

AGRIFOOD
SKILLS AUSTRALIA



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Management**

on the

QUALITY OF TEACHING OPTIONS PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's agrifood industry comprises all rural and related industries, food processing (including beverages, wine and pharmaceutical production), meat, seafood and racing industries. Economically, environmentally and socially, the industry plays a vital role throughout Australia's regional landscape.

Across these five sectors, the Australian agrifood industry is at the forefront globally in productivity, product quality, innovation and sustainable practice.

In summary:

- The value of production currently stands at close on \$200 billion pa;
- The industry is predominantly regionally based and occupies over 60% (nine million sq km) of the Australian landmass;
- Over 883,000 employees work in 184,450 separate enterprises;
- The industry manages the world's third largest fishing zone;
- The industry produces over 90% of the nation's domestic food supply and generates food for over 60 million people globally; and
- Exports are valued at over \$30b, roughly 20 per cent of Australia's exports.

As a responsible global citizen, Australia's agrifood industry is well positioned to pioneer world class and world best practice to assist it to address current challenges posed by the aftershocks of the global financial crisis; rising population levels; increased pressure on natural resources; water and food security; declining soil fertility; rising energy costs; changing climatic patterns and the demand for sustainable production footprints.

To meet these challenges and ensure Australia's continued global competitiveness and productivity growth in to the agrifood sector, Australia requires a flexible, dynamic and responsive training system that guarantees the current and future skills requirements of our workforce.

Key Recommendations

In summary, Agrifood Skills Australia supports proposals for improving the quality of VET teaching in Australia that:

- **Strengthen and maintain an industry centred and flexible training system that delivers quality outcomes;**
- **Boost the number of high quality VET teachers;**

- Support the provision of training by industry practitioners in ‘thin markets’, particularly in regional and remote Australia;
- Reform current policy settings to enable the delivery of incremental building blocks of skills as a pathway to full qualifications, where appropriate, so that the new skills and deep knowledge required across the agrifood industry can be delivered;
- Enhance requirements for full-time VET teachers above Certificate IV level to hold a qualification higher than that at which they are teaching, taking into account whether they have substantial industry knowledge. The exception being for part-time and/or casual industry experts. It is important that artificial barriers for industry to engage with what is meant to be an industry driven system are not created; and
- Establish a pre-requisite induction program for people undertaking VET teaching, with the caveat that existing workplace experience, technical and pedagogical knowledge, and the level of teaching responsibility, be taken into account; while supportive of induction programs, these must not become a barrier for industry experts to engage with the system.

NB It is the view of AgriFood Skills Australia, that the Quality of Teaching in VET Options Paper was compromised by the decision to group all VET teachers, trainers, assessors etc together. This decision placed a disproportional focus on full-time VET professionals in large public and Private RTOs - be they teachers or assessors, at the school level post-school certificate, undergraduate or post graduate level, when in reality, and particularly in the case of the agrifood industry, the situation is far more complex.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agrifood Skills Australia was established by the Australian Government in 2004 as one of 11 Industry Skills Councils. It has the task of providing accurate industry intelligence on current and future skills needs and training requirements for the agrifood industry.

Agrifood draws on widespread industry networks and active stakeholder engagement. This involves:

- Collecting industry intelligence and advising business and government on workforce development and skill needs within each of its major sectors Australia-wide;
- Actively supporting the development and implementation of quality skills training arrangements and related services;
- Providing independent skills and training advice to businesses, including matching identified skills needs with appropriate training solutions; and
- Promoting the benefits of skills development and training to industry enterprises, employers and employees.

Agrifood Skills Australia is unique amongst the Industry Skills Councils in the breadth and diversity of the five sectors the industry encompasses.

Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation Land Management - comprising rural production (agriculture); amenity horticulture; conservation and land management; landscaping, parks and gardens and turf; animal care and management. Over 460,000 people are employed in this sector.

Food, Beverage and Pharmaceuticals - comprising food processing, pharmaceuticals and beverages including beer and wine, it is Australia's largest manufacturing industry employing over 224,000 employees. 40% of whom are located in non-metropolitan areas. A further 14,000 workers are employed in the pharmaceutical sector.

Meat – comprising meat processing, wholesaling and retailing, small goods manufacturing and food services. The sector employs around 55,000 people.

Racing - comprising three codes – thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing. Of the 117,000 people involved in the industry, most are self-employed, part-time or transient with 95% of them working in non-metropolitan areas.

