

**Submission
No 194**

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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The Director and Honorable Members
Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No6
Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales.

Response to the Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales

This response is particularly relevant to the following terms of reference:

- 1 (b) (ii) The development of Skills in the NSW Economy.
- (iv) The delivery of services and programs to regional and rural communities.
- (d) The effects of a competitive training market on student access to education and training, skills and pathways to employment.
- (e) Competency based training and the application of training packages to workforce requirements.

1. In regional areas it is often difficult to recruit applicants with the literacy and numeracy skills required to undertake engineering trade courses, Fitting & Machining and Electrical in particular. Lack of numeracy skills in particular, leads to apprentices withdrawing from or prolonging their training.

2. Under Smart & Skilled there is no provision to rise to an appropriate standard. Prospective apprentices skills in literacy and mathematics including numeracy, algebra and trigonometry which are essential to a highly skilled tradesmen in such fields as Fitting & Machining & Electrical are lacking.

3. Since the beginning of 2015 a Fitting & Machining apprentice's attendance at Riverina Institute of TAFE has been reduced from 108 days over three years to 67 days over three years and an Electrical Apprentice from 108 day to 84 days. As a comparison a defense force apprentice receives 225 days off the job training. Responsibility for the training previously provided by TAFE has been transferred to the employer. An engineering business that does provide this level of training to apprentices would be required to take machines and personnel off line, therefor reducing productivity.

4. Under Smart & Skilled, TAFE attendance hours for the Fitting & Machining Trade Course at Riverina Institute have been reduced from 864 hrs to 540 hrs. As a result the hours of support staff, such as Storepersons have been reduced further, from 864 hrs to 270 hrs. The storepersons' role is integral to apprentice learning in ensuring the availability and the fitness of tools for purpose. It also enforces the correct use of the technical terminology and thus reduces the possibility of errors occurring as a result of misunderstanding.

5. The word "Competency" in the phrase Competency – Based Training needs to be accurately defined. Is an apprentice "competent" simply because he or she can perform an isolated task, or a series of isolated tasks? It appears under current assessment arrangements, that it does. In fact a tradesperson is only truly competent when he/she can perform the task, understand how it works, what needs to be done and what will happen if it is not done correctly. There is a real danger that apprentices are being trained to gain a qualification, not master a trade.

6. Employers of apprentices have to rely on customers to bring in jobs that will provide appropriate training opportunities for the apprentice. They have no control over the timing of such jobs and may not be able to guarantee that they will even occur. As a result co-ordination of on the job and off the job training, each reinforcing the other is difficult to achieve.
7. Engineering Trades suffer from a serious skill shortage. In regional areas workplaces are finding it difficult to attract qualified engineering tradesmen, and are forced to employ workers from other trades, such as the automotive industry. It is difficult and ineffective, under such circumstances, to turn responsibility for training back to employers.
8. By contrast, in the Riverina district, under previous training models, TAFE and Industry has a long history of working together to produce very highly skilled tradesmen.
9. The competitive training market has led to a decline in the required level of trade teacher training. During the 1980s & 1990s TAFE teachers were required to gain a Diploma in teaching. By the first decade of the 21st century the required level was Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. There is now a strong possibility that trade teaching may be delivered by "Trainers" and "Assessors". This down-grading of required skills is contrary to trends in every other educational sector, where the emphasis is on the need for ever-more-skilled teachers.
10. The current enthusiasm, online & workplace delivery, while less costly than compulsory TAFE attendance is misplaced. Apprentices need opportunity, practice and time to learn. TAFE used to support this. Workplaces lack the range of industrial experiences and mentoring opportunities that can be turned on for the occasion, TAFE had structured challenges for the apprentice to achieve the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding. Achieving this skill level takes time, a diverse mix of learning opportunities and co-operation between the RTO and workplaces.
11. The Engineering Trades are not valued for their contribution to society and the economy, rather they are punished for their high cost of training to meet industry standards. Younger tradesmen in industry lack much of the underpinning knowledge, skills and breadth of practice because of RTOs drive to reduce costs and increase profits. Funding now is less than 50% of what it was ten years ago. There is no suggestion in primary, secondary or tertiary education that a cheaper system is as good as or better than a more expensive one. Education and training are expensive, but they should be viewed as a social investment rather than a cost, because it is society that benefits in the long run.
12. The current system of assessment and certification is open to corruption, because the RTO and the Employer are the assessors, Certification depends on their judgment. To avoid any suggestion of corruption or malpractice on the part of the assessors, assessments should be carried out independently. Once assessment has been conducted it should be the role of industry to ultimately provide certification.

Graham O'Brien