



CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE &
INDUSTRY
QUEENSLAND

invigorating

> Vocational Education and Training Workforce

**CCIQ Submission to the
Productivity Commission**

30 July 2010



As the State's peak business organisation, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Productivity Commission's Education and Training Workforce Study. Representing the interests of 25,000 businesses in all industry sectors across the State, CCIQ recognises the vital importance of vocational education and training in addressing critical skills shortages and providing viable career pathways to young people.

CCIQ believe that the vocational education and training sector plays an important role in delivering the quality educational outcomes pivotal to addressing skills shortages and increasing participation, productivity and economic growth in Queensland. Creating a strong and productive workforce is central to business success and underpins employment and economic growth. Workforce planning and continued investment in the vocational education and training sector is therefore a high priority for Queensland employers.

As Queensland's economy recovers from the global financial downturn, skills and labour shortages are likely to re-emerge as a major constraint on business growth. CCIQ encourages the Federal Government to continue to focus on meeting industry needs for education and training and support the development of the skills base needed to drive strong economic growth and productivity. CCIQ advocate that the current economic environment, despite its challenges, presents an excellent opportunity to undertake and implement workforce planning activities in the vocational education and training sector and place the nation in a strong position to take advantage of the anticipated upturn in economic activity.

> Skills Shortages in the Vocational Education and Training Workforce

Australia faces significant skills shortages in a number of industries and at a range of skill levels. In order to remain competitive, it is essential that action be taken immediately to identify and address barriers that limit the attractiveness of vocational education and training career pathways. Strategies should be developed to facilitate a strong and growing vocational education and training workforce that reflects the quality expected of those graduating the system.

The vocational education and training sector is critically short of quality trade and technical teachers. Feedback from our members indicates that the business community has significant concerns about the capacity of the vocational education and training workforce to meet future demand and deliver quality outcomes for students. In particular, our members are concerned about the limited staff available to support the vocational education system including school-based vocational education programs, manual arts and home economic faculties and the broader public TAFE and private VET sectors.

Anecdotally, CCIQ are aware that the number of new individuals entering the vocational teaching profession has been dramatically declining over recent years. Two major providers of the technical and vocational teaching qualifications in Queensland have reported low enrolment numbers over the past few years. Declining feasibility of delivering technical and vocational teaching qualifications and the resulting cancellation of course delivery by providers is likely to result in reduced capacity for the vocational education and training workforce to meet future demands.

This is a concerning trend for industry and employers. Without an adequate supply of vocational education and training practitioners to deliver quality training in our vocational education and training system, particularly in schools, we will struggle to attract young people into vocational and technical industries and meet the skills needs of the future. However this shortage is not due to lack of interest. Inflexible teacher-training opportunities, impractical teacher registration requirements and personal financial constraints are the primary barriers to more qualified trades people and professionals participating in trade and technical teaching.

> School-Based Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues

Addressing skills and labour shortages of VET practitioners in schools requires a broader assessment of workforce issues impacting the teaching profession. Recent evidence suggests that students with the greatest potential are not pursuing teaching as a career, which is undoubtedly impacting on the capacity of the vocational education and training workforce.

Changes to wage and working conditions of teachers over time have impacted on the number and quality of people choosing to enter the teaching profession. A 2006 report prepared by the Department of Education, Science and Training found that in the years from 1983 to 2003, the academic standard of young people entering teaching declined significantly. Tight labour markets have recently contributed further to this decline, with university entrance scores falling significantly. Declining entrance levels also serve to impact the status of the teaching profession, further reducing its appeal to high quality students.

The attractiveness of teaching professions in Australia also diminished during this period as a result of increasing wage disparity between the average teacher pay compared with non teachers with a qualification. While remuneration is not the only factor influencing career pathways, it is a strong reason why many graduates choose not to enter the profession. The ongoing pay disputes throughout 2009 and its significant media attention undeniably impacted on the public perception of teaching as a career option and undermined the value of teachers in the community, making this an unattractive career pathway for school leavers.