Seafood - comprising wild catch commercial fishing, aquaculture and post-harvest processing sectors. It also includes the pearling industry. 17,200 people are employed across the wild catch, harvesting and aquaculture sectors, with a further 7,200 employed in processing and wholesale.

2. THE AGRIFOOD INDUSTRY

2.1 The Agrifood Industry and the Australian Economy

Australia's agrifood industry comprises all rural and related industries, food processing (including beverages and wine), pharmaceutical production and processing, meat, seafood and racing industries.

Across these five sectors, the Australian agrifood industry is at the forefront globally in productivity, product quality, innovation and sustainable practice.

In summary:

- The value of production currently stands at close on \$200 billion pa;
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- Exports are valued at over \$30b, roughly 20 per cent of Australia's exports; and
- Agrifood sectors represent in the order of 46 per cent of retail sales.

2.2 Diversity of Enterprises and Workforce

Australia's agrifood industry is extremely diverse. It requires a flexible training system that fosters quality and effective training delivery within an extremely broad range of contexts and management structures.

The agrifood industry is characterised by:

- Large scale multi-nationals through to family owned businesses;
- Rural and remote based operations through to metropolitan based enterprises;
- Operations in both terrestrial and water-based environments;
- Casual, seasonal-based work through to permanent full-time occupations;
- High level science and technology focussed occupations through to labouring roles;

- Significant proportion of workers with low levels of language, literacy and numeracy;
- Significant numbers of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds and indigenous workers; and
- A sub-culture of learning which is developmental, lifelong and situational.

“Diversity of this magnitude underscores the need for training providers to have the necessary pedagogical capabilities to maximise the flexibility within Training Packages and turn it into individually designed skill solutions for learners and enterprises alike”.¹

2.3 Agrifood Training Packages

Agrifood Skills Australia maintains and continually improves 10 Training Packages on behalf of its industries. These 10 Training Packages reflect the agrifood sector’s broad coverage.

Amenity Horticulture (RTF03)*
 Animal Care and Management (ACM10)
 Australian Meat Industry (MTM07)
 Conservation and Land Management (RTD02)*
 Food Processing (FDF03)**
 Racing Industry (RGR08)
 Rural Production (RTE03)*
 Seafood (SFI04)
 Sugar Milling (SUG02)
 Agrifood (AGF07)

* to become AHC 10 Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management

** to become FDF10 Food Processing

In 2008, 77,528 persons were enrolled across the agrifood qualifications – equating to just nine per cent of the agrifood workforce. Furthermore, of these, only 19,782 completed their qualification. This reflects a typical trend for only one quarter to one third of publically funded enrolments in agrifood to be converted into completed qualifications.

Feedback from the industry reveals that the issue lies not with the value of relevance of these Training Packages. Instead, the goal in a number of sectors is not a full qualification but a skills set to perform a task or a job. Once the necessary employment skills are acquired, the learner withdraws from the remainder of the qualification and the publically funded system.

¹ Agrifood Skills Australia (2010) *Environmental Scan*

3. QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

As a responsible global citizen, Australia's agrifood industry is well positioned to pioneer world class and world first practice to assist it to address current challenges posed by the aftershocks of the global financial crisis; rising population levels; increased pressure on natural resources; water and food security; declining soil fertility; rising energy costs; changing climatic patterns and the demand for sustainable production footprints.

*"Quantum shifts needed in technology, science, our practices, how we work together and most importantly, the skills of our people, are starting to be seen as comparable to the great industrial and agricultural revolutions."*²

Action is required by the training system, policy makers and the industry.

3.1 Satisfaction with Current Arrangements for Assuring the Quality of VET Teaching

The agrifood industry's ability to maintain its competitive advantage and to drive productivity gains within expanding and changing global markets and operating conditions is being compromised by inherent inadequacies in Australia's education and training systems.

Of major concern to the agrifood industry is the variation in the quality of VET teaching delivered by public training providers, private and enterprise RTOs throughout Australia.

Existing policy settings of Australia's training system are out of step with the directions required for the agrifood industry. Foremost among these being:

- The focus on boosting the attainment of full qualifications, whereas in the agrifood industry, learning is developmental and socially embedded and occurs over a lifetime.
- Continued funding of full qualifications at the expense of Skills Sets is logistically and financially unviable for government and industry.
- The audit practice focusing on compliance and paperwork at the expense of teaching quality through the observation of quality learning outcomes and the ability to apply skills in a range of settings within the workplace.

