Response to Parliamentary inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

19th March 2007
Response to Parliamentary Inquiry
Service Skills Australia is pleased to provide this submission in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education. Our response is given to the inquiry in the context of vocational education and training and addressing two particular points of the inquiry.

- Any skills shortages in your industry and their possible relationship to geographical differences in education and training participation
- Strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in education and training

**About Service Skills**

Service Skills Australia is the Industry Skills Council for the Australian service industries. Skills Councils are the recognised national bodies providing advice on industry training and skills development needs to government and industry.

Service Skills Australia represents the interests of almost 640,000 businesses across sectors including retail and wholesale, sport, fitness, community recreation, outdoor recreation, travel, tours, meetings and events, accommodation, restaurants and catering, caravans, hairdressing, beauty, floristry, community pharmacy and funeral services.

Service Skills Australia supports skills development for our industries by:

- working with our industries to identify skill needs
- providing advice and assistance to industry on skill development and engaging with the vocational education and training system
- providing advice to government on the key skills development issues for our industries
- developing and maintaining products - including training packages and support materials - that support skills development in our industries. We currently manage a total of 14 industry training packages.
Response to Key Consultation Questions

Skills shortages in the service industries and their possible relationship to geographical differences in education and training participation

Our Service Industries Environmental Scan 2008 included several statements about geographical differences and their effect on the participation rate of Australians in training and education, and the skills and labour shortage. It included perspectives on the geographical position of training and educational bodies and hence their accessibility, and problems which are based on divergences in state and territory training systems.

- The “Industry Change Drivers Report (2006 Services Industry Qualitative Data)” by Service Skills Victoria states that the accessibility of training for younger people in regional towns and rural areas is a concern of the service industries in regional Victoria. Low accessibility to training facilities near the regional towns that are in need of trained staff means younger people are forced to move further a field to seek training. Following this training they often do not return with their skills. In regional and rural areas, tourism business development and expansion in particular are being hampered by staffing issues.

- A 2007 study by Services Skills Australia, “Skills to participate: Investigating the effects of skill shortages on the NSW sport and recreation industry”, noted that there is a lack of skilled and qualified staff – and training opportunities – in rural and regional areas due to reluctance by providers to offer some courses, and a lack of qualified instructors and assessors in many regions. A lack of appropriately qualified activity-specific instructors and assessors in many regions in NSW has meant that suitably experienced workers miss out in gaining qualifications that would allow them to train and accredit other regional workers. Often such accreditation and/or training is only available in metropolitan areas. This situation acts as a disincentive given the expenses and inconveniences associated with travelling to metropolitan areas, particularly in activities such as horse riding where transport and associated expenses are substantial, or in activities where training/accreditation occurs over an extended period of time.

- National employers continue to experience major frustrations and inefficiencies due to inconsistencies between the states and territories in administrative arrangements for apprenticeships and traineeships.

- The difficulties that small businesses have conforming to complex legislative and regulatory requirements have been widely reported. Greater consistency is needed Australia-wide, including consistency by state and territory training systems. Lack of consistency is impeding the take-up of VET training.

Divergences in state and territory training systems contribute significantly to the problem of irregular quality of training and education providers, as described in the Extracts from the National Strategic Audit of Training in the Hospitality Industry (see Appendix one).

Some training providers in rural areas have only a limited range of training opportunities for students and trainees, which may be based on economic
reasons instead of industry need. On the other hand, there are other training providers in rural areas which engage more in development of courses based on the need of the local community and companies in order to provide future employees with the appropriate skills to find a job within their community.

Strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in education and training

At the 2008 Service Skills Australia conference “Update, Motivate, Educate” several presentations highlighted examples of trainings in remote areas. In general, the success of these programs was based, besides other factors, on personal engagement and commitment as well as the awareness of the need for tailored training. This meant involving the local community and existing business, as well as considering the social structure, trends in occupations, skill needs and the existing skills of trainees.

Recommendations

To reduce geographical barriers and increase training participation several strategies need to be conducted in parallel:

- Increase the awareness of the Australian public for the need of training
- Enforce policies to assure consistent quality by educational and training bodies across state and territory boarders that meet industries’ requirements
- Promote successful examples of remote training and facilitate networking and co-operation a
- Promote programs which tailor the training layout to needs of older workers, parents and re-entrants to the workforce
- Support the implementation of training and education initiatives in regional and rural areas that:
  - Build skills and knowledge that will assist the growth of business in the region
  - Build social capital in the region and community
- Support implementation of training and education in regional and rural areas through whole of government approaches and with funding that matches the issues and requirements of the regional and rural area
Appendix One

Extracts from the National Strategic Audit of Training in the Hospitality Industry – 2005

The results of this audit (which still resonate today) found that:

- Fairly significant non compliance with Commonwealth, state/territory legislation and regulatory requirements. (42.5%)
  - A number of audits revealed that RTOs were not addressing the requirement of the revised AQTF Standards to include “industry” legislation and regulatory requirements. This is a concern considering that within the hospitality industry there is significant industry legislation and regulatory requirements such as safe food preparation, minimum age limits at premises serving alcohol and in gaming establishments, and the responsible service of alcohol. In particular, it is important that RTOs who operate interstate are aware of the industry legislation and regulatory requirements outside of their home jurisdiction.

