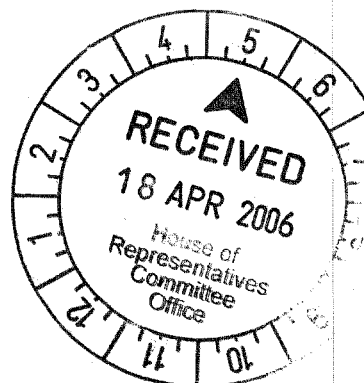




27 March 2006

Mr Alby Schultz MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600



Dear Mr Schultz

**NURSERY & GARDEN INDUSTRY NATIONAL SKILLS STUDY REPORT
FINDINGS 2005/2006**

We refer to the evidence presented in Sydney by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia regarding the committee's inquiry into Rural Skills Training & Research on 20th October 2005.

It is with great pleasure we present the findings from our National Skills Study. At the time of the inquiry, the research project had just been initiated and was concluded in February 2006. Over 500 industry people participated nationally.

The findings presented in the National Skill Study lend support to the evidence provided at the inquiry.

Feedback from industry employers and employees of particular includes views about the "training system" in which they operate, incorporating the national training package and registered training organisations.

To summarise, the following points were raised during the research:

1. Most people interviewed have little or no idea what the national training package is. However, if asked about the content of TAFE courses (and if they have recent experience with a traineeship or apprenticeship) then they have quite detailed views.
2. There is a strongly held view that the current system **dumbs down** qualifications. There is little rigour in the system and attendance is often all that is required to gain a qualification.
3. There appear to be **discrepancies** between states in terms of content of qualifications, despite the package being national. It appears that each provider can put their own flavour on a qualification.
4. There is a clear view that the current package should be more **industry relevant** and address things that cannot be done on-the-job or through a business.

5. **Articulation** (or the lack thereof) within the package appears to have some major flaws. For example, at present it is possible to do a diploma level qualification in horticulture without having any previous plant knowledge. This has led to some serious concerns by business owners about the structure of the current package.
6. There is also a fairly widely held concern that the package commences at too low a level. Employers and employees agree that there is **not enough complexity**.
7. **Content** of the package and the relative time spent on certain topics needs to be reviewed to reflect the current business environment, for example the impact of changing climatic and economic conditions.
8. There is strong view that the package must address **underpinning knowledge** and theory, particularly plant physiology, and not just focus on skills. It should not have a complete competency focus and apprentices completing this qualification should understand how and why plants grow and reproduce.
9. Another comment is that the whole area of training systems / packages contains too much **jargon**. It is not participation-friendly
10. Employers are not kept in the loop and there appears to be **little interaction** between TAFE teachers and employers. The overall message from discussions with those closely involved in the horticulture training industry is that there needs to be much closer **liaison** between business and educators and that both sides have to work at this.
11. There is **widespread disregard** for the TAFE system but, to some TAFE colleges' credit, this is not universal.
12. **TAFE is behind the times**. Many of the teaching staff have been out of the industry for 10-15 years and so are way behind current best practice.
13. The TAFE system is **under-resourced, under-funded** and generally run down. Complaints about TAFE are not unique to horticulture. As a result the system generally is perceived as inflexible, unresponsive and not customer (trainee) or end user (employer) focused.

The findings from the National Skills Study will be used by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia to set the direction for skill development activities in 2006 and beyond, including the drafting of the National Training Plan. The findings from this report will provide valuable input into the review of the Amenity Horticulture National Training package, which is currently underway.

We hope that the feedback provided by our industry members can be of assistance to the committee. Should you have any questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate in contacting me direct on (02) 9876 5200.

Yours sincerely



Candice McNamara
National Training & Recognition Manager

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE COMMITTEE

ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 113

**ATTACHMENTS, APPENDICES AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED WITH
SUBMISSIONS ARE HELD IN THE COMMITTEE OFFICE**