



Productivity Commission: Vocational Education and Training Workforce Opportunity for Further Comment

This submission to the Productivity Commission Education and Training Workforce Study is made by ForestWorks, the Industry Skills Council for the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry.

This consultation response is to:

- Chapter 4: Government involvement in the VET sector
- Chapter 6: Implications of a changing workforce
- Chapter 7: Ensuring workforce capacity and efficiency.

Chapter 4: Government involvement in the VET sector

It is critical to recognise that the dominant conversation is the role of government in VET but as this research process continues we seek that there is capacity to understand as well as recognise Industry's contribution to learning.

Whilst there are TAFE's such as NSW, East Gippsland (Vic) and Great Southern (WA), servicing the industry, the majority of delivery for this industry is with private RTOs who deliver to the workplace, train and assess on site in work hours, with few cross enterprise opportunities to build learner demand (Ref 4.6).

Ref 4.18 refers to the trend for government to apply demand driven policy for VET. This is supported, but with a mindfulness that, for this industry, the Victoria policy shift (there is some current movement in this with the new state government) has imposed barriers to people requiring career change, or indeed coming to the industry and requiring new lower level qualifications.

The question (Ref 4.21) as to whether or not providers are compensated for pursuing non commercial objectives as requested by government is stark when it comes to addressing workplace participation for learners who are not confident with their language, literacy and numeracy to successfully participate in nationally recognised qualifications. Currently RTOs are not supported to have a learner centred focus in achieving competency. Encouraging learners at workplaces to continue to seek complete qualifications and continue to learn is difficult if their skill demands require explicit foundation skill development to meet current workplace needs.

The enrolment pattern in the forest and forest products training package is predominantly single or small clusters of units of competency with assessment being predominantly visual, observation and verbal questioning. There are very limited resources and opportunities to support a learner who is interested in continuing their learning but will face increasing reading and writing challenges in this process. Understanding workforce development needs of the VET practitioners will require a link between the trainer's competency, knowledge of their learners and industry cultures and history in skill development. This last component impacts on the trainer when the industry does not have a strong apprenticeship or traineeship culture, and in this industry, where training begins after you have the job.

Chapter 6: Implications of a changing workforce

The discussion on a different skill set to for successful implementation of RCC/RPL is timely as the relationship between existing workers, active learners and higher qualifications are described as a seamless process when in reality these three elements may be disconnected (Ref 6.15). The confidence in the RPL approach is strongest in the RTOs with greatest workplace delivery, however for many trainers who work in a classroom environment with full time students the evidence is that they are not confident and often over assess.

Chapter 7: Ensuring workforce capacity and efficiency

The references to workforce planning are strongly supported especially where there is recognition for the different roles and contributions of a successful VET system in place for workplaces:

- skilled and qualified educators
- skilled and qualified trainers and assessors
- skilled workplace trainers (with or without qualification)
- skilled workplace assessors (with or without qualification)
- skilled RPL/RCC assessors

This breadth of workforce planning reflects the diversity in delivery both in institutions as well as in workplaces from auspice to direct delivery and assessment models. E-learning and web based technologies will also influence the skill set demands of the workforce.

Ref 7.6 to the role of private RTO's, is in this industry significant – they are the major providers to the industry and whilst their work may be often fee for service, they are still working to the national training system, are still meeting the AQTF and have specific workforce development pressures. It is inevitable their access to professional development is less with their infrastructure often focussed on a particular sector. They are limited in their capacity to form partnerships and maintain relations with enterprises, let alone with other providers to share or partner in delivery.

When Skills Australia identifies the difficulty in record keeping for large providers, then the impost for small private providers will be great. The role of the ISC in assisting the industry providers will continue to be integral in meeting both training package demands as well as the wider policy debates that occur– such as the sustainability projects that were undertaken in 2010.

Whilst workforce planning is supported, the data demands on RTOs is already expressed to ForestWorks as a major impost on industry RTOs, especially in light of decreasing funding on an hourly rates for delivery (for instance, in Victoria there has been a 12% drop in the hourly funding rate since 2001 and 8.5% drop in NSW funding).

An earlier submission described the industry and this information is again reiterated:

1. The key issues facing our industry related VET workforce are how to:
 - keep the VET workforce current in industry practice
 - attract highly motivated people from industry to the VET workforce
 - retain highly motivated people in a low volume learning environment
 - manage the pressure on trainers and assessors to deliver outside of their core skill strengths
 - support the pulp and paper industry as the nationally accredited training is undertaken through an auspicing arrangement. Its VET workforce are therefore not captured in the scope of this project

2. Our recommendations are:
 - ensure that the link between industry workplaces and VET workplaces are embedded in VET practice to deliver to industry best practice
 - recognise that VET workforce trainers and assessors are required to have their industry qualifications and their training and assessing qualifications. This double qualification requirement should translate into a high level of respect and integrity of the professional judgement applied by people in this role
 - improving a statistical collection including at subset level to ensure effective understanding of different VET workforce profiles and their pressure points and demands

3. The forest and timber products industry relies on a VET workforce that:
 - trains and assess' in the workplace
 - rarely delivers in an institutional setting
 - often works with single units of competence rather than whole qualifications
 - comes from industry and is more often part time in both industry and VET
 - predominantly works in industry based RTOs and meet the minimum requirements of a Certificate IV TAA
 - predominantly does not have a training or assessing qualification beyond the minimum requirement of Certificate IV
 - are often not confident with broader skill development strategies for language, literacy and numeracy
 - are often not confident in marketing training to enterprises
 - often teach in isolation, in workplaces
 - are expected by workplaces to offer value beyond immediate teaching role – such as commenting on workplace flow and practices

4. The RTOs for the industry are:
 - TAFE, with small numbers of teachers to support each other in this industry
 - industry based not for profit RTOs with few full time staff and with a limited number of industry specific qualifications on their scope
 - very small RTOs with single or small numbers of units of competence on their scope

5. Currently the supply of training is matched to demand. There is evidence of high levels of responsiveness to industry demand as:
 - The VET workforce ie trainers work across jurisdictions
 - Training so mainly workplace based
 - employers and employee associations are actively supportive with promoting the importance of national skills development and recognition

The VET workforce for this industry delivers the qualification in a funding context that does not meet its delivery costs and needs, that is, the training is regional, has high cost equipment demands, specialised technical knowledge in a very low volume environment. These factors

place significant pressures on the VET workforce to deliver quality, flexible and creative approaches to ensure learners receive quality education without sufficient funding to properly perform the skill development activities to the level required. In addition to this profile, the majority of training in the industry is currently mapped to the national competency standards but much of it is not recorded via AVETMISS.