

17<sup>th</sup> May 2005

Mr. Ian Dundas  
Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Agriculture  
Fisheries and Forestry  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA. ACT. 2600

Dear Mr Dundas,

The University of Ballarat welcomes the opportunity to provide the following response to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research.

The University of Ballarat is Australia's only regional dual sector university with a history of delivering education and training for more than 130 years. The university offers a diverse range of courses with a commitment to offering and delivering education and training to Western Victoria.

#### **ITEM 1**

The University of Ballarat, School of Business Services – Primary Industries delivers, through its TAFE Division, vocational courses in Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Wool Industry and Thoroughbred Racing at Ballarat, Ararat and Horsham campuses. Delivery is also provided at the Longerenong campus of the University of Melbourne. The University's client focused approach to training results in many modes of delivery including on campus, flexible delivery, on and off the job training and specialist industry based courses delivered in regional areas on demand.

Training delivered is focused on trainees, apprentices and school based new apprentices at Certificate II and III in Agriculture, wool industry training includes shearing, shed hands and wool classing training from Certificate II to Certificate IV level, specific industry skills training is delivered from levels II to V. Forestry training principally encompasses Occupational Health and Safety for the Forestry Industry and Chainsaw Level I and II training.

The TAFE Division also delivers VET in schools in Certificate II Agriculture and short courses to meet the specific demand areas such as Chemical Handling, Tractor Front End Loader Operations and Header Operations.

Demand for all courses offered across the region is relatively constant and the training has a high practical skills-based approach, delivered flexibly to accommodate the needs of students.

#### *Articulation*

Apprentices and trainees undertake training with their employer (usually parents) and once this is completed may elect to do some short courses which fulfill their needs. VETiS students undertake the agriculture program as part of their secondary studies with the intent of returning to employer or family properties or alternatively to access higher education in agriculture.

#### *Access*

Most students travel extensive distances to attend training, some of those in excess of 100km. Some students do not have licenses and with no access to public transport have to rely on parents/employers. Also staff have to travel extensive distances to deliver and assess training which is being completed on the job as part of student training plan. This is costly and time consuming.

## **ITEM 2**

Agriculture training offered in the region is based on local demand patterns, skill needs of specific agricultural enterprises of the region, student enrolment quotas, training priorities of the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE), as well as advice from a significant number of advisory committees and relevant organizations throughout the region.

A critical factor that must be considered in training delivery is the funding available for Agriculture training in relation to the restricted course offerings, human resources cost of training delivery and the high cost of modern machinery and equipment.

The University is delivering entry-level training to apprentices and trainees, in Agriculture, skills training to the existing workforce and employment training for Australian Wool Classer and Owner Classer qualifications in the Wool Industry.

The Rural Production Training Package RTE03 and allied training packages on which agricultural training is based present problems to Registered Training Organisations in the delivery of relevant training. Some of the areas of concern are:

- ANTA's focus on more generic competencies and the use of imported units make it difficult to deliver industry specific training as required by the client.
- Many competencies overlap and duplicate training.
- Stand alone approach to some competencies make them difficult to deliver.
- The currency of competencies is critical as changes in environment, technology, equipment and industry focus is real time and training package content is based on reviews over years.
- Some competencies cannot be delivered if equipment is not accessible to the students. Registered Training Organisations are not adequately funded to purchase high cost state of the art equipment used in agriculture and must rely on the good will of machinery dealers and allied agricultural industries for access to the equipment. Training delivered on the job only allows students access to equipment on the property and therefore restricts exposure and training in use of new technologies and equipment. Both these issues bring with them legal responsibility and Occupational Health and Safety concerns.
- Packaging rules for training make it difficult to build a suitable qualification for the specific enterprise.

### **ITEM 3**

There is a need to undertake an extensive analysis of future trends in Agriculture focusing on each region, as generic research lacks significant capture of environment factors unique to each region and the associated skill requirements.

The diverse nature of agriculture enterprises contributes to a huge range of potential skills training fields however the total number of persons employed in these fields is very low which contributes to issues surrounding adequate provision of education and training.

Having established the knowledge, skills and technological demands on a regional basis, further alignment of training packages needs to occur incorporating a level of flexibility that will enable regional skill gaps to be addressed.

#### **ITEM 4**

Access to state of the art equipment, machinery and cutting-edge technology for training purposes is an issue that must be addressed to equip students with the skills, knowledge and technical expertise for farming, now and in the future. The current funding model allows for 'maintenance of delivery' only and does not allow for acquisition of new equipment or investment for the future of Agriculture training.

This often results on blame against the Registered Training Organisations for not being able to deliver appropriate training whereby the driving fault lies with the resourcing of training.

In the Rural Production Training Package RTE03, packaging rules often make it difficult to develop a suitable training plan of competencies within the qualification for the employer and their specific agriculture enterprise.

If you have any queries relating to this submission, please contact Mr Peter Sudholz, Acting Head of School for the School of Business Services on 03 5362 2718.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed)

Virginia Fenelon  
Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Vocational & Further Education)  
University of Ballarat