

Government Skills Australia
Industry Skills Council Inquiry Submission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) have evolved and developed since their inception. As the ISC for the Government and Community Safety sector, Government Skills Australia represents the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and workforce interests of Correctional Services, Local Government, Public Safety, Public Sector and Water.

Through the GSA Industry Advisory Committees (IACs), GSA has an essential link to its industry sectors and their wide constitutions. GSA also works closely with Registered Training Organisations, (RTOs), state industry training and advisory bodies, industry associations, enterprises, union and others to meet the needs of employers, employees and other stakeholders to delivery a range of innovate and response products to meet emerging skill and workforce development needs.

Through a robust governance structure, GSA ensures accountability to the Commonwealth and other stakeholders in the utilisation of Commonwealth funding for both general operation and specific projects and programs, including the Skills for Sustainability initiative.

Lastly, ISCs have worked together to develop an unprecedented level of cross-industry collaboration and leadership on skills and workforce development.

GSA welcomes the opportunity to demonstrate its role and effectiveness in the national training system, particularly for the Government and Community Safety Sector.

INTRODUCTION

On 22 June 2010, the Senate referred an inquiry into the Industry Skills Council (ISCs) to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee and seeking a report by 30 September 2010.

As one of the eleven ISCs, Government Skills Australia (GSA) sees this inquiry as an opportunity to demonstrate and promote our work with the Government and Community Safety sectors of the Australian workforce, to the Committee.

In this submission, GSA seeks to provide the Committee with evidence and examples of how it is providing services to our industries through the provision of quality training products and qualifications and workforce development and career advice.

INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCILS

ROLE

The mandate of Australia's Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) is to bring together industry, educators and governments and unite them on a common industry-led agenda for action on skills and workforce development.

ISCs are:

- recognised and funded by the Australian Government;
- governed by independent, industry led boards; and
- not-for-profit companies limited by guarantee.
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Specifically, the formal roles of ISCs involve:

- using industry intelligence to advise business and government on workforce development and skill needs Australia-wide;
- actively supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services including training packages;
- providing independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions; working with enterprises, employment service providers, Registered Training Organisations and government to allocate training places under the Productivity Places Program; and
- engaging with State and Territory Governments, State and Territory industry advisory bodies and peak representative bodies in their area of industry coverage.

GOVERNMENT SKILLS AUSTRALIA

Our Role

Government Skills Australia (GSA) is a national Industry Skills Council for the government and community safety sectors representing the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and workforce interests of Correctional Services, Local Government, Public Safety, Public Sector and Water.

GSA provides industry intelligence on skill needs and training solutions to the Australian Government to develop a skilled workforce.

GSA services industry through the provision of quality training products and qualifications, workforce development and career advice.

Coverage

- Public Sector
 - The public sector consists of the governments of the Commonwealth, States and Territories, statutory bodies and state-owned corporations. The sector delivers diverse economic and administrative services in cities as well as rural and regional areas.
 - The sector represents 18% of the total Australian workforce. Its employees develop, review and implement policies on behalf of the government of the day and for the good of the community.
 - The public sector offers variety, opportunity and challenge and tends to recruit a high proportion of graduates as it requires people who have high level analytical skills. Development and training are on offer to those willing to improve themselves. The sector

has a tradition

of promoting from within, and encourages employees to take on short-term higher-duties opportunities in their departments or other agencies as a means of growing capability.

Women are well represented, and in the flexibility of work practices the sector is a leader.

