

Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee

Vocational Education and Training Sector

Introduction to the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council

Funded by the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development, the Food, Fibre & Timber Industries Training Council (FFTITC) has three core functions:

- Providing forward looking advice to State and Commonwealth Governments on vocational training needs and priorities for public funding
- Promoting vocational training to industry, including partnerships between industry and the training sector.
- Supporting innovation and workforce development.

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council service the following industry areas:

- Furnishings (furniture manufacturing, glass processing, soft furnishings, blinds and awnings etc)
- Forest and Forest Products (including timber board manufacturing, timber truss and frame)
- Textiles, Clothing, Footwear and Allied Services (clothing manufacture and design)
- Animal Care and Management (veterinary nurses, animal attendants)
- Horticulture, Conservation and Land Management
- Rural Production (growing of food and food production)
- Seafood, Food and Beverage Manufacturing

As a not-for-profit incorporated body, the primary purpose of the Training Council is to provide advice to Government on behalf of industry, and ensure all nationally recognised training programs and packages reflect the current and future needs within the industries.

We work with key industry organisations to indentify current and future vocational education and training priorities. We undertake extensive research into the skill and workforce development needs of industry and produce an Industry Workforce Development Plan for the industries mentioned above

We promote industry take-up of training, including promoting new training initiatives from the Department. We also ensure that the quality of this training remains at the highest level and advocate the benefits of participating in and supporting training.

Please note: For the purpose of this submission, the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council will be commenting only on a select number of points in the Terms of Reference. For further information on the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council, please go to www.fftitrainingcouncil.com.au.

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The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council strongly believe in the following principals:

- That the VET sector is an industry led system that supports economic and community growth for Australia.
- That the VET sector is responsive to the needs of industry and is flexible and responsive to changing labour market and industry environments.
- That the VET sector provides a high standard of training and workforce development that meets the current and future needs of industry's workforce.

Terms of Reference

(a) the role played by TAFEs in:

(i) educational linkages with secondary and higher education,

(ii) the development of skills in the Australian economy,

(iii) the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects, and

(iv) the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment;

Issues/Comments:

- The VET sector can directly support economic growth, productivity and industry competitiveness if it provides the skilled workforce required by business.
- The Public Training System's reach is broad not only in the diversity of qualifications that are offered but also in terms of its geographic footprint, and its support for a wide range of learners.
- The Public Training System, particularly in regional locations provide a wide range of programs for equity groups, where private RTOs may find these programs onerous and too expensive to deliver.
- The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries are predominantly small to medium enterprises and the majority of them are not currently involved in vocational training. Due to the importance of employer knowledge of the system, in particular the benefits to his or her business, the reasons for this lack of participation must be identified and addressed.
- There is no marketing of Vocational Training in general – only specific programs offered by RTOs. If vocational training and education is to be higher valued, particularly by young people, then it needs to be marketed.
- There is no central point where customers can find out what is being offered in WA. The current website only shows partial offerings and they are not current and up to date.
- Employers seeking information and support within the existing system are confronted with a bureaucratic system that is extremely difficult to navigate. There is often "TAFE speak" instead of "industry speak" and employers quickly disengage from the conversation.
- Regional customers only get to see what is being offered in regional locations, ie the local Public Providers only advertises areas that they have capability and experience in. School leavers, in particular, don't know what is being offered statewide.
- Enterprises currently do not have access to a 'Training Advice Centre' – as the majority of career services are focused on advice to individuals. The Food, Fibre and

Timber Industries Training Council recommend that this idea be researched further. Enterprises need access to a 'one stop' shop so that they can access information on a range of training areas. The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council recommends that these "one stop shops' be state based so that local knowledge and networks can be utilized.

- The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council also believe that there needs to be an increased focus on Workforce Development. There needs to be investment that increases organizational capabilities in workforce development. Funds that encourage middle and upper management of organisations to gain skills and understanding of the importance of workforce development are essential. This is particularly relevant to small to medium enterprises.
- Because of a lack in workforce development understanding, it is very difficult to 'sell' the concept of skilling your workforce to meet future industry needs. Many businesses, particularly small to medium enterprises do not have a human resource policies, training plans, job descriptions – all necessary tools to assist in skill and workforce development.

Terms of Reference

(b) the effects of a competitive training market on TAFE;

(c) what public funding is adequate to ensure TAFEs remain in a strong and sustainable position to carry out their aims;

(d) what factors affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business;

(e) different mechanisms used by state governments to allocate funding; and

Issues/Comments:

- Federal and State Government Policy do not always meet industries needs. Budget/costing models seem to influence policy over industry requirements.
- Thin training markets, a lack of available (and experienced) trainers and the prohibitively high cost of regional and remote training delivery impacts the delivery of training in the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries.
- There needs to be a national and state approach to servicing thin markets. In some niche industries, the lack of public providers delivering qualifications in their area has reached a critical level.
- There has been extensive public infrastructure and capability within the WA Public Training System. This obviously is an advantage as industry can access current and in some cases state of the art equipment and resources.

However, this also means that there needs to be continued support to ensure that equipment and infrastructure do remain current.

- Public Training Providers are funded to deliver training to individuals, whether they are job seekers, apprentices, career changers. This is their core business. Commercial activities require extra resources and is often seen by the college as a 'second priority'. In regional colleges, commercial activity is even further hampered by a lack of access to lecturers because of their 'profile delivery load'.
- With the introduction of various state Entitlement Models, a regional entitlement list is strongly needed. There needs to be more freedom within the system to meet a particular training need that might only be required in one or two locations.
- Public Training Providers, particularly from the regions have strong community obligations and its equity and social programs play a central part in community and regional development. They need to have the ability to meet these obligations. On a competitive basis, it is unequitable between public and private RTOs as private RTOs have more choice with what they deliver, where and when.
- If the cost of registration to deliver training increases as it has been, smaller RTOs will be forced out of the market resulting in a further demand on the Public system to auspice or form partnership models with specialist delivery organisations
- There are currently auspicing arrangements with industry – where publically funded delivery is done in the workplace and the RTO regulates and certifies it. Much of the onus is on industry; however there is little or no recognition of that effort in the way of resources or financial remuneration.
- The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council supports increased workplace delivery (partnership between industry and RTOs) but suggests that this be combined with increased support from RTOs in areas such as literacy and numeracy, pastoral care and mentoring. The RTO has the role of 'training specialist' and should be optimising the workplace training experience for the student by looking at the progress of each student's learning, and ensuring that the workplace delivery meets the instruction needs of each student.
- Currently, full qualifications are the most common product offered to individuals and/or industry by Public Providers. These are often not attractive to industry. The delivery of skill sets rather than full qualifications has been suggested as a key training solution to address a number of workforce development needs. This includes post trade skills in new technologies, supervisory skills, sustainability skills, and pre-employment programs.
- Funding for Public Providers is linked to the various state Skilled and Priority Occupation lists which are often heavily weighted on total employees and employment growth. These effectively preclude many food, fibre and timber industry occupations from being considered for funding. Inflexible ANSZCO codes that do not cover many of the occupations, compounds this problem.

- Centres of specialization would be beneficial in a number of areas. Having a centre of specialization in a metro area with some responsibility/partnership with regions would also be advantageous. However, there are also some concerns:
 - Is there capability of lecturers with a high level of industry currency?
 - Defined boundaries of RTOs would be difficult to manage.
 - The balance between private and public RTOs would be difficult to manage as well.