

ForestWorks Industry Skills Council

Response to the Skilling Australia for the Future *Discussion Paper 2008*

ForestWorks welcomes with enthusiasm the Australian Government's commitment to increasing investment in training to address the skills shortages across our economy through a demand driven model.

In particular our industry endorses the reference to and approach for skill development to be increased, improved and deepened. Significant issues across our industry are:

- safety
- new competencies for computerised innovations in equipment and work flow
- absolute critical role forest, wood, paper and timber products play in the global challenge of climate change and environmental management
- opportunities with biofuels
- partnerships within the Asia Pacific region relating to supply chain implications for illegal logging and deforestation pressures in developing countries.

Our feedback to the discussion paper will focus on:

- Demand driven system
- Higher level skills
- Establishment of Skills Australia and strengthening the Industry Skills Council role
- Productivity Places Program (PPP)
- Responses to issues for discussion questions as requested in the paper.

Demand driven system

ForestWorks supports the demand driven model and increased funding available nationally for additional training places for delivery of training via Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

As an alternative system to the current state allocation model, this new system may need up to 24 months to determine its potential to contribute towards addressing Australia's skill shortages. ForestWorks will be well positioned to review this system as we exercise our new capacity as an Industry Skills Council (ISC) to interact with enterprises to work with us on skill development issues while implementing the PPP, and through the ongoing development and application of training package infrastructure.

Higher level skills

The forest, wood, paper and timber products industry is supportive and respectful of an economy wide approach to higher level skills acquisition. However the vocational education and training (VET) system must still allow for resources to meet all the demands of a skilled workforce particularly in the certificate II–IV qualification profile.

Certificate II and Certificate III level skills are fundamental to the productivity of most of our industry enterprises and as such, these skills are often the foundation of higher level skills. The new system must continue to work at building and enhancing skills at these levels.

Establishment of Skills Australia and strengthening the Industry Skills Council role

ForestWorks welcomes the intention of improved 'diagnosis, auditing and distribution of information' to address skill needs. We also support Skills Australia in providing high level advice to the Australian Government and believe it is critical the group is well supported and provided with strategic research and access to critical thinkers from our industry. Our ISC has a Board of Directors and a fifty strong group of members representing all industry associations and sections, which are focused on effective strategies for the industry.

We look forward to our expanded role as an ISC and to developing a partnership with government and industry in driving these changes. We appreciate the developmental approach and phases to implement this model and are confident that we can provide the intelligence of our industry to address current and emerging skill development needs.

Productivity Places Program

ForestWorks supports the 60% target of places for existing workers as a priority for our industry, especially given the demands of climate change and biofuel developments.

The definition of an existing worker as a person who, 'in any given week, works for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind' is a concern for our industry as this definition may see many existing worker places being taken up by people who, by our industry definition are not existing workers. The application of this definition will need to be monitored.

Our industry has a skill development profile whereby approximately 95% of training is undertaken in the context of the workplace and as part of a job in the workplace. The opportunity for job seekers to work in our industry as a pre work program has in the past been met with limited enthusiasm from enterprises. This is due to the high risk nature of worksites and the amount of resources required to provide a rigorous induction and the additional supervision necessary for new workers. The resources for these workplace efforts are usually applied to new employees rather than potential employees.

ForestWorks is investigating the workforce and skill development demands to meet the climate challenge implications for our industry in Australia and regionally. We are mindful of ensuring resources continue to meet the business and skill development needs 'of the day' and further seek assurance that in this challenging area of climate change, initiatives and flexible models of approach for skill development will be supported.

Delivery of the additional places must be progressed in a manner that does not redirect existing places from planned activity. We must ensure that the PPP opportunity does not fall into the trap of a volume success indicator. Our industry research from 2003, 2005 and 2007 demonstrates that our enterprises do have critical skills shortages but they are not of high volume. However, this does not mean that addressing these critical skills shortages are without their challenges, it is often the reverse.

This program has the potential to re-build enthusiasm in our industry as a career choice for young people in remote locations by selling it as a true career path with real progression within the industry.

Access to funded training delivery is only one issue of many that will need to be addressed to meet the skill needs of the industry.

Issues for Discussion

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

ForestWorks is a robust organisation within which industry focuses its discussions and debates for workforce developments. This approach is healthy at the state/territory level and national levels.

From these established relationships and protocols we strongly advise that the ISC should be the pivotal or central point of contact to interact with the industry to support Skills Australia access information and dialogue with industry.

We have a membership model with fifty organisations across Australia representing each industry sector, industry associations, and state and territory training advisory bodies. Membership is industry focussed. Representatives of our member organisations meet three to four times per year and we would welcome attendance by a Skills Australia representative at these meetings.

- 2) Training provider relationships are managed with all key training providers to our industry, through separate forums (refer to discussion point 5 for further information). What sources of data on skills shortages should Skills Australia access?

