

## **INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW**

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



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A COUNCIL OF  
QUALITY  
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GRAHAM TAYLOR, GENERAL MANAGER  
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REFERENCE NUMBER: 113/05GT:ms

WHEN REPLYING PLEASE QUOTE NUMBER

The Director  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Email: [statedevelopment@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:statedevelopment@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir

**Inquiry into Skills Shortages in Rural and Regional NSW**

Rural and regional Australia does have its unique markets and in turn skill requirements. With changing economies these needs evolve, therefore it's difficult to predict specific technical skill requirement for the longer term.

Unfortunately the benefit of skills training is not maximised unless it is converted to experience (ie learning) and this learning can be applied for extended periods in order to gain economic and social return on the skills/learning training commitments. Unfortunately with regional economies and markets being dynamic and skill needs changing this is difficult to achieve.

A submission is attached and I trust it tests the thinking and current standardised skills acquisition and education programs.

If you need further clarity or information please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

GRAHAM TAYLOR  
GENERAL MANAGER

Encl

1 August 2005

SUBMISSION TO  
INQUIRY INTO  
SKILLS  
SHORTAGES IN  
RURAL AND  
REGIONAL NSW  
BY THE  
STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON  
STATE  
DEVELOPMENT

## **1. Queanbeyan Skills Shortage**

Within each Regional Centre there will be a different socio-economic makeup, levels of growth, cultural and family structure needs. These in turn reflect the nature of the economy for each region. Hence a regional areas "skill needs" must be assessed individually based on their unique communities and economies.

These needs will also vary with time, change and evolving communities.

This reflects that skill needs are unique and evolving for each region, and at this point in time Queanbeyan has skill shortages in the following areas:

### **Professional:**

- Accountants; for financial/business support;
- Health Professionals; particularly nurses relating to age profile, insufficient young members coming through the systems;
- Teaching; not necessarily in total numbers but in gender make-up, insufficient male teachers.

### **Trades:**

- Building and Construction; is not being met due to the regions rising growth;
- Motor Trades; repairs, panel beating, auto electrics;
- Hospitality; a major issue for the region, ie the Snowy Mountains;
- Other trades generally; VET isn't a fully supported option by the education system of this region. There is a gap in the education-skill needs matrix. A proposed Australian Technical College for Queanbeyan would be of great benefit for greater integration of the education levels.

Although this is a snapshot of a point in time, it doesn't reflect why there are shortages/needs for Queanbeyan or define the needs for the future.

## **2. The Business Environment and Skill Dynamics**

Businesses operate in dynamic competitive environments, with more open global economies and advancing technologies. Survival is linked to being responsive and flexible in dealing with these changes. The people within a business must be skilled and developed to support these changes.

The Federal Government sought to improve industry's performance and developed nationally recognised standard competencies for the nation's workforce. Competency Based Training was the foundation for Vocational Education and Training realm of our education system.

This lead to defined standardized skills/competencies for each occupation; with opportunities for advancement, prior learning recognised and building skills to support improved performance. The Federal Government linked training/skills to improving national performance?

However, this national categorisation of standard skills has moved away from the needs of the individual regions and more importantly taken the flexibility to learn and develop as required for an individual business/local industry or region. There is a balance between these two principles however it becomes confusing when an apprentice is being skilled/educated in a trade at a college which bears no resemblance to the practical application that is in their regional workplace.

This reflects that training is skill acquisition, it isn't of benefit unless those skills can be applied and mastered – this reflects learning.

Education, skills enhancement and learning opportunities within an industry/region must be linked. Skills alone don't reflect improvement, performance or advancement within a dynamic environment.

However, this is only education/skill enhancement, learning requires the practical application of these skills which in turn requires strong links with the industry/business to support "learning". If skills gained can't be "learned-applied" in an employee's workplace then sharing within the regional trade/industry members could be of benefit.

### **3. Vocational Education and Training for the Future**

The unknown future can only be visualised; how do we know what skills are required for the future. Skills will be expanded, modified and new.

The V.E.T. system must be flexible and response for the future or we are skilling a workforce based on our past; it must move to streamlined and responsive development programs. It is important that the beneficiaries of the skills have ownership of the system – ie the employees and learners who are at the face of innovation and the customers.

Flexibility to develop the required "change" skills is important and requires input from individual organisations, with the skills needed by a regional company matching their level of development within their regional and greater markets. New vocational skills must be developed quickly, for regional industries are moving away from specialised jobs to more broadly defined roles with greater diversity of skills.

The tutors, educators and competency trainers in this system must also be continually growing and learning for the VET system to be dynamic. The focus is on "adult learning" approaches for the workforce (post school leavers), learning from knowledge, others, experiences and personal development. This means the individual learner grows with new skills and competence.

The learner must acquire 'personal development' plus technical skills; for without personal development the ability to see a different future will be lost and skill acquisition is then focussed on the needs of today and the past.

### 3.

Personal development with open thinking leads to innovation, progress and building a new future and/or responding to change, plus greater context and appreciation for the benefits of skill development/learning/change.

Hence personal development/open thinking must be built into industry training; a focus on the person and their skills.

A potential problem for the VET system is that it keeps people learning new skills within a standardised system, which build expectations of ongoing employment with these skills.

However, the greater skills acquired reflects the greater the value of the person to the business and higher rewards. These higher pays from a business' possible employer costs/budgets reflects less people can be employed. Usually the lower skills are those lost from the business (lower productive return to the business). This then impacts the unemployment areas of communities; especially regional communities with limited markets.

Once outside the workforce an individuals skills are falling behind the growing dynamic needs of the business – their ability for re-employment is diminished with time unless VET programs are more closely linked to government support programs to assist re-entry into the workforce and learning from the supported training/experiences.

### 4. Summary

Within broader economies, business's survival is linked to competition within a market, which requires responsiveness, innovation and vision. Businesses must deal with the unknown future and ongoing change, yet Vocational Skills are defined, standardised and administered by people with past experiences; hence they are not founded on economic/business benefit but in government/union linkages as a means of aligning skill acquisition to rewards.

The VET system by its nature limits innovation and competition, further it arguably doesn't sit well within a growing deregulated work environment; due to its size and structure.

Skills acquisition is part of a total education/learning system, with a focus on functional skills/competencies. This must be dynamic to meet the needs of changing economics and individual regional markets, with the diversity of functional/technical skills linked to personal development for the individual learner. This assists recognition of skills required for innovation/experimentation, and has the ability to reduce the time involved in new skill acquisition. Tutors also need this personal development or they can't assist in the 'personal development' of others and become system/rules focussed in lieu of learner needs focussed.

The VET skills and competence standards could be linked to dynamic functional skills and incremental personal development through all levels of the education system.

4.

Learning is a primary focus for an individual, yet training and competence should be responsive to the needs of business relating to its specific (regional) market. It appears the "training-competency" field is still evolving and unfortunately may be imposing the level of innovation/performance needs on businesses, not responding to their needs; hence standardisation Vs flexibility and creativity.

Regional skills development must be linked to learning (application of skills) plus involvement by the employers in developing the needs/skills for their industry and regional market.