



WAFARMERS

Submission to:

State Training Board

Growing apprenticeships and traineeships & TAFE Industry
Skills Centres

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Background

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the State Training Board Industry Consultation papers; TAFE Industry Skills Centres and Growing apprenticeships and traineeships. WAFarmers commends the State Training Board on releasing these consultation papers and extending the opportunity for industry to feedback suggestions to the Board.

As background, WAFarmers is the state's largest and most influential rural advocacy and service organisation. WAFarmers boasts a membership of over 3,500 primary production businesses and individual farmers including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers and beekeepers. Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$7.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental wellbeing of that land and the animals that graze it.

Introduction

Agriculture was the largest contributor to national GDP growth in 2016-17, and is the fastest growing industry, particularly driven by the grains and livestock industries.¹ There are many different career paths within the agricultural industry, and many different options available to up-skill and train in all areas of the industry. There is a large trend within agriculture that has seen many people moving away from VET to higher-education, and bachelor degrees throughout Australia. Higher education is not appropriate for everybody wanting to work within, and it is important to have affordable and high quality TAFE colleges and VET systems to support the growing agricultural industry and fill the gap between non-qualified individuals and higher-educated individuals.

Growing apprenticeships and traineeships - The Apiary Industry

Currently within WA there are national qualifications that can be delivered for beekeeping; however there are a lack of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that have the capacity and capability to deliver the content.

The Honey Industry in WA is thriving, and there is now more of a demand for traineeships within beekeeping. If traineeships were offered through a capable RTO or through Recognition of Prior Learning in Western Australia, it would benefit both the employer and employee. It would upskill the employee and would allow them to further their career as a beekeeper.

A beekeeping traineeship within WA already has the support of many leading commercial beekeeping enterprises that have a constant need to employee quality trained staff. It is not a regular trade and there are very few suitably experienced or qualified people available. Having no recognised traineeship programs consequently means that all training and experience is generally provided "on the job". This makes it difficult to attract quality people and suitably train them with a qualification that is then meaningful for their future employment either with our business or with any other.

¹ - Media statement - Agricultural contribution to national GDP. <http://minister.agriculture.gov.au/joyce/Pages/Media-Releases/agriculture-now-largest-contributor-to-national-gdp-growth-and-fastest-growing-economic-sector.aspx>

WAFarmers Beekeepers Section has 16 commercial beekeeping members, including some of the largest commercial enterprises in the State. There is currently some activity happening within the apiary industry to establish a permanent, formal beekeeping traineeship in WA and to help build capacity and capability of the RTO's. WAFarmers would like to see this process accelerated to meet industry demands, and hopes that the State Training Board can accommodate this process.

WAFarmers have also brought this to the attention of the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council and are working with the council to ensure the beekeeping traineeships are promptly delivered in WA.

The Agricultural Industry

The agricultural industry is not traditionally an industry that has used the apprenticeships training model to employee trainees. There are no apprenticeships offered for agriculture in WA, however there are traineeships and VET courses, including certificates and diplomas.

There are some barriers that influence the uptake of trainees within the industry including the common use of seasonal workers over intensive seasonal periods. Many producers employ short-term employees over the busy periods, typically being backpackers or non-skilled labour and often not employees who intend to stay within the industry.

The agriculture industry is very broad and for many career paths within the industry and it is not essential to have a formal qualification for many jobs, thus the VET sector is not highly valued. WAFarmers believes that the value of the VET sector needs to be marketed and promoted to the industry in order to upskill the industry and encourage more young people to enter the industry.

The State Government, along with industry should be encouraged to better promote the benefits of employing trainees as this assists in ensuring the longevity and sustainability of individual businesses as well as the broader sector. Furthermore, the additional intake of employees can be seen as a catalyst for the workforce to explore upskilling opportunities, this is a benefit to the employee, employer and the industry as a whole.

Attracting young people to the industry can be seen as another barrier. Often, if a young person has not grown up on a farm or in a rural setting; agriculture can be perceived as driving tractors and being quite mundane work. This is definitely a misconception. Agriculture is going through a very exciting change, involving great technological advances and changing farming practices. Furthermore, agriculture has many ancillary sectors including science, trading and marketing.

