

Murray-Riverina Employment, Education and Training Roundtable Forum

Summary of proceedings

April 2011





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and Workplace Relations**

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NSW Business Chamber

NSW Business Chamber is one of Australia's largest business support groups, helping around 30,000 businesses each year. Founded in 1885, the NSW Business Chamber works with thousands of businesses, from sole traders to large corporates.

Independent and non-government, NSW Business Chamber represents the needs of business at a local, State and Federal level, working with governments and authorities to create a better environment to do business in.

NSW Business Chamber is consistently engaged in policy interaction with Government regarding skills issues, providing high level input and recommendations to support employer and industry engagement in a range of workforce skill development programs.

The Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships Centre (ABLAC) is an important part of NSW Business Chamber's activities. ABLAC is NSW's most experienced provider of Australian Apprenticeship services. ABLAC has specialist knowledge, expertise and over ten years' experience in the signup processes and ongoing management of apprenticeships and traineeships. ABLAC works under a contract funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

NSW Business Chamber's employment, education and training policy development is supported by a Workforce Skills Policy Committee, which includes employer representatives from regional and metropolitan areas, Australian Apprenticeship Centres and Registered Training Organisations, including TAFE.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of issues and proposed solutions identified during NSW Business Chamber's Murray-Riverina Employment, Education and Training Forum, held in Wagga Wagga on Wednesday 30 March 2011.

NSW Business Chamber hosted the forum in response to feedback received from local members expressing concerns about employment, education and training issues in the region, including concerns about the foundation and employability skill levels of young people, the lack of provision of certain tertiary programs and skill shortage pressures.

The forum was attended by 40 local stakeholders, including employers, Community Partnership Brokers, Registered Training Organisations, Australian Apprenticeship Centres, secondary school representatives, State Training Services and local government.

The purpose of the forum was to generate discussion about local employment, education and training issues, and propose solutions to some of the challenges identified across the region. The issues identified during the forum include matters of regional, state and national importance. Therefore, solutions proposed will involve engagement at regional, state and commonwealth levels.

The forum was hosted by NSW Business Chamber's Murray-Riverina Regional President, Stephen Joyce, Regional Manager, Ben Foley, and NSW Business Chamber's Education and Training Advisor, Nick Minto. The agenda for the forum is attached at Appendix 1.

Regional education overview

The Murray-Riverina offers high quality tertiary education options for school leavers, those seeking to advance their education and those wishing to retrain. The region has a strong education sector, with good primary, secondary and tertiary coverage across the region. The region has multiple campuses from Charles Sturt University and the Riverina Institute of TAFE, with 19 campuses. The region also has a state-of-the-art commercial pilot training facility and RAAF base along with an Army Recruit Training Centre. These facilities are well utilised, with TAFE enrolments in trades currently at their highest levels.¹

The Murray-Riverina region, like many regions in NSW, faces re-emerging skills shortages. The provision of appropriate vocation education and training and higher education services for students is a critical element in addressing this issue. This can be effectively supported by a more flexible and responsive skilled migration system. In addition, there are several examples of industry and business working in partnership with education providers to deliver quality outcomes.²

Murray Region

The proportion of post-school qualified people in the Murray region is below that of NSW. Figure 1 shows that education levels, as a ratio of post school qualifications to population over 15 year olds across the Murray region, are in line with the regional NSW and Victoria state averages. Almost a third of the population in the Murray region aged 15 years or over hold a post school qualification. For NSW the population aged 15 years and over with a post-school qualification is 54.5 per cent. Almost 20 per cent of the population aged over 15 years in the Murray region hold a Certificate level qualification.³ The high level of manufacturing trades is evident in the large percentage of the population with Certificate level and trade qualifications.

