

NCK Evers Network
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Mr. Don Challen AM
Chair of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council
C/O Department of Treasury and Finance
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Dear Don

The NCK Evers Network is concerned about, amongst other things, an effective response in Tasmania to the significant workforce adjustments that will result from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenge is to improve the skill base for relevant industries to support economic recovery. To the extent that changes/compromises to existing VET arrangements are required, they should be negotiated to achieve the overall objective.

To be successful, the response must be industry centric with very high levels of industry consultation and involvement. It needs to build on a rigorous three stage approach:

1. Identification of relevant industries/skill areas.

The first step would be to identify the industries/skill areas (existing or emerging) which can contribute significantly to Tasmanian economic development. There is no shortage of work on this subject so the task should be able to be done in a relatively short period. A starting list might include the following:

- Catering and hospitality
- Tourism
- Building and construction trades
- Plumbing and electrical
- Metal trades
- Science/Engineering
- Marine and shipbuilding
- Aquaculture and fisheries
- Energy industry
- Primary industries

Settling on a final list could be done by the Economic Recovery Taskforce in consultation with government and industry. It is not envisaged that fields such as hair and beauty, automotive, business services or art and design would be included. Some facets of health and community services could be considered.

2. Specification of required skills for each industry/skill area, current supply/demand situation and assessment of quality of existing training.

This task should be completed through facilitated workshops with small groups of knowledgeable/major participants in each industry group. These groups should identify where serious skill gaps exist, the rectification of which would make a significant difference.

3. Development of desired training arrangements for the identified skills or skill groups

On the basis of the assessments of the quality of existing training for the identified skills/skill groups, using primarily industry players, consider alternative methods by which the training outcomes can be achieved. This could be through TAFE, private providers or industry consortia or any combination. This will require consideration of the quality of both teaching resources and equipment and how these should be addressed. Whatever proposal is developed there should be significant industry involvement at all stages of delivery. Recommended arrangements for delivering training should be developed for each skill/skill group.

The identification of changes to VET sector structural and financial arrangements required to put desired training arrangements in place and process for achieving these changes is also required. The objective here should be to change existing arrangements to fit the changes in training delivery, not to compromise the training delivery by seeking to conform to existing arrangements.

In considering how best to give effect to the sentiments expressed in the paragraph above, it is the Network's firm view that the current TAFE structure is unsuited for the challenges the State faces in the VET space. This is largely because of outdated and restrictive industrial practices that have constrained this formerly "fit for purpose" organisation to the extent that it simply does not have the industrial flexibility needed to do the job required of it.

The Network believes that a "Jetstar model" should be implemented by the Government; creating a separate SOC type organisation with contemporary industrial practices to help address the VET challenge confronting the State, utilising TAFE resources wherever possible but in no way being constrained or compelled to do so.

Dan Norton

On behalf of Bob Annells
Convenor