- Local Government
 - Local Government is one of the three tiers of government in Australia and plays an essential role in the development and maintenance of the local community infrastructure and services. The sector provides services that complement those provided by other tiers of government.
 - Currently, there are around 700 local government bodies in Australia accountable to diverse metropolitan, regional, rural, remote and Indigenous communities. This includes 560 local government councils with statutory responsibilities.
 - The local government sector employs approximately 178,000 people nationally. There are about 6,600 elected councillors in Australia with an average of just under 10 councillors per council. Councils largely operate autonomously and are primarily accountable to their local communities. They are generally not subject to Ministerial direction by either state or federal governments. Sometimes, such as in the area of planning and development, councils work jointly with the state government, and their decisions may be subject to advice and direction from state government.
- Public Safety
 - The public safety industry works to prevent natural and man-made threats and to provide the community with protection from those threats; seeking to ensure the security and safety of all Australians. It represents a significant number of volunteers.
 - Public safety industry coverage includes:
 - Defence
 - Australian Police Forces
 - Fire Services and Land Management Agencies
 - State/Territory Emergency Services
 - Emergency Management
 - Aquatic Search and Rescue.
 - The public safety industry requires a sustainable workforce of competent and capable career and volunteer personnel, trained to safely fulfil their roles. The industry needs a pool of highly trained operational personnel who are committed to teamwork and safe work practices, and capable of working across multiple hazards, using advanced technology, and applying risk management principles and processes.
- Correctional services
 - The correctional services industry is a key service provider to the justice system in Australia, responsible for managing the supervision of offenders in secure care and community-based environments. Approximately 30,000 people are currently employed within the industry nationally.
 - In general, correctional services are the responsibility of state and territory governments and there is a Correctional Services Department in every State and Territory. In addition, in several States some services are contracted to private service providers with the state departments operating in a contract management capacity. There are custodial centres in all capital cities and in many regional centres. Community corrections offices in metropolitan and regional centres are based on the concentrations of corrections clients. Correctional staff members also travel to remote and Indigenous communities to supervise and monitor the progress of offenders in meeting their sentence obligations.
- Water
 - The water industry provides a fundamental service to communities and enterprises across Australia. This includes supplying irrigation water to farmers and other users and providing drinking water and wastewater services, including sewage treatment, to

- households and industry. Core water industry skills are also required in a number of industries, including mining, hospitality and local government.
- The skills of the water industry workforce and enterprises are critical, given Australia's highly variable rainfall and frequent water shortages. Efficient use of water resources is essential for the long-term sustainability of Australia's productive land and natural environment.
 - The water industry includes the major sectors of:
 - water sourcing, treatment, supply and distribution
 - wastewater collection and treatment, stormwater and drainage wastewater and biosolids reuse
 - ground water recharge
 - water quality management, monitoring and measurement.
 - The water industry employs water and wastewater treatment operators; networks maintenance personnel and specialists, such as hydrographers; environmental advisers; water quality officers; infrastructure and treatment systems designers and managers; remote essential services operators; trade waste operators; dam safety operators; and water scientists, including chemists, biologists, microbiologists, lock operators, and ground water hydrologists.

Purpose

Government Skills Australia as one of the eleven ISCs contracted by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), determines its services and priorities from the direction of industry advisory committees for each of its sectors.

Industry engagement

GSA works closely with Registered Training Organisations, state industry training advisory bodies, industry associations, enterprises, unions and others to create more flexible pathways within and between industries. This helps meet the needs of employers, employees and other stakeholders by delivering a range of innovative responses to emerging skill needs.

GSA provides industry leadership and influence, develops and disseminates training products, partners with industry and training providers to provide training solutions, and engages with clients and stakeholders to advance the training agenda for government and community safety. GSA is one of the official voices on skills development for its industries.

Our core business reflected in the 2007-2010 Strategic Plan is to:

- Develop and continually improve Quality Training Packages and products based on consultation and research;
- Develop and executive strategies to promote industry occupational, career and volunteering opportunities;
- Engage with industry to foster ownership and commitment to the vocational training system;
- Provide information and expert advice on GSA industry sectors and their skills development needs;
- Promote and market our services and products; and
- Influence and respond to changing political, government and economic policies.

Our Structure

GSA operates as a registered non-profit company. The registered company name is Public Service Skills Ltd. It receives funding through a contract with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and tenders for other funding from industry and government contracts and grants programs.

GSA's Relationship with DEEWR

GSA receives funding from DEEWR through a Funding Agreement which expires on 31 July 2011.

