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Dr Shona Batge
Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils

1. Executive Summary

The current processes at both vocational (IBSA) [and school curriculum (ACARA)] levels are of vital concern to the whole of Australia's dance training and education sector, setting a national framework that will impact and shape the whole industry in the long term, both for private and public dance training providers, in both schools and studios.*

1.1 Key issues

CDE are extremely concerned that the recent IBSA Project for National Dance Qualifications has exposed issues that highlight flaws in process, which, with incomplete or poor outcomes, dance trainees, will suffer from a diminution in existing standards. Coupled with growing industry perception that government has an agenda of competing with private providers, the opportunity of “win-win” by working in balanced partnership towards improving dance education and teaching standards will be lost. Ultimately, educational outcomes for all dancers, whether in private or public tuition anywhere in Australia, will be the opposite of intention; a diminishing access to qualified and experienced teachers and standards.

This stems from lack of prior industry consultation and impact studies, leading to “woolly” government thinking, including a rigid “one-size-fits-all” policy. At the time of writing remnant concepts such as “mapping”, mooted and left unresolved at closing and final NPRG meeting, are to be left to RTO's to arbitrate between dance societies' technical attainment certificates. CDE contend this will open the door to third party de-facto regulation, *which would be redundant if pathways and benchmark standards had been established and agreed by the industry at the outset.*

All of this trend will detract from the value of the core concepts of AQF portability and equity of access, reducing the value government would like to see recognized in the AQTF processes. This ultimately will lead to diminution of Australia's hard won reputation as a source of well trained dancers, delivered by the dance training societies up to the present time without government intervention.

1.2 Recommendations

If government is to participate in dance training at the grass roots student level, a sector hitherto entrusted to the dance training societies, it must:

- Provide instrumentalities such as IBSA [and ACARA] with funding adequate to gain and retain management individuals having genuine subject matter expertise, industry recognized independence and credibility.
- Manager(s) should also have periodic, publicly advertised liaison with relevant industry bodies.
- Industry representative bodies must be audited/validated to have been truly elected by dance societies and providers to be their formal representatives, not only self-nominated “peak” associations.
- Standing sub-committee members with dance training provider expertise should be responsible for dance competencies and be drawn from industry to ensure technical attainments are set within an *industry agreed minimum performance benchmark* for each dance genre as they exist and/or evolve.

This will take time and funding but will avoid an inevitable free-for-all if standards are allowed to fall below those currently established by the dance societies, before government intervention, which we suggest is the current trend. Only then will government have a sustainable dance training industry ISC team having credibility and liaison facility appropriate to this sector.

*ACARA is recognized as a separate issue but dance training and CDE providers span more both departments responsibilities and issues are interlinked

2. Response to Senate committee on ISC operations - Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to review the operations of ISCs being conducted by the standing committee, with specific reference to a project which effectively closed its process late last year but which had many flaws and left industry concerns unanswered and issues unresolved. The outcomes await ministerial endorsement at time of submission.

As an individual familiar with earlier incarnations of IBSA (CREATE Australia) at the Federal Level and VETAB (NSW) at the state level, We have individually contributed government methods and actions over the past ten or more years in coming to grips with the (dance) arts performance and training generally. The NDQ, however, is the first time government has made a serious attempt to engage with the dance training sector. (As distinct from dance performers/performance funding etc)

3.1 Committee brief

The preceding Executive Summary highlights observations and recommendations. The following sections covers significant aspects of the committee brief:

The role and effectiveness of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) in the operation of the national training system particularly as it relates to states and territories and rural and regional Australia
Impact on rural & regional employment contribution - see below

Accountability mechanisms
No specific comment

Corporate governance arrangements of ISCs
In regard to NPRG issues and operations – see below

Processes to prioritise funding allocations across all ISCs
Arts training & industry support/engagement issues – see below

ISC network arrangements and co-operative mechanisms
No specific input

The accrual of accumulated surpluses

No specific input

The effectiveness of each ISC in implementing specific training initiatives

Very relevant - NDQ is a case study of how it can go awry! See below

Any related matters

See below relating to other dance training & education issues

4 Specific observations arising from conduct of the IBSA NDQ project**4.1 Inadequate ISC Funding & Outcomes**

We suggest that the lack of adequate funding to ISCs (relating to vocational training) for the Arts sector has led to coalescing of unrelated industries into a conglomerated ISC lacking focus, industry credibility or permanent industry subject matter expertise. IBSA is an example, where “The Arts” has come to reside for the moment seeming to have been “tacked together” with other unrelated industries after the closure of Create Australia.

