

POST CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Economic growth and workforce capacity: the only way forward

Over 450 industry and educational leaders, policy makers and planners met in Melbourne on 21st July at the '*Putting Skills at the heart of the economy*' conference to explore one of the biggest challenges facing Australia's productivity – the supply of appropriately skilled workers.

While acknowledging that developing economies are quickly skilling their people as a platform for competitive growth, delegates heard how Australia's productivity and participation challenge is far more complex and that the nation will have to do a lot more than simply train. "Half the world's population is having an industrial revolution. In Australia, we need clever thinking and a shared vision on how we position training as part of a more sophisticated workforce planning and development approach that drives productivity and which enterprises can't afford to be without," said Chris O'Brien, Chair of the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council.

Presenters at the sold out conference included Heather Ridout, Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group and member of the Skills Australia board who asserted that Australia must build the workforce's adaptive capacity and "be a country that can think and act on its feet".

IBM's Managing Director Andrew Stevens outlined how technology and advanced analytics will move deeper into the physical world necessitating a broader, deeper level of skill, and add a further, unstoppable imperative to the current skills challenge.

Australia's 11 national Industry Skills Councils and Skills Australia hosted the joint event to raise awareness and debate on the role of skills development and workforce planning in raising productivity levels.

In addition to development of Australia's nationally endorsed qualifications, ISCs coordinate the Australian Government's *Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program*, a \$50m investment in raising the skills of existing workers based on co-investment by the enterprise. "We know industry is prepared to invest, and invest deeply if the policy settings are right as indicated by EBPPP's oversubscription" commented Ray Barker, Chair of Skills DMC.

"This program is a watershed in how the industry and Government work in partnership to build Australia's human capital. The trick is to ensure that we move forward on this basis systemically, not just limit a great model to a program" Ray Barker added.

In a wide ranging, interactive program, the day explored a number of key issues including migration, an ageing workforce demographic and the need to attract new entrants into the workforce. Chair of Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council, Jon Northorpe saw the event as a positive vehicle for driving the skills agenda through debate in a wider context and audience than is typical.

“We’re overwhelmed with the response to the conference, and most especially that industry has been involved - in earnest - in what can too often be a training centric environment. It’s forced us to challenge each others’ thinking – and our own” he added.

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Australia’s 11 Industry Skills Councils are independent, not for profit, industry led bodies funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. ISCs develop and maintain Australia’s nationally endorsed qualifications in which over 1.3 million students were enrolled in 2010. They also work closely with enterprises to help them build their workforce capacity, and currently manage the highly successful *Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program*.

Skills Australia is an independent statutory body, providing advice to the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations on Australia’s current, emerging and future workforce skills needs and workforce development needs.