



Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils

Background

The NSW Public Sector Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB) has been operating since 1996, working with Commonwealth, State and Local Government agencies and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to increase employer and employee participation in vocational education and training in NSW. As part of its contractual agreements with the NSW Department of Education and Training, the ITAB has provided advice to the Department on public sector training requirements and successfully accessed funding to implement training programs and develop training resources to facilitate skills development across the three tiers of government in NSW.

The NSW Public Sector ITAB has responsibility for working with the following industry sectors – public sector, local government, public safety, correctional services and water, a portfolio that mirrors that of Government Skills Australia at a national level. Since the inception of Industry Skills Councils in 2002, the ITAB has had the opportunity to work closely with Government Skills Australia, and to a lesser extent, IBSA, and observe the activities of other ISCs through receipt of e-newsletters, emails and website searches.

Our comments to this Inquiry are informed by these experiences and observations and are limited to the following matter.

Role and effectiveness of ISCs in the operation of the national training system particularly as it relates to states and territories and rural and regional Australia

The ITAB supports the establishment and ongoing funding by the Commonwealth of bipartite, industry-defined and industry-driven skills councils that provide an independent voice on national workforce training and development needs. For Industry Skills Councils to be able to demonstrate the leadership and vision which is expected of such organisations, they need to be:

- Led and staffed by strategic thinkers who are committed to extensive consultation with the industries they represent
- Provided with sufficient funding across a longer contractual period to allow ISCs to plan and deliver longitudinal projects and to implement work plans without concern about the potential termination of funding. A commitment by the Commonwealth to long-term contracts with ISCs would also assist in attracting and developing high calibre staff.

To effectively perform their role in the national training system, Industry Skills Councils need to establish genuine partnerships with their State and Territory advisory networks. The extent to which Industry Skills Councils engage with State & Territory Industry Training Advisory Bodies appears to be inconsistent across ISCs and within ISCs, depending on the industry sector. Some ISCs have established formal relationships with ITABs through MOUs or contracts whereby services are performed by the ITAB on behalf of the Industry Skills Council. Other good practice models include the nomination of a state and territory ITAB representative on sector advisory committees and the conduct of regular meetings and teleconferences with their state colleagues.

The establishment of formal arrangements between ISCs and ITABs should be sought by the Commonwealth as it strengthens relations between national and state bodies, minimises duplication in consultation with stakeholders and is an efficient means of utilising the limited amount of funding given to training advisory services. Where there is no formal agreement or arrangement in place between the ISC and State/Territory ITABs, the outcome has been lack of consultation, communication, sharing or involvement of the State ITABs in decision-making. Such an outcome is not productive for either party and can ultimately diminish the quality of advice provided to Commonwealth and State Governments and the training products produced for industry.

As responsibilities of ISCs broaden beyond training package development into areas such as workforce planning and management of Commonwealth programs such as the EBPPP, it is critical that ISCs work with their industry and state/territory partners to develop products and manage projects that are based on transparent consultative and decision-making processes.

Another matter which inhibits the effectiveness of ISCs in implementing the national training system is the lack of funding available to develop the non-endorsed components of training packages. Whilst considerable cost and time is spent by ISCs reviewing and/or developing units of competency and qualifications, the lack of training support material often deters RTOs from offering particular qualifications and units, particularly if the market is small and regionally dispersed. Funding for the continuous improvement of training packages should be expanded to include the provision of non-endorsed components, particularly if there is evidence that such products would facilitate the delivery of training to a thin market.

In conclusion, the NSW Public Sector ITAB suggests that Industry Skills Councils:

- Be retained with a contractual agreement that allows them to focus on longer term strategic planning and implementation
- Be required to demonstrate their partnership arrangements with State and Territory Advisory Committees which reflect a genuine commitment to national and state collaboration
- Be responsible for managing the development of training support materials where there is a demonstrated need and demand in a market that may struggle to attract training providers