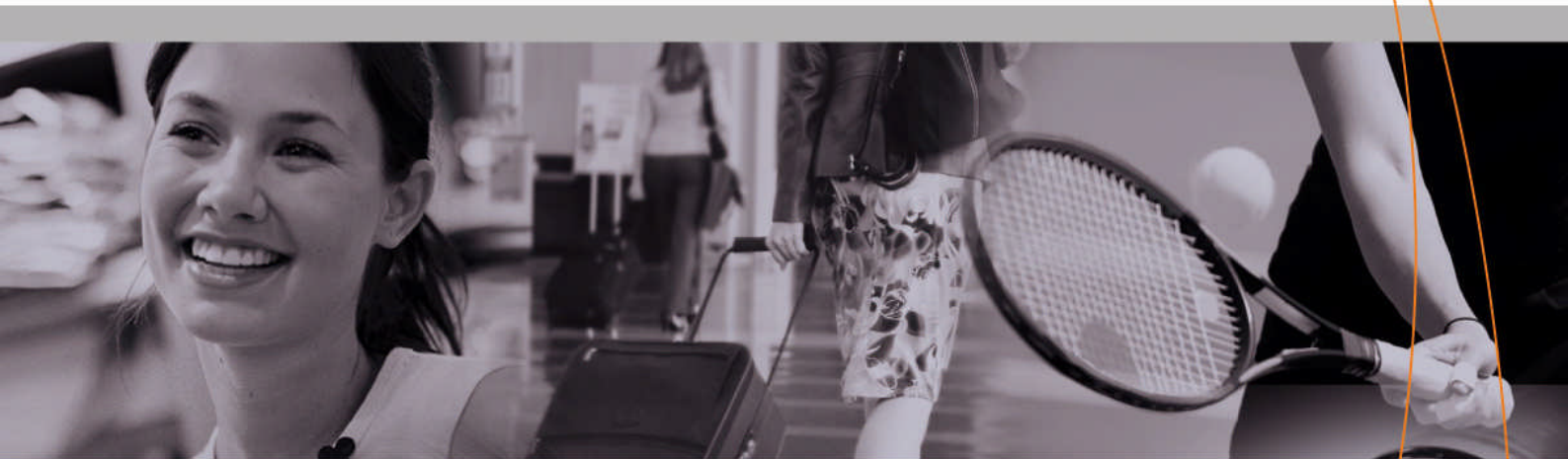


Service Skills Australia Submission to
Skills for Sustainability



October 2009
Skills for Sustainability

Skills for Sustainability

Sustainability Skills Stocktake and Gap Analysis

A Discussion Paper

Introduction

Earlier in 2009 Service Skills Australia (SSA) participated in the ISCs review regarding the issue of environmental sustainability in training packages, which resulted in a report entitled Environmental Sustainability: An Industry Response (available from, www.isc.org.au).

Even though the service industries are not seen as a major contributor to high carbon levels and a polluted environment, it is one of the industries with the most customer contact and therefore possibilities to build awareness. In the service industries the issue is about **contextualising existing skills and changing behaviour** rather than a comprehensive systemic change. When a customer sees sustainable practice in a hotel, local food promoted in their favourite café and sustainable products used at a hairdresser it promotes sustainable practice, engages customers and helps to change existing mindsets – of both customers and the workforce. This is even more important because contrary to some other industries the workforce of the service industries will grow in the future and therefore sustainable business practice will reach more people¹.

Awareness of environmental sustainability issues, such as water and energy restrictions, is on the rise among Australians. Approximately 26% of the adult population in Australia, nearly 4 million consumers, are regarded as being green consumers or LOHAS – ‘Lifestyles of health and sustainability’². Green skills are driven by consumer demand. Companies are being urged to become more environmentally friendly because customers are looking for companies which incorporate sustainable practice and provide green products and services.

Furthermore, so-called green collar skills are not only covering areas like trade skills (such as green plumbing, construction of energy efficient buildings, renewable energy and low input gardening) but also business leadership, entrepreneurship and project management. Making the transition to a sustainable and more resource efficient economy will require innovation across all industry sectors. For many employers, green skills have always been a part of best practice activity. Waste management and energy conservation to reduce costs are effective strategies to impact business bottom line. Emissions’ trading is likely to catalyse new attention to supply chain management, building services and transport and logistics, which are core issues for many retail and wholesale businesses³.