¹ NSW Business Chamber (2010) 10 Big Ideas to Grow Murray Riverina

² Ibid

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census

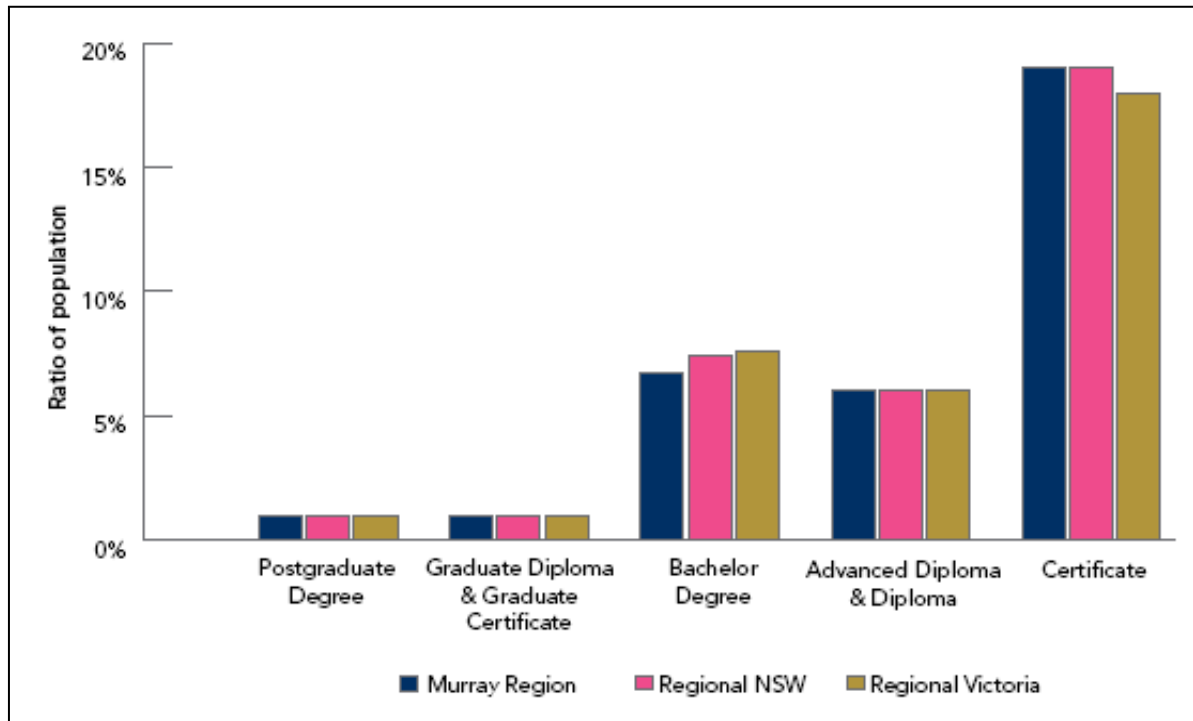


Figure 1: Percentage of the Murray region population with post school qualifications (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census of Population and Housing)

The Murray region is serviced by the following institutions:

- Charles Sturt University (Albury)
- La Trobe University (campuses in Wodonga and Mildura)
- TAFE NSW (Riverina Institute) – Albury, Corowa, Coomealla, Deniliquin, Finley
- Wodonga TAFE
- Sunraysia TAFE (Mildura)
- National Environment Centre (Thurgoona)
- University of NSW Rural Clinical School (situated at the Albury Base Hospital)
- Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre (Albury)
- In excess of 30 private Registered Training Organisations

Riverina Region

The proportion of post-school qualified people in the Riverina is also below that of NSW. Specifically, 46.3% of the Riverina’s population aged 15 years and over had a post-school qualification compared to 54.5% in NSW.⁴

The Riverina area has a similar tertiary education profile to other regional areas across Australia. Figure 2 shows that the Riverina area has a smaller proportion of individuals

⁴ Regional Development Australia (2010) Riverina NSW Regional Plan 2010-2015

holding university qualifications compared to the overall percentage across NSW. The Riverina area has a lower percentage of people with Bachelor Degrees and Diplomas. Some 41% of people in the Riverina area holding a tertiary qualification do so in the form of a Certificate.