² Agrifood Skills Australia (2010) *Environmental Scan*

In particular, while there are a number of stand-out examples of excellent industry focused training³, the overall quality of VET teaching within the agrifood industry is further compromised by:

- A shortage of suitably qualified and experienced VET teachers - exacerbated by the aging of the industry experienced VET workforce and the continuing imperative for currency of technical skills and experience among trainers;
- Thin markets due to the required nature of the sector for the diversity of jobs within the agrifood industry;
- The difficulties experienced in sectors and regional areas due to thin markets where time restraints impair the quality and effectiveness of on-the-job training and where support for continuing professional development opportunities for trainers and assessors is lacking;
- Inadequate sharing of accountability for quality outcomes between trainers, assessors and industry;
- A universal weakness in 'teaching' practice. Technically competent trainers can be challenged when having to use varied teaching methodologies or cope with diverse groups; and
- A lack of understanding of Training Packages by many VET teachers, with a resultant focus on the up-front delivering of competencies rather than adopting an outcomes-based approach to learning.

Recommendations

AgriFood Skills Australia recommends that any changes recommended in the report to the Australian Government must take into account the regional nature of the agrifood industry and the fact that flexibility is required to deliver the training needs of the sector in thin markets.

AgriFood recommends that the report should advocate to:

- Transform Australia's vocational education and training into a contemporary skills and workforce development system that builds enterprise capability alongside ensuring the competence of the individual; integrates research findings and new technologies within a broader approach to skilling; and provides services along the complete skills and workforce development continuum;

³ *The meat industry pours considerable resources into fostering and supporting high standards of VET teaching through MINTRAC. MINTRAC has developed standardised training and assessment resources for all Units of Competency, provides RTOs with regular access to industry networks and professional development opportunities, and develops a wide range of resources to enhance the professional capacity of trainers.*

- Reform the public funding model for training to remove existing disparities between the training funds available across States and Territory jurisdictions and between public and private providers;
- Advocate for Agrifood Skills Australia to inform the Australian Government budget for skills investments that will support services along the length of the skills and workforce development continuum and ensure skilling outcomes are linked to workforce planning and meaningful employment;
- Ensure government consults further with Industry Skills Councils to identify those areas where additional training incentives are required;
- Reform current policy settings to enable the delivery of incremental building blocks of skills and full qualifications, where appropriate, so that the new skills and deep knowledge required across the agrifood industry can be delivered; and
- Ensure that the new VET regulator, due to come into operation in 2011, has the support of State jurisdictions and the confidence of industry to deliver quality standards for RTOs.

3.2. Structure of the VET Teacher Workforce

Overall, Agrifood Skills Australia supports measures that will ensure greater flexibility to raise the quality of VET teaching. Mindful that no one size fits all, Agrifood Skills Australia supports the following:

- differentiating the qualifications required for VET teachers according to their varying levels of responsibility;
- a pre-requisite induction program for people undertaking VET teaching, with the caveat that existing workplace experience, technical and pedagogical knowledge and the level of teaching responsibility be taken into account; while supportive of induction programs, these must not become a barrier for industry experts to engage with the system;
- the imperative for full-time teachers to have a continuing connection with industry; and
- No additional mandating of qualifications for those teaching up to and including Certificate IV. However, those teaching Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications should be qualified at a higher level than that at which they are teaching or have significant demonstrated industry experience. It is important that any recommendations do not introduce further barriers to industry experts engaging with the VET system.

3.3 Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

The ability of the agrifood industry to attract and retain quality workers in the face of increasing skill requirements and labour shortages is of paramount importance. The industry recognises

the imperative of good job design and work organisation as a means of being identified as an 'employer of choice'.

The attraction and retention of workers is closely aligned with the quality and relevance of training that industry and Australia's VET system is able to provide. The industry's success in this regard is compromised by the aging of the VET workforce, along with a shortage of trainers with appropriate technical expertise, a trainer qualification and the capacity to provide relevant, engaging training in higher level qualifications.

The proposal to use highly skilled and experienced industry employees as 'master practitioners' needs to be tempered by the reality that releasing these employees from their full time role or running their business is not always feasible.

Further, access to quality VET opportunities are limited in many instances within the agrifood industry owing to the prevalence of small enterprises and the location of operations in regional and remote areas. These areas have insufficient students (thin markets) to support employing separate specialists in schools and RTOs and place an unacceptable burden on private providers and small enterprises to provide appropriate training.

