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**THE EDUCATION
PROFESSIONALS**

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION SUBMISSION

Regarding the Skills and Workforce Development Agreement
June 15 2020

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WHO WE ARE

For more than forty years 'Life. Be in it.' and The Education Professionals Pty. Ltd. (TEP) have been developing and implementing quality community initiatives - the successful Activate Program, the JobsNOW initiative, Know n' Grow Early Childhood, Huff n' Puff, and ColourGrid profiling are examples of these involvements.

For the past twenty years the two entities have combined their expertise and skills to encourage all Australian communities to 'Be More Active' and to 'Live More Of Your Life' - the work of the 'Life. Be in it.' Health Promotions Institute and of the Overseas Student Support Network, Australia (OSSNA) provide examples of our accomplishments.

Although we have worked closely with many individuals and organisations we have always maintained our independence throughout these times.

Please visit lifebeinitsservices.com.au and livemoreofyourlife.org for additional background information.

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A CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

At the National Press Club on 25 May 2020, Prime Minister Morrison said the government would request the Productivity Commission to present clear information about Australia's skill needs and fix a funding system "marred by inconsistencies and incoherence, with little accountability back to outcomes".

TEP agrees with the Prime Minister Morrison's summation - the system, as strong as it once was, is now broken.

An interim Productivity Commission report was commissioned by Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg in late 2019. It was to focus on increasing participation in vocational education in a bid to boost skills, jobs and productivity.

In the 2019 budget the government committed to spend \$200m over four years and a further \$148m in 2023-24 to create 80,000 apprenticeships by doubling incentive payments to employers to \$8,000 per placement.

In April 2019 a review of the sector by a former New Zealand skills minister, Steven Joyce, called for the National Skills Commission to achieve a "nationally-consistent funding model based on a shared understanding of skills needs".

TEP supports Steven Joyce's call.

Commissioner Jonathan Coppel said there was "substantial scope to reduce waste and better target" the total of \$6.1 billion spent by federal, state and territory governments on vocational education.

TEP agrees with Commissioner Coppel that there is "substantial scope to reduce waste and better target,".

Commissioner Malcolm Roberts has criticised the existence of "dozens of different subsidy rates, even for the same courses". He cited a certificate three in individual support, the course for work in aged or disability care, subsidies for which can vary by as much as \$3,700 across Australia.

TEP knows such discrepancies exist. University and TAFE rates, for a nationally-accredited course with the same learning outcomes, sometimes differ by more than \$4,000.

The report concluded the government should reform the sector to make it "a more efficient, competitive market driven by the informed choices of students and employers". TEP believes that 'informed choices of students and employers' should be given far greater importance - but considerable input should be invited from industry groups and community representatives.

It has been suggested that the government should ‘pursue a single national regulator, reform course pricing and curate clearer information for students about course quality and outcomes’. TEP does not endorse this contention that ‘a single national regulator’ be established. Establishing a ‘single national regulator’ has the potential to leave personal issues unattended and have many more individuals ‘fall through the cracks’ TEP considers course pricing, specific information that is free of jargon and easy to understand, and the pursuit of quality outcomes are certainly important issues.

THE NEED FOR A CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

Many people currently believe that the words ‘education’ and ‘learning’ are interchangeable – but this is certainly not so.

- ‘Education’ refers to the formal process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. "a course of education"
- ‘Learning’ is an informal process in which knowledge is acquired through experiences and interactions at various times and in different places.

It is apparent that the Productivity Commission and the federal government have highlighted the design, promotion and delivery of ‘education’ and that there is ‘substantial scope to reduce waste in the Vocational Education and Training system.’ TEP agrees with this position.

THE BELIEFS OF THE EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

No training organisations are ever quite alike, and none stays the same from one year to the next. The spirit of these organisations are usually reflected in their students, teachers, administrative staff, directors, associates and the wider community in general.

