

# SPERA'S RESPONSE TO MAYER COMMITTEE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON EMPLOYMENT- RELATED KEY COMPETENCIES

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President**

The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (Inc.) would like to offer the following paper as a response to Mayer Consultation process. The paper is based on:

- a meeting held with Mary O'Sullivan
- an Executive committee teleconference
- a session led by Ann Borthwick at the 8th SPERA conference
- a working session with SPERA members at the SPERA conference

SPERA links people with a diverse range of interests in education and training to promote the development of rural Australia. One goal SPERA has is to advance the education opportunities for all people in rural Australia. With this in mind SPERA is pleased to offer the following comments on the consultation paper.

Our key concern is that this report has been prepared for an urban setting using a committee concerned with urban issues. It would seem appropriate to enlist committee members from a cross section of the clients to be addressed to ensure all target groups are represented. Ignoring the special characteristics and needs of the rural sector indicates an inequitable basis for the whole report. We therefore offer the following points in an attempt to eliminate this inequitable treatment.

1. The group "rurally disadvantaged" needs to be added to the list on page 45 of the report as "geographically isolated" is not sufficient.
2. The discussion on "Employment related Key-competencies" (p. 4-6) does not truly reflect rural situations. The reference to "range of settings" does not adequately state the need for equality of outcomes. This section over emphasises the need for preparation for the workplace - almost to the specific type of urban work. There is a need to broaden the notion that key competencies are generic and expand on the idea of transferability.
3. When discussing the clarification of the target group (p. 6) SPERA believes there is a need for much investigation and definition. The relationship between the eight key learning areas and the key competency strands needs to be clearly articulated in ways that take account of differing locations, socio-economic status, and cultural identities.
5. In discussing the key competency strands and their provision the following points were raised:
  - A need to address a flexible approach to the provision of competencies not just classroom, workshop or large company.
  - Models, or examples of provision of competency need to be varied and should include small businesses and primary industries. This would indicate a much broader interpretation.

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- There needs to be a clearer statement on the transferability of skills so that all situations are accommodated. The notion of competencies within a context need to be addressed - different levels for different applications/settings.
  - Particular concern is raised on the competency "working with others and in teams". This can be particularly difficult to achieve in some rural settings and therefore has the potential to be based against rural groups. Also nothing has been said about the particular skill of working alone and the competencies requires by the individual.
  - Another competency which can be seen as a bias against the rural section is the competency using technology. The range of technology available in some rural settings is particularly limited. Also many support personnel are inaccessible to many communities. Many rural schools/communities are particularly adept to adapting available technology to suit the requirements. Perhaps a statement on this flexibility would avoid inequity.
6. In relation to performance levels further clarification is required with the relation between performance levels and the A.S.F. levels. This section is confusing and creates the opportunity for inequitable approaches to standards and levelling.
- Also, there is a need to include the possibility for achieving the levels in an individual situation - not necessarily a school or urban industry.
7. There appears to be no reference in performance levels or key competencies to the notion of prior learning. This eliminates the acquired skills of those young people who have left school, are unemployed or self employed.
8. The preliminary validation by industry (p. 46) needs to be extended to include primary industries and some small business. This will assist in the application of key competency strands to rural settings. As one expansion of this issue there is a need to consult with education and training providers and community agencies in non-metropolitan areas to ensure the relevance of offerings.
9. The records of performance need to identify flexibility and be non-time specific. How to assess the criterion has not been truly addressed. In rural situations there is a possibility of involving community members but training and inservice will need to be addressed.
10. There is a need to introduce the idea of a minimum standard of access for all 15-19 year olds across the nation. This should include a statement on the need for equality of outcomes which will receive unequal treatment.
11. Implementation factors
- If the aim is to provide programmes to achieve key competencies in the local area then the discussion needs to include telecommunication links, mobile classrooms, multipurpose usage of existing centres.
  - There will be a need to extend TAFE and rural training schools offerings to provide more equitable access for rural clients.

- Professional development of teachers, trainers, industrial officers will need to be addressed with particular provision for rural areas.
- Barriers to participation need to be removed. These include:
  - \* location/access
  - \* funding/resources
  - \* lack of information
  - \* lack of accommodation
- Flexibility in structures, timing of courses, enrolment and delivery modes could address the participation barriers for many rural clients.
- Many current, successful initiatives have been resourced by CAP, REAP etc. and these could be included in the implementation of the Mayer recommendations. Such initiatives could be seriously affected by the proposed NAT CAP, broad banded equity suggestions.
- When finalising details of standards, some consideration should be given to moderating standards. In discussing the assessment of key competencies some thought should be given to ownership and management to make it manageable.
- In the implementation recommendations major consideration must be given to resource implications. To ensure that rural 15-19 year olds are able to appropriately participate in the key competency structure adequate funding must be made available. SPERA suggests a pilot/trial programme in both rural and urban setting to help adequately assess the resource implications.

In summary the comments from the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia indicates that:

- more consultation needs to occur with educators and employers in rural areas.
- much more consideration needs to be given to the implementation and resourcing of the proposals, particularly in rural areas.
- a trial programme should be initiated immediately to assess the implications for a national project.

Should you wish to discuss the issues raised in this paper please contact one of the executive officers of SPERA. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the committee, we wish you well in your endeavours to improve the education and training of the 15-19 year old group.