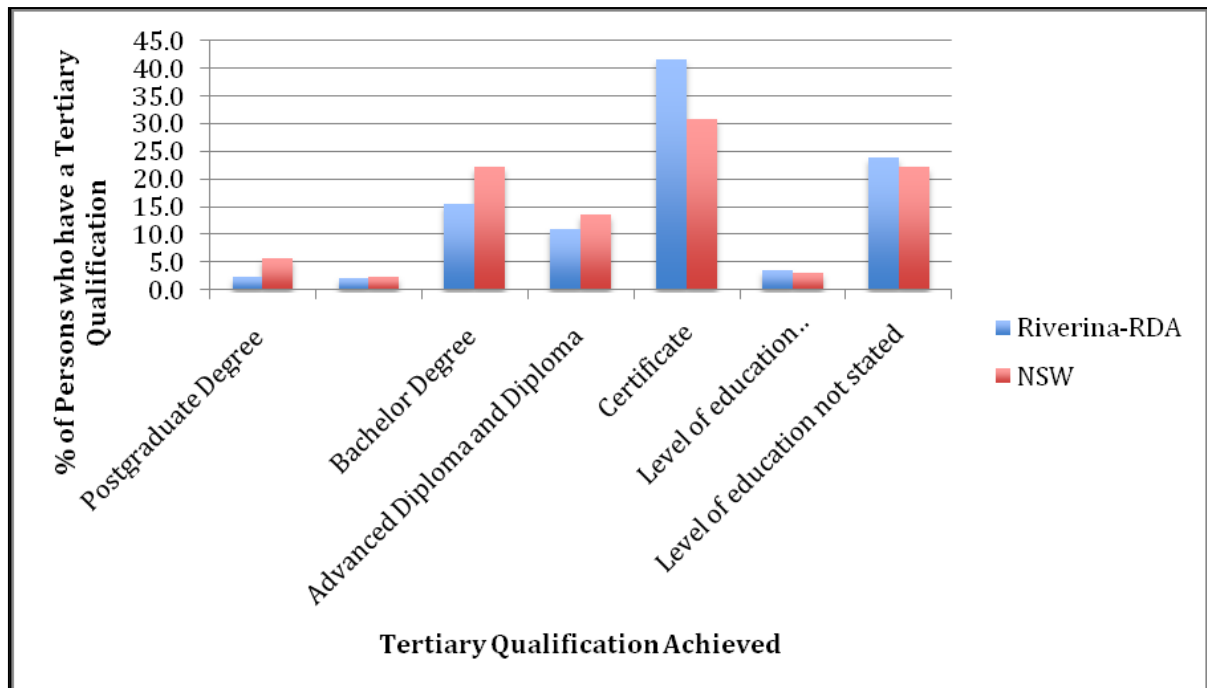


Figure 2: The Percentage of the Riverina population with a post-school qualification.

(Source: Regional Development Australia; ABS 2006 Census. *Includes Tumut and Bland Shires)

The Riverina is serviced by the following institutions:

- Charles Sturt University (CSU)- Wagga Wagga Campus
- University of NSW Rural Clinical School (Wagga Wagga Campus)
- TAFE NSW Riverina Institute NSW- Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Leeton, Narrandera, Temora, Cootamundra, West Wyalong, Tumut, Young, Junee, Lake Cargelligo and Hay campuses.
- Murrumbidgee Agricultural College, Yanco
- Riverina Community College, Wagga Wagga
- Riverina Business Enterprise Centre, Wagga Wagga
- Western Riverina Business Enterprise Centre, Griffith
- GALA- Griffith Adult Learning Association
- Australian Airline Pilot Academy, Wagga Wagga
- Over 30 other private Registered Training Organisations

According to Regional Development Australia, the Riverina has a greater proportion of employed persons relative to NSW in the occupations of managers, technicians and trades workers, community and personal service workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers. In contrast, NSW had a greater proportion of workers in the occupation of professionals, clerical and administrative workers, and sales workers.⁵

⁵ Regional Development Australia (2010) Riverina NSW Regional Plan 2010-2015

Issues and proposed solutions

Following presentations from State Training Services and NSW Business Chamber, roundtable attendees were asked to participate in an open forum contributing their ideas and comments on what were perceived to be the biggest issues impacting on the region's employers. A broad range of employment, education and training issues were identified. Attendees participated in break out sessions to identify potential solutions that could be implemented to promote regional development in the Murray-Riverina. Given the broad range of issues identified it was not possible to identify solutions for all issues raised. A more comprehensive list of issues raised during the forum can be found at Appendix 2. A selection of issues, and accompanying solutions, are outlined under the headings below.