In order to secure an ongoing supply of quality VET teachers, Agrifood Skills Australia recommends that:

- Government allocate funds to Skills Councils to jointly and adequately fund 'master practitioner' roles with their respective industries. Financial incentives, responsibilities and opportunity for career progression attached to master practitioner roles would need, at a minimum, to be commensurate with those within the industry from which the master teacher was drawn;
- A holistic industry approach to skilling across the education spectrum – schools, VET and higher education empowered by a new category of cross-sectoral teachers qualified to teach across these sectors. Government to work collaboratively with industry skills councils, employers and training providers to establish priority regions and to promote and facilitate this new teaching role; and
- Agrifood Skills Australia to provide input to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on appropriate inclusions within national curricula in relation to the agrifood industry.

3.4 VET Teacher Preparation and Development

Improvements in the quality and standing of VET teaching in Australia require a flexible and appropriately funded model that provides industry, skills councils and other key training stakeholders with the incentives and ability to deliver the desirable learning outcomes.

Agrifood Skills Australia supports the creation and sustaining of a dynamic and highly capable VET teaching workforce. New and continuing VET teachers will require enhanced levels of institutional and industry support to develop and maintain their teaching skills, industry knowledge and technical skills. These objectives need to be achieved without burdensome mandating requirements for qualifications, assessment and reporting.

Agrifood Skills Australia supports:

- The requirement for all people commencing VET teaching to undertake an induction program developed with the flexibility to accommodate existing industry and/or teaching experience, technical and pedagogical knowledge and the intended level of teaching responsibility;
- Modifications to the new TAE Training Package to include optional units introducing broader pedagogical skills;
- The requirement for full-time VET teachers above Certificate IV level to hold a qualification higher than that at which they are teaching. The exception being for part-time and/or casual industry experts. It is important that artificial barriers for industry to engage with what is meant to be an industry driven system are not created. Full-time VET teachers seeking progression to be encouraged to undertake higher level qualification and maintain industry currency in their field;
- The use of Quality Skills Funds for Industry Skills Councils and RTOs to work collaboratively to develop appropriate and targeted mentoring schemes and strategies for delivery to VET teachers in priority areas;
- Funding provided to Industry Skills Councils to work with RTOs to develop quality nationally consistent training and assessment materials, map the changes in new training packages, such as the new AHC Training Package, provide an appropriate industry context for the required learning and encourage and assist VET teachers to develop their own teaching materials that deliver desired learning outcomes;
- An enhanced role for Industry Skills Councils to build the capacity of industry to train its trainers and to inform and advise enterprises on quality RTOs;
- Industry Skills Councils and industry to host professional development seminars for RTOs; and
- Agrifood Skills Australia to play an enhanced role in assisting industry to access the high quality trainers with the knowledge and capacity to provide delivery relevant to people drawn from across the AgriFood industries.

3.5 Accrediting Teacher Education Qualifications

In view of perceived inadequacies in the current methods of determining the appropriateness of the length, content and pedagogy of VET education teacher programs, the proposal to establish a VET Teachers' Professional Association to improve the professional standing of VET teaching and accreditation in Australia is welcomed. Membership of the association would be drawn primarily from those in full-time teaching within both public and private institutions and RTOs.

Such a Professional Association would be required to acknowledge and support the reality of the broad range of situational and contextual requirements of an industry driven VET teaching

system and one that, in the case of the agrifood industry, was largely delivered by small RTOs in regional Australia that may rely on industry experts rather than full-time teaching professionals to deliver training.

Agrifood Skills Australia supports:

- The establishment of a VET teachers association to improve the quality, standing and attractiveness of VET teaching and accreditation as a profession; that in keeping with the broad range of situational and contextual requirements of the delivery of industry training, especially in regional Australia, there would be no mandating of membership; and no introduction of a school teacher style registration process; and
- The relevance and currency of related industry experience as an integral component of initial continuing accreditation of qualifications for full-time VET teachers and accrediting.

Agrifood Skills Australia does not support:

- The establishment of a regulatory board, as is the schools' model, to accredit qualifications - the possessions of which, in turn, are a condition of practice. It is imperative that the system maintains industry at its centre.

3.6 Registering Teachers

Of paramount importance for Australia's continued global competitiveness and productivity growth is Australia's ability to develop and maintain a dynamic and responsive training system.

Agrifood Skills Australia supports measures that help position VET teaching as a career of choice, within an industry focused system, without providing barriers to participation in the system.

It is the view of Agrifood Skills Australia that the establishment of a register of VET teachers and/or an external registration process based on the schools' model would provide a deterrent on the ability and willingness of part-time trainers drawn from small or family owned enterprises to participate in Australia's training system.

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