

## **ForestWorks ISC Submission to the Productivity Commission on the Impacts and Benefits of COAG Reforms**

This submission to the Productivity Commission on the Impacts and Benefits of COAG Reforms is provided by ForestWorks ISC, the learning and skill development organisation for the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry.

ForestWorks ISC has chosen to provide information in regards to two COAG's VET reforms:

- Productivity Places Program
- Youth Attainment Transitions reform

### **Comments regarding the Productivity Places Program**

The Productivity Places Program has been a successful model enabling enterprises in the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry to engage with the National Training System in workforce development activities and increase their skill base.

During late 2007, and through to 2010, the impact of the global financial crisis and other concurrent factors generated a contraction of the industry's activity across many sectors – it is estimated that employment decreased by 11% from the 2006 levels and training activity was also lower in 2007.

Despite the industry's loss in capacity, the NCVER database shows that during this period of time the overall enrolments in Forest Products Industry (FPI) and Forest Pulp and Paper (FPP) courses have continued to stay up and even exceeded the 2006 levels.

Being an industry where training is frequently delivered 'on the job' rather than before employment, ForestWorks attributes the merit for sustaining industry's motivation in continuing investing in skills and training to the Productivity Places Program initially and then the Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program (EBPPP) - 43% of the total enrolments in each year, over the last three years, were under EBPPP agreements.

ISCs have sought to quantify the early impact of EBPPP. While the study is still underway, early indicators substantiate industry's feedback and ISCs' belief that systemic adoption of EBPPP's policy settings is needed if industry is to be re-engaged – in earnest – by the National Training System.

We believe that the direct industry engagement with government supported training places strengthens the drivers to engage young people in our industries. The job is linked to training and a commitment to skill development is established to meet job demands.

### **Comments regarding Youth Attainment Transition programs**

In the forest and timber products industry, the common industry practice is to train once employed. This is particularly due to the specialised skills required in operations, the low number of individuals demanding training for this industry and the high equipment costs for off-site training.

With the scope of investigating strategies to compensate for an aging workforce and the low number of new entrants, the industry looked at the opportunities offered by the Youth Attainment Transitions reform and undertook several projects in different geographical locations which sought to attract young people from schools.

A non-formative assessment indicates that the projects had run for a period of time but ceased for various reasons. A distinct feature of all these projects was the necessity and importance of a mechanism, whether it was a project coordinator or other facilitator, which needed to connect schools, RTOs, students and their families with industry and community. Issues associated to OH&S supervision and difficulties in accessing isolated forest coupes were also some other factors that contributed to inability to progress with Youth Attainment initiatives in this industry.

Below there are few examples of linking young, school based students with the industry:

#### *Albany Project*

Supported by Local Partnerships funding and Timber 2020 the industry, schools and RTOs worked extensively to coordinate a school based pathway in to the industry. This program ran across two school years and was viewed at the time as a success by all parties. The impact of the two largest employers collapsing – Great Southern and Timbercorp, with a depressed market and one funding source ceasing resulted in the program not being pursued

#### *Tumut Project*

In 2007 -2008 a successful school based traineeship pathway program was conducted in Tumut with the high school, Riverina TAFE and the largest sawmilling and processing employer in the community. Again, whilst this was successful, it did rely on a high level of organisation and coordination that was difficult to sustain.

#### *A Queensland Activity*

There has been an extremely successful engagement between Northside Truss and Frame, a Brisbane based timber truss and frame manufacturer, and their local high school, Bray Park High School.

Approximately 100 students who were finding their mathematics syllabus challenging and at risk of dropping the subject, were able to engage in a program where a senior truss detailer participated in one classroom session per week to interact with the teaching staff to provide practical working examples of how mathematics is applied in the truss and frame industry.

The classroom activity was followed up each alternative week with a day's on site work experience enabling students to apply the knowledge they had learnt in class the previous week.

This program has resulted in a high retention rate of students who would otherwise dropped mathematics and with some of the students gaining employment with Northside Truss and Frame on completion of their formal schooling.

Our key learning from these projects has been to record the activities and to ensure these examples can assist in future local initiatives. We strongly support the capacity to be supported to have local and regional activities identified and supported but are cognisant of the often extensive preparation and ongoing coordination required to ensure a success for the students as well as the workplaces.

We trust this response to your work provides insight from one particular industry that has a strong regional relationship with employment, skills and engaging with young people to secure that skilled workforce into the future.

Michael Hartman  
**CEO**