



## Submission

### **POSITIVE FUTURES: APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS IN QUEENSLAND**

QFF offers the following response on behalf of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance.

The Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA) developed from industries' need to engage more with the education and training sectors, and the Queensland government's commitment to create and support jobs across Queensland.

The purpose of the Alliance is to address mutual goals for member organisations that focus on attraction, development and retention of new entrants and existing workers to underpin the prosperity of Queensland's agricultural sector now and in the future.

The Alliance provides advice to government, service providers and other organisations with respect to employment, skills, industry training and workforce planning on behalf of Queensland's agriculture and related industries.

RJSA members, like Jobs Queensland, are interested in knowing what is working well within the Apprenticeship and Traineeships (A&T) system and what could be done to increase industries' use of it within the rural sector. We have sought industry feedback on the November 2016 Discussion Paper and summarized responses are as follows:

1. Why has there been a rise in older workers entering apprenticeships and what are the benefits as a result?

The NCVER data on commencements of A&T working in Queensland agriculture in 2015 (394, mostly trainees) shows that most workers entering A&T (around 60.9%) in the industry are 19 and under. Only 4.2% of these commencements workers are 45 years and over.

Even though there is a low number of workers entering A&T over 45, there might be an opportunity to work closer with older generations particularly to fulfill seasonal work needs and in upskilling the current workforce.

There is an increasingly older population in regional Queensland particularly in Agricultural industries, which could benefit from upskilling. There is also a part of the older generation that is seeking a change of lifestyle and wanting to explore new opportunities. Relocation to rural areas in many cases involves the need to re-skill. When older generations have been accepted, they were found to be better prepared for the workplace and in many cases very reliable. They also offer new insights and perspective, based on related life experience.

2. How would you strengthen the role of apprenticeships and traineeships as a pathway to employment for young people?

The Agricultural industries could increase the use of on the job training options to prepare young people for work. On the job training should be encouraged particularly in high skill areas where innovation and creativity are needed and where future jobs are likely to be.

Suggestions to strengthen the role of A&T to employ young people include:

*The united voice of intensive agriculture*



- More focus on career guidance with increased awareness of career paths.
- Provide stronger mentoring and guidance services (especially for young apprenticeships). Linked to this is the issue of who is to provide supervision and mentoring as well as ensuring mentors have the necessary skills to guide the A&T in skill development.
- Encourage closer links between Queensland Department of Education and Training's School to Work Transition Programs such as CultiV8 and A&T pathways.
- Offer the flexibility for multiple business to share a trainee. In agriculture a number of industries have become very specialized. The pig industry for example. A pig producer may take on a trainee to train in their grow out herd and be exposed to just a specialized section. However, the trainee may miss out on developing skills in farrow or weaning skills. By sharing the trainee model, the trainee would be able to gain better insights into the whole production chain, outside on specialist business.
- In rural settings, an apprentice or trainee is on a lower pay and in some instances may have to assume the training costs, cost of training resources and maintain a living. To strengthen these A&T and make them more appealing, each A&T training provider should be providing training resources at no additional fee. A review of financial support offered such as living away from home allowance, rental subsidies, student and travel subsidies can help.

3. How would you increase the diversity of people undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships?

The majority of agriculture industry apprentices and trainees are male (73% of commencements in 2015) and the majority are Australian. Some suggestions to improve diversity are:

- Offering training flexibility in delivery of training. For example, online delivery of theory so mothers can access training needs in the evening or out of standard work hours.
- The stronger links between vocational and tertiary education pathways could allow for additional options for people wanting to further their education or widen their skills base. This will allow for additional options to be considered by people wanting a career path.
- Offering ongoing literacy and numeracy training and tutorials to apprentices and trainees that need them.

4. How could the flexibilities of the apprenticeship and traineeship system be further explained to industry and employers?

In the agriculture industry, most of the employers would be small to medium size business. They are not likely to understand or want to assume any risks in undertaking an A&T. It is possible farmers feel out of their depth and feel like they do not have the skills to train an apprentice.

As with lot of programs, industry can find the program confusing. It is important to ensure clear and concise information is provided to industry. The information should be refined in a way that is particular to their needs.

There is scope to further help and provide advice to farmers on the benefits of using A&Ts to help grow their business. Industry organisations can play a role in informing the market. Additionally, it would be beneficial to increase the use of employer and industry forums available to inform the market.

