



## Skills Report Position Paper 2: Awareness of Trades

### REPORT FINDINGS

Focus groups with employers during the research uncovered issues relating to the lack of awareness of trades opportunities and lack of appreciation for trades pathways within the education system.

The role of schools in encouraging students to take on trades and to pursue school-based opportunities is recognised as being critical. However, there are also barriers in this regard, including:

- There is a financial barrier to VET-related programs for students in non-government schools.
- One-week blocks of work experience are not viewed as particularly useful, whereas regular industry exposure and gently breaking teenagers into the concept of a full day's work might be of greater benefit.
- Schools could be utilising willing industry representatives to a far greater degree to give a clearer picture of the workplace and role requirements.
- Career advisors seem to focus on supporting students on a pathway to university ahead of apprenticeships or trainee opportunities.
- Teachers lack the expertise needed to provide advice regarding trades and VET pathway options.

*"We need to take the real world to the schools."*

### SITUATIONAL REVIEW AND GAP ANALYSIS

RDA Orana has reviewed the current situation to consider the gaps and issues in the programs already on offer in the region. Findings suggest the following:

- work experience programs through schools are uncommon, with schools supporting arrangements made by individual students but not putting a formal program in place themselves
- careers expos for school students focus on university opportunities, not on jobs, with trades pathways under represented
- smaller businesses without dedicated human resources expertise have tried and failed to recruit suitable staff by advertising, so resort to word of mouth.

### SKILLS GAPS

Regional data gathered from businesses across the region's 12 local councils suggests the critical skills shortages in the trades areas are:

- machinery and heavy vehicle operators
- carpenters
- cabinet makers



- hospitality, including both cooks and chefs
- slaughtermen
- mechanics, auto electricians and diesel fitters
- electricians
- welders
- panel beaters
- qualified tradespeople in general.

Businesses in seven of the 13 local government areas highlighted machinery operators as a critical skills shortage, while businesses in five local government areas flagged mechanics.

Health care is also an emerging industry nationwide and aged care occupations are expected to grow in coming years. Gilgandra and Warren local government areas are already experiencing a skills shortage in this area.

Figures from the 2016 Census show that the over 65s now make up 18.6% of the region's population. This is 2.3% higher than the NSW average and represents a growth of 2.6% in five years. In the Warrumbungle Shire, 26% of the population is over 65, while the figure in Gilgandra is 23.7%.

Changes in funding available under the NDIS are also triggering a growth in demand from the disability sector. Couple with the growing needs of the ageing population, this is creating an increased need for low or unskilled employees in the near future.

### **LACK OF AWARENESS OF TRADES**

Both schools and families tend to focus on students entering university, at the expense of the trades. As a result, there are a number of university graduates with limited employment prospects who may have been better suited to pursuing a trade that would allow them to be fully employed and productive.

The gap appears to be in generating awareness of roles and then matching those to interested students. With university marketing teams now well resourced, career expos tend to focus on university opportunities, while trades and skills fairs are lacking.

RDA Orana believes a Jump into Jobs career exploration day would provide an opportunity to explore trades, showcase opportunities and highlight the career paths of successful business operators based in the region with a trade background. Pilot programs could be offered at Dubbo and Cobar in the first instance and promoted in spring, with job opportunities available the following summer. This represents a chance for students to 'get the jump on jobs' before they finish school and would take the pressure of the HSC exam period for students who are not solely focused on gaining admission to university.

This format would promote trade-related careers and identify the skills gaps in the region. Where genuine vacancies were available, employers could interview interested students on the day.

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF VET TRAINING**

The Australian Government invested \$1.4 billion over seven years into the Trade Training Centres in Schools program to help students successfully move to further education, training or work, particularly in areas



showing skills gaps. Between 2008 and 2016, the program funded 375 modern Trade Training Centres and 136 Trade Skills Centres to focus on working with industry and having appropriate student support in place. The centres were designed to link schools, industry, TAFE and other registered training organisations but are not necessarily delivering the level of outcomes that what was intended, with a 2016 review showing less than half the students studying for a Certificate I completed their training, while completion rates for Certificates II and III were 37% and 35% respectively.

There is now also a relatively strong focus on VET training during the HSC years, with students attending classes at TAFE. This is proving popular in larger centres and via the public education system, where there are no(or low) fees associated. However, a 2015 discussion paper by the National Farmers' Federation, in response to the Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses suggested that many VET participants undertake their studies and training with little, if any industry exposure or involvement.

Their submission suggested that a VET participants often fail to secure employment or apply their acquired knowledge and skills in the relevant industry or field of study. Thousands of students also complete qualifications in fields with limited employment opportunities (such as conservation and land management). As a result, many graduates are likely to begin work without experience in the relevant field.

Under a national review of teacher registration, announced in February this year, tradies and nurses could be given new pathways into schools to share their skills. The review aims to ensure all teachers across early childhood, school and vocational education are meeting high-quality standards.



## *RDA Orana Position*

RDA Orana is committed to building an awareness of the trade-related career pathways, including apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, and to supporting small businesses to find suitable employees when they lack the dedicated human resources expertise.



### **RECOMMENDATION**

Seek funding to develop a Jump into Jobs career exploration day, with pilot programs at Dubbo, Mudgee and Cobar, to promote trade-related careers and help match employers with interested students.