¹ According to the Factor 4 scenario in ‘Growing the green collar economy’, report to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum employment in the retail and wholesale trade will grow by 25% from 2006 to 2016 and 48% from 2006 to 2026.

² Marlow, 2007, LOHAS: What every green business needs to know about their market

³ Hatfield-Dodds, S., G. Turner, H. Schandl and T. Doss, 2008, Growing the green collar economy: Skills and labour challenges in reducing our greenhouse emissions

In addition, sustainable business practice can be promoted to existing and potential customers and used to increase productivity, save energy and therefore money. As stated in the report to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum 'Growing the green collar economy'... *There is a triple-dividend of greater wellbeing, cost-saving and greater competitiveness and reduced environmental impact to be earned if measures would be taken to support the skill revolution required for a low-carbon, environmentally sound society*⁴.

The vocational education and training (VET) sector has two responsibilities:

- to help employers and employees make sustainable decisions by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge
- to set a good example by engaging in sustainable business practices itself.

Questions

1. What activities are you aware of in the area of the development and embedding of sustainability skills in VET training products and how might information about these be brought together?

Current reviews

Environmental issues are seen by many Australians as one of the most important problems facing the country today. Government initiatives on sustainability and climate change cover several parts of Australia's industries. Current papers and Australian Government initiatives/policies include:

- COAG's Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Agenda
- COAG's Participation and Productivity Agenda (education, skills and training)
- National Action Plan for Education for Sustainability led by the Council for Education for Sustainability
- Outcomes of the Senate Inquiry into the Effects of Climate Change on Training and Employment Needs
- Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (2010)
- Cutler Review/recommendations on innovation
- National VET Strategy: Shaping our Future
- Skilling Australia for the Future
- Work on the next generation of Training Packages by the Joint Steering Committee of the National Quality Council (NQC) and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Skills and Workforce Development Subgroup

⁴ Hatfield-Dodds, S., G. Turner, H. Schandl and T. Doss, 2008, Growing the green collar economy: Skills and labour challenges in reducing our greenhouse emissions and national environmental footprint. Report to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, June 2008. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Canberra.

- Nation Building Package (Teaching and Learning Capital Fund (TLC) for VET, 2008-09 to 2011-12)
- National VET Sector Sustainability Policy and Action Plan
- NSW Green Skills Strategy⁵
- NSW Department of Education and Training: Skills for Sustainability
- Dusseldorp CSIRO, Growing the Green Collar Economy.

Climate change demands not only the development of new skills to support new jobs in new industries, it also demands a re-tooling of the skills of the existing workforce. As the service industries are major employers in Australia, employing almost 2.5 million people⁶, with an additional 1.7 million volunteers engaged⁷, there are many opportunities to introduce sustainable business practices to employers. As stated by the NSW Department of Education and Training in 'Skills for Sustainability' ... *industry and enterprise leadership is required to develop innovative business culture and practice under new commercial and legislative imperatives, using new management skills to ensure that responses to environmental drivers are examples of best practice and will bring competitive advantage to business. Innovation refers to new ways of thinking about business models, production and processes and the delivery of excellence in new products and services.*

Sustainable business practice within the VET sector

Every business within the VET sector, whether training providers, training authorities, training advisory bodies or Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), can engage in sustainable business practices. For example, the NQC will develop appropriate standards as part of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) for voluntary certification of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as providers of Green Skills during 2009.

In order to practise what is preached, businesses within the VET sector need to set a good example and follow and promote sustainable business practices. As previously mentioned, this is about contextualising existing skills and changing behaviour. This can range from double sided printing to promoting carbon offset for industry conferences. Instead of handing out presentations, Service Skills Victoria handed out USB sticks at their Working with Workforce Development Forum. SSA reduced the number of hard copies of its annual Environmental Scan while providing pdf and online versions on its website. Projects like 'Leave the car at home!' from ACE (Western College/Dubbo) intend to educate managers and supervisors to analyse benefits of home-based work with the aim to increase the number of home-based workers and to significantly reduce the use of petrol and CO2 emissions.