They should not work in isolation, but share their experiences with industry, and with other training organisations. The purposes of the collaboration is to generate sustained conversations about what the commonly held ideas might mean and how a variety of teachers, organisations and industries might assist each other.

TEP believes that there is no such thing as a distinct, detailed blueprint for a quality teaching/learning organisation any more than there is for a successful family. While not exhibiting precisely similar configurations and traditions, quality organisations do share powerful guiding ideas and principles that are widely accepted even as they take different forms in practice.

WHERE DO WE START?

Commissioner Jonathan Coppel and Commissioner Malcolm Roberts have certainly been set a task by Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg and Prime Minister Morrison, but it is a task that is extremely necessary and long overdue. **TEP and the 'Life. Be in it.' Health Promotions Institute have successfully delivered quality programs at all community levels from pre-school to adult learners, involving local, indigenous, migrant and international participants. They have also provided expert advice and support in legal proceedings both inside and outside of 'the system'.**

We have read, and sometimes re-read, the 60 initial submissions made to the Productivity Commission and feel that in some instances there is a lack of context .

Approximately 20 years ago Australian education practice at all levels was regarded as leading the world, and TEP agrees with Prime Minister Morrison's present belief that the system is now "marred by inconsistencies and incoherence, with little accountability back to outcomes" **TEP believes that Australia currently does not have a clearly-defined 'system', that this completely unsatisfactory situation has been brought about by factional infighting, and the avoidance of responsibility for more than a decade.**

Many people currently holding positions of responsibility have little or no knowledge of the findings of the Karmel Report (1985), the Finn Report (1991), the Mayer Report (1992) and the Employability Skills for the Future Report (2002). These investigations and reports had our education offerings regarded as some of the best in the world - and must be revisited, **TEP's suggested starting point is to revisit two of these foundation reports - there is no need for lengthy, costly and often fruitless philosophical discussions because the work has already been done (and already enshrined in legislation)**

This process could begin by asking a few simple questions of 'industry leaders'

1. In 1992 the Mayer Committee detailed by regulation the number of hours for study at each of the seven levels of qualifications, and also provided a framework for assessments at each of these levels.

- **What are these, and why are they not enforced today?**

2. The Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) established legislative requirements, standards for the quality of course delivery, and the legal framework governing delivery of education to overseas students studying in Australia on student visas.

- **How is the ESOS Act currently enforced , and what are the penalties for non-conformance?**

A SUMMARY OF POST COMPULSORY EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRALIA OVER THE PAST 35 YEARS

Important, high-level efforts to identify and establish the skill sets required to enter, to access and remain in the world of work have been the Karmel Report (1985), the Finn Report (1991), the Mayer Report (1992) and the Employability Skills for the Future Report (2002).

The Karmel Report in 1985 stressed the requirement of the secondary school sector to support the attainment of educational standards that would lead to long term employability.

The Finn Review Committee of 1991 reported on "... national curriculum principles designed to ... develop key competencies "

In 1992, the Mayer Committee "...used its own expertise, consulted with industry and with educators in schools, Vocational, Educational and Training (VET) sectors, and the higher education sector, to undertake validation exercises which involved further consultations with industry"

The Committee created three levels of performance for each competency "... which differentiated the levels of competency necessary to undertake the activity, manage the activity, or evaluate or revise an activity undertaken"

In 2002 the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) commissioned the 'Employability Skills for the Future Report', to provide advice on the following 5 key areas:

- possible new requirements for generic employability competencies that industry requires, or will require, in the foreseeable future, since the Mayer key Competencies were developed;
- clear definitions of what Australian and leading business enterprises mean by 'employability' skills and the consistency or otherwise between the various terms similarly studied;
- a proposed suite of employability skills, including outlines of assessment, certification and reporting of performance options that suit both industry and education;
- industry (small, medium and large business) reactions to the proposed suite and reporting options;
- a report on the case studies involving 13 large enterprises; and
- a report on focus group research with small and medium-sized enterprises.

