

19 December 2014

Response to paper 'Industry engagement in Training Package Development'

This paper argues that the system for Training Package development should be left with the Industry Skills Councils, in accordance with the current practice. The system works well on the whole, and any problems with particular Training Packages or industry areas should be addressed individually within the current system.

The basis for our submission

The paper is written on behalf of a team of researchers who have been working with Industry Skills Councils for three years on a project funded by the Australian Research Council: '*Recognising the skill in jobs traditionally considered unskilled*'. The project can be seen on the National Research Data web site at <http://researchdata.andcs.org.au/recognising-skill-jobs-considered-unskilled/346952>

More information can be found on the Federation University Australia web site at <http://federation.edu.au/faculties-and-schools/faculty-of-education-and-arts/research/fea-research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/folder2/recognising-skills>

In this research project we examined, in detail, nine occupations from a range of industries that are covered in total by three Industry Skills Councils (ISCs). Two of the ISCs (MSA and SSA) have contributed funding and staff time for three years towards the project, and the third, CPSISC, has contributed staff time as the project developed.

The researchers are: Professor Erica Smith, Federation University (Fed Uni), Associate Professor Ian Hampson (UNSW), Associate Professor Anne Junor (UNSW), and Professor Andy Smith (Fed Uni).

In addition to our current experience, members of the research team have worked with, and are working with, these and other Industry Skills Councils in other ways over a period of more than a decade, including:

- Other current or previous research projects in which Skills Councils are industry partners;
- Research projects funded directly by Industry Skills Councils;
- Speaking at Industry Skills Councils events;
- Involvement in national project groups for development and review of Training Packages;
- Involvement in national reference groups for other projects of ISCs;
- Working alongside ISC personnel in national initiatives relating both to VET and to constituent industries.

Two of the research team have also been VET-sector managers, in public and private sectors, and have regularly sought advice from ISCs on a range of issues.

Our experiences working on this project have confirmed our previous experiences that ISCs form an essential part of the VET system. They possess an immense amount of knowledge and experience both about the VET system and about the industries which they serve. Staff display a passionate commitment to their industries and occupations, to attracting the right people to their industries through careers and other initiatives, and to producing qualifications that are high quality and meet the needs of industry.

In this project we have seen first-hand the deep contacts that ISCs have within their industries. They have been able to gather high-level industry personnel (from small and big businesses alike, as well as employer and employee associations) to attend consultation forums on products of our research, and to consult by telephone. An example of such events was a series of consultations on the findings from our industry-level interviews and company case studies. These consultations, arranged by the ISCs, took place in Sydney in November 2013, and up to 20 people attended each of the nine events. The ISCs have since forwarded our analyses to their internal and external Training Package expert developers for comment. They have devoted the time of their own senior managers to liaising with us and providing advice on our research so that the best possible results are obtained for their industries and for Australia. They are open to ideas for improvement, and shared their ideas and Training Package update information with us willingly. In our visits to companies, many of which we arranged independently from the ISCs, we have learned first-hand about the engagement of those companies with their ISCs and the close relationships that exist and that have been developed over time. In short, our experience indicates close and trusting relationships between industry and ISCs.

Moreover, as academics we refer our students at all levels (Diploma through to PhD) to ISCs for industry information as well as information about training for the industry. Our students are already working in the VET sector or in industry, often in senior positions. We have noted that those who are in close touch with their ISCs tend to be the most confident and competent, thus enhancing the capability of their RTOs, companies and the national training system.

We have also noted over this period the contribution of ISCs to Australia's reputation and exports through advice to other countries on the development of their VET qualifications systems and their own industry skills council systems (e.g. India). This is only possible through ISCs' expertise in the development of Training Packages

Flaws in the new proposal

We therefore read with concern of the proposal to decouple the development of Training Packages from the ISCs. We believe, and have evidence from our research, that improvements to Training Packages *per se* are needed, and will be submitting a paper to the *Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses* with some suggestions. But we believe firmly that ISCs are the bodies best placed to develop and review Training Packages. The flaws in Training Packages are not the fault of the ISCs; ISCs have been required to work to national directives on the nature and format of Training Packages.

Improvements in the quality of training delivery are also needed, but again this is not the fault of ISCs. In fact they do make valiant efforts to influence the quality of delivery in so far as they are able, but are thwarted by the current rules around the content of Training Packages and by other current features of the VET system such as poorly controlled marketisation. If their role was extended rather than reduced, they would be able to have more impact on quality of training delivery.

The objectives listed for a contestable model are achievable within the current system. No evidence is presented in the paper that these objectives are not currently being met. Improvements to Training Packages are needed, but not to the system for developing and reviewing them.

It should be noted that any person or body can become involved in consultation on the development and review of Training Packages and these sessions and webinars are attended by a range of participants including industry bodies, individual employers, human resource and line

managers from major organisations, employee representatives and training providers. Any individual or organisation can also provide input via ISCs' web sites. ISCs have built up valuable lists of people willing to contribute in this way. Industry is already fully engaged in Training Package development.

Training Package development and review needs to be linked to other activities; it cannot be carried out in isolation. It requires management by bodies that are deeply embedded both in their industry sectors and in the VET system. ISCs display this dual expertise and have developed and maintained the expertise over a long period of time ensuring continuity. Other bodies do not display this advantage.

In summary

In short, the major contributions of ISCs to the VET system are

- A deep knowledge in industry needs over time;
- Multi-layered connections into industry, ensuring advice is as accurate and triangulated as possible;
- An understanding of the training market and RTO capability;
- An ability to draw together all stakeholders in an ordered and transparent manner;
- The respect accorded to them in industry and across the VET sector.

The Australian Industry Skills Council system is respected across the world and has been developed over a long period of time. ISCs are an integral part of the Australian VET system and they provide stability in a system which is increasingly fragmenting and in crisis. The VET system would be much the poorer if Training Packages were no longer developed by Industry Skills Councils.

We would be pleased to make ourselves available to provide further evidence to VET Reform personnel on this matter. I can be contacted, for this purpose, or to provide further information, on 03-5327 9665 or at e.smith@federation.edu.au



Professor Erica Smith

On behalf of the research team for '*Recognising the skill in jobs traditionally considered unskilled*'.