

RESPONSE 79
Skilling Australia
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Skilling Australia for the Future Response to public discussion paper

To
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I welcome the opportunity to share some thoughts on the broader topic of Skilling Australia. I fully realise that some of the points raised below will be outside the scope of this discussion paper and the terms of reference for your new body. Nevertheless I will share my thoughts with you in the hope that some of the points find a home on day.

Thank you and best wishes with a most exciting new program.

Ian Palmer

How should Skills Australia interact with industry groups to ensure that it has access to the most appropriate and up to date data?

Individual employers need to see the data collected is useful and meaningful to them, or they will disown the topic as an academic research project, not a genuine plan to address the problem. Use descriptions against the AQF labels of Cert I, II or III etc to indicate the common names of occupations or trades so employers not familiar with the jargon can relate. A shortfall of XX Cert III in the engineering field is not as meaningful as a shortfall of XX Boiler makers, Welders and sheet metal workers.

Industry needs to see graphs and easy to interpret annual reports on its industry, and geographical region so they can see if the problem is getting better or worse.

What sources of data on skills shortages should Skills Australia access?

I'd like to see data on the number of VET in school students who continue into the industry they have studied. Perhaps NCVER already has this?

Likewise I'd be keen to see the mismatch between student's subject selection and the available jobs in the marketplace. Talk about a reversal of the demand and supply approach. Students and schools pick subjects and run courses based on student popularity, with little or no regard for the local economy's demand.

In our area we have 400 students doing VET Entertainment and only one person got a Traineeship in the area according to 2006 Trainee commencement figures. Metals is screaming for staff, yet schools are struggling to get kids enrolled. The challenge to correct this situation is huge and multifaceted, but we must do more if we are truly to make an impression on a worsening skill shortage.

Getting regionalised data about real occupations into the hands of schools, parents and students, as well as local Chambers of Commerce, Councils, Economic Development Boards and Local Community Partnerships will help ensure they stay focused on attempting to address supply and demand imbalances at a local level.

Making this data more widely available and easy to interpret, by schools, parents and students is important for informed subject selections and career planning.

Industries too need to see data that shows "lead indicators" revealing if they are either succeeding or failing in influencing students into subjects that relate to careers in their industries.

Skill shortage industries need to work on becoming employers of choice through substance, not glossy brochures aimed at students, who soon discover on work placements that that hype is not fulfilled in reality. I look forward to the day industries send out noisy DVDs or shiny brochures to shop floor supervisors helping them to create meaningful and enjoyable work placement experiences that inspire students to seek careers within their industry. Data that shows how many employers have adopted enterprise level skill shortage plans may promote ownership across the industry.

Perhaps schools can receive financial incentives to promote and develop capacity in skill shortage areas. Currently in NSW Government schools Principals find all sorts of ways to discourage enrolments in externally delivered VET courses as it directly **reduces** student numbers and teacher staffing ratios. This is so incredibly counter productive.

How will ISCs ensure that their environmental scans take full account of workforce issues in their areas of industry coverage?

I strongly encourage you to report performance in closing the skills gap with comparative charts between states, industries and occupations. Only when the data clearly shows which groups are effectively closing the skills gaps, will the recalcitrant states and industries stop hiding behind outdated views, and slanging at others.

It must be obvious as to who is getting on with the job and who has spent years blowing hot air. If one industry does a great job and makes serious inroads, they must stand out and be praised in front of their peers.

Industries who fail to reform industry awards to modernize apprenticeships; Education systems who repeatedly fail to address supply and demand imbalance must be exposed and forced to account.

What is the best way to ensure that state based industry advisory bodies are engaged in the model without duplication of roles?

How can ISCs encourage and highlight responsive Registered Training Organisations delivering high quality training for their industry?

What can be done to ensure that the training outcomes for individuals and enterprises translate into appropriate employment outcomes?

Apprenticeships as the best solution to the tradesperson shortage, but industry is still not responding quickly enough to the challenge. CERT II in schools and school based apprenticeships are good, but again are not a strong enough solution. Cert II is below industry needs, and in NSW SBAs are strangled in rigid red tape, despite the recent "reforms".

The Trade Training Centres are being forced into one of the LEAST effective models being School Based Apprenticeships, simply because they can get RTO income under this model.

A far more successful approach would be to find a funding solution that allows schools to conduct Pre Apprenticeship courses, or re- badge the current CERT II course with some Cert III modules as Pre Apprenticeship courses. Deals could be done with TAFE, GTOs and others for recognition and credits of the apprenticeship time so students are guaranteed a reduced time in the remained of the apprenticeship, effectively enticing them into the trade as they get pay rises and completions faster.

Give any employer that chance to take over a trained 2nd year apprentice, rather than a green 1st year and most will jump at the 2nd year. Pre-apprenticeship courses fit this need, but have been limited to date because of irregular funding and ad hoc scheduling resulting in poor awareness among the potential candidates. At the same time the employment outcomes of pre-apprenticeship course graduates are often 90% plus. Pre apprenticeship course work, but are not funded in schools. It would only take a little marketing nous to package CERT II Vet in schools as Pre apprenticeship courses. Parents intuitively understand the term Pre- Apprenticeship and students would appreciate the formal recognition of a credit off the apprenticeship term. This creates a strong incentive to participate.

Signs have emerged that students are not taking personal responsibility for becoming job ready due to a rising expectation that the school will somehow find them an apprenticeship (SBA). Some are in fact advocating some of their personal responsibility to find an employer and or keep the job. If the apprenticeship fails the school comes under fire from the parent to resolve the issue. In turn schools become shy of further involvement in the system.

Having students in Pre- apprenticeships, and the best being taken into SBAs will encourage other students to rise to a higher standard of employability and personal responsibility.

Pre- Apprenticeships are also easier market to employers who can try out students and convert to SBA or regular apprenticeships.

How can this program be managed to best meet the needs of employers?

Work Placement should be broadened to encompass all skill shortage areas, not just the 9 industry endorsed frameworks as currently endorsed by NSW Board of Studies.

In extraordinary amount of LCP resources are squandered in NSW trying to create any kind of Work Placement for Entertainment students, due simply to the fact that the jobs are not there. The result is a lot of Mickey Mouse placements aimed at achieving compliance, which in turn creates a lot of students who feel demotivated and cheated of valuable learning time. At the same time students enrolled in critical skill shortage areas remain un-serviced with Work Placement as the resources have been forced into far less productive areas.

This artificial situation has arisen due to misplaced ideology from a school system serving its own needs rather than the greater need of the economy and community we live in. Supply should not rule demand, it must be in balance.

Ends