The framework of the *Employability Skills for the Future* was underpinned by a number of critical factors.

- It was closely linked to, and built on the Mayer Key competencies.
- Employers (regardless of enterprise size) recognised the link between ‘Employability Skills’ with the Mayer Competencies.
- Small, medium and large firms identified the same critical mix of skills as being necessary for employability and continued employment for employees.

In 2001, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia undertook a major research project designed to provide the Department of Education, Science and Training with a detailed understanding of the employability skills needs of industry.

The research was published by the Commonwealth of Australia in 2002 as the report *Employability Skills for the Future*.

In the report, employability skills were defined as “skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions”.

The report also identified an *Employability Skills Framework* incorporating eight key skill groupings:

- communication skills,
- team work skills,
- problem-solving skills,
- initiative and enterprise skills,
- planning and organising skills,
- self-management skills,
- learning skills, and
- technology skills.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MAYER REPORT, AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NOW

The Mayer Committee was set up by the Australian Education Council and the Ministers for Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) to undertake further work on the employment-related key competencies concept contained in the Finn Report.

The committee is chaired by Mr Eric Mayer, chairman of the Business-Higher Education Round Table and former chief executive officer of National Mutual.

The initial report of the Mayer Committee, released in February 1992 concludes that increased retention rates to Year 12 schooling have produced the need for Australia's school system to re-examine the purposes of post-compulsory education.

The report said that nationally consistent approaches to the assessment of key competencies implies the need for monitoring consistency in interpretation and application of the performance standards across both school and training sectors and across States and Territories.

"This may be a very significant step in co-operation and might be expected to take some time to achieve," the report concludes.

The report said that higher retention in education has led to an increased emphasis on a range of post-school pathways and on broad vocational preparation.

In the training sector, the Commonwealth and State Ministers established a Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee and began to implement a nationally consistent framework for the recognition of training.

This new system is based on the progressive introduction of a competency-based approach to vocational education and training, linked to award restructuring through the National Training Board.

As part of the development of this new system, the Finn Report identified six areas of employment-related key competencies.

Competence was viewed by both the Finn and Mayer reports as the ability to perform in a given context, and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations.

"This means that the learner must grasp the principles and concepts which underlie particular applications, since this is the basis of transfer to new situations," the Mayer Report said.

Competence is therefore defined narrowly to mean the demonstrated capacity to do a specific task, and even more narrowly by detailed specification of the conditions under which performance on the task is to be demonstrated.

The concept of competence required the capacity to think about performance and also to perform, and it goes beyond pure or abstracted thinking to the skilled application of understandings, according to the Mayer Report.

Incorporation of these key competencies within all post-compulsory education and training programmes was seen by the Mayer Report as ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to develop competence in these areas, regardless of the pathway they follow in post-compulsory education.

The description of competencies as outcomes linked to explicit criteria and performance standards had significant implications for assessment practices.

It meant that, in many instances, valid assessment had to be based on the practical demonstrations of performance.

The key competencies which formed the basis of this new system of vocational education were not subject specific, but regarded as underpinning the whole curriculum.

This implied the need for a whole-curriculum approach to ensuring that all young people develop their competence in each of the key areas.

According to the Mayer Report, individual State and Territory school systems needed to examine the ways in which this approach and the assessment methods implied by the notion of competence could be accommodated within existing assessment arrangements.

"Ways of achieving national consistency in reporting need to be considered in relation to the particular assessment and reporting arrangements in the school sector in each State and Territory and the feasibility of establishing mechanisms in the training sector for producing individual records of performance and collecting statistics on assessments on a State-wide basis," the report said.

One of the benefits of this system of national consistency in assessment was that people would be given improved portability of post-compulsory education and entry-level training credentials.

