

## Information Paper

### Attracting young people into the agri-foods and fibre industries

#### Key messages

1. The creation and implementation of an overall industry wide strategy and plan is a key element of going forward in a coordinated and cooperative manner
2. All partners – investors and deliverers – ought to be regarded / regard themselves as collaborators operating in a competitive yet structured setting, recognising commercial opportunities and areas of market failure [that are expected to continue without strategic intervention]
3. The attraction, retention and management supply chain operates like other supply chains, noting that there are public and industry good implications of market failure
4. The somewhat simplistic approaches [many of which come from lack of understanding of the complexities] currently being undertaken in some parts of the supply chain are thought to be counter productive
5. An understanding of the key niches in the supply chain, their drivers and impediments, the role of current and emerging players, etc form key elements of the development and implementation of a suitable strategy.

#### 1. Background

In 2010 QualDATA Pty Ltd collaborated with the Council of RDCs [CRRDC] and CRC Association to undertake a National RD&E Survey with a particular focus on Extension and Adoption. Capacity building in its widest context featured as an area of interest and subsequent concern. The CRRDC initiated a Steering Committee to examine areas for enhancing collaboration and improving coordination – including the attraction and retention of key personnel to the industry.

QualDATA then initiated a roundtable meeting with key industry personnel to examine this issue in further detail for the [independent] advice of the CRRDC. This strategy paper emerges from the 2 December 2010 roundtable, at which a number of primary participants in the issue of attracting and retaining young people into the agri-foods and fibre industries reviewed key structural and strategic issues.

Participants were: Ken Moore RIRDC, David Russell PICSE, Sam Nelson NFF, Geoff Bloom Rural Skills Australia, Arthur Blewitt Agrifood Skills Australia, Jo Ruscoe FRDC [CRRDC], Ben Stockwin PIEF, Su McCluskey CRRDC and Gordon Stone QualDATA.

#### 2. Purpose of meeting and achievements

The group aims were to:

Purpose	Achievement
Map who does what, why and is accountable for it	Mostly achieved – however the accountabilities required further elaboration
Articulate the strategic positioning of the	Achieved – noting that there are other players to be

key players	mapped
Define the agreed territory of each of the key players	Achieved – noting accountabilities
Define potential collaborative partnerships	Not achieved – too early to define overarching partnerships
Demystify this space to potential investors and government	To be examined on 15 December 2010 via CRRDC meeting

The discipline brought to the discussion was for each of the key players to define their participation in this area, based on the principles of – ‘what am I paid to do’; ‘what defined responsibilities do I have for which I will be held accountable’; and ‘what is needed in this space to make a difference’. This brought up a range of issues including:

- Attitudinal change of a raft of stakeholders is crucial – whose role? What action is best taken? One organisation or a group?
- Who undertakes what type of lobbying to whom? Is it one or several players?
- How can investors and stakeholders ‘understand the complexities of this landscape’?

This mapping is preliminary – and focuses only on the players present at the meeting. Not only are there additional participants in this discipline there are additional emerging players. As well having expertise, they are often seeking funds from the same group of investors which simply adds to the complexity [and confusion in the market place]. This raises questions about integration of activity in order to leverage investments.

It is noted that there are structural difficulties in ‘picking collaborators’ – and yet in an increasingly crowded market place with emerging un-proven players – perhaps this is a necessary option.

**3. Key issues regarding the Attraction and Retention of young people**

It emerged that the discipline of Attraction and Retention is best regarded as a Capacity Building Discipline in its own right. In reality its consideration as a specific Supply Chain with the range of complexities [some of which are outlined above] that come with any supply chain is more appropriate.

The most cost effective process is for all key players in the discipline to collaborate – ideally with investors – to demonstrate and implement a cohesive and strategic approach. It was considered that supporting players ought to be asked to support the endeavours to clarify positioning and activities, rather than ‘muddy the waters’.

It was noted that many of these issues were reported in the study ‘Strategy To Attract Young People Into Horticulture’ undertaken by QualDATA for HAL in 2004. This study developed a road map and business plan as part of the study. It was likewise noted that many agribusiness companies are reporting attraction of bright young people as a key issue for attention.

*Key finding*

*It was concluded that a Personnel Attraction and Retention Strategic Development Plan would be highly relevant to create a suitable context for collaborative funding and operations of developing and managing a suitable supply chain to attract and retain young people.*

**4. The Supply Chain**

A number of resources that support thinking about this strategically were supplied to the meeting by Agrifood Skills, PICSE and CRRDC. They demonstrate:

- The flow of people along the supply chain from school to employment [PICSE]
- Notes on workforce attraction and workforce development, along with names of a number of contributors [CRRDC]
- Key elements and factors affecting the development a sustainable work force that supports agri-foods and fibre industries economic growth [Agrifood Skills].

It was noted that one of the key needs in the supply chain was for non-education organisations to understand ‘how schools operate in an education system context’ and ‘appreciate how to access the schools system’. One of the key threats was regarded as being that there are superficial stories about primary industries and agrifoods industries that are used in the schools system that provides particularly simplistic information. This creates a poor reflection of the current innovative and globally competitive industries within the agri-foods and fibre sectors.