4.2 Reliance on third party input.

While this was part a result of budget restrictions, IBSA’s processes in turn have become a casualty, as this submission contends, so much so that not one person in IBSA or Verve had any dance industry training skills let alone any prior credibility before engagement with the dance sector. Instead there has been a perceived over-reliance on third party “behind the scenes” advisors which clouds transparency and has caused IBSA to appear to be captive to external industry ambitions and business directions.

4.3 Poor Industry “consultation”.

From the CDE standpoint, our involvement, initially one of support and desire to contribute to the NDQ, [IBSA approved an advert funded by CDE societies – copy available on request] has moved to one where a whole segment feel alienated and under threat of being bypassed by government to suit third party ambitions, to the point of perceived ambush by third party interests. All in the passage of 12 months!

[This same concern now extends to other government initiatives in dance education such as the dance curriculum content now being planned under the ACARA scheme].

CDE members and executive individuals (some of whom operate successful RTO’s) were, and remain, supportive of government contribution to the Arts and dance in particular, but are looking to a much more open partnership with the dance industry rather than the current perception that government is attempting to set up parallel and competitive delivery systems in an industry which has been efficient and self reliant to this date. At the moment government seems to be captive to sectional interests, even to the point where the perception is that government is funding third parties as providers of dance training in competition and to the exclusion of the existing training societies.

Initially we expected that the target outcome was betterment of training for the ultimate stakeholders - the dance students themselves - as recipients of these new qualifications. Instead, we have witnessed an almost dictatorial one-way and presumptive communications programme initially lacking any real attempt to understand how the private dance training societies successfully deliver dance training, and how government could leverage existing established society knowledge and constituent teacher resources. This appears to have been bypassed by those driving government policy in this sector for both vocational (IBSA) [and school curriculum (ACARA)].

All of the content of CDE observations and suggestion have been submitted to IBSA progressively via forums, meetings, formal submissions etc in an open and frank debate. Some outcomes have been positive, but the debate, if any, has been conducted in an atmosphere of prescribed and pre-arranged solutions. Answers to questions were polite, but dismissive, often demonstrating total lack of subject matter and industry knowledge.

4.4 Non-recognition of Dance Teachers’ contribution to local communities.

The lack of an environmental scan is compounded by the lack of a post rollout economic impact analysis (“no budget”) on outcomes of a new entry into dance training standards and delivery, particularly in rural and regional Australia, with overtones particularly impacting women in these areas. Throughout the nation some 20,000+ dance teachers conduct

classes for an estimated 2,000,000 students of all ages. Not only do these local studios contribute to the cultural fabric with daily classes and annual concerts, they also contribute significantly to the local economy by providing (often self-) employment particularly for women who would otherwise be on welfare or non-rewarding low wage occupations. This is particularly so in rural and regional Australia. CDE is desperately concerned that both the NDQ [and ACARA] dance curricula are almost designed by intent to supplant these experienced teachers and their contribution. Government should be seen to be actively working in partnership with these existing private providers, not competing by bypassing their representative societies such as those now formation members of CDE!

4.5 IBSA Self-audit: observance of DEEWR guidelines

Many of DEEWR's own guidelines for writing Training Packages were shelved in a rush to publish new qualifications. Stemming from a fundamental lack of a prior environmental study of the industry, (again reluctantly acknowledged by IBSA and recorded as "not in budget" or "not in scope" at NPRG meetings, only at the insistence of CDE representatives). Expediency of delivery in a rushed process has caused significant breakdown in process, transparency and perceived probity at many levels. CDE have voiced these very significant concerns to IBSA whose NDQ project processes have operated in a way that has locked out and reduced the voice of these private dance-training societies.

5. Core detailed issues & history arising on NDQ project

Putting aside above general observations on government funding of Arts education and processes, the fundamental observations with respect to this (NDQ) milestone project are:

- **An overall lack of adequate budget**
- **Rushed implementation**
- **Lack of industry engagement**
- **Prescriptive non-consultative approach to addressing industry needs**
- **Inflexible pre-conceived "one-size-fits-all" deployment process**

These in turn lead to the following detailed issues, many of which were raised with IBSA via forum postings and direct correspondence. In most cases the tough questions delving into policy and fundamental issues were either ignored, misinterpreted or dismissed with banal answers:

5.1 Project Management – non-consultative approach

No prior in depth "environmental scan" analyzing breadth and depth of delivery methods, content and processes of all providers across the whole sector, with equal omission of economic impact statement on effects on industry and employment outcomes, particularly in remote & regional Australia.