It should be noted that proposed solutions have been identified by roundtable attendees and are not presented here as NSW Business Chamber policy positions. Various solutions, however, may be used to inform NSW Business Chamber policy and may be promoted to state and commonwealth authorities as part of NSW Business Chamber advocacy activities.

Attraction and retention

The lack of educational opportunities in rural and regional areas means that many students from these areas are forced to move away from home, either to a metropolitan area or another regional area in order to access desired tertiary education opportunities. Barriers include difficulties in attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff, developing and raising aspirations in relation to further learning and substantial costs (for students and their families) in accessing educational opportunities.⁶

Roundtable attendees indicated that the attraction and retention of young people in the Murray-Riverina region was a significant issue. It was suggested that when young people are forced to leave the region to pursue educational opportunities, there was a great risk that they might disengage or disconnect from their community and be less likely to return to work in the region once they have completed their studies. This has a negative impact on the regional economy and community.

The attraction of skilled migrants, individuals and families from other parts of Australia was also seen as important for regional development.

⁶ The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (2009) Rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities

Proposed solutions

- Investigate the use of incentives to attract young people back to the region when they are qualified. This could include a scholarship system with a commitment to serve a certain number of years in the region. This was seen as particularly relevant to the human services industries (teaching, nursing/medical/ancillary and community services). Incentives could also be used to cover relocation costs for individuals and families considering moving to the region.
- Identification of skills required to meet current and emerging needs of regional employers.
- A comprehensive audit of existing workforce skills and aspirations, including sub-set audits to identify commonalities.
- More support for families of skilled migrants to assist with relocation and integration into local communities.
- Holistic support for whole families moving to the region (employment for partners, affordable housing, education, schools, transport etc).
- Potential for the Evocity⁷ model to be replicated at a regional level. This could include collaboration with Regional Development Australia NSW. An emphasis was placed on income compared to the cost of living. It was felt that more needed to be done to promote local industries and employment opportunities using various marketing strategies. Infrastructure improvements, growth of art and cultural sectors, and opportunities for career progression and advancement were identified as being particularly important.

Strategic planning

Forum attendees emphasised the need for a greater level of strategic long term planning to ensure the future viability and competitiveness of local businesses and industries. This will involve input from a wide range of stakeholders to develop and shape a shared vision for the future that focuses on desired outcomes. It will encourage collaboration and co-operation between and within all three tiers of government (local, state and commonwealth), employers and industry, and the community. This planning will need to be responsive to the need for higher level and additional skills, increased workforce participation, higher productivity levels, skill needs in specific industry sectors, and foundation skills.

⁷ Seven of NSW's leading regional cities have partnered to form the Evocities campaign and encourage people to live, work and invest in an Evocity. The seven Evocities are Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga. In the Federal Budget 2011-2012, \$4.3 billion has been committed to regional Australia, including \$1 billion to Regional Development Australia and expansion of the Evocities program.

Proposed solutions

- Initial and ongoing analysis to determine probable future directions of local industry, including key growth sectors and areas that will require further attention and support to develop and grow (e.g. creative industries). Identify strategies to prepare for future workforce trends and funding systems.
- Education of employers about the importance and benefits of workforce planning and enterprise based workforce development strategies.
- A regionally based workforce development strategy could be employed to clearly articulate future workforce development needs, outlining key education and training objectives and outcomes for the region.
- It was suggested during the Forum that future projections relating to education and training demand can be unreliable. Therefore, it was proposed that the region focus on the provision of generic skill sets that will enable transferability of skills and ensure young people can adapt to a range of occupations as the labour market requires. The provision of basic employability skills and work placements as part of tertiary course was also considered important.
- Some attendees suggested that ethics classes in secondary schools can contribute to sustainable economic development and build stronger and more tolerant communities.
- Apprentices should be able to start their training from a young age (e.g. 14 years of age) and School Based Apprenticeship structures need to be strengthened to ensure pathways to full apprenticeships and other tertiary level training. Competency based progression was seen as critical to building the number of skilled tradespeople in the region and allow apprentices to become fully qualified in a shorter period of time. The growth of school based traineeships and apprenticeships were seen as an important opportunity that the regions employers could capitalise on. However, there is a need for the provision of more quality workplace training arrangements. Further connections and partnerships between local businesses and schools were considered very desirable. The difficulty in finding employers willing to take on a school based apprentice was viewed as a significant barrier.
- Some attendees noted that working conditions and treatment of employees in some industries needed to be improved. It was suggested that there was a role for industry associations and government to provide information and support to promote a change of employer culture in some industries and increase the level of up-skilling of existing workers.

