



Industry Skills Council

15 June 2009

Elton Humphrey
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Humphrey

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Health Workforce Australia Bill 2009

I am writing to provide a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Health Workforce Australia Bill 2009 on behalf of the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (ISC).

The ISC is well established as the developer of the national vocational education and training (VET) qualifications and competency standards for the health and community services industries. Development and implementation of these standards are having and will continue to have a pivotal role in workforce development and reform in the health and community services industries. The ISC welcomes the opportunity to provide advice through the inquiry particularly to highlight the potential for intersecting with and complementing the functions with Health Workforce Australia in areas of strategic workforce development and research.

Role of the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council

The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (ISC) is recognised by Commonwealth and State and Territory Training Skills Ministers as the national body providing advice on the workforce development priorities including skills development needs of the community services and health workforce to government and industry. The ISC has been in operation for over fifteen years and our role has been strengthened through the new Australian Government's *Skilling Australia for the Future* policy.

The ISC has a formal role as part of the National Training System and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to provide key services. The ISC also provides services on a contract basis to a range of other government agencies and clients and this work constitutes half of the revenue of the ISC with the DEEWR ISC funding the further half. The functions of the ISC are to:

- Provide intelligence and advice to the new national Skills Australia body on industry workforce development under the *Skilling Australia* policy
- Collect, analyse and report on data and provide leadership in workforce skill development
- Maintain the national qualifications and competency standards for the industries in the Health and Community Services Training Packages; and
- Influence the supply of skills to industry by promoting implementation of these Training Packages.

The ISC is comprised of a Board of 12 directors representing the unions and employers in industry including:

- *Public employers* nominated through the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) and the Community & Disability Services and Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC)

- *Private employers* nominated through the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) and the Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA)
- *Unions* nominated through the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

Key outputs of the ISC over the last three years include establishment and review of over 150 national qualifications and over 1000 competency standards covering work roles of over half of the 1.13 million Australian workers in the health and community services industry¹.

Intersection in roles between Health Workforce Australia and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council

Stakeholder engagement and consultation across all of industry

The process for development and endorsement of qualifications and competency standards requires agreement on end products by all industry stakeholders including government sector employers, private employers, unions, regulatory bodies, professional and peak associations and other stakeholders. The level of broad industry engagement established and managed by the ISC has ensured the standards and qualifications are well accepted and implemented by industry as the basis for development of future work roles and functions. In the ISC experience therefore the composition of Health Workforce Australia as proposed predominantly to represent the interests of government employers in the health industry may present some challenges to gaining much needed agreement across workforce reform issues.

It will be important that Health Workforce Australia acknowledges the nature of the stakeholder process in areas of strategic workforce development and research currently managed by the ISC. There is potential for the ISC to progress future strategic priorities of Health Workforce Australia e.g. through development of new priority qualifications and competency standards and implementation strategies for these. Similarly Health Workforce Australia may influence relevant processes as a government employer stakeholder including through the two AHMAC nominated Board members on the ISC.

Future skills articulation between the VET and higher education sectors

The ISC Environmental Scan 2009 identifies that future health and community services workforce development and reform requires better articulation of skills between the VET and higher education sectors. The Bradley Review of Higher Education recommended merging of the ministerial council responsibilities for the VET and higher education sectors as part of a strategy to enable better linkages between the sectors and this recommendation is being adopted by the Australian Government. The health and community services industry are at the forefront of these policy reforms in the education sector due to a large workforce that draws on both the VET and higher education sectors.

The ISC notes that the national qualifications and competency standards although emerging from the VET sector are now frequently used for training, skills development and workforce planning across all of the health and community services workforce. The Environmental Scan notes further that the current delineation between VET and higher education in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) will in future act as a barrier to further workforce reform.

The ISC notes that much of the immediate and important work of Health Workforce Australia will include management and improvement of clinical placement for health professionals trained in the university and VET sectors. The VET sector qualifications and competency standards such as Enrolled/Division 2 Nurses which are included in the HLT07 Health Training Package

¹ Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Environmental Scan 2009*

will need to be part of the clinical training arrangements under HWA as these are an integral part of the nursing workforce and training pathways.

It should be noted that the Training Packages also now include the capacity to establish Vocational Graduate Certificate and Diploma level qualifications and these have been developed in the areas of case management and client assessment, statutory child protection and family dispute resolution. These qualifications and competency standards reflect work functions carried by health and other professionals such as lawyers and barristers. There is potential to new further competency standards in the Training Packages to reflect high skill areas in the health industry and factor these roles into future planning; notwithstanding the complex and ongoing approach to core competencies for health professionals initiated by the National Health Workforce Taskforce.

In addition to the Bradley Review recommendation to stream education sector regulation and arrangements Skills Australia will now seek whole-of-workforce advice from Industry Skills Councils; not just in relation to the VET sector of the workforce. It will be critical for Health Workforce Australia and the ISC to streamline and co-ordinate relevant efforts as soon as possible.

Relationship between the community services and health industries

The boundaries between community services and health are currently unclear. Sectors such as disability, aged care, mental health and alcohol and other drugs are viewed as being located with the community services industry and national qualifications and competency standards for these roles are included in the CHC08 Community Services Training Package. Each of these areas however has a close interface with the health/clinical environments.

The ISC has structured the community services and health competency standards so that they can support flexible job design based on client and community service delivery needs that may cut across a range of different areas of community services and health. These structures are based on engagement with the range of relevant stakeholders and the ISC recommends that Health Workforce Australia acknowledge the context of stakeholder consultation and engagement when approaching reforms in job design that combine the traditional elements of community services and health.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry and please contact ISC CEO Di Lawson for any further information 02 9270 6630, di.lawson@cshisc.com.au

Yours sincerely



Dan Hill
Chair