Sustainable business practices within the service industries

The NSW Green Skills Strategy has identified retail and wholesale as one of nine priority industries. While the 'green jobs' sector is rapidly growing and has significant

⁵ NSW Green Skills Strategy Implementation Plan 2008-2010, draft for consultation July 2008

⁶ ABS 6291.0.55.003 Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, August 2008, table 6291.0.55.003 E15_AUG06 - Employed persons by Sex, Industry (ANZSIC06), State, Status in Employment

⁷ ABS 4441.0 Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006; table 18 Volunteering, Organisation type

potential, traditional industries have a large, established position within the NSW economy. Making them more environmentally friendly has the greatest immediate potential for reducing greenhouse emissions⁸. Besides developing environmental concept stores including energy efficient lighting and heating/cooling, the retail and wholesale industries have significant potential to provide a range of sustainable products and services, as well as advice on water and energy efficient products to consumers.

Project like 'Green Goods; from Byron Region Community College and 'EnviroSales (Homeware and Hardware)' from TAFE NSW, Northern Sydney Institute, aim to educate retailers and retail tutors about environmentally sustainable products, merchandise and services in order to increase consumer access to goods that are carbon neutral, waste and water reducing and energy saving. Consumers are looking for easy and practical ways to incorporate sustainable practices and products in their life, making sustainable options more affordable and available.

Offering sustainable products is used by many companies for marketing and promotion. As customers are taking greater consideration of where to shop and what to buy, presenting themselves as a sustainable business can be a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) to attract a new customer base and bond with existing ones.

In the hospitality sector, programs like Green Table and ec3 promote sustainable practices and are supporting companies to adapt sustainable solutions. This includes recycling of waste, energy saving through the use of special light bulbs and insulation, green purchasing by buying local, water reduction activities in relation to garden design and the use of efficient appliances, using special cleaning products and reducing laundry and grey water disposal, as well as changing stationery use (e.g. green printing and use of recycled paper)⁹. Currently, Green Tourism Skills, a project by SSA and Queensland Tourism Industry Council, is looking at how 'Green Skills' may be incorporated into the job outcomes for food and beverage workers, gaming operators, tour guides, cooks, front office and housekeeping workers, cellar operators, retail and wholesale travel workers and baristas.

These programs are also valuable as an information tool to inform employers and employees about existing possibilities from slight changes towards sustainable practises to becoming a green business. Business Events Australia promotes several sustainable programs and also uses the '6 Star Green Star' rating of the Melbourne Convention Centre as USP.

For the outdoor recreation sector, extreme weather events such as floods and bushfires and the loss of recreational area have had direct effects on businesses. The fitness sector has to face criticism that gyms are using too much energy and that a walk (or run) in the park is by far more sustainable. However, there are also examples of sustainable practices, such as gyms which are generating a significant portion of its own electricity through the sweat-producing efforts of its members¹⁰.

In the beauty sector, some operators are already using other options to replace baths as a way of saving water and hairdressers are using non-toxic products in their salons.

8 NSW Green Skills Strategy Implementation Plan 2008-2010, draft for consultation July 2008

9 Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, Environmentally sustainable practices of Victorian tourism enterprises, 2007

10 http://springwise.com/lifestyle_leisure/index.php?page=5

With consumers making more purchasing choices based upon sustainability issues, training in areas such as product knowledge, brand marketing and customer information will need to be enhanced and updated.

However, the trend towards sustainable and organic products also depends on the level of disposable income and living costs, as well as consumer confidence. Furthermore, even consumers with an attitudinal commitment towards sustainable products do not always purchase green alternatives. Price and product quality are still the key drivers for purchasing decisions¹¹. According to a study from oOh!media Group Ltd, around 83% of respondents were often influenced by price discounts and 63% said they usually stick to their regular brands¹². Hence, the additional cost for a sustainable product is still the main focus for customers and sustainable brands have to work harder to attract consumers away from their regular brands.