- Further work should be done to promote opportunities for career progression in certain industries across the region. More marketing and advertising by employers can inform young people and jobseekers of the range of opportunities available in the region.
- There is a need for more industry based teachers and trainers to provide industry specific and relevant skills.
- NSW Business Chamber's 10 Big Ideas to Grow the Murray-Riverina argues that the establishment of Centres of Excellence could highlight research and learning outcomes in various regional locations, for example, in food and wine production in Griffith. The establishment of Centres of Excellence can work to attract young people to the region who want to study in specialised areas.

Career advice in schools

Roundtable attendees raised concerns about the quality, consistency and industry relevance of career advice in schools. Career advisors were seen to be overworked and seriously under-resourced. The lack of dedicated career advisors in schools was a major concern. Too often career advice is provided by teachers who do not have the required industry knowledge or experience. It was suggested that this has led to a continued bias towards promotion of university pathways and ignorance of the wide range of vocational options available to students. The importance of provision of quality career advice was viewed as an increasing pressing issue given the new school leaving age requirements. Roundtable attendees also identified a gap in career advice delivery for early school leavers that "fall through the cracks". Roundtable attendees agreed that young people need quality career information from industry experts and qualified career development practitioners.

Proposed solutions

- There is a need for greater resourcing for career advisors in schools, with dedicated resources for advisors that specialise in career advice and have a comprehensive knowledge of local industry and career opportunities. It was suggested that some of the best career advisors have psychology degrees, however it was difficult to recruit individuals with these additional skills.
- Career advice structures need to be created to target early school leavers once they have lost contact with the schooling system.
- Career advice services would benefit greatly from stronger partnerships between schools, local businesses and industry associations. Such partnerships can facilitate exchange of information, work placements and work experience opportunities. Employers could benefit from guidelines or a checklist that could be used to ensure quality and stimulating work experience.

- Roundtable attendees identified a number of previous career advice programs that were successful. These programs include initiatives by Career Development Australia (including, structured network of National Industry Career Specialists (NICS) who provided Industry Sector specific career information with a focus on skills and labour market needs. Previously funded Commonwealth programs included Regional Industry Career Advisors (RICAs), and Local Community Partnerships to ensure that, through schools, young people had greater access to current career information. The RICA program was considered to be particularly useful as the advisors provided detailed industry information relating to skill demand and labour market requirements that could be used by career advisors based in school. Roundtable attendees agreed that such programs should be re-established. In addition, attendees noted the effectiveness of one-stop-shop support services provided by the former Commonwealth Employment Service.
- The current transition advisor based at Griffith was also cited as an effective program.
- It was acknowledged that support from school principals was critical to the success of career advice services based in schools. There could be potential for targeted engagement with some school principals to inform them of the benefits and importance of career advice services for young people. Access to professional development for career advisors is also critical.
- Engagement with parents was considered particularly important. There was some concern that vocational options continue to be perceived as low value options suitable for students that are not academically inclined.

Employer obligations

Forum participants felt that many employers were unclear about their obligations when taking on an Australian Apprentice. Recent research by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows that many individuals do not complete their apprenticeship or training due to poor on-the-job experiences, concerns with the employment environment and feeling under supported.⁸ This research also suggests that better support for apprentices and trainees reflects positively on the whole experience and profile of the system, as well as improving retention and completion rates.