A proposed solution would be to increase the role of Australian the Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) and to engage a network of industry leaders, whose role is to understand the program, the mechanics and provide guidance on use of the program. This would result in an 'industry lead' process and strategy.

5. In your opinion, what is the purpose of the apprenticeship and traineeship system?

The purpose of the A&T system is to encourage on the job training to complement formal training. It provides hands on experience and training, so that the trainee is more equipped to perform a job in the future. The system is aimed at encouraging potential new workers in an industry the opportunity to learn and grow. It provides the basic skill set in an industry context and in a way that both matches both the trainee and employer needs.

## INCENTIVE PAYMENTS

6. What role have incentives played in your interaction with the apprenticeship and traineeship system?

Incentives play a role in the system. Many RTO's will encourage qualifications where they get the most funding to deliver the training or units of competencies (skills sets).

The dollar value makes a difference for all parties. The incentives that are provided to an employer and a trainee can make a difference. This can be particularly important if the objective is to motivate small business to enter the system.

Incentives have assisted employers, however most employers see that the level of incentive payment is not enough to compensate for the level of supervision, assistance and overall management a trainee requires. This is especially true in agriculture industries that only employ 1-2 staff.

Larger employers would be likely to take A&T even when no financial incentive is provided if they perceive the A&T as beneficial for their business. Nonetheless, the incentives in this case would encourage increased numbers of A&T.

7. Have particular aspects of the incentives schemes influenced you more than others?

The ongoing support offered by the incentive scheme has assisted some companies in the agricultural industries to employ A&T in rural areas. Assistance to A&T such as 'Trade support loans' and the previous "Tools of trade" have a role in encouraging new A&T.

Targeting incentives to particular areas or qualifications and the dollar value of the incentive make a difference. Incentives targeting occupations in demand can be useful if the use of the incentives is properly monitored.

8. How could the incentives available be best understood by industry and employers?

Current information about what incentives are available is difficult to decipher for industry specialists working in the workforce development space, let alone an employee who has little or no knowledge about A&T. The information also contains many caveats and is written using bureaucratic jargon that is not easy to understand.

A suggestion would be to have an assessment tool to identify which incentives would be more appropriate for each business. A quick tool that includes the age of trainee, size of business, location, industry to narrow the incentives across government to those applicable to their own circumstances.

This would also increase the role of the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers servicing the agriculture industry in Queensland. Currently there is not a GTO servicing the particular needs of Queensland agriculture.

Further promotion through targeted industry forums and other industry specific media forms would also help.

9. In what way could incentives assist with the creation of new jobs or productivity improvements in your business or industry?

At the moment, a large proportion of agricultural employers will have limited time and resources to provide coaching to A&T. The amount of the incentive would need to compensate for the time and effort and to provide financial benefits for the company.

Some businesses in the agriculture industry do not have the capacity to maintain the minimum hour requirement for a full time placement and are often deterred by this. Therefore, incentives or arrangements that allow employers to offer part time or more flexible conditions to apprentices and trainees could be more appealing to the agricultural industry.

It is also important to note that providing these opportunities might influence the uptake of apprenticeships but not necessarily translate to increased jobs. Incentives should be placed to those opportunities where there is a logical path way to work.

## ACROSS INDUSTRIES

10. Do you use training methods that include work based learning (e.g. apprenticeships and traineeships) or institutional pathways (e.g. Certificate 3 Guarantee)? Why?

Agricultural industries use both work based learning and institutional pathways. Incentives and characteristics of Certificate 3 guarantee have encouraged their uptake.

Preferred training methods in the industry are based on work placement and/or experience, providing linkages between students, job seekers and employers. This approach is important as there can be a real disconnect between local students, local business and employers especially in agriculture. This methodology breaks down those barriers. Giving students an experience in the workplace also enhances their perspective of the agricultural industry and its diversity of jobs.

An analysis of this training in the horticulture industry shows that although the industry's preferred training method is 'on the job', 'work based learning', this is overwhelmingly non-accredited training. There are a number of factors influencing the lack of take up of A&T. As identified in the Production Horticulture Workforce Development Plan (2013 – 2015), 73% of survey respondents had never employed a trainee or apprentice for the following reasons:

- Don't have enough work all year round
- It is too time consuming to manage
- Young people don't seem to be interested in production horticulture
- Employers cannot see any benefits to their business
- Employers don't know much about traineeships
- It is too costly
- Providing staff with time off for study is inconvenient
- Employers don't have staff with adequate mentoring skills

11. Are there features of your business/industry which impacts on the employment of apprentices or trainees?

The key driver on the uptake of A&T is the productivity and profitability of the company and the economic outlook of the industry.