Queensland businesses have identified that the best way to improve the quality and availability of teachers was to address the on-the-job working conditions and student behaviour issues preventing more people entering the profession. Other possible mechanisms include the introduction of minimum entry requirements for teaching courses, improved models for teacher training and increasing the workplace training and work experience component of teacher training.

> VET Practitioner Training and Qualification Models

Queensland's business community has a strong interest in improving the status of the vocational education and training workforce, central to which is addressing workforce shortages and improving the quality of the teaching workforce. Accelerated teacher-training methods targeted at retraining people from occupational and industry backgrounds could provide a mechanism to increase the number of well-qualified vocational education and training professionals.

CCIQ believes that intensive teacher-training and qualification models provide an excellent opportunity to increase the vocational education and training workforce and improve student

outcomes. We have encouraged the Queensland Government to consider such shortened teacher-training models as a mechanism to address the state's critical shortage of vocational education and training practitioners in Queensland schools.

We believe that an intensive on-the-job teacher training model, similar to that of the Teach for Australia initiative, would be effective in reversing the trend of low participation in vocational teacher-training courses. Under the model proposed by CCIQ to the Queensland Government, outstanding apprentices and trainees at the end of their training contract, and high-performing existing workers and tradespeople would be nominated to enter the 'Trade Teaching Internship' program where they would be placed within a teaching environment, working alongside an existing teacher, to receive intensive teacher training and mentoring.

With all levels of government focused on boosting participation in vocational education and training, raising educational attainment levels, and reducing educational inequality, this proposal would meet a number of objectives broader than simply reducing teacher skills gaps. Placing high achieving apprentices, trainees and young tradespeople in classrooms provides strong role models, exposes students to vocational career pathways and may lift those outside the social and economic mainstream into higher achievement and employment. In the current economic climate, teaching also offers a solution to job security for skilled tradespeople, particularly recently completed and out-of-trade apprentices and trainees.

> Ageing Vocational Education and Training Workforce

Population ageing, and the associated decline in workforce participation, is projected to impede the productivity and growth of regional, state and national economies. As labour force growth declines, competition for the existing skills in the workforce will increase significantly. Effectively managing the changing demographics of the workforce poses a formidable challenge to all industry sectors. For productivity and economic growth to be maintained it is imperative that labour force participation of the under-employed, older workers, is maximised.

Ageing workforce demographics are particularly evident in the vocational education and training sector, presenting a significant concern to the business community. Primarily, this concern relates to the capacity of the vocational education and training workforce to achieving the outcomes needed to support our economy. Unless action is taken to augment labour supply and address the increasing number of workers approaching retirement age, it is likely that the quality and quantity of services available will be significantly impacted, particularly in rural and remote locations.

To meet future workforce challenges resulting from the ageing workforce in the vocational education and training sector, long-term workforce development strategies should be developed and targeted at retaining existing skills and attracting new entrants to the sector. Although challenging, CCIQ believe the ageing workforce may present new opportunities to the vocational education and training sector to utilise the ageing labour force as a mechanism to deliver a sustainable, skilled workforce capable of meeting future demands. In conjunction with the intensive teacher training and qualification model previously discussed, mechanisms to recruit mature aged, qualified tradespeople and professionals into the vocational education and training workforce could be utilised to address the anticipated labour shortages in the sector.

> Emerging Industries and Technology

Workforce planning activities must ensure that sufficient numbers of well-qualified vocational education and training professionals are available to meet the emerging needs of business and industry, particularly in relation to technological advances. To remain competitive, Australia must position itself to capitalise on advancing technologies, innovative business practices and emerging industries. For this it needs an increasing proportion of the workforce with higher level skills and qualifications. The capacity of the vocational education and training sector to respond to and deliver training in new and emerging technologies is an ongoing concern for the business community. Feedback from our members indicates that the inability of the sector to rapidly adapt and respond to emerging technologies is significantly impacting business growth and productivity.