The project GreenSkills shows employees are also interested in the environmental impact of their employers. Apprentices and trainees are placed in business that either deliver sustainable products and services or are looking to minimise their own environmental impacts¹³. Current knowledge in sustainable processes can be a valuable asset when selling their services to customers.

Training packages

At this stage, environmental sustainability is included in the more recently reviewed training packages. SSA is committed to ensuring sustainable work practices is appropriately included in all training packages, which will be covered through upcoming continuous improvement (e.g. hairdressing). **The process of continuous improvement through its alliance with industry is well placed to keep the VET sector current with changes in technologies and to provide the flexibility to respond to evolving market conditions.**

Many of the sustainable skill requirements for the service industries relates to product knowledge, purchasing criteria and business practices as well as imparting sustainability onto customers.

Guideline sustainability units of competency are also available for packaging into SSA qualifications. These include:

- BSBSUS201A Participate in environmentally sustainable workplace practices
- BSBSUS301A Implement and monitor environmentally sustainable workplace practices
- SITXENV001A Participate in environmentally sustainable work practices
- SITXENV002A Implement and monitor environmentally sustainable work practices
- SITXENV003A Develop workplace policy and procedures for sustainability

¹¹ Palmer, 2008, The green revolution: are consumers buying it?

¹² Australian Centre for Retail Studies, Retail Insights, Edition 118, March 31, 2009

¹³ <http://www.wpcgroup.org.au/media/33392/greenskills%20flyer.pdf>

Floristry (SFL09):

- BSBSUS201A Participate in environmentally sustainable workplace practices
- BSBSUS301A Implement and monitor environmentally sustainable workplace practices

Sport, Fitness and Recreation (SIS09):

- SISOOPS201A Minimise environmental impact
- SISOOPS202A Use and maintain a temporary overnight site – embedded throughout unit
- SISOOPS304A Plan for minimal environmental impact
- SISOOPS506A Manage natural resources

The content of the sport, fitness, outdoor and community recreation workforce development strategy is currently being scoped and will include references to sustainable business practice and skills.

Tourism, Hospitality and Events (SIT07):

- SITXENV001A Participate in environmentally sustainable work practices
- SITXENV002A Implement and monitor environmentally sustainable work practices
- SITXENV003A Develop workplace policy and procedures for sustainability
- SITTPPD004A Plan and implement minimal impact operations
- SITTPPD006A Plan and develop ecologically sustainable tourism operations

Currently the tourism and hospitality workforce development strategy does not refer specifically to sustainability or green skills. However, the document has as focus area 4 'Focus on management and business skills' (under Priority Area 1: A highly skilled workforce). This is in line with the above mentioned need for business leadership, entrepreneurship and innovation skills.

Beauty (WRB04):

- SIBBSPA001A Work in a spa therapies framework – embedded throughout unit

Funeral (SIF06):

- SIFBGM006A Evaluate building and grounds maintenance and development needs – embedded throughout unit

Hairdressing (WRH06):

- Not explicit at this stage – to be addressed through continuous improvement

Retail (SIR07):

- Not explicit at this stage – to be addressed through continuous improvement

2. Which of the six options above do you think would add value and why? What other activities should be included?

Option 1 - the process of training package review and continuous improvement - identifies sustainability skills required by the workforce as mentioned above.

3. Should trainers and assessors in targeted industries and occupations like plumbing, air conditioning, construction and facility management participate in professional development relevant to skills for sustainability? Should these be mandatory to maintain current competency?

SSA believes that it is upon the industries to set standards and mandatory requirements for their professionals and that it is not within the scope of an ISC to regulate an industry.

4. What can be done to encourage ISCs and industry stakeholders to offer low-cost professional development for targeted groups of trainers and assessors who are delivering training and assessing in skills for sustainability programs?

SSA provides, as part of the implementation process for new training packages, professional development to training providers and assessors. This would also be the best process for sustainability skills.

5. What measures can be taken to reduce the duplication of the development of government-funded courses and units of competency relevant to sustainability? What can be done to share information amongst the appropriate agencies on the status of courses relevant to skills for sustainability?

In order to avoid duplication and inefficient use of resources, and as recommended in NQC's 'VET products for the 21st century', state accredited courses should be publicly available on the NTIS.