This agreement requires GSA to successfully complete its role as an ISC through:

- Provision of integrated industry intelligence and advice to DEEWR, Skills Australia and enterprises on workforce development and skills needs of our sectors and specified regions and enterprises;
- Maintenance and continuous improvement of training materials in line with the Model 2008 process and active support of the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services;
- Provision of independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions; work with enterprises, employment service providers, RTOs and DEEWR to allocate training places under the Productivity Place Program;
- Engagement with State and Territory Governments, State and Territory industry advisory and peak representative bodies in our area of industry coverage; and
- Achievement of the articulated KPIs and successful performance of the roles and performance measures listed in the Agreement.

GSA focuses on a successful achievement of the following.

There are six KPIs in the agreement:

1. Development and improvement of quality Training Packages and products based on industry consultation and research;

2. Development and execution of strategies to promote industry occupational, career and volunteering opportunities;
3. Engagement with industry to foster ownership and commitment to the vocational training system;
4. Provision of information and expert advice on GSA industry sectors and their skills development needs;
5. Promotion and marketing of our services and products; and
6. Influencing and responding to changing political issues and to government and economic policies.

Industry Representation

The GSA Industry Advisory Committees (IACs) are the essential link between GSA and each of its industry sectors and their wide constituencies. IACs are required to demonstrate that they represent a wide and comprehensive range of interests in each sector. They include a balance of employer and employee interests, state and territory interests, national peak bodies and professional associations, and training providers. Members of the IACs are nominated by the peak bodies they represent and are accountable to their nominating body and GSA for the quality of the advice they provide.

Under the funding agreement with DEEWR, GSA is required to engage with State and Territory Governments, State and Territory Industry Advisory Bodies and peak representative bodies in the area of industry covered. (Schedule 1, Clause C.2(d))

IACs are not peak bodies in themselves, rather they are as the name implies, an advisory committee made up from an industry's peak bodies. IACs have no statutory role or function and have no corporate existence.

GSA's Industry Advisory Committees perform a significant role for industry in that they:

- reflect the training interests and issues of the broad and comprehensive range of stakeholders in the industry sector(s);
- provide advice on the skills and training interests of the industry sector;
- represent the skills needs and career development requirements for employment in the industry sector in the work of GSA;
- identify the priorities for training projects and product development;
- provide advice on the communication strategies which meet the needs and protocols of the sector;
- nominate the membership and operations of national project specific reference groups or national steering committees;
- endorse national project proposals and project plans for industry sector projects;
- act as a resource and the industry sector in matters related to employment, recruitment, workforce analysis, training, skills needs and Training packages and their support materials; and
- manage the industry sector endorsement of national project outcomes through sector agreed protocols.

RESPONSE TO INQUIRY SCOPE

(a) - The 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.

Uptake of Training Packages

Corrections

The uptake of CSC07 Correctional Services Training Package is extremely good. While the enrolment and completion numbers are small compared to other packages, the proportion of the industry it reaches is significant. The number of employees in the correctional services industry with a VET qualification at certificate three level or higher is significantly higher than the national cross-industry average.

One hundred percent of enterprises in Australia (both public and private) that manage offenders or detainees as their core business use the CSC07 Training Package. Of the 11 service providers (eight public and three private) operating nationally, nine have their own enterprise RTOs, while the remaining two operate partnership arrangements with TAFEs.

Local Government

The uptake of LGA04 Local Government Training Package appears relatively low in national data due to this data being limited to publicly funded provision and full qualifications only. Local Government has a low level of full qualification training provided by public providers due to the limited availability of public RTOs prepared to provide training delivery and assessment in thin markets, as well as low levels of publicly subsidised offerings. Also many local councils are seeking to up skill and re skill existing staff which rarely requires a full qualification. A range of other Training Packages are drawn on for qualifications due to the broad range of work/occupations in local government. The limited nature of national data has been raised continually by this and other industry skills councils over the years.

Public Safety

The public safety industry includes representatives from international agencies, through their membership of fire sector and police sector peak bodies. The industry utilises minimal commonwealth or state/territory funding for the delivery and assessment of training as almost all public safety agencies are RTOs.