Another important feature is the scope of work and the predominantly seasonal nature of the work in agriculture. A&T are essentially for entry level jobs, and in agriculture these tend to be seasonal and

therefore ineligible for the mainstream A&T programs. Consideration should be given to widen the A&T programs to permit middle level management and supervisory roles to be eligible.

Currently, the employment of A&T is more likely to be used by animal sectors that are not affected by seasonality and are more likely to use contractors and labour throughout the year. Conversely, in production horticulture, when it is peak season there is no time to spend mentoring an apprentice or trainee and when it is off season there would be insufficient work.

The agricultural industry has some features to consider that might affect the uptake of A&T:

- a. Access to suitable training providers in rural and remote areas.
- b. Level of supervision required in managing an apprentice. A lot of employers in rural and remote hire minimal staff. There is not spare staff to get the daily work completed as well as supervising trainees.
- c. The organisational structure and the financial viability of company are likely to influence their capacity to support and mentor A&T.
- d. In some sectors, there would be an inability to guarantee continual employment throughout seasons. The workload may not be continual so there is not the capacity to take on an employee for the full 12 months of a year. Therefore, the scope work and degree of flexibility of the arrangements would also influence the uptake of A&T.

12. Can you describe any initiatives introduced to address them?

RJSA supports the Queensland Agricultural Workforce Network (QAWN), which aims at helping the Queensland agricultural industries to secure a supply of local workers that are trained and skilled for local industry requirements. QAWN officers across Queensland are working with farmers in all sectors to find labour solutions to help them grow their businesses. QAWN has created media and resources to assist understand the A&T system (e.g. AG Traineeships and Apprenticeships: 5 things you need to know).

13. What would make apprenticeships and traineeships more attractive to your industry?

The move to enable employers to share an apprentice or trainee is a positive step forward and we believe that it could potential improve uptake if it was better promoted and understood by producers. This involves trainee sharing across businesses who might offer compatible seasons and production cycles to ensure continual employment, while also exposing the trainee to multiple sectors within agriculture. Apprentices and trainees would be more likely to engage in various tasks in agriculture and help employers in times when they are more useful. Consideration should also be given to widen the A&T programs to permit middle level management and supervisory roles to be eligible.

## RETENTION AND OUTCOMES

14. What are the key success factors in the completion of apprenticeships and traineeships?

Key success factors include:

- Provision of ongoing support. This includes mentoring and monitoring for both trainee and employer.
- Employer involvement and skills. This includes clear understanding of their role as mentors and supervisors.
- Level of skills and maturity of the trainee. The level of foundation skills that the trainee has developed prior A&T helps in the process as well as their commitment and interest in the area of work influences learning and completions.
- Allocation of appropriate work to training requirements.

- Career path and potential financial incentive/pay. To achieve better outputs targeting occupations that are more likely to be on demand and with a clear path into the future is the best way forward. This includes the ability of the business to ensure continued employment for the duration of the traineeship or for a Group Training Organization to provide good, equivalent alternatives should the employment cease.

15. What support is important in assisting small to medium businesses participate successfully in the apprenticeship and traineeship system?

Small to medium businesses in agriculture are less likely to engage as they normally don't have the time and resources to pay and to train someone new. The majority of these companies won't employ many employees and are normally run by family. The best way to encourage uptake would be to ensure that the process is easy to understand, flexible, and it is cost effective. For these small companies, it is important to ensure financial incentives remain to encourage their uptake of A&T.

The provision of more industry specific information and examples rather than generic information would greatly help improve understanding and potentially uptake of A&T. Currently the information provided has so many caveats and multiple links to other information that it becomes too difficult and tiresome to navigate. Employers are time poor, so the simpler and more relevant the information is, the more likely it will lead to engagement. A clear understanding of what is involved and the potential benefits is essential.

It would also be important to have increase support of bodies such as the AASN and the support of a GTO that services Queensland agriculture.

16. What would be needed for larger employers to increase engagement with the system?

Large employers normally have resources and systems in place to benefit from the A&T. They would also be more likely to retain the trainee. Clear understanding of the role and the benefits would be essential for these organisations. The provision of more industry specific information and examples rather than generic information would also greatly help improve understanding and potentially uptake of A&T.

