy response that encompasses more formative assessment processes in the workplace after they have secured a meaningful job.

Processes that provide progressive feedback in context with the work performed develops confidence and self esteem as well as preparing them for the more formal summative assessment used to determine competency under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Access to additional professional and intensive support to progress to higher levels of work skills must be supported at the industry level where work based knowledge acquisition becomes a part of their daily work routine and skill development. This takes time, professional support and money. These support mechanisms should be delivered in the workplace on the job and in a partnership with participants, training organisations, Industry and Government

Putting support professionals in the workplace and providing the incentives for this to be effective will result in productivity gains that will leverage benefits across the whole of the community.

This will require an investment in the trainers, some of whom may be existing workers in enterprises and larger industries, many of whom may already have the workplace knowledge but lack the qualification and incentive to mentor/train individuals entering their sector.

This assumption, that potential participants and existing workers are able to cope with higher qualification literacy and numeracy skills to achieve higher qualification levels is fraught with an unacceptable level of risk in our remote and regional areas of the NT. I would say also that this risk also applies in our main towns and centers where the available jobs require levels of literacy and numeracy above middle school levels.

This would also apply to many migrants and refugees who have English as a second or third language in the NT whom may also be disadvantaged by the prerequisites for getting a job.

The real demand is for a job. Training should follow the job in this context to help close the gap.

Even though we are small from little things big things grow.

Sincerely
Terry

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