Public Sector

The number of publicly-funded course enrolments in PSP04 Public Sector Training Package qualifications continues to rise with an increase from 4006 enrolments in 2007 to 5115 enrolments in 2008. For example, in Western Australia the creation of a Public Service Commission has generated increased interest in PSP04 and they are now looking to align their training to the training package, which will further increase uptake of qualifications.

It should be said however that the above data does not reflect the true uptake of PSP04, as the majority of training in the public sector is not publicly funded and so currently not captured on a national basis.

Water

There has been an increase in the number of enrolments and completions in qualifications from the Water Training Package in 2008. The development of national learning resources at Certificates II, III and IV levels have supported the uptake of the training package by enhancing RTO capacity.

The training package is increasingly being used for RPL of existing workers in water enterprises to provide formal qualifications and for up-skilling or re-skilling existing workers.

(b) - Accountability mechanisms in relation to Commonwealth funding for the general operation and specific projects and programs of each ISC.

Under the conditions of the DEEWR Funding Agreement GSA provides regular audited financial reports to DEEWR. GSA ensures all receipts and expenditure of funds are separately identifiable at all times. GSA provides audited financial statements at the end of each financial year to DEEWR in an accrual based form, including profit and loss, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the accounts. All financial reporting and activity is undertaken within the Australian Accounting Standards and audits are undertaken by an appropriately qualified and recognised auditor.

Under the *Corporations Act 2001*, GSA is also required to produce an Annual Report.

GSA is highly aware of the importance of using Commonwealth funds in the most appropriate and effective manner at all times and as such ensures competitive procurement processes are undertaken to ensure best value for money.

Accountability mechanisms in relation to Commonwealth funding for the EBPPP initiative:

Industry interest

In December 2009, GSA sought expressions of interest to engage as broad a cross-section of Government industry stakeholders as possible in order to raise awareness of EBPPP and the training opportunities it provides. Interest in EBPPP included:

- Corrections: seven organisations from six States sought funding for 627 training places
- Local Government: 89 councils from seven States/Territories sought funding for 3677 training places
- Public Safety: 33 organisations from seven States/Territories sought funding for 2188 training places. However since submission closing date, GSA has received an additional 15 applications from the Public Safety industry.
- Public Sector: 45 departments from eight States/Territories sought funding for 2771 training places
- Water: 35 organisations from seven States/Territories sought funding for 1776 training places

Total applications received: 224

Selection Criteria

GSA submitted a shortlist of organisation applications. Government Skills Australia considered all applications and prioritised these.

98% of submitted applications were accepted by DEEWR.

The tables below depict the national distribution of funding associated with the Program. (Application statistics (n=209))

By Sector:

	Total funding sought	Total funding awarded	Percentage of total GSA funding (compared with other sectors)
Public Safety	\$ 14,090,000.00	\$ 1,362,292.00	35.3%
Local Government	\$ 24,455,000.00	\$ 838,461.00	21.7%
Public Sector	\$ 18,805,000.00	\$ 796,431.00	20.6%
Water	\$ 11,270,000.00	\$ 439,508.00	11.4%
Corrections	\$ 4,000,000.00	\$ 420,240.00	10.9%

By State/Territory:

	Total applications received	Total funding awarded	Percentage of total GSA funding (compared with other States/Territories):
ACT	2	\$585,966.00	15.2%
NSW	45	\$232,428.00	6.0%
NT	3	\$169,766.00	4.4%
QLD	34	\$510,313.00	13.2%
VIC	40	\$522,380.00	13.5%
SA	33	\$668,745.00	17.3%
TAS	8	\$265,155.00	6.9%
WA	36	\$902,179.00	23.4%

(c) - Corporate governance arrangements of ISCs

GSA Board

The GSA Board is a representative body that works within a strong governance framework. This ensures that the business of the Company is well managed and that all aspects of the DEEWR funding agreement are met, ensuring value for money for DEEWR as a funding body and also the needs of the industry sectors GSA represents.