"Systematic development of the key competencies in school programmes will increasingly mean that young people entering such training programmes will already have well-developed competencies in the key areas which can be recognised in the form of credit, both assisting their advancement and avoiding duplication of the training effort," the report said.

Assessment and reporting of individual performance against nationally agreed standards provided young people with a clearer picture of their capacities and better information for setting personal goals for improvement.

The Mayer Report said that appropriate and feasible methods for assessing the competence of a young person in a training programme being delivered on the job are likely to be very different from the methods available for assessing the competence of a young person studying in an isolated school setting.

Work at that time was already under way on the preparation of national statements and profiles in eight learning areas.

These were intended to provide a national framework for curriculum development by systems and schools and an agreed basis for subsequent collaborative work.

Implementation of the new national system for recognition of vocational education and training commenced in 1992 and significant progress was expected to be made in the establishment of national core competency standards by 1993.

THE MAYER KEY COMPETENCIES

Key Competencies	Descriptors
1. Collecting, analysing and organising information	The capacity to locate information, sift and sort the information in order to select what is required and present in a useful way, evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it.
2 Communicating ideas and information	The capacity to communicate effectively with others using a whole range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression.
3. Planning and organising activities	The capacity to plan and organise one's own work activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring performance.
4. Working with others and in teams	The capacity to interact effectively with other people both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, including understanding and responding to the needs of others and working effectively as a member of a team to achieve a shared goal.
5. Using mathematical ideas and techniques	The capacity to use mathematical idea, such as number and space, and techniques, such as estimation and approximation, for practical purposes.
6. Solving problems	The capacity to apply problem-solving strategies in purposeful ways, both in situations where the problem and the desired solution are clearly and evident, and in situations requiring critical thinking and a creative approach to achieve an outcome.
7. Using technology	The capacity to apply technology, combining the physical and sensory skills needed to operate equipment with the understanding of scientific and technological principles needed to explore and adapt systems.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK

Term	Explanation
Personal attributes	Term used to describe a set of non skill-based behaviours and attributes that employers felt were as important as the employability skills and other technical job-specific skills.
Skills	Term used to describe the learned capacity of the individual. <i>Skills</i> has been used instead of <i>competencies</i> , reflecting the language of enterprises interviewed and to avoid any definitional confusion with the different ways <i>competencies</i> is used.
Elements	<p>The <i>elements</i> are the facets of skill that employers identified as important.</p> <p>The mix and priority of these elements would vary from job to job.</p> <p>The list of elements is not exhaustive but rather reflects the information provided by the interviewees in this study.</p> <p>The list of elements is indicative of the expectations of employers.</p> <p>The level of sophistication in the application of the element will depend on the job level and requirements.</p>

PAST FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN FOLLOWED UP

The significance of past findings and recommendations of the Karmel Report (1985), the Finn Report (1991), the Mayer Report (1992) and the Employability Skills for the Future Report (2002) have been ignored. TEP has found that administrators, trainers, auditors and other individuals in influential positions placed little importance on what has been happening within their industry. TEP has highlighted the Mayer Report and the ESOS Act as examples of the important foundations for quality post-compulsory education and training. Widespread changes should be made to the current materials and resources to better align learning outcomes to the job requirements of industry.

At the turn of this century skilled tradespersons who were recruited to provide apprenticeship training at TAFE were required to complete a low-cost induction process of approximately two days (usually of a weekend) that provided practical advice on working with adult learners. Today this user-friendly induction has morphed into the compulsory Certificate IV in Training and Assessment with a fee of approximately \$1,500 - \$2,000 and a completion time of at least six months - even experienced teachers holding qualifications of a degree or higher, are not permitted to provide training in the TAFE system without it. This situation also needs to be addressed.

