

# Challenges of 'skills for jobs and growth'

**Q** TU TAFE Organiser **PAUL REARDON** reports on the consultations around the Queensland Government Green Paper, 'Skills for Jobs and Growth'.

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'Skills for Jobs and Growth' was released on 9 June 2005 and identified six priorities for vocational education and training:

- tackling the urgent shortage of trades skills;
- strengthening Queensland's skills base for the future;
- developing a more responsive and flexible VET system;
- initiating a new engagement with employers to tackle skill shortages;
- developing a workforce and skills response to the ageing population; and
- increasing labour force participation through new skilling strategies for the under-skilled

The paper puts forward 24 proposals to address these priorities, including proposals:

- for modernising apprenticeships;
- to establish a new Specialist Trade and Technical Skills Centre;
- for skilling for the associate professional workforce; and
- to upgrade the infrastructure of TAFE and other public providers.

Over the last few months, the Department has held consultation forums throughout Queensland. These have covered two areas:

1. Skills and Qualifications Reforms; and
2. Industry and Trades Reforms

Consultations closed on 31 August. Over 900 people, including many TAFE teachers, have participated in these forums. A key topic of debate has been the proposal that TAFE should move away from the delivery of Certificate I and II and concentrate on Certificate IV and above courses. Apparently the negative feedback at the forums has been so strong that the idea has been dropped (TAFE in Queensland has 18 per cent of its delivery in Certificate I and II courses).

There has also been strong opposition to a further reduction in nominal hours for courses.

Another theme raised at the consultations by industry is concern about Block Release. Employers (and some unions) have argued that there needs to be more on site delivery of education and training. Some parts of industry are also arguing that it is not worthwhile TAFE buying new equipment that is going to be quickly outdated, so it is better for the public provider to provide training in the workplace.

There is also a push to 'wrap' courses around the individual's flexible contract work (especially in areas of underemployment) and not just offer training at an Institute at a particular time and date. It has been mooted that to facilitate this there could be a trainer in the workplace with a Certificate IV qualification and then apparently

there could be a 'roving' RTO which would come to the workplace and quality assure the training.

It is interesting to note that some employers are also saying they would prefer to have a 15 year old commence employment rather than employ a person who has undertaken a School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship.

TAFE teachers have welcomed the acknowledgement that the competition model in TAFE has not worked. There is also a recognition that the 'training market' generally is not always truly competitive, with clusters of oligopolies in some industries. However, the Department's preferred approach, which sees the private training providers as a resource and suggests provision of public TAFE infrastructure to them, is problematic.

In relation to the proposed Specialist Trade and Technical Skills Centre, concerns have been expressed about its ability to provide services to students located outside of the south-east corner of the state.

The QTU has provided a written response to the Green Paper based upon the following key points:

- The QTU does not support the establishment of new courses within TAFE at the expense of the provision of Certificate I, II and III courses.
- The Government must commit funding on a statewide basis and develop a TAFE system that is responsive to the needs of all Queenslanders not one that is principally focussed on the South East Corner of the State.
- Funding must be ongoing and additional to any funds currently allocated to the TAFE system.
- Any new courses must be developed, implemented and assessed by appropriately qualified, professional teachers.
- Links between TAFE Institutes and schools as a consequence of the ETRF agenda must be maintained; and
- Any changes to the provision of trade skills training and technical skills training must occur for appropriate educational reasons. ❖

*Paul Reardon is QTU TAFE Organiser.*

A copy of the Green Paper, Skills for Jobs and Growth, can be downloaded from [http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/client/about\\_us/research\\_publications/strategic\\_policies/skills\\_jobs\\_growth/index.html](http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/client/about_us/research_publications/strategic_policies/skills_jobs_growth/index.html).