The agricultural industry plays a pivotal role within the Australian economy and the future of agriculture needs to be marketed to young people in schools, particularly metro-based schools around WA to encourage people to take up careers in the industry.

TAFE Industry Skills Centre

WAFarmers are supportive of the transformation of TAFE colleges into Industry Skill Centres. WAFarmers commends the State Training Board or the recognition of engaging with industry to understand the training and skill development needs now and into the future.

TAFE is the main training provider in Western Australia, and it is imperative that the standards of resources and teaching quality are continually improving to ensure Western Australia's workforce is highly skilled. TAFE needs to be servicing the WA market and delivering what industry require. Industry involvement in setting standards and identifying skills shortages should continue to be a priority for the entire VET sector.

It is important for TAFE colleges to understand what industry need now and into the future, thus consultation and communication is central to developing a fit-for-purpose industry Centre of Excellence. By building further capacity and capability of TAFE within WA, the relationship between registered training organisations and the sector will strengthen, leading to an improvement of the quality of training and industry participants.

Agriculture in WA is fortunate to have the Muresk Institute which currently acts as a one-stop-shop for agriculture. WAFarmers is involved with the Muresk Institute Industry Advisory Committee and has input and involvement in the development of the Industry Skills Centre and Innovation Hub for the Agribusiness Industry Concept Paper. WAFarmers remains supportive of Muresk Institute evolving into a Centre of Excellence for the agricultural sector, interacting with industry to deliver both vocational and tertiary education.

There is currently a gap between young people who are non-skilled and those who have attained a higher education qualification, i.e. a Bachelor of Agricultural Science or Agricultural Business. Agriculture is a unique industry where qualifications are not always necessary for a lot of career paths within the industry.

In order to upskill the industry and market the VET sector, the Industry Skill Centre should be required to more clearly identify the product and the context of the courses available. The skills taught within the course need to be adaptive and relevant to the changing environment of the industry.

Agriculture has a whole raft of new skills emerging that people new to the industry will need to expertise in. As the industry advances, the qualifications available through the VET sector need to reflect the industry needs. In order to encourage the agri-sector to use the available VET training model, content needs to be relevant to the industry and up to date with current technology.

WAFarmers believes it is important that TAFE colleges, particularly Industry Skill Centres catering for a particular industry, are receiving funding for technology and capital expenditure. Currently the funding system doesn't seem to be directed at technology and equipment. It is vital that the Industry Skill Centres represent a state-of-the-art facility, with up to date industry specific software, training in basic and advanced courses, in an effort to provide students with advances skills that are workplace ready.

WAFarmers suggest that the staff delivering the courses within the TAFE College have relevant knowledge and experience within the industry and are up to date with latest technology and trends. It is perceived that TAFE staff have lost capacity over the past years and in order for to upskill the agricultural industry, the staff should have relevant knowledge and experience within the industry. There could be potential for industry to provide professional development for lecturers and staff to keep their knowledge up to date.

WAFarmers are also supportive of the Industry Skills Centre acting in a recruitment role and connecting businesses to suitably qualified job seekers and TAFE graduates. By building a strong relationship with industry, there is scope for the recruitment process to be streamlined, making it easier for graduates to find a suitable work placement.

Conclusion

WAFarmers, as the largest representative group for farmers in WA, commend the State Training Board seeking input from industry about the VET sector within the State, and are appreciative for the opportunity to contribute to the system.

The VET system helps deliver skills needed for many industries within WA, and WAFarmers believe it to be important to promote the value of the VET System within the agricultural industry. WAFarmers are very supportive of upskilling the agricultural industry and educating young people about the vast amount of opportunities available within the industry. Promotion of agricultural traineeships and the value that the VET system can add to personal business and the whole of industry need to be promoted.

WAFarmers are supportive of the move to transform TAFE colleges into Industry Skills Centres and are fortunate to have Muresk Institute. Moving forward, it is important that Industry Skill Centres are represented as state-of-the-art facilities, with relevant and up to date technology and knowledgeable staff. These measures, should they be adopted will ensure that skilled labour enters the industry which will be of great benefit to the training institutions, the employer and employees who undertake the training.