The funding, policy and regulatory authorities need to work in collaboration with Registered Training Organisations - both public and private - to ensure confidence and adequate standards in program and product provision. There needs to be adequate material, environmental and physical infrastructure to meet learners and organizational needs. TEP believes our national focus should promote and encourage the concepts of lifelong learning, social inclusion, unemployment, under-employment, and encourage participation by members of disadvantaged communities

There needs to be some level of autonomy or support given to trusted providers to create programs that are responsive to local need to meet the identified needs of diverse populations and capabilities. TEP encourages a systematic approach to partnerships involving Schools/Play Groups/Sporting Clubs/Community Gardens/Men's Sheds/U3A/ACE/Road Safety/Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation/'Life. Be in it.' and TAFE in order to reduce barriers and promote a culture of lifelong learning. These relationships will help us develop additional support mechanisms for 'at risk' and vulnerable cohorts such as the unemployed, and those at risk of being unemployed and those restricted by low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Our post-compulsory education and training system should also recognise the contributions of others. We must not allow volunteers to be unacknowledged, taken for granted, and TAFE should provide support wherever and whenever possible. For instance Grandparents are the most popular form of childcare in Australia today. Approximately one-fifth of Australian children aged 12 and under - received grandparent care, far outstripping other forms of childcare such as long day care, and before and after school care. Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2014 indicated that more than 97% of grandparent care in Australia was unpaid. More recent estimates, even taking into account recent government policy changes, suggest that grandparents are contributing in excess of \$3.94 billion to the Australian economy in unpaid childcare, with the typical grandparent-carer (usually the grandmother, consistently providing average unpaid childcare of more than 30 hours per month.

Without standardised entry requirements, many unsuitable individuals are being enrolled in courses. Applicants are sometimes convinced to enrol by unscrupulous providers, despite the likelihood of that applicant being unable to understand the learning outcomes of the course. TEP, with the support of Sushi Das and Nick McKenzie of Fairfax newspapers and ABC Television exposed the workings of 'shonky colleges' approximately 6 years ago. An inquiry that subsequently took place in Canberra reported that approximately 20% of Registered Training Organisations (RTO's), including the operations of some TAFE college departments, were 'shonky'. Unfortunately many of these practices are still evident because of lack of follow-up. The rules and regulations are already in place, but they are not being enforced.

Many of the current VET courses in the market do not align to the requirements of employers, and do not enable the individuals to be 'work ready' and effective when they enter into roles. TEP asks 'Why is it that students can graduate in, say nursing, but are refused the accreditation necessary to enter their chosen profession?' Lack of English is often cited, but if English competency was lacking the prospective student should not have been enrolled in the course at the first instance. (see previous comment),

Current certification and accreditation frameworks need to allow more flexibility in course content and enable far quicker changes to content to align to the changing nature of industry. TEP believes this is an area for immediate focus. Full-time study is considered to be 20 hours per week, and this permits international students to seek part-time employment to help meet the costs of their training. Inflexible course timetabling at some RTO's makes the finding of a part-time job almost impossible. Nationally-accredited studies are expected to be reviewed and updated at least every 5 years, but somehow this has not been happening - causing the delivery of out-of-date content.

There should be flexibility of qualification structures, particularly for mid career workers... and for the development of new skills. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes need to be further developed and applied with integrity so that qualifications ensure that confidence and professionalism of the system is maintained and improved. **TEP supports the strengthening of industry involvement in the mapping of skills, the promotion of learning outcomes and for further involvement in economic development efforts at local, regional, national and international levels. This should be particularly of interest to international students, or to local students who wish to travel overseas upon course completion.**

Although the Productivity Commission has been ‘asked to focus on increasing participation in vocational education in a bid to boost skills, jobs and productivity’ we should also recognise that similar opportunities for investigation and improvement also exist in the areas of Early Childhood, Primary School, Secondary School, at University and for older Adults.

It should be noted that a major review of the Australian curriculum has just begun, with its aim to ‘declutter the workload for prep to year 10 students’. Public consultations are to be held between February and June 2021.

TEP believes that a comprehensive approach is required to review and revitalise ALL education processes and providers in Australia.