

Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry

'The Voice of Territory Business'

28 April 2003

Mr Bartlett
 Chairman
 Standing Committee on Education and training
 House of Representatives
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT 2002

Dear Mr Bartlett

The NT Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the largest employer association in the Territory representing approximately 1500 members or 20% of Territory business and our members employ approximately 22,000 employees.

Our membership is from a wide cross sector of business including construction, hospitality, retail/wholesale, motor trades, manufacturing, security, business and finance, Indigenous communities and businesses, and the community services sector.

Over 65% of our members employ less than 20 employees, with a further 20% employing 20 – 50 employees. This reflects the Territory business make up of predominantly small business.

The Chamber has offices in four of the major centres - Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and East Arnhem and representation in Tennant Creek, making us truly representative of industry across the Territory.

Services to our members include, industrial and work place relations advice and representation, international and export assistance, financial advice, environmental audit and awareness programs, lobbying, networking and information dissemination.

The Chamber also has a comprehensive training division, delivering general training courses, in-house training and consultancy services. The Chamber is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with accreditation under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

• Industrial and Workplace Relations

• International, Trade and Commerce

• Training Services

• Business Networking

• NT Expo

• International Business Council

• Manufacturers Council

• Tourism Council

• Environment Services

• Regional Offices

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Our Training Services Division has been involved in a range of employment, education and training projects over recent years. Significant projects include:

- The Northern Australian Skill Shortages project
- Employment and Training Field Officers (ETFO)
- Employment, Education and Training Advisers (EETA)
- Schools Industry Liaison Officer (SILO)
- Business Education Partnerships Advocates (BEPA)
- Indigenous Employment and Education Project (IEEP)

Training Services currently participate in two Commonwealth projects – Education Training Advisers (ETA) which has a focus on informing members about education and training matters, and on increasing the numbers of New Apprenticeships and the range of Training Packages being utilised. The other is Business and Industry School to Work Alliance (BISWA) which is to provide for employer engagement with the MCEETYA Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework and to influence key stakeholder groups towards a positive perception of Vet in Schools activities.

Another key initiative is the Chamber's Employer Reference Group, which is made up of employers with a vision of leading business in learning. The purpose of the Employer Reference Group is to play a leading role in enhancing, developing and supporting Vocational Education and Training within the Northern Territory community.

As a result of the projects managed by the Chamber, education and training has emerged to become a core business activity for the Chamber. This has allowed the Chamber to identify key issues in relation to education and training within the business community.

The Chamber believes that the Northern Territory education and training system must provide students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to participate fully in society. The development of a comprehensive education and training system in the Territory is pivotal to the achievement of short and long-term social and economic goals. Every young person in the Territory should benefit from a sound education platform which provides basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The NTCCI is a member of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and as such supports the ACCI Submission dated October 2002 as presented to the Committee, however we would like to take this opportunity to make particular representation as it relates to the Northern Territory.

The place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

- The range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs.

- NT Employers are now more aware and accept the usage of industry developed and endorsed Training Packages for the delivery of VET in Schools across the board.
- School timetabling remains one of the most problematic barriers to the delivery of Vet in Schools - some schools have adopted a seven day timetable and others a five day timetable. Seven-day timetabling causes problems for industry as it doesn't allow for the same day being allocated for work release each week.
- VET in Schools needs to be targeted to real local job opportunities, skill shortages and future demand. In the NT we have new industries being developed in the defence, oil and gas, and manufacturing sectors with technology being a large component. There is an excellent opportunity for the NT to position itself in training for these areas.
- Vet in Schools needs to be supported by adequate career advice in schools as the present system does not provide for quality, professional, dedicated career advisers. Under the old Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) there used to be a dedicated service to schools and students providing all career information to students. This has been one of the casualties of the new system. Neither the NT Government nor the Schools have picked up the slack leaving a big void. Industry is willing to participate but cannot do it alone and needs students to make informed decisions about their careers. Perhaps a centralised model needs to be considered.
- There is a need for teachers delivering VET in Schools to have appropriate qualifications and recent industry experience. The NT has had a program of Industry Teacher Release however lack of resources has not seen any of this activity for at least 5 years. If the program cannot be reintroduced, then at a minimum, a professional development program should be developed with an industry focus.
- Employers want young people with skills that make them employable from the commencement of their employment. Our small businesses do not have the time or the inclination to take on young people without basic entry level skills. The skills of problem solving, decision making, communications, team work, self management, planning and organising, technology, learning and initiative should be vital components of any vocational education system and embedded into the classroom.
- In the NT with our small population base we are not resource rich, and remote and regional locations can pose challenges with resources.
- The NTCCI has concerns over schools being RTOs in their own right when the work load in obtaining and maintaining RTO status becomes an impediment to implementation of VETis. The Chamber supports partnership arrangements for the delivery of Vet in Schools.

The differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs

- Work experience programs and structured work placements are still vital in giving students an opportunity to explore the world of work. School Based New Apprenticeships in NT have really only taken off this year due to a concentrated

effort by Group Training NT – currently have approx 50 students and is increasing. Whilst School Based New Apprenticeships are an excellent pathway for many students it is only one of the programs in the whole Vocational Learning system.

- Industry still does, and will continue to, accept students into workplaces for work placement and work experience opportunity.

Vocational education in new and emerging industries

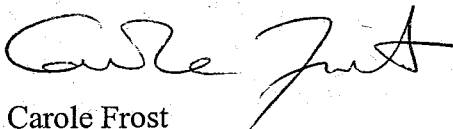
- Whilst it is important to train for the new industries coming to the NT in the near future, it is important not to forget the foundation skills required by industry.

The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.

- Generally the participation of indigenous students in VET is hampered by poor social and economic factors. In addition, Indigenous students have very low literacy rates. These factors need to be addressed before there can be an increase in participation in VET in Schools. There are proven skill shortages in the NT and willingness by employers to employ indigenous employees, however the poor numeracy and literacy skills prevent indigenous employment.
- The Chamber has been concerned for some time that there needs to be mechanisms in place for Employers taking on Indigenous students participating in vocational learning such as, one on one support or mentoring, etc.
- The Chamber considers that Vocational Education could commence early for Indigenous Students – perhaps from Year 8 for particular students and industries.
- As current retention rates are so low a number of initiatives are required including, co-ordination of key stakeholders, resourcing, community ownership and leadership, and a whole of government approach at all levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this hearing. We would be pleased to provide more information should the need arise.

Yours sincerely



Carole Frost
Chief Executive Officer