GSA's principles of good governance are supported by:

- policies and procedures that are regularly reviewed and audited;
- transparent financial management and reporting;
- informed decision making with information sought from Board subcommittees, senior management and external expertise;
- strategic thinking; and
- regular self review, continuous improvement and enhancement of skills.

Board members have access to a Governance Charter, Governance Handbook and Code of Ethics to guide their actions.

External Review

External review of GSA's activities occurs on a number of levels including:

- as part of the DEEWR funding agreement requirements including production of continuous improvement plans for training packages, annual environmental scans, annual business plans and completion of an annual report;
- external independent auditing of the company's financial returns;
- lodgement with the Australian Securities Investments Commission (ASIC) of required documentation under the *Corporations Act 2001*; and
- an annual general meeting for company members.

(d) - Commonwealth Government processes to prioritise funding allocations across all ISCs.

As this is a Commonwealth Government process, GSA has not commented in this submission on the rationale used to prioritise funding allocations across all ISCs.

GSA however has had a productive and cooperative relationship with DEEWR for a number of years and looks forward to continuing this in the future.

(e) - ISC Network arrangements and co-operative mechanisms implemented between relevant boards.

In 2005, the newly formed ISCs agreed to establish the 'ISC Forum' to progress national vocational education and training priorities and matters of cross industry relevance. While based on an agreed Terms of Reference for its operations, the Forum is not an entity in its own right nor does it purport to have a view on any matter, rather views expressed are clearly defined as those of the 'collective' ISCs. The Forum convenes every two to three months with meetings held by Chairs or CEOs or both groups depending upon emerging priorities and matters for discussion.

Meetings of the Forum rotate around the jurisdictions to enable ISCs to meet with State Training Boards and local stakeholders, such as the industry chairs of the local Industry Training Advisory Bodies. The Forum regularly meets with the Chair and Chief Executive of Skills Australia, and with its full Board as appropriate. The Chairs of the ISCs also form part of the Strategic Industry Forum (SIF) convened by Skills Australia and which most recently met in June 2010. The SIF's membership of chairs of the State Training Boards, industry peaks and Skills Australia provides an opportunity to further enhance the collective industry voice on skills, workforce development and related priorities for the system.

ISC nominees sit on national committees and working groups on behalf of the collective enabling information to flow to and from the group, these have included: Energy Efficiency Skills Committee, NQC's Sustainability Skills Action Group and Framework Implementation Action Group, various COAG regulatory reform working groups, Australian Flexible Learning Framework Innovation and Leadership Management Committee and the Navigation Projects Steering Committee.

Most recently, June 2010 saw the collective run its first national conference entitled 'Strategies for the Future'. With a targeted invitation list of ISC board members and industry representatives from key bodies within the system, the 100 strong audience explored two key themes through a series of preeminent national and international speakers:

- International approaches to green skills and sustainable practice
- Rethinking workforce development: connecting skills demand, supply and utilisation.

The collective maintains a basic web portal for ease of stakeholder access to contact information, and as a single repository for key documents such as the full suite of 2010 Environmental Scans, and any joint reports such as '*Environmental Sustainability: An Industry Response*'. Links are provided to other key national bodies within the system, and users encouraged to visit the relevant ISC's website for industry specific or detailed information.

The collective progresses work at an operational level through a series of joint Working Groups each of which operates in accordance with agreed Terms of Reference. These groups enable ISCs to optimise resources and the sharing of ideas/ good practice and currently exist in the areas of workforce development; project management; Training Packages; language, literacy and numeracy.

In addition to negotiating agreement within sectors and across jurisdictions, ISCs collectively negotiate agreed 'whole of industry' positions, as evidenced by the joint letter to the Ministerial Council from ISC Chairs, ACCI, Ai Group and ACTU in response to the *VET Products for 21st Century* report prepared by the Joint Steering Committee of the National Quality Council and the COAG Skills and Workforce Development Sub Group.