Improved industry engagement through Skills Impact is one way to ensure that industry is consulted and engaged. Therefore, improving and increasing the scope of available incentives and qualifications included on the National Skills Needs List.

## **SATISFACTION AND QUALITY**

17. How would you define quality in an apprenticeship and traineeship system?

It can be defined as a system that provides workers with applicable skills to meet business needs.

Quality of A&T includes ensuring that:

- The student meets the standards required to perform the job and has an ability to solve problems, and innovate.
- The courses and training are relevant to industry's needs and the methodology used conducive to improved learning and capacity.
- The training provider has the skills, reputation and experience needed.
- The provider has followed due process to ensure that results are achieved and learning is achieved.
- A wide geographical range of employers provide A&T job training experience that allows development of skills conducive to growth.

- Trainees completed the programs and gain an industry recognized, useful and respected qualification.

18. Are you satisfied with the current apprenticeship and traineeship system? Why?

Agriculture is not a high user of the system. The system would need to allow more flexibility to support the characteristics of agricultural business. There are some concerns about the availability of qualified instructors and the training requirements to properly service agriculture. Further guidance and support needs to be provided to both new apprentices and trainees and employers.

There is also a perception of vocational training that doesn't support its uptake. Many young people are dissuaded from apprenticeships (by teachers and parents) because of perceptions of low status, poor earnings and poor working conditions.

19. What strategies could further improve the quality of the current system?

Strategies to improve quality would include:

- A more thorough independent and expert review of the courses and the training. Including rating of: the content and methodology of the training; the experience and reputation of the training organization; the level and quality of mentor support and training.
- Group Training Organisation could also support the trainee to access quality employers, who have the ability to supervise the trainee effectively.
- Improvement of the uptake of the latest technology and practices in the training programs.
- That the trainee has an opportunity to complete their qualification with exposure to a variety of contexts within an industry and has the ability to gain experience in a couple of workplaces. This may show that the opportunities offered at one workplace may be different in another workplace within the same industry. Workplaces may employ differing levels of technology or address problems in a different manner. Exposure to diverse workplaces may show a trainee that there are other aspects to the industry that they might not be aware of by staying with one employer for the duration of their training.

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

20. What is your awareness of, or experience with, pre-employment apprenticeship and traineeship programs?

Limited awareness of the benefits and experience with pre-employment A&T programs in Agriculture industries. Where it has been experienced, it is perceived as valuable. It is particularly useful to guide the decisions on apprenticeship uptake.

21. Do you value these programs as a pre-employment pathway? Why?

These programs are very important to ensure that the trainee and the employer's expectations and needs are clearly identified prior to entering into a longer term engagement. It allows the trainee to test career opportunities. However, the skills acquired at pre-employment level offered at the school level are not of the same quality as the ones acquired and supported by structured in longer and more formal on the job training engagements.

22. What would enhance the value of pre-employment apprenticeship and traineeship programs for both employers and participants?

Educate employers about what these programs involve and the benefits that they bring. They might then develop the confidence to get involved as the trainee would be likely to be a work ready candidate.



Providing more information to participants on the career path and opportunities could also help uptake. In addition, a higher level of literacy, maths and science at school level would enhance the value of the experience for both employers and employees.

## SCHOOL BASED

### 23. What has been your experience with school-based apprenticeships and traineeships?

There is limited experience with school based A&T. There is also a perception that school-based A&T are not very effective unless you have a pro-active career pathways officer at the School. This career pathways officer must understand that the student may not always have the facility to source training or engage with an employer. Therefore, the officer will need to actively work with the student to commence a school-based activity. A further challenge with school-based A&T in rural areas is the difficulty faced by students in accessing reliable transport to the business.

### 24. How has the school-based apprenticeship and traineeship system met your needs?

No response

### 25. Please provide examples of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships proving to be a valuable employment pathway.

These A&T provide an opportunity for the employer and student to develop a long lasting relationship, increasing the opportunity for employment to continue on the completion of the activity.

### 26. What enhancements would you suggest to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships?

Some suggestions for future enhancements include:

Encourage work experience but at the same time provide fundamental training and skills, particularly those that would prepare the student for future jobs. This must go beyond just teaching a trade to also teach broad skills that would allow the student to be adaptable and mobile.

