

MEDIA RELEASE

2 May 2014

CPSISC Opposes Devolution of Vocational Education and Training to States

CPSISC has questioned the idea put forward by the Commission of Audit under Recommendation 39, to devolve all VET policy/programs to the States, labelling it as inappropriate and damaging in the context of a national economy which relies on a skilled, mobile workforce with up-to-date and nationally consistent skill standards.

This is an economic efficiency and productivity issue, and not an educational issue. Industry strongly supports the existing system of national standards for vocational education and training. Whether or not education as a constitutional responsibility is devolved to the States, the Commonwealth has an overall responsibility for Australia's economy and economic management, and a skilled, productive, mobile workforce is a fundamental part of national economic performance.

National Training Packages with standards developed by industry are the platform on which our national Training system is built and this work cannot be handed to the States – we are just emerging from the last century's era of inconsistent and incompatible state-based trades training requirements. To hand this back to the States would mean each State would go its own way, and qualifications from one State would not be recognised in another.

We do not want to return to a model with eight separate variations around the country. A plumber or a carpenter needs to be confident that his or her training in one state will be both accepted and empower him or her to operate effectively in another State. Nor do we want a model driven by State education bureaucracies telling industry what skills their workers need – that is unacceptable in a rapidly changing and technologically driven Australian work environment.

National competency standards driven by industry itself are the only acceptable way forward for our industries to be confident of this. The work of an independent broadly based Industry Skills Council like CPSISC, working with industry to develop and maintain national standards is vital to this process. This role is not one which can be integrated within Federal departments as they have demonstrated that they cannot effectively capture and implement the needs of industry in a timely way.

Other countries such as India have adopted the Australian models for training as they feel our system is one of the best models in the world. There is widespread support across Australian industry for a national model as best suited to a 21st century economy.

CPSISC would ask the Federal Government to reconsider the abolition of workforce development policies as programs such as EBPPP, Critical Skills and NWDF which have been a huge benefit to our industry and Australia's economy. The Co-contribution model has significantly helped Australians up-skill and build their future workforce and this is work that must be continued. If national productivity is to be increased, and higher economic growth achieved, it makes sense to continue these programs.

For a Government that prides itself on removing red tape, replacing a satisfactory national system with eight State based systems which will fragment consistency and the quality of training is a retrograde act. The price we could pay for this short term action, apparently driven by educational considerations, could be very, very high over the medium and longer term. Given that the Industry Skills Councils were established by the coalition and have performed exceptionally well it seems ludicrous to abolish the current national system or wind back their functions.

CPSISC ask the Federal Government to take into account our comments when responding to the Commission of Audit.

For further Media queries contact: Alan Ross, Chief Executive Officer CPSISC (02) 6253 0002. alan.ross@cpsisc.com.au