

Regional Employers' Alliance Project – Pilot Projects' Status Report

Introduction and Background

The Regional Employers' Alliance Project (REAP)¹ is a Commonwealth-State skills shortage initiative funded through the Strategic National Initiatives component of the 2005-2008 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce.

During 2007 Local Government Managers Australia National (LGMA) led a project to create alliances focusing on addressing skills shortages with regional employers across the agriculture, infrastructure, local government and resources sectors. In 2008 LGMA is managing the development and roll out of cross-sectoral workforce pilot projects in Central Highlands Queensland, Upper Hunter New South Wales, and Northern Tasmania.

The REAP project partners in 2008 are:

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
- Cement Industry Federation (CIF)
- Civil Contractors Federation (CCF)
- Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA)
- Minerals Council of Australia (MCA)
- National Farmers' Federation (NFF)

The direct involvement of regional enterprises has been a key strategy to ensure that the roll out of pilot projects is viable and regionally appropriate. This is being achieved through the establishment of a Regional Employers' Alliance Committee in each region to:

- Act as an advisory group for the development and implementation of the regional pilot project;
- Identify examples of good practice in training, workforce and career development, and other areas within the REA members' industries and sectors;
- Provide relevant knowledge, skills and expertise regarding skills and workforce needs, and development potential in their sector;
- Support and promote linkages across sectors and industries with regard to skill enhancement, training, workforce and career development; and,
- Suggest approaches to effectively and efficiently roll out the pilot project within their sector.

Preliminary Findings

The three regional projects are progressing well and are substantially in line with the project task frameworks developed in March and April 2008. Consideration of the activities and processes used in each of the projects already reveals valuable insights regarding process and methodologies for working within regional locations, across industry sectors, within training disciplines, and across the institutional boundaries imposed by government, and training and education bodies.

Full details of these findings will be provided at the **Regional Employers Alliance Project (REAP) Showcase Forum – Promoting Sustainable Workforce Development – Innovative Solutions to Skills Shortages** on 26 November 2008 in Melbourne.

Regional Project Activity

A brief summary of the status of each of the three regional projects is set out in the next three pages. Comprehensive information on the activity and achievements of each of the projects will be provided at the REAP Showcase on 26 November. For further information please contact Angela Zivkovic, Workforce Development Manager, LGMA, on email angelazivkovic@lgma.org.au or phone 03 9696 6077.

¹ REAP is the working title for the project.



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Upper Hunter, New South Wales Project

The Project

A model for the establishment of flexible career pathways that is portable across sectors that utilise mobile plant in the Upper Hunter region, in the local government areas of Singleton, Scone, Upper Hunter, Cessnock, Muswellbrook, Maitland, and Dungog.

Regional Manager: Michael Murray, CEO Pegasus Management Group (Pegasus)

The Specific Tasks

The project entails the design of a methodology for cross-industry recognition of mobile plant operations' competencies. A model will be prepared for the items with the highest level of cross sector usage and will be piloted using a grader of the Caterpillar 12H, identified in discussions with sector leaders based in the region as the most suitable item because of its broad use across the sectors.

A group of 12 grader operators from across local government, civil construction, agriculture and mining will be selected, with the support of the local employers, to participate in the pilot.

The pilot group will then be assessed against the model created for the grader using relevant units of competencies from each of the training packages in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Certification for the competencies gained will then be issued to the participants.

Activity to Date

Completed to date are: Reviewing and mapping of the Training Packages relating to the industry sectors selected for the pilot – mining, local government, civil construction and agriculture – that refer to a grader of the Caterpillar 12H; the determination that the Unit within Civil Construction (Plant Operation) Cert III has the most robust competency base from which to build a practical cross-sectoral recognition framework, after receipt of advice from experienced grader operators; and assessment and mapping of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes that meet AQTF and VET sector requirements.

Development of the assessment tool for a *Pathway to Recognition Resource Kit* has also been completed. The Kit will assist operators, in conjunction with their supervisors, to complete self-assessment and assist Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to complete an assessment as per the competency base i.e. the Unit within Civil Construction (Plant Operation) Cert III.

Findings to Date

There are significant variations with regard to management of competencies required by workers who operate a common item of mobile plant equipment. The Civil Construction (Plant Operation) Unit of Competency provides the most comprehensive set of Elements of Competency and Performance Criteria that can be adapted to a wide range of contexts. The equivalent Unit from the Certificate III in Surface Coal Operations is less comprehensive. Additionally, neither the Local Government nor the Agriculture packages provide structured Elements of Competency and Performance Criteria that can be used to build a recognition or training program.

The complexity of the AQTF and the RPL systems necessitates that a guide accompany any recognition and/or training pathway for workers and their supervisors. Such a guide needs to be in plain accessible language with training terminology explained and minimised.



Regional Employers' Alliance Project – October Status Report Central Highlands, Queensland Project

The Project

Seasonal Workforce Attraction – matching local skill needs to the skill sets and skill development potential of an experienced travelling population across the Central Highlands Shire.