Focus on development of broad vocational capabilities such as systems thinking, problem solving, and creativity. This will foster capabilities and habits that are indispensable in a modern workforce. It is important that these skills are instilled early and they are best developed through experience and practice in the workplace. It is also important to encourage skills that facilitate technological development, use and uptake.

It would also help to provide transport assistance for rural areas. Regional farmers would be more inclined to participate if they had confidence that the student is able to attend work each day. Some students have limited access to transport, making it difficult to coordinate attendance to training and work.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

### 27. To what extent is increased specialisation a feature of your industry?

The agriculture industry still has a preference for generalist skills as the employee is often required to work in multiple areas within the business. There is still a need for hands on practical skills, as well as a need to increase the uptake of technology.

Digital technology has increased over the years with mechanical and robotic systems being incorporated into daily business activities. Agriculture will be increasingly impacted by technological change and digital disruption, which is likely to be a major influencer of the nature of work. The A&T program has to stay relevant and keep up with specialization.



28. How is this affecting your participation in the apprenticeship and traineeship system?

The participation of agricultural industries is affected mainly by other factors previously discussed, particularly lack of information and support. Nevertheless, it would be more attractive for the industry to participate in the A&T system if it produced apprentices or trainees that were prepared to deal with the technological change and assist the businesses in technology uptake.

Technological changes affect the types and scope of work allocated to the apprentice and/or trainee. There is a trend towards increasing use of technology and increasing need to use data to improve performance. It is very likely that the occupations of the future will be increasingly in need of more advanced technical skills, particularly in the provision of Agri-services.

Currently, there are some limitations in the units of competency that can be used to complete a certificate that is in the pre-qualified lists. The units of competency need to be flexible and encourage technology uptake.

29. What is the tolerance of industry to the use of simulation within the apprenticeship and traineeship system?

The use of simulations is limited in the industries at the moment and the level of uptake in the use of simulation varies across agricultural industries. Vocational outcomes rely on dimensions of competency in a range of situations in various contexts and practical skills are highly regarded as the best way to achieve these competencies.

Simulation is a useful tool that is underutilized by the industry. As long as it is cost effective, the use of simulation could potentially help in developing skills in many areas, particularly in high risk activities. However, there is a preference to complement this kind of training with real life training, due to the implicit risks and implications. This is applicable in activities such as the use of quad bikes, tractors and forklifts.

Simulation could be used as part of training in most farm management competencies and activities. Training in the use of GPS systems and unmanned aerial vehicles and drones could certainly be done using simulators and could be very attractive for the industry.

30. How is technology changing the training requirements of apprentices and trainees in your industry?

Although much of the work on farms still remains manual, an increasing number of farms are adopting new technology in their packing and processing facilities, farm operations and administration side of the business. For the most part, it is the much larger employers rather than the small to medium agribusinesses who have embraced new technologies and have the capacity to expose apprentices and trainees to the new digital literacy skills required.

Employers still require employees with practical skills but there is increasing need for these workers to also be able to deal with changes in technology faster and proactively.

The agriculture industry will need to embrace the use of technology and the opportunities that these innovations offer. The ability to deal with changes in technology is just part of any job and trade. We know that the industry will be highly influenced in the next years by digitally disruptive technologies. Particularly the 'Internet of Things', increasing application of precision agriculture, robotics, artificial intelligence, drones, and sensors as well as the requirement to deal with large amounts of data. All employees will be increasingly exposed to these technological changes.

31. What changes could assist apprenticeships and traineeships continue to meet the challenges of technological change?

A&T content and training will have to remain relevant and able to incorporate change as it takes place. In addition, trainers will also be required to upskill to remain relevant and be able to deliver up-to-date training and relevant to the industry.

Group Training Organisations (GTOs) working with agribusinesses need to have knowledge of the technological changes within the agriculture industry, so that they are able to ascertain whether or not an employer has the capacity to sufficiently expose the apprentice or trainee to new technology. If the employer doesn't have the capacity, then the GTO should consider a shared trainee option. This will allow the trainee to have the opportunity to gain the full range of agriculture technology skills necessary to achieve the qualification.

This could also be achieved by the incorporation of study leave or similar into the workplace agreement for the trainee to undertake work experience with supplier of technology. For example, a trainee in agriculture could undertake work experience with a drone company, a machinery company, a sugar mill or similar. Students should also be encouraged to attend field days and relevant conferences to learn more about changing technological environment.