- Non compliances identified in approximately 45% of the audits against Standard 7 which relates to the competence of RTO staff to deliver the hospitality qualifications
  - There were many instances where RTOs were not able to provide sufficient evidence that their training and assessment staff held vocational competence for the qualification/units of competency they delivered and assessed. In some cases RTOs had not even identified what vocational skills and industry experience was relevant.
  - South Australia reported a number of instances where there was no evidence of the qualifications required and that no RTO was able to provide evidence of a process for direct supervision. Lack of processes for direct supervision was also an issue for other jurisdictions. A number of jurisdictions also found examples where assessments were being conducted by staff without the required assessor competencies and without any other arrangements in place.

- Fifty three (60.9%) of the site audits conducted for Standard 8.1 recorded non compliances. This standard relates to the quality of assessment practice that it meets the requirements of the endorsed components and Training Packages
  - States and territories reported that overall assessment processes did not comply with the requirements of the assessment guidelines in the training package.
  - The Queensland report, which was representative of the findings of other jurisdictions, noted that there was a general lack of understanding of the assessment context and requirements for these units as documented in the training package, specifically, collection of evidence which shows that skills have been demonstrated in a fully equipped operational commercial kitchen over a period of time and on a specified number of occasions.
  - A number of jurisdictions reported that practical assessment did not always occur in a realistic environment which simulates not only the physical aspects of a fully equipped operational commercial kitchen but also working within the time constraints and pressures experienced in a
commercial kitchen. Many RTOs are reliant on the facilities available in the workplace of the apprentice/trainee. This arrangement is not always suitable as evident at audit, where apprentices/trainees were being employed in premises which did not offer the service delivery across all food service periods and menu items and styles.

- Evidence available at audit showed that assessments did not always meet the requirements to be valid, reliable, and fair.

- A number of the jurisdictions reported that RTOs placed too much emphasis on theoretical assessment and that assessments did not focus on the application of skills to the standard required in the workplace. The audit found that several RTOs had unsatisfactory assessment processes that did not comply with the Training Package requirements, and in particular, the assessment of practical application of skills was not assessed to the standard required by the Training Package.

- Assessment tools varied in quality. Many assessment tools were designed to assess the elements of competency only and neglected the critical aspects of evidence, the dimensions of competency, and the key competencies.

- Practical demonstration/observation was in some cases assessed through checklists of performance criteria with no link to actual observation of ‘demonstrated behaviours’ from the student. In some cases no comprehensive assessment instruments were used for the assessment of practical skills and the only evidence of competence was a tick or the letter “C”, sometimes on an attendance sheet. Further, it was not always possible to identify the tasks completed to provide evidence of competency. There was confusion between the status of third party reports/testimonials and practical observations by RTO assessors. Practical assessment tasks and oral questioning were not documented in all cases. Students were unaware that assessments were carried out during practical activities.

- Many RTOs were unable to present evidence to auditors to ensure that their assessments involved evaluation of sufficient evidence to enable judgements to be made about whether competency has been attained.

- There was also an instance cited where RTOs were using delivery and assessment materials that had been developed for a previous version of the training package. The materials had not been reviewed and aligned to meet the requirements of the current version of the training package.

- In relation to compliance against standard 9 [1 to 4] (relating to the way the RTO identifies, negotiates, plans and implements appropriate learning and assessment strategies to meet the needs of each of its clients), there was a high level of non-compliance

- The reports of non compliance from these jurisdictions identified that learning and assessment strategies did not always identify target groups, learning and assessment methods and assessment validation processes and pathways. Target groups were often too broadly identified; vocational pathways did not always correspond to units of competence chosen; pathways were often not identified; learning and assessment strategies were sometimes available on a unit of competency basis rather than the whole qualification. There was little evidence of industry consultation in the development of learning and assessment strategies.
- Queensland reported that, while many of the RTOs audited were able to provide evidence of ‘compliant’ learning and assessment strategies, there was a general impression formed by the auditor that these documents (typically on the ANTA framework/template) were completed in order to be compliant with the AQTF.

- In relation to Standard 9.2, (validation) there was significant non compliance reported by a number of jurisdictions who reported that in a number of cases there was little or no evidence that validation of assessment activities was occurring. Where a process of validation existed, there was often insufficient documented evidence of a number of assessors participating in the process. In some cases the RTO employed only one assessor and there was no evidence of validation between RTOs. There was also no or insufficient evidence to validate the review of assessment strategies or actions taken to improve the quality and consistency of assessment. There was a lack of understanding about the true nature of validation especially the requirement to compare and evaluate assessment processes, tools and evidence contributing to judgements made by a range of assessors against the same competency standards.

- Although there was a degree of compliance with Standard 9.3, overall, almost one in two audits recorded non compliances.

- From the jurisdictions with the highest number of non compliances some of the issues were that: it was often not clear how learning needs for each target group were identified; the requirements of the training package not being met; little evidence of negotiation of the learning and assessment strategy with employers and learners for workplace delivery and assessment; documented procedures to manage the transition of training packages were not always in place; and contextualisation of tools was poor or non-existent.

- There was a high level of compliance across the jurisdictions with Standard 9.4 (staffing, facilities and resources).

- However, there were instances where there was insufficient evidence of adequate access to staff, facilities and resources to enable the RTO to meet the training package requirements. Some RTOs were unable to show adequate resources to support learning and assessment services in hospitality qualifications including qualified trainers, training and assessment resources, and access to commercial kitchen facilities and equipment.