Proposed solutions

- There is a need for more structured support for employers and their apprentices and trainees. This will involve greater levels of support and education for

⁸ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2010) Report 2: Overview of apprenticeship and traineeship institutional structures

supervisors in the workplace. Industry or workplace champions and mentors should be identified.

- Greater recognition of employers who provide quality and supportive on-the-job training is required. These can then be used as examples that other workplaces can learn from.
- There is a lack of streamlined accessibility to information for employers of apprentices and trainees. The system remains overly complicated. Employers need better access to information about how to provide quality on-the-job training and support.
- Some attendees suggested that an accreditation or registration system for employers could be considered.
- It should be noted that the Apprenticeships for the 21st Century Expert Panel has considered these issues in its report that was presented to the Australian Government in January 2011.

Industry promotion

Roundtable attendees felt that more could be done to promote existing employment opportunities and key industry sectors in the region. There was a general consensus that that local industry and employers could be doing more to promote themselves and could benefit from greater assistance to do so. An effective means of attracting people to work in the region, and retaining young people within the region, is to market and promote the diverse range of career opportunities available.

Proposed solutions

- Identification of independent industry champions. Employer organisations/industry organisations could effectively disseminate information, promote relevant industry sectors and engage with the local community.
- Identify best practice in regionally based skill development strategies.
- Create a network of local industry based forums to exchange information and promote industry. This would need to be driven by employers and industry.
- Host industry-based expos to lift the profile of local industry, advertise local employment opportunities, establish partnerships and create a networking opportunity for employers, jobseekers and the community.
- Attendees re-emphasised the importance of stronger partnerships between local businesses and schools (see career advice in schools section).

Educational attainment

Research consistently shows lower levels of higher education participation in regional areas, compared to metropolitan areas.⁹ As reflected in the regional education overview above, the Murray-Riverina region has lower levels of higher education participation relative to the NSW average. This is problematic as recent reports indicate jobs that require higher level tertiary qualifications are growing at two and a half times the rate of other jobs in Australia.¹⁰ This is an important consideration for the future economic development of the Murray-Riverina region.

Proposed solutions

- There is opportunity to create stronger transitional pathways between vocational education providers and higher education providers in the region. Further collaboration between TAFE, private RTOs and university campuses in the region will be desirable.
- Further provision of higher level qualifications by RTOs in the region (such as TAFE degrees). For example, at a tertiary level, there is strong demand in the region for qualified engineers; however it is not currently possible for students to undertake engineering qualifications in the region.
- There is a need to strengthen engagement between tertiary education providers and employers to develop the right skills and capabilities required for successful workforce participation and identification of future workforce requirements.
- The 10 Big Ideas to Grow Murray-Riverina emphasised that there is scope for local businesses to work with Government and education providers in the region to identify and address areas of skills shortages and ensure the provision of courses to meet demand.
- The 10 Big Ideas to Grow Murray-Riverina also recommended further the collaboration between industry, vocational education and university sector across the region, highlighting best practice.
- More work needs to be done to ensure that young people progress past Certificate II level courses and attain Certificate III and Diploma level qualifications.

⁹ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2010) Regional participation: the role of socioeconomic status and access.

¹⁰ Skills Australia (2010) Australian Workforce Futures; an national workforce development strategy; Skills Australia (2011) Skills for prosperity; a roadmap for vocational education and training.

Conclusion

The roundtable forum generated considerable discussion and debate relating to employment, education and training issues in the Murray-Riverina region. A broad range of issues and solutions were identified. Attendees were particularly concerned about issues relating to:

- attraction of skilled workers and retention of young people in the region;
- strategic planning to respond to future workforce requirements;
- the quality, consistency and industry relevance of career advice in schools;
- awareness of employer obligation to Australian Apprentices;
- the promotion of local industry and associated career opportunities; and,
- the level of educational attainment in the region.

Some of the solutions identified may be used to inform NSW Business Chamber policy and promoted to state and commonwealth authorities as part of NSW Business Chamber advocacy activities. NSW Business Chamber received very positive feedback from roundtable participants (reflected in event evaluation forms) and will consider hosting similar forums in other parts of regional NSW.