*Key finding*

*The non-strategic and somewhat simplistic approaches currently being taken in the schools arena particularly are considered to be counter-productive. These messages are unable to / do not convey the more appropriate integrated story about the values of contemporary rural industries that more properly ought to be promoted.*

Meeting attendees identified their niche in the supply chain:

RIRDC [personnel are 1x FTE]

- Does – Support young people during their tertiary degree training with funded scholarships and mentoring using industry placements
- Could – Facilitate understanding of the landscape and how it works and why, including who the players are

PICSE [personnel are 19x FTEs]

- Does – Change attitudes and builds inter-relationships amongst students, teachers, employers and parents to agrifoods/fibre industry careers with a particular focus on science pathways and leading suitable students who have a focus on professional degree careers to university study opportunities
- Does – work specifically in the cohorts of Years 5&6; Yrs 7-10 and Years 11&12
- Does – mentoring of students through their transition to Yr 1 university and throughout their university careers

- Could – Support other players and implement the current program to support VET pathways
- Could – Through its Innovation Program, that supports changes to its operations, assist other players with knowledge, experience and expertise in a collaborative and value adding space

Rural Skills Australia [personnel are 9x FTEs]

- Does – focus on how to overcome skills and labour shortages
- Does – provide training information and advice on a state-by-state basis in order to increase employer confidence in the benefits of the current training systems
- Does – promote the national rural training packages, especially in rural and remote areas
- Does – work with NFF members in particular re future skills issues / management
- Does – work on special projects as required, such as an on-line VET system and accessing career resources, and is based on access to funding
- Could – work on additional projects using their networks particularly if funding was longer term rather than short term

Agrifood Skills Australia [personnel are 23x FTEs plus 3-7 consultants at any one time]

- Does – strongly focus on advising the job and employer end of the supply chain with emphasis on communicating ways in which employers and industries can increase their overall productivity and attract and retain key personnel
- Does – focus on improving how employers think about creating suitable jobs in a careers context so that they ‘think about jobs professionally like banks’ thus supporting workforce literacy in context of developing careers pathways
- Does – emphasise the use of pilot projects as ways of demonstrating the success and value of changed practices
- Does – work on the adoption and diffusion of technology in order to support adoption of innovation
- Could – engage more strongly with R&D agencies on strategic endeavours to pilot and investigate options
- Could – collaborate with other players on defined projects
- Notes that there are 9x rural focussed training packages that are current.

PIEF [personnel are 1.5 FTEs with future potential of 1.5-3 FTEs]

- Does – focus on inclusion of Primary Industries within the Australian Curriculum as a K-8 context, a grade 7-12 subject, as year 11/12 electives and as VET in schools subjects, with primary Industries examples and resources embedded throughout the Australian Curriculum’s website; based on the strategic facilitation and coordination of all primary industries education initiatives and career information/development to Australian Schools K-12.
- Does – A one-stop portal for schools to connect to all primary industries referenced to the Australian curriculum with Industry member resources included in resources on PIEF website and Australian Curriculum website.
- Does – Industry member involvement in annual resources development to Australian schools.
- Does – Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) benchmarking survey of student and teacher knowledge of the primary industries and the career and career pathways available

- Could – undertake related tasks based on funding support such as develop resource kits and support high quality teacher professional development related to primary industries education and career paths.

The roles of CRRDC and NFF were considered to be ‘enablers’.

### **5. Other relevant factors**

A range of factors that affect the ability of the agri-foods and fibre sectors to move forward in this discipline are:

- Greater coordination is required – so that all players are seen to be and are collaborators / partners; rather than competitors [thought to be shaped in context of competitive RTOs]
- Any partnerships have to demonstrate defined value and benefits to – attract, then retain and then manage young people – all are crucial parts of the supply chain
- There is a terminology all of its own in this discipline – important to speak / understand the language if you are / want to be a player – and also important to note that this is a highly competitive space
- The current players have equal difficulty linking to RD&E organisations as they [RD&E organisations] report linking to the players – a conduit would be valuable
- The focus has to be on supplying a valued service
- Some guiding principles would be valuable for investors and those seeking investment – to show what the priorities are for investors and the most simple investment / application processes [are varied, somewhat complex, etc]
- To what extent is there market failure – as it is apparent that it exists? If so –whose responsibility is it to address that issue?
- It seems apparent the RDCs and CRCs need to understand the context and value of the varied initiatives in the supply chain so each can be assigned a place on an industry basis and sector wide basis
- Initiatives have to be both outcomes and context based in terms of their delivery promise – and that needs to be appropriately assessed through robust contextualised evaluation.

In terms of the supply chain, the key elements are:

- The Landscape has to be known and understood
- Factors affecting its operation also have to be understood
- Key elements of measuring success are important – in a consistent robust manner
- A set of Steps Forward are crucial – and ideally required sign-off in an educated manner
- There are a lot of well kept secrets in the rural industries – those secrets in terms of careers ought to be told in a structured manner
- A focus on innovation, policy settings, government and public funder collaboration is equally important so that all players operate systematically and in collaboration
- At the end of the day it is all about Jobs in a Careers context – to meet industry needs and employee needs and aspirations – in flexible and portable jobs settings.

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