

INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

Organisation:

Name: Mr Bill Archer

Telephone:

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Theme:

Summary

The Chair person

Inquiry into Skill Shortages

I wish to make a submission into the above inquiry on the lack of skilled workers in the Metal Fabrication Light (Sheetmetal) Trade and more specifically the skills related to Sheetmetal manufacture.

I have a small business located in Parkes NSW and I am a Sheetmetal worker by trade. I do not specialise in making any particular product but will manufacture anything a customer requires that I am capable of doing in the workshop. This situation leaves a very wide opening on the skills I require of a fellow worker.

There is a gross lack of tradespeople in Metal Fabrication (light) in Parkes and within the cities of Dubbo and Orange. A tradesmen who can fabricate and install an air conditioning duct run this week, Fabricate a stainless steel hopper scratch finish tomorrow and repair a auger flight when needed are impossible to find yet these are the all rounders that many manufacturers would like to find.

Hard jobs you may think, but, if a Sheetmetal tradesman is to have diversity, then he/she should know the planning procedures and have the skills to do these jobs, after all they are part of the off the job training offered within TAFE.

In the past this was possible but today those talents have been lost because the good tradesman has snuffed it and what we see today is youth with generic skills that are taught by unqualified teachers in the country colleges where apprentices attend.

How did this situation happen? Where have all the tradesman gone? Quite simply there is no off the job training carried out west of the mountains in the Sheetmetal trade. If an apprentice is employed to work on metal less than 3.00mm in thickness or he/she has the opportunity to work in stainless steel, aluminium or copper in the workshop then he/she should be directed to do Metal Fabrication (light) modules.

For him/her to do these modules then they must trek to either Chullora TAFE or Newcastle TAFE at major costs to them. How much does it cost to travel to Sydney or Newcastle and stay there for say 7 weeks a year while attending a block of studies? My estimates that you would get no change from \$500.00 per week and that's doesn't include public transport or a sit down meal they would usually have at home.

What employers tend to do is send the apprentice to Dubbo or Orange and do the Metal Fabrication Heavy (Boilermaking) modules. That way the apprentices can travel to and from the TAFE which, from Parkes, is over 100km. The apprentice (and sometimes the employer) is none the wiser to what modules are available that can be attended if they were available within the region.

In today's world where we are on the go with computers and fast food and taking things for granted one just has to look around at what is produced by the Sheetmetal worker, things

such as fast food outlet bamarities, restraunt kitchens, Macas and KFC are full of it. There is a Sheetmetal component in every glance in the city.

It is a fact that a Sheetmetal worker can easily go into the metal fabrication (heavy) area as he/she is given comprehensive off the job training through TAFE however the transfer of trade from heavy to light manufacture seldom happens, if ever at all.

It is unfortunate for the skills base on off the job training is Metal Fabrication (heavy) orientated and is taught in many of the country and Metal Fabrication (light) is non-existent in country colleges. My personal belief is that if the situation was reversed 20 years ago then the skill shortages of today may be lessened and even the good old farmer (if he attended a college to be taught Sheetmetal part time) who relies on the land would be able to fix his own machines (consider the Sheetmetal in that field) and when times were tough, like now, he could utilise the skills to get a job in the metal fabrication industry.

We can get tradesmen from the cities to come to the bush looking for work and a change in life style but to get them to come on a wage that is less than what can be earned in Sydney is a big ask and a big sacrifice for them.

It would be nice to see that focus changed on how the Metal Fabrication (light) industry gets off the job training especially from country colleges.

Could it be considered in this inquiry that the following suggestions be investigated:

1. That the relevant department for Education and Training investigate the possibility of having at least one country college that delivers Metal Fabrication (light) modules to country apprentices. (Here in Parkes there has seen the closure of Austop (108 semi

skilled employees and in tonight's news the pending closure of Electrolux in Orange.

How much Sheetmetal is in white goods?)

2. The consideration of increasing the living away from home allowance to apprentices attending block release at TAFE to a level where they are not out of pocket.
3. The employment of more 'sheetmetal work' teachers in the TAFE system before the existing teachers retire. Let the older teachers be mentors to the new breed so that the existing skills are not lost through natural attrition.
4. Do a better sell to the Metal Fabrication (light) industry so that the existing modules are utilised and there is a multi skilled workforce in place.
5. Consult with industry associations to get their view on the current situation of the skill shortage.
6. Check with Chullora and Newcastle TAFE on enrolments of apprentices from the country attending Metal Fabrication Light as block release.

I would be glad to discuss this further if required as changes to the locality where these skills can be taught need to be changed if we are to be a clever country.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Archer', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Archer

9 August 2005

PS

I have an apprentice in my employ and he attends Newcastle TAFE. In 3 years he is more than likely to pack up his tool box and move on. I'm left to start the roller coaster again and still try to make a quid.