Short cuts in establishing committees and invited industry representatives.

Rejection of offer to provide a user manipulable statistical modeling application drawn from extrapolations of dance students based on ABS statistics (males & females in relevant age brackets) that would be exposed to dance curriculum in either public or private tuition.

A rush to publish competencies where volume/quantity outweighed content in giving appearance of progress – a triumph of quantity over quality.

A condescending, prescriptive and almost dictatorial stance by technical writers where knowledge of vocational "eduspeak" supplanted informed consultative information gathering and discussion. People with subject matter expertise from CDE membership were offered to IBSA throughout the project but ignored until too late.

Inappropriate approach of using "nearest-fit" of existing units of competency without understanding content, and delivery methods of all industry segments, particularly the dance societies.

Very little effort taken to educate industry providers or writing team ahead of any meetings -observed approach was "we have compiled the competencies so you can comment but only within the constraints of what is written". The cart before the horse for an organisation that concurred that they had no staff with industry specific knowledge at the outset.

Inflexible approach to engaging with industry in spite of reasonable submissions [70 page "white paper" submitted – copy available] and requests for more time to be spent with face-to-face meetings, exacerbated by over dependence on

phone conferencing (often with poor connections), which, as the primary communication method, may have benefits of convenience but has limited effectiveness. Another triumph of quantity (phone hookups) over quality of content.

CDE (representing 3,000 dance teacher members) had expected a significant level of face-to-face communication and committee work. Instead we were afforded:

- One group meeting (6 CEO's and experienced executives) with one IBSA representative.
- One 60-minute phone conference (a special "concession" for the dance societies)
- One last minute meeting (3 hours in June 2010) with IBSA technical consultant and one of CDE's member associations – which, if anything, concluded that CDE submissions for separate pathways warranted further investigation. This did not stimulate any further consultation or different outcomes from those in dispute.

Australia wide "Consultancy" meetings, when held, were 90% pre-set agendas with little time given, let alone notice taken, of questions and feedback.

While queries were scrupulously followed up, the responses were bland, non-specific, or often missed the point entirely, giving appearance of "resolved" by "ticking" the boxes but achieving little content. Records will show many follow up calls claiming to finalise issues, whereas we contend that there was no resolution to many issues and responses did not serve any constructive purpose, since purpose of question was to help communicate industry needs, while answers tended to be "don't tell us we'll tell you", "we know it all", "trust us" Few answers gave confidence that the question was understood.

5.2 Project Governance - NPRG meeting shortcomings:

- Minutes disputed as "not true and correct record" were subjected to post meeting justification and re-inclusion with alteration to "acceptable-resolved status" of issues voted as "non acceptable" at prior meeting.
- Meeting notes and agenda issues pre-marked as "resolved" prior to meeting. No effective debate driven on issues during meeting, even when CDE representatives sent "aide memoirs" after each meeting to help secretary compile true and complete records. More interest exhibited in finishing on time than meaningful debate & actual resolution.
- Potential conflict of interest of panel members not declared on issues of substance relating to other business associations/interests of such members. (Member should have declared conflict and offered to abstain)
- Summaries of discussions with other societies deemed "private" and not for disclosure to NPRG members.
- Inclusion of specifically named providers competencies appears to give government endorsement of this specific society and is contrary to strong advice from many sources within NPRG and external consultancy sessions.

6. Project Outcomes. (To date)

Elements of the "white paper" document have been used but out of context (in a overly zealous application of a needless "one-size-fits-all" approach). While helping improve technical content for full time and TAFE providers the "fits-all" dictum has ironically left the original provider society with an unusable set of competencies which need to be augmented to substitute for the original and current accredited set! An unfortunate situation since this provider RTO had uniquely pioneered the use of AQTF in dance student training via 10 years of prior national accreditation and audits by VETAB (NSW).

A final meeting of the NPRG was held on 6 September 2010 with a view to signing off the Case for Endorsement to go to the Minister. In relation to Certificates I-IV in Dance, the two members of NPRG representing the private dance training societies dissented from the recommendation to endorse these qualifications, finding them not fit for use by a large segment of the industry.

