



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

ADVANCING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

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

The Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA) developed from the agricultural sector's 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 our member organisations ¹ that focus on the attraction, development and retention of new entrants and existing workers to underpin the prosperity of Queensland's agricultural sector now and into 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, together with the Department of Education and Training, are interested in strengthening the Queensland VET system to deliver relevant, quality training to produce a skilled workforce to fulfill the needs of the agricultural sector particularly in rural and remote regions.

We have collated industry feedback on the Discussion Paper and summarized responses are as follows:

1. How can VET support development of new industries and business practices, and promote the continued growth of priority industry sectors? (keeping up with innovation)

The agriculture sector recognises the need to embrace the use of technology and the opportunities for advancement that these innovations offer. We know that the industry will be highly influenced in the next years by disruptive technologies that nevertheless may increase efficiency, productivity and profitability.

Emerging business tools such as crowd-funding, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, nutritional genomics, micro-grids, GPS and sensors will be applied, however, these skills will be required to work in tandem with proficiency in finance, succession planning, risk management and best practice management. Predicted future skill needs include those not traditionally associated with agriculture including engineers, data analysts and business support services.

The ability to deal with changes in technology is part of any job and trade. To remain relevant and continuously adapt to the advancement that technology and innovation brings, Government, industry, RTOs and those developing training packages must embrace the concept of continuous learning. This will be important because the ever-changing landscape requires these stakeholders to be up to date with the latest knowledge and be flexible to any change required, including the lead-times necessary in order to implement appropriate responses.

¹ RJSA's members are: Cotton Australia, The Timber and Building Materials Association (TABMA), Agforce, Growcom, Queensland Farmers Federation, Canegrowers, Queensland Chicken Growers Association, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)

The united voice of intensive agriculture



To be more responsive to the changing needs of industry, National Skills Service Organisations (SSOs), such as Skills Impact, should receive greater funding to investigate and incorporate the latest innovations and best practices into relevant training packages. We believe the current level of funding and resources are insufficient to adequately perform this role.

It is vitally important that content and training delivered by the VET sector anticipates and incorporates change as it takes place. SSOs should have access to quality experts to ensure the training packages are continuously reviewed and improved with knowledge of the latest developments, enabling the transferral and application of advances as they occur.

RTOs and their trainers will also be required to upskill to remain current and able to deliver up to date training that is relevant to the industry. It is essential that trainers are kept up to date with the latest innovations and best practice. To encourage RTOs to invest in the professional development of their training staff, it is recommended that the government investigate the potential to introduce a funding program for preferred suppliers. RTOs should also be encouraged to build partnerships with research and innovation organisations and be able to access experts in the field to make sure students are exposed to the most up to date knowledge.

To be more relevant to industry requirements and support the current workforce to constantly update their knowledge, the need for new skill sets should be investigated with a higher priority. Adopting more flexible course structures that allow students to train in areas that might not be conventional agricultural subjects but of significant value to their career in agriculture should be encouraged – for example, combining courses of agriculture and engineering.

The Department of Education and Training should consider providing funding for more skill sets that can contribute to certificate level courses. This will provide an incentive for industry to use the VET system to update their employee's knowledge in the particular competency needed to perform their role. This benefits both the individual's personal development and meets the need of employers whilst inculcating the merits of training in the workforce.

Government initiatives and programs seem to focus on providing benefits and investment to industry sectors based on projections of their growth potential ie: Health due to ageing populations. However, the Agribusiness sector is an important contributor to the economy and particularly significant to driving growth in regional areas. There are many and diverse opportunities for new entrants to be involved in the future of the industry. Technological change will bring the demand for more professional and technical jobs in our industry. We need to have more control regionally to what is considered a priority industry. Agriculture does not seem to get enough credit for the contribution it makes to local economies thus limiting program availability and funding.

2. How can we support a quality VET system in Queensland so that we meet the needs of industry, employers and students?

There is a need for increased standardisation across qualification levels to ensure that the standards required from qualifications is consistent and the workload appropriate for what is expected; this includes ensuring that there are similar inter-industry standards.

Too many RTOs are focused on the financial gains available from certain subsidies rather than providing training that will be of benefit to the industry. Greater engagement between RTOs and industry bodies should be encouraged so that there is an improved understanding of the specific needs of industry. For example, many RTOs are trying to encourage agricultural employers and their employees to undertake a qualification in Rural Operations yet as a result of the broad range of the units of competency available, those which are being

delivered are not necessarily the most beneficial or suitable for the industry. The RJSA is committed to working with RTOs to address these sorts of situations.

A key issue to improved quality is ensuring that open communication happens across the system. Customers of the VET system should have access to a single point of contact where they can get all the facts, information and a better understanding of the system. Therefore, local support is needed. Access to regional resources should be explored as a mechanism where customers can go.

Industry bodies can play a more active role in ensuring that quality education outcomes are achieved for their sectors. Industry bodies consult with and amongst their industry sectors in various aspects. They represent the interests of their industry and therefore are in a good position to be able to listen to and then express industry concerns in regards to VET quality and to work with the VET system to ensure that issues are voiced and addressed. Many of them already have close connections with DET, such as the RJSA 'umbrella' grouping, and work proactively to ensure their industry needs are heard.