If you have any questions about the content of this report, please contact Nick Minto (NSW Business Chamber Workforce Skills Policy Advisor), Nick.Minto@nswbc.com.au, (02) 9458 7267 or Ben Foley (Murray-Riverina Regional Manager), Ben.Foley@nswbc.com.au, (02) 6041 4867.

APPENDIX 1: Employment, Education and Training Roundtable Forum Agenda



Wednesday 30th March 2011

Employment, Education & Training (EE&T) Roundtable forum – Wagga Wagga

Agenda

- 10.40am - Welcome, Acknowledgements & Introductions: Ben Foley (Murray-Riverina Regional Manager, NSW Business Chamber)
- 10.55am - Presentation: Nick Minto (Workforce Skills Policy Advisor, NSW Business Chamber) to provide attendees with an understanding of the issues facing employers across the state of NSW from an EE&T perspective
- 11.15am - Presentation: Garry Whittaker (Regional Manager, Riverina State Training Centre) to provide attendees with an understanding of the issues facing employers across the Murray-Riverina region from an EE&T perspective
- 11.30am - Open forum where attendees are asked to contribute their ideas/ comments on the biggest issues impacting on our regions employers
- 12.15pm - Lunch/ Networking
- 1.00pm - Break out group sessions where participants will be asked to come up with potential solutions to some of our regions issues
- 1.40pm - Presentation of findings by each break out group
- 1.55pm - Close and where to from here

APPENDIX 2: Issues identified by attendees during the open roundtable discussion

- Need for greater industry promotion – career opportunities available, career progression and communication of skill needs.
- Complexity of the National training System – overly confusing for employers.
- Casualisation of the workforce and concerns about job security.
- Employee poaching – employers who invest in training staff can lose out to those that don't invest but offer higher wages.
- School based apprentices – difficulty finding employers.
- Need for generic skills provision, including employability skills.
- Funding issues for employers – some employers are better able to access government funding and understand eligibility better than others. Many employers are not aware of the entitlements available.
- Need for further Indigenous placement and support services.
- Australian Apprenticeship Centres are not contracted to provide the full gambit of support services and advice. There was a concern that AAC contracts promote excessive focus on commencement targets.
- Employers are not clear about obligations to Australian Apprentices.
- There is a need for funding of the Australian Apprenticeship system to be focused on completions rather than commencements.
- Paper work for sign up a significant burden for employers.
- Poor administration of the Productivity Places Program.
- Too much red tape and bureaucracy throughout the training system – e.g. RTO compliance.
- The lack of quality and industry relevant career advice for school students. Currently a lack of resources in this area.
- Young people have different expectations and aspirations. Employers need to adapt to attract skilled young people.
- Low completion rates of Australian Apprenticeships.
- Influence of parents on young peoples' education and training decisions
- Early intervention needed when informing young people about career options and the subjects that need to be taken at school to progress into those careers.
- The whole community has a role in mentoring young people and supporting them in their education.
- Need for work ready graduates and school leavers.
- Parents need to support apprentices for 3-4 years in some cases. Another example of benefits associated with competency based progression.
- Need for education of parents re education and training options and associated wage premiums. Parents are the major stakeholder.
- More industry partnerships and connections with schools required.

- Wide diversity of demand for skills means that RTOs must provide massive scope and trainers with relevant industry skills.
- Role of future planning to meet skill needs of the future.
- Need to shift training from a transaction to partnership and collaboration.
- Transport and driver licencing issues. Young people need driver licence earlier in regional areas.
- Importance of childcare influencing the ability of people to work.
- Employability skills of jobseekers.
- Courses versus real life.
- Commitment to Australian Apprentices, employer time and productivity loss.
- Employer responsibility – some employers are not signing off on completion of work based training and RTOs then face withdrawal of funding.
- Investment in existing workers and need for up-skilling and career progression opportunities.
- Importance of part qualifications and skill sets.
- Industry driven pre-employment programs.
- Skills attraction and retention
- Employers that make a commitment to training don't face the same skill shortage pressures.