One of the greatest strengths of ISCs is their intrinsic value as independent brokers of agreed advice and directions for skills development. When this is achieved collectively by the 11 ISCs – across sectors, jurisdictions and between employer and employee representatives - it delivers a level and breadth of grass roots 'buy-in' unable to be replicated by any other organisation inside or outside of the tertiary arena. The value and sure footedness this provides the system in going forward with large scale policy reform and initiatives, represents an incalculable return on investment in the ISC structure.

The creation of 11 Industry Skills Councils has enabled an unprecedented level of cross-industry collaboration and leadership on skills and workforce development. Not since the National Training System was conceived has this been possible. As singularly focussed organisations, without affiliation but with vast stakeholder networks, complemented by deep levels of expertise, ISCs are without parallel.

Following are some examples of joint submissions on cross-industry issues that GSA in collaboration with the 10 other Industry Skills Councils have participated in, including:

- Joint ISC submission Environmental Sustainability: An Industry Response, May 2009
- Joint ISC response to AQFC's Proposals for Strengthening the AQF - July 2009 (Submitted to AQFC)
- Joint ISC/ industry peaks' advice to MCVTE on 21st Century Training Products Final Report – June 2009 (Submitted to MCVTE)
- Joint ISC response to Skills Australia's Foundations for the Future - May 2009 (Submitted to Skills Australia and DPM's office)
- Joint ISC position on COAG Skills and Workforce Development Sub Group Paper – November 2008 (Submitted to NQC)

(f) - The accrual of accumulated surpluses from public funding over the life of each ISC's operation and its use and purpose.

Each year GSA commits funding to its operational and project costs according to priority based on industry intelligence regarding areas requiring continuous improvement or development of new units/qualifications. After researching and collecting real time industry intelligence an annual Environmental Scan is developed which informs the Continuous Improvement Plan and ultimately the company's Business Plan. The Business Plan then informs the budget allocations and activity is undertaken accordingly. It is common for committed funds to be rolled over to the next financial year where a project crosses more than one financial year. Where there are surplus funds and where it is considered appropriate by DEEWR those surplus funds are reallocated to new projects under the same process as described previously and in line with our contractual obligations to DEEWR.

(g) The effectiveness of each ISC in implementing specific training initiatives, for example the Skills for Sustainability initiative under the National Green Skills Agreement.

GSA completed Phase 1 of the Skills for Sustainability project in March 2010 and provided a report to DEEWR outlining a plan for Phase 2. Phase 1 included a review of the Training Packages administered by Government Skills Australia. The review identified gaps and areas where skills for sustainability may need to be embedded or new units may need to be developed. Extensive desktop auditing of current training package content has been validated through industry consultation to ensure proposed solutions to implementation of initiative are in keeping with industry initiatives and priorities. Ensuring the approach has industry involvement will mean the delivery of a product that will allow the initiatives to be most seamlessly integrated into the training culture of the industries.

Phase 2 was accepted by DEEWR and a performance based contract for Phase 2 established. It involves the development or rewriting of units of competency as required to ensure that skills for sustainability are embed in the training packages. Work has commenced to advance the outcomes and deliverables of Phase 2 and additional resourcing in the process of being identified and secured to ensure deliverable of outcomes in accordance with the agreed completion date of 31 December 2010.

GSA believes this comprehensive approach across its industries will effectively implement this specific important specific training initiative.

CONCLUSION

In this submission, GSA has provided evidence and examples of how it is providing services to its industries through the provision of quality training products and qualifications and workforce development and career advice.

Through its close working relationship with the GSA IACs, RTOs and other stakeholders, it meets the needs of employers, employees and other stakeholders to deliver a range of innovate and responsive products to meet emerging skill and workforce development needs. In doing so, GSA achieves the objectives of the Commonwealth funding provided. In turn, through transparent accountability mechanisms, fiscal responsibility and corporate governance frameworks, GSA can demonstrate how it is affectively and responsibly utilises its Commonwealth funding.

With the other ISCs, GSA participates in a range of cross-industry activities that contributes to the provision of advice and leadership in skills and workforce development.