ForestWorks supports data from government sources such as NCVET, ABS and other commonwealth and state government departments.

ForestWorks also encourages Skills Australia to utilise ForestWorks information and advice as a key source of data.

We conducted an extensive national data collection strategy in 2002–2005 to address the reporting gaps within the ABS of the industry size and skill demands. We will aim to continue this project to ensure accurate industry advice.

We will have data as identified in the ISC agreement with the commonwealth largely in the form of environmental scans for the industry. This data will be based on conversations, meetings, networks, enterprise visits. We will also establish a data collection system to provide data for trend and gap analysis.

Our data collection is primarily sourced from our industry, particularly through the Skill and Employment Council members, including the state training advisory bodies. This activity is described in papers, reports, statistics and presentations. Our website and newsletters will be available to Skills Australia on both invitation from Skills Australia as well as from our own initiative. Our data from visits and meetings is collated; it is tested with either other regions or sectors, as appropriate, and distributed nationally to ensure the data has integrity and validity.

ForestWorks Ltd

PO Box 612, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051
Suite 1, Ground Floor, 559A Queensberry St, North Melbourne, Victoria
Tel: 03 9321 3500 | www.forestworks.com.au

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Our ISC Board are critical thinkers and advocates for our industry who meet regularly to provide formal commentary and strategic advice.

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

ForestWorks environmental scans will be rigorous with a continuous interaction with industry representatives and enterprise contacts in an ISC that is comprehensively supported by our industry.

The history of partnerships and collaboration across our sectors at enterprise, regional, state, national and international level is healthy. This will continue as the ISC expands its alliances. We are mindful that in seeking information from workplaces, we will be efficient and targeted in our collection strategies.

The methodology will draw on existing research and documentation, surveys and test data from enterprises and associations. Information will continue to be distributed to our members; agreements on issues and directions will continue to be made through quarterly meetings.

We have experience with adopting a scenario planning approach to seek wider input into industry identified issues. These issues are then re-tested and validated through industry. This approach has proved successful in identifying emerging issues early in their development.

The environmental scan will be a pivotal document to the success of the PPP in our industry.

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

ForestWorks has a strong collaborative model in place with state and territory based industry advisory bodies, which is actively fostered and respectful of enterprise and association relationships. This 'partnership' arrangement between the organisations strengthens the intelligence that we can provide. While the bodies are separate we have a foundation that is open and transparent in the exchange of information, advice and rigour with our sources of data capture.

We operate with a series of principles – that we are collaborative; that we are respectful of each others' roles and responsibilities; and that there is reciprocity across the organisations with regards to involvement in decision making processes. The latter principle is in place with the state industry advisory bodies as current members of ForestWorks and participation in regular Skills and Employment Council (SEC) meetings. ForestWorks also maintains membership with some and has good relationships with all state training advisory bodies.

Effective mapping or understanding of reporting requirements to 'build' advice that limits duplication will continue to occur. There is an appreciation of the range of scope with some state bodies that extends beyond the ForestWorks industry.

We will be designing, in collaboration with state industry advisory bodies, agreed criteria for enterprise visit protocols to ensure a 'single point of contact' for enterprises through the approaches developed between ForestWorks and state industry advisory bodies. We will aim for a seamless and supportive relationship, based on our 'intelligence' gathering, to underpin the success of the PPP. These arrangements will be negotiated to best meet the needs of each state and territory and the industry.

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

The Forest Industry Assessment Plan System (FIAPS) was established in 2006 by ForestWorks in response to industry demand as a means of ensuring reliable and consistent training and assessment outcomes to agreed industry standards.

This service provides a national network of providers and enterprises with access to industry validated assessment materials and professional development activities for industry trainers and assessors. This service is coordinated and maintained by ForestWorks as part of our mission to improve industry's capacity to develop and maintain a skilled workforce. FIAPS is the key mechanism that ForestWorks uses to encourage high quality and responsive delivery by RTOs to the industry.

ForestWorks undertakes to strengthen this network, which currently has a national membership of some 85% of RTOs who deliver the FPI05 Forest and Forest Products Training Package. All states and territories that actively provide training to our industry are currently represented on this network.

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

The forest, wood, paper and timber products industry has a history of ensuring appropriate employment outcomes as training is central to work in the industry.

The industry has developed a strong culture of providing a training place to an existing worker in the workplace or to a person beginning employment in the workplace (with employment continuing after training has completed).

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

Flexibility of the PPP will be the key criteria to meet the needs of employers. The role of placement officers will be crucial in managing the interface between skill shortages, an existing worker/person beginning employment and an RTO. Fast tracking apprenticeships, access to skill sets and efficient administration will all be factors in meeting needs.

Seasonality will also be a factor for some of the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry sectors to access training.