Industry bodies could also have a stronger role in ensuring that training customers make an informed decision when considering their training options by increasing their understanding of the training packages, their rights and responsibilities, the role and responsibilities of the RTOs, etc.

Annual VET forums involving relevant RTOs and Industry bodies would help address quality by creating stronger open communication channels where concerns from industry and RTOs are addressed. Career advisors would also benefit from attending.

In schools, career advisors play a vital role to ensure that students are properly informed of their career pathway opportunities therefore it is important that these career advisors are providing current, quality information. At the moment, many career advisors are employed on a casual and part time basis with little time to be able to digest all information in order to provide proper, comprehensive career advice to young people. Career advisors should be considered a full time position and they should be properly trained and aware of industry needs and future prospects.

Strategies to improve quality would include also a more thorough independent and expert review of the courses and the training that would include rating of: the content and methodology of the training; the experience and reputation of the training organisation; and the level and quality of mentor support and training.

Another point to consider is to increase flexibility in funding, training delivery and methodology; whilst ensuring quality is achieved. There are still too many RTOs that stipulate which training or units of competency will be used in full qualifications without accessing partnerships to use appropriate registrations to deliver units of competency that may not be on their own scope.

3. How can we support all Queenslanders to access and participate in VET?

Improving the access to, and simplicity of, information and advice about the system. There should be increased effort in improving the 'brand' perception of what VET is and the value it provides. Effort should be made in overhauling the reputation of the sector and its promotion.

Increased flexibility in funding would increase the engagement of all Queenslanders in training. Despite industry's ongoing call for the funding of more skill sets, this has still not occurred. The agriculture sector currently only has one funded skill set – the Farm Business Management Skill Set. Support of skills sets will benefit the current workforce by accessing training tailored to their needs. This will certainly incentivise their use of the VET system as a method to update their knowledge and therefore increase their ability in the

uptake of new knowledge and technology. Increasing the options for those already in the workforce that require upskilling to due changes in their industry would be highly beneficial.

In the case of the agribusiness sector, its preference is for slightly older workers (mid-twenties and over) with a level of maturity and experience. These workers are in most cases better prepared for the workplace and in many cases very reliable and highly committed. However, the system does not provide the same level of support for mature workers, but increasing the support for those workers is important. Allowing subsidised training for those that already have qualifications in other areas will help these workers better meet the needs of their employers, improve the regard and enthusiasm for training within the business and further foster uptake of the VET system.

In terms of young people:

- More focus on career guidance with increased awareness of career paths.
- Provide stronger mentoring and guidance services.
- Encourage closer links between to Queensland Department of Education and Training's School to Work Transition Programs such as Cultiv8.
- Expose young people to different industries and career paths. For agribusiness, it is important to expose them to the opportunities that are available across the value chain. The contribution of agribusiness to the economy is significant and young people should be better informed of the multiple career options that they have. This information should be provided at a regional level.
- In rural settings, a review of financial support offered such as living away from home allowance, rental subsidies, student and travel subsidies can help to attract young entrants to the industry.

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 the delivery of training. For example, online delivery of theory so mothers can access training needs in the evening or out of standard work hours.
- 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. In the case of international students, it is important to ensure that a level of English and literacy is met to allow them to be able to perform their job.

4. What is working well in the VET system in Queensland, and what could be improved?

What is working well:

Some RTOs actively engage with industry and look for alternative ways to improve service delivery for our industry. They are aware of the particular challenges we face and the need to change the way they do business in order to adapt to industry needs; strategic partnerships have been formed to deliver programs better suited to our industry's requirements and profile.

There has been an increased focus on the quality framework underpinning the provision of training. The model to improve the consistency and supply of quality training is an evolving one and allows more active involvement of industry in the process, of which we are supportive.

The VET system provides subsidies for those in need and provides support for fee-free training post- year 12. These benefit the economy in the long term by improving employment opportunities to those that need it.

What could be improved:

- There are some concerns about the availability of qualified instructors and the training requirements to properly service the agribusiness industry. Increased access to quality trainers with up to date skills is imperative.
- Increased uptake of technology and new knowledge in training packages needs to be significantly improved.
- Improved communication and career guidance with increased awareness and promotion of career pathways. Increased awareness of the variety of options that the VET system offers, together with current information about the incentives available.
- Stronger links between vocational and tertiary education pathways would allow additional options for people wanting to further their education and widen their skill and knowledge base.
- Subsidised training should be permitted for people who have completed previous training in other fields but require further training to meet particular industry needs. Under the current Certificate 3 Guarantee eligibility criteria prospective students must not have or be enrolled in a certificate 3 level or higher qualification. Also, under the current Higher Level Skills Program, prospective students must not have or be enrolled in a certificate IV or higher qualification This is too restrictive.
- We also highlight the need to support a greater use of skills sets which will motivate the current workforce to use the VET system to update their knowledge and skills, therefore providing employers with workers with the specific operational proficiencies they need.
- There needs to be more support for employers who chose to take on 'adult apprentices' aged over 21. The statistics show they are more likely to complete their traineeship or apprenticeship compared to younger apprentices. Currently, the employment of adult apprenticeships is more expensive and therefore employers tend to employ younger apprentices. There is an incentive in place for supporting adult Australian apprentices, however, this incentive is in place for those over 25 and is only available for occupations listed on the National Skills Needs List. This support should be changed to cover those over 21 and support other needed occupations.