Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education

Submission

This submission is based on the need to obtain professional assistance in the workplace in the country environment and the difficulties in obtaining trained staff in a rural environment. This is based on one profession although it applies to all professions and non professional staff across a range of employment groups in regional Victoria.

Introduction

The need to train local staff has become paramount in regional Victoria as resources from the capital cities continue to decline or remain in the regional environment for only a very short time. The number of agencies advertising for staff has also declined as the cost of advertising has soared for little or no result. Staff are being recruited from one agency to another and whilst this solves an immediate need for one it compounds the pressure in the other organisation: ‘Robbing Peter to pay Paul’. It then becomes a bargaining battle which is to the advantage of neither organisation. In this instance the employee is the winner, perhaps in financial terms only.

In January 2006, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) based in Shepparton was contacted to see if they would be willing to run a course in surveying in order to train either existing staff or new staff. This contact was made out of frustration in not being able to attract prospective employees into the profession at the regional level.

GOTAFE response was very positive and the wheels were put in place to formulate a course through contact with industry representatives. In this particular instance a group of surveying representatives from local firms and government agencies in the area formed a working group to set up a training course for technical officers in the Surveying field. The course was and is aimed at two types of staff: those who have been in the industry for a number of years and who do not have a formal qualification and for those entering the industry and looking to enter the industry but who have no skill base.

In the case of those with experience and no formal qualification, course instruction put recognition of prior learning or experience (RPL tools) was introduced and a number of students graduated at the end of 2007 in this area. This particular course was Certificate III in Spatial Science. A number of these students have now begun the Certificate IV in Surveying at Shepparton.

For those entering the workforce in this area of surveying with no skills the certificate III provided them with the basic tools to undertake their work in the field and office. The benefit of this was that employers gained a quicker advantage in putting the employee to effective work than otherwise might have been the situation.
Course Structure

The structure of the course in Spatial Science is based on an introductory 5 day session followed by 5 three days sessions at approximately 2 month intervals. This gives the employer a clear understanding of when his/ her employee will be away from the workplace and for how long. This has been found to be more accepted than one day sessions every month as it allows students with distance to travel to maximise the benefits of the course.

The lecturers of the course are current practicing surveyors and draughting managers from the Government and Private sectors. Currently equipment is borrowed from one organisation although GOTAFE is seeking funding from the Federal Government to purchase a range of Surveying equipment.

The course in Surveying at certificate IV level is again staffed by practicing surveyors and draughting managers from the Government and Private sectors. Thus the level of information being delivered is current as a number of the teaching staff are also examiners for the Surveyor’s Board of Victoria.

Present Program

The Certificate III in Spatial Sciences is in its second year with 11 students attending classes and a number of others seeking qualification through RPL tools. The Certificate IV in Surveying currently has 5 students and again RPL tools will be available for those seeking them.

Qualification via RPL tools involves the student providing written and verbal discussion on all the key areas for the specific certificate. This is conducted in an interview session with the student’s manager in attendance to verify that the student has completed the necessary work. Areas that are determined to be deficient require the student to attend specific classes in that area.

Presently one student has gone through the RPL routine and has been advised that he still requires attending classes in mathematics in order to qualify. A qualified surveyor and TAFE lecturer or coordinator are required to be part of the examination process.

Further Intentions of Training

It is envisaged that these courses may lead employees into further training if they desire either at the Diploma level or Degree level. This will not be known for some time in this particular instance as the employees are finding out their strengths and weaknesses in the professional area. However, it is providing opportunities for those who may not have otherwise attempted any formal training in the area of surveying.

It is also intended to form similar courses in Engineering in 2009 and already a core group of engineers and surveyors has been formed to investigate the advantage of such a course.
Given the importance of both courses it may be possible to combine a number of units to gain economies of scale and to allow students to cross pollinate between the professions.

**Conclusion**

The importance of allowing local students to student in their local environment cannot be doubted and this is clearly recognised by the diversity of students in the current courses. Students recognise the value that they can add to the local professional by studying and working in the local environment rather than seeking higher education in the capital cities.

In addition those not wanting to go to the capital cities have a means of beginning their tertiary studies at home before making a move to a larger city if they desire it.

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