
Communiqué for the COAG Industry and Skills Council Meetings Skills Ministers

20 November 2015

The skills session of the Council of Australia Governments (COAG) Industry and Skills Council met in Hobart on 20 November. The session was chaired by the Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP, Australian Government Minister for Vocational Education and Skills. State and territory jurisdictions were represented by ministers with portfolio responsibility for skills. The Government of New Zealand is also a member of the Council.

Industry Forum

Skills are critical to ensuring the productivity of the workforce both now and in the future. To commence the day, Ministers engaged with members of the business community, peak industry and training bodies and students. A clear theme of the meeting was to improve foundation skills, especially amongst young people to improve their work prospects. The forum also discussed the need for entrepreneurship to help grow business and employment opportunities.

Skills Ministers

Reform of the vocational education system to maintain a focus on relevance of training, high quality delivery and improving consumer information has been the focus of Skills Ministers since the Council first met in April 2014. This meeting continued its focus on these reforms, announcing a range of actions, as well as some areas for future focus.

Underpinning the national system with data

The provision of transparent data allows better information for consumers, regulators and government. Ministers acknowledged the release of the first year of Total VET Activity data as a significant improvement in the availability of information about activity within the VET sector. This could not have been achieved without the cooperation of all governments working together, and the involvement of VET providers who contributed their data.

Building on this work, today the Council agreed to focus on improving access to information, which will assist consumers of VET to choose between course and provider offerings and provide a more accurate picture of student progression through the VET system and employment outcomes. The Council agreed to national actions including developing new indicators and measures, revising survey instruments and increasing consumer access to information, including on the My Skills website. Ministers agreed that work in this area should minimise additional impact on training providers.

With the advent of total VET activity, Ministers agreed that it is important to explore ways to deliver deregulatory benefits to RTOs and regulators by streamlining system reporting of quality indicators.

National VET System

Ministers discussed the intention of COAG to consider roles and responsibilities for VET within the Federation. Ministers acknowledged that a number of substantial issues facing the sector need immediate action to build confidence in VET. This included strengthening the operation of VET FEE HELP, improving quality assurance processes and a fresh look at the relevance of training to respond to the demands of a modern economy. Ministers specifically agreed to pursue further harmonisation of systems, including access to publicly subsidised training for multi-state employers to upskill their

workforce. Ministers directed Senior Officials to commence work in this area and report at the next meeting.

Work is underway reviewing the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform and Ministers noted the importance of sharing best practice and understanding the interactions in the system at the local and national levels. The review will inform any future arrangements.

Industry responsiveness and quality

Quality of training delivery and the responsiveness to industry are key themes of reform within the skills system. Both were considered extensively during the meeting, with many ideas productively discussed and some key actions agreed.

The formation of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) in May this year was a major advance to strengthen the voice of industry at the centre of the training system. The Committee has made significant progress in determining a methodology for managing industry-determined qualifications within the training system. The Council welcomed the progress report provided by the Chair of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee, and were pleased to endorse the first 17 training packages approved by the AISC for implementation.

A number of ideas to improve quality and regulation, and avoid unintended outcomes, were discussed and will be explored further. Ministers welcomed the reforms already undertaken in the area of VET FEE-HELP and Minister Hartsuyker indicated that further reforms were under consideration.

The Commonwealth has been leading a process of reforming training products to ensure that they are best fit for the needs of industry. The Council agreed to a suite of reforms to training packages and accredited courses that:

- ensure obsolete and superfluous qualifications are removed from the system;
- ensure that more information about industry's expectations of training delivery is available to training providers to improve their delivery and to consumers to enable more informed course choices;
- ensure that the training system better supports individuals to move easily from one related occupation to another;
- improve the efficiency of the training system by creating units that can be owned and used by multiple industry sectors;
- foster greater recognition of skill sets; and
- ensures that new training courses can be developed as quickly as industry needs them and available to support niche skill needs.

Training provider compliance with assessment requirements has been an area of some concern within the system. To ensure high quality within the system the Hon Luke Hartsuyker, Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, will consult with VET stakeholders and all jurisdictions on reform options to improve assessment in VET and the Council will give further consideration to actions to improve assessment and quality outcomes. Priority areas to be investigated will be approaches to strengthening the skills of VET trainers and assessors, consideration of improved validation of assessment including potential for greater industry involvement and options for tougher regulatory interventions.

Next Meeting

Ministers agreed to hold the next meeting in Sydney in March 2016.