Regional Manager: Liz Alexander, Director, Blue Dog Agribusiness

The Specific Tasks

The project involves designing a number of surveys to ascertain sectoral and cross-sectoral skills needs, associated annual time period of skill demand, job vacancies and capacity for short term contracting of key enterprises in the agriculture, mining, civil construction/earthmoving and local government sectors. The information gained from analysis of the surveys will be matched to the data ascertained from surveying experienced traveller populations' work skills, and interest in contract work in Central Highlands. This analysis will form the basis of a database of Central Highlands' businesses interested in contracting experienced travellers.

The project will identify barriers to engagement and incentives to attraction of a seasonal workforce drawn from the experienced traveller population. The Regional Employers' Alliance Advisory Group will then develop strategies to encourage and assist local enterprises to employ the 2009 traveller population.

Activity to Date

The project activity to date: experienced traveller survey circulation, monthly collection and analysis; and training of individuals involved in tourism (e.g. caravan park operators) in the completion of the surveys.

Also completed to date are: analysis of 107 agricultural skills surveys collected via interviews at the AgGrow Field Days in July; interview with local government; publication of sector case studies outlining the skills challenges and positive experience of employing skilled travellers and mature age workers; analysis of 52 earthmoving/civil construction surveys (85% of earthmoving contractors in the region); as well as completion of individual interviews with 7 of the 10 mines in the region.

Findings to Date

There is extensive interest from the Central Highlands Regional Council, earthmoving contractors and the agricultural sector in participation in a regional seasonal workforce strategy. For example, 85% (91) of the 107 agricultural businesses surveyed indicated an interest in employing skilled persons on a short-term basis. Also 77% (40) of earthmoving contractors surveyed stated an interest in continued involvement. Enterprises within the mining sector have also indicated their interest.

Well over half of the agricultural businesses (64%) and earthmovers surveyed (71%) operate with current job vacancies. Local government also experiences a high level of vacancies in labour roles in its Civil Operations department. Agricultural and earthmoving enterprises experience an average minimum length of vacancy of 6 months. At the same time, agricultural businesses outlined some disadvantages in employing unskilled labour, including reduced uptake or abandonment of technology, increased costs related to damage to equipment and/or stock, high cost of training and supervision, and associated inability to leave the property.

Analysis of the first 110 travelling population surveys indicates that there are two distinct groups interested in work: itinerants under 35 years old who already work in agricultural enterprises; and holiday makers between 45 and 65 years of age, many of whom have skills and current licences/tickets relevant to local workforce needs. Moreover, the interest is in work for a minimum of 3 months.



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Northern Tasmania Project

The Project

A common skills project for support workers in industries involved with agriculture, land and environmental management in the local government areas covered by the project: Devonport, Dorset, George Town, Kentish, Latrobe, Launceston, Meander Valley, Northern Midlands and West Tamar.

Regional Manager: Trevor Forshaw, Consultant, SED Consulting – Tasmania

The Specific Tasks

The project involves the investigation and determination of the common skill sets required of support workers across a number of enterprises from the project sectors, and the mapping of relevant competencies to enable the design of a methodology for cross-industry recognition for this common skill set and the associated competency. A model will be prepared for the skills and competencies that enable workers to be job-ready for both seasonal and on-going support work. In discussions with sector leaders based in the region, the core skills required by a support worker in the Rural Operations Certificate have been identified as being the most appropriate skill set to model due to their broad cross sectoral application across a range of enterprises in the region.

A competency training package will be developed for piloting in the region, with the support and participation of employers across local government, agriculture and the cement industry.

A pilot group will then be assessed against the model created, using relevant units of competencies from each of the training packages in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Certification for the competencies gained will then be issued to the participants.

Activity to date

Activities completed to date are: identification and mapping of 42 common skills for support workers against Training Packages relating to agriculture, mining, local government and infrastructure; the determination, in consultation with regional employers and training providers, that Rural Operations Certificates II and III have the most comprehensive competency base and flexibility to enable building a cross-sectoral recognition process; development of a matrix of 23 core competencies in collaboration with the Regional Employers' Alliance Advisory Committee; assessment and mapping of the 23 core competencies against current training packages to determine the different levels of achievement; and development of a pilot training program for both existing and new workers – in consultation with training providers, regional enterprises and job network services – to ascertain assessment processes and identify potential participants.

Findings to date

The Certificate II Rural Operations Unit of Competency provides the most comprehensive set of Elements of Competency and Performance Criteria that can be adapted to a wide range of contexts for training new workers. However, there is limited compatibility across Training Packages at the Certificate III level as the training becomes more industry specific. Local enterprises have expressed keen interest in participation in the development of training and recognition of this core skill set for support workers.

The delivery process may require a panel of training organisations as no single training organisation in the region is able to cover all the training needs of the proposed training package. An impediment to funding the roll out of a pilot is that the workforce it requires may be predominantly casual, however the focus of training programs is on part time and full time permanent workers.

