



RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY

Improving Qualified Worker Rates through more Responsive Training Solutions in the Green Triangle (South Australia region)



LITA Training and the Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub wish to acknowledge the South Australian government and its funding of this project through its Building Capability Project (BCP) initiative and are equally appreciative of the generous contributions of local and national industry stakeholders which informed this project's findings.

Course non-completion is a complex issue encompassing factors that are both in and out of a training provider's control. Nevertheless, course non-completion is a cost to the individual, their employer and the training provider whilst also having implications for the meeting of state and national vocational education and training (VET) attainment targets. With the retention rates of those enrolling in Forest and Wood Product (FWP) Certificate III qualifications slipping within the Green Triangle (South Australia region), this research project sought to both detect the causes as well as to identify alternative training solutions that might better service the local forestry industry's immediate and emerging skill demands of its workforce. This was explored through a range of research methodologies including interviewing 11 local CEOs and senior Managers from prominent forestry companies as well as an extensive literature review.

With concerns about the forest harvesting industry's mortality and injury rates, ensuring that forestry operators are consistently skilled to a national standard as accredited through the national Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is considered as critical. However, the research discovered that forestry employers were, in the main, preferring to use non-accredited training unless required by regulatory or licencing obligations. This project highlighted the fragile situation faced by training providers in educating local forestry industry of the importance of national accreditation as the quality skills benchmark and the extended role that training providers, in liaison with their local Forest Industry Hubs, must play in changing employers' understandings of the value of a nationally qualified workforce. Pleasingly, the 'leg work' has already commenced with several industry self-regulated initiatives leading the way, such as the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) and the Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA) *Safe and Skilled Essential Training Standards* program, the CFMEU's *Skills Passport* and company specific procurement requirements of its contractors.

Alongside this industry educative strategy, to both continue to attract but more importantly retain students, the project's research identified that it is timely that training providers review their existing FWP training products and services against a quality scorecard of:

- currency and relevance, and
- flexibility and accessibility.

The research overwhelmingly affirmed that companies want a direct synergy between training programs on offer and their workforce's specific training needs. The project also identified that industry wants to engage in 'shorter and sharper' training bursts to address immediate requirements of a specific job role, such as for operating a harvester or forwarder. Research recommendations encourage training providers to consider:

- adding shorter accredited skill sets to the training provider's scope of registration and informing of pathways towards full accreditation through completion of several skill sets
- offering more efficient recognition of prior learning (RPL) services, where non-accredited courses could be recognised alongside their experiences, with the individual only required to complete gap training to address any identified deficits, and
- reviewing and rolling common competencies together from relevant units, reducing the required learning time by eliminating duplication.

It was identified that the region could be better serviced with a wider range of accredited training, which aligns to the skill needs shared by the interviewed CEOs and senior Managers, including for team leader and managerial levels. This strategy could lift student retention rates through the

assertion that low course attrition is fuelled by course relevance and most probably, that currently individuals are currently 'peg holed' into what was on offer against limited training provider scopes of registration. It was pleasing to note that Skills Impact¹ has identified and is currently progressing the development of a range of innovative units of competency and skill sets to increase the currency of the FWP Training Package, which address skills in demand, including:

- introducing firefighting skills rather than the current fire prevention
- strengthening bushfire management
- developing AI and other technologically advanced equipment operating skills, as well as skills in the use of Lighting Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) technology and drones to collect forest data, and
- addressing emerging mental health first aid.

Course accessibility was equally an important issue in supporting student progression with a clear indication that training providers need to innovate in ways that better cater to both the forestry industry's shift work cycles and the dispersity of its employees, who predominantly work in remote locations. The project identified virtual delivery, using video-conferencing software, and supported with e-learning activities are one way that training providers may extend their reach as well as remain connected with their students. Encouragingly, a strong number of project CEOs and senior Managers (60%) believed that their employees were ready to undertake e-study options.

The Green Triangle (South Australia region) is an important economic centre for forest and related wood products for South Australia (SA). Local industry spoke loud and clearly through this project, however the challenge for training providers is to determine the levels of investment required for service innovation against the realities of operating viable businesses in a specialist and thin market.

The project recommended that training providers servicing the Green Triangle (South Australia region) consider:

Offering Better Training Products and Services

(ensuring product and service viability/sustainability and a strong forecasted ROI through the preparation of individualised business cases)

- a) review the training provider's existing scope of registration to ensure servicing of the forestry harvest sector's skill needs and where appropriate, introduce pathways from Certificate II through to at least Certificate IV full qualification levels in a priority order
- b) introduce relevant accredited skill sets in a priority order and ensure their inclusion on the South Australian (SA) *Subsidised Training List (STL)* through application
- c) review all existing and planned qualifications on scope of registration for duplication and update training products through 'clustering' the delivery in order to reduce the scheduled course training durations
- d) consider the incremental introduction of a virtual and on-line delivery service model as an alternative option where appropriate and draw from the model agriculture training providers' best practice approaches

¹ Skills Impact is the national Service Skills Organisation, which supports the Forest Management and Harvesting Industry Reference Committee (IRC) with responsibility for the national FWP Training Package

- e) strengthen the training provider's Recognition of Prior Learning's (RPL) services and consider a fee for service approach, given the funding policy restraints in place through the *Skilling South Australia* program
- f) consider converting the training provider's up-front applicant suitability test into an industry recruitment aptitude assessment service
- g) secure third party auspiced partnerships to service local employers' needs where the local training provider does not have the expertise or resources

Better Engaging with Industry

- h) coordinate and publish a bi-monthly regional training news bulletin to local forestry industry and stakeholders, which promotes regional good practice accredited training case studies and celebrates training results and achievements
- i) in liaison with the Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub, run an annual industry skills forum to inform of local training innovations and new regional service offerings, as well as to enable the sharing of industry's emerging skill needs and challenges

Adopting a Change Agent Role

- j) in liaison with the Green Triangle Forest Industry Hub, play a proactive role in educating and changing employers' understandings of the value of a qualified workforce as measured through the achievement of nationally accredited qualifications and skill sets, which may be 'fast tracked' through RPL and gap training services
- k) in liaison with the Department of School Education (School Pathways), seek to pilot a school/industry connection and transition service, which includes engaging the services of professional career practitioner/s

For more information about this report's findings, please contact Sandy Kanahs, General Manager, LITA Training on 08) 87351474 or training@lita.org.au