Stemming from a fundamental lack of a prior environmental study of the industry (again documented at NPRG at the request of these representatives), expediency of delivery in a rushed process has caused significant breakdown in process, transparency and perceived probity at many levels. CDE have voiced these very significant concerns to IBSA who they believe have operated in a way that has locked out and reduced the voice of the private dance training societies.

[The communication gap between dance training societies and IBSA regarding the new package for student training has widened so much so that they have now formalized their association as CDE, a formidable and formally elected peak association currently comprising 8 dance societies representing over 3,000 dance teachers who annually assess over 200,000 students of all ages].

In the wider context of all providers of dance, government decisions will impact an estimated 20,000 or more private dance studios/teachers who have some 2,000,000 students of all ages under dance tutelage in all genres of dance in any one year. TAFE and full-time dance schools would be a small proportion of these. [An environmental scan would have provided objective analysis/figures – perhaps those driving the project advising government “behind the scenes” did not want to disclose this fact! If other statistics/studies are available they were not disclosed on request even at NPRG meetings].

CDE has recently (Jan 2011) sent a letter to the honorable Minister Evans further explaining the reasons and ongoing issues relating to rejection of the Qualifications by CDE members on NPRG. This letter respectfully suggested that the Qualifications in question, Certificates I to IV in Dance, be released only as interim or temporary to allow alternate pathways for better and further industry agreement on addressing needs for all students of dance [copies of letter to Minister Evans is available on request].

CDE has similar concerns regarding the dance portion of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting project being planned for dance in schools. While a separate department the same advisors and similar mindset are driving it as evident in the NDQ project.

Appendix A

Dance Training Societies – involvement & Background Information.

To this point in time dance training at the formative ages from 5 to 18 (including vocational training over latter 7-8 years) has been the exclusive domain of the “dance training societies” in Australia for the past 70+ years. The function of establishing pedagogic standards of delivery and assessment criteria and all know-how has been in their custody from the beginning.

In total there are about 12 operating as Australian controlled associations each with membership of 200-900 teachers. Including foreign controlled and non-aligned teachers there is an estimated 20,000 dance teachers active in the country. These address an estimated aggregate of 2,000,000 dance students of all ages in all genres. The major societies presence stems from earlier industry training practices, particularly in the UK who in turn originally learnt by demonstration and face-to-face exposure. Gradually training techniques and “competencies” were documented to create the now extant and widely used body of work called “syllabus” unique to each society. These cover many traditional/old and new dance genres e.g. classical (ballet), jazz, tap, hip-hop, contemporary, “street” etc amongst others. Most dance societies are not-for-profit organisations whose board members are honorary contributors. Each of the societies, whose members are mostly dance teachers, employ the societies’ individual syllabus and examination systems, and compete strenuously for membership in all states.

The NDQ project-initial involvement

Announced in late 2009 with 12-month duration the CDE societies both individually and jointly voiced both support for the AQF and AQTF, relating to this project and asked to be included on the NPRG governance committee (Initially there were no other dance societies directly represented, the balance being mostly TAFE and full-time dance trainers).

As a first for full scale government involvement in dance training and to assist IBSA and Verve (project managers) gain visibility for the project, member societies paid for a full page ad in a premium national dance magazine actively encouraging dance teachers to join in IBSA/Verve forums – there being little or no public announcement by IBSA prior to this time. [IBSA approved content - copy available on request]

Of initial concern was that the team firstly had no industry specific technical experts on either the IBSA or Verve teams, compounded by the fact that there was no apparent prior knowledge of the names of the dance societies let alone their executives, in spite of some societies having 70+ years presence in the Australian industry.

Dance society input to NDQ

From the outset societies expressed concerns, posted questions on public forums about project objectives and identification of ultimate stakeholders, short time frame and lack of genuine industry involvement. Coupled with this lack of dance industry end user focus (CDE contended these should be all students of dance) it is a significant testament to the depth of this mounting disquiet that some 80% of the competing Australian dance societies came together immediately as a concerned action group.

On specific invitation by IBSA one dance society RTO made their full suite of intellectual property available as input and an exemplar for construction of competencies for the creation of NDQ competencies for the dance training societies.

In additional response to IBSA’s call for industry input, a substantive 70 page “white paper” specification was endorsed by the CDE action group and submitted in March 2010 and tabled at NPRG to assist the team in understanding societies’ progressive training needs, recommending separate vocational “stepping stone” pathways for part-time studio dance training [about 95% of all professional dancers have passed through this gateway on the road to paid employment as either performers or ultimately teachers].

END