



GETTING ON TRACK FOR CHANGE:

A workforce development strategy for the sport and recreation industry

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Context: State of play

In response to the documents *Australian Sport: The pathway to success*¹ and *Australia: The healthiest country by 2020*,² Service Skills Australia has consulted with industry and drawn together a range of issues raised by these and other documents that affect the long-term outlook of the sport and recreation industry. These issues will need to be addressed in order to ensure that the sport and recreation workforce is adequately prepared to meet the challenges set for it by Australia and its governments. Incorporating concerns raised by the social inclusion, preventative health and mental health agendas, *Getting on Track for Change* compels industry leaders to co-operate, collaborate and champion the agenda of workforce development for sport and recreation.

Reflecting on recent transformations in the sport and recreation industry (as well as general workforce, social and consumer trends), *Getting on Track for Change (Getting on Track)* argues that workforce development—incorporating the key issues of leadership and improved support for volunteers—is the central avenue for adequately addressing and responding to the shifting landscape (as demonstrated in Appendix A). Without a clear co-ordinated approach to planning and developing the sport and recreation workforce, the industry may be challenged by the prospect of increased competition for skilled labour—for both *paid* employees and *unpaid* volunteers.

Match practice and planning

In preparation for *Getting on Track*, Service Skills Australia (as the national Industry Skills Council for sport and recreation) has undertaken a range of national consultations with industry across a number of projects including:

- Development of the 2009 and 2010 Environmental Scans, including research into the workforce planning needs of industry.³
- Continuous improvement of the industry's skills framework—national sport and recreation training package.
- Development of this document—*Getting on Track for Change: A workforce development strategy for the sport and recreation industry*.

Outlined below are structured discussions detailing:

- 1** the inevitable risks (if action is not taken)
- 2** the actions required to deliver meaningful change
- 3** the complications likely to arise from this process, and
- 4** the outcomes associated with true success.

Workforce planning and development is both the coach and the guide of the sport and recreation industry. This strategy does not seek to set sporting, recreation or health policy. Rather, it seeks to note the direction and provide advice to industry on the best way to develop and deploy the skills and labour required to achieve their goals, informed by a clear understanding of the nature of the workforce.

¹ Australian Government (2010) *Australian Sport: The pathway to success*.

² Australian Government (2009) *Australia: The healthiest country by 2020; National Preventative Health Strategy—The roadmap for action*.

³ This includes skills forecasting that Service Skills Australia commissioned the *Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET)* to undertake in June 2010 and research into the labour and skill needs of volunteers across the service industries—both forthcoming publications.

Target audience

In 2009,⁴ Sport, Fitness, Outdoor and Community Recreation defined themselves as industries that:

encompass [...] a range of people (paid and unpaid) and agencies for the express intention of providing services relating to participation in physical activity to enrich the lives of all Australians for the health and well being of the community.

Given the significant changes currently sweeping through these industries, the purpose of this document is to assist those employees (existing and potential) and organisations who identify with the need for “future proofing”. In making recommendations for the future of this workforce, Service Skills Australia (SSA) is aware of the development of a National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework and the implications that this will have on the workers and organisations.

Furthermore, SSA is aware of the divergent nature of these industries and the reality that—in spite of the educational policy definition of sport and recreation including sport, community recreation, outdoor recreation and the fitness industry—these industries, for the most part, do not identify as a collective. To that extent, this document speaks to those workers and agencies that are involved in the pursuit of engaging the Australian community in sport and active recreation and can include:

- Sporting organisations and agencies—including government policy makers, community and professional organisations
- Community recreation organisations and agencies
- Outdoor recreation organisations and agencies
- Fitness organisations including not-for-profits, agencies and private organisations.

⁴ Service Skills Australia (2009) *Sport, Fitness, Community and Outdoor Recreation: Environmental Scan 2009*, p.3.

Risks: Break point

Following on from the Independent Sport Panel's *The Future of Sport in Australia* ("the Crawford report"), the sport and recreation industry is at a crossroads. A lack of co-ordinated engagement between the sport and recreation and health agendas will risk maximising returns for the National Preventative Health Strategy. The consequences of a lack of a clear, co-ordinated approach to planning and developing the sport and recreation workforce will flow beyond the future of Australian sport and negatively affect our education system, our health system and our local communities.

Outcomes to avoid

- ✘ Sport and recreation will struggle to recruit (i.e. attract and secure) quality labour.
- ✘ The sizeable volunteer workforce currently available to sport and recreation will lack the support they need to fulfil their roles and potential, leading to attrition.
- ✘ The opportunities to engage a sizeable (and trained) workforce—capable of maximising wellness and developing healthy behaviour—will be lost.
- ✘ There will be a negative flow-on effect to the achievement of the industry's key performance indicators (KPIs) (e.g. participation and talent identification).
- ✘ Sport and recreation will struggle to retain quality labour and experience high volumes of staff turnover.
- ✘ True change will not occur and true success will not be achieved.

Without a clear co-ordinated approach to planning and developing the sport and recreation workforce, the industry may be challenged by the prospect of increased competition for skilled labour—for both paid employees and unpaid volunteers.

Complications: Hurdles to face

There are a range of obstacles to navigate if the sport and recreation industry is going to move to its next level of performance. The Crawford report clearly identifies a range of systemic barriers to success, including the predominance of organisations afflicted by short-term visions—a matter that is encouraged because of short-term funding arrangements.

Australian Sport, with its support of recurrent funding and KPI measurements for grassroots and elite level, shifts the perception of sporting organisations to the longer term. Meanwhile, the National Preventative Health Strategy (NPHS) recognises the role of fitness and recreation to achieve better health outcomes. To this extent, the NPHS articulates links between the health and recreation industries and reflects work already underway.

Other challenges that this Industry Skills Council (ISC) has identified include:

- A fragmented industry across state and federal boundaries—sharing common issues described in this paper, but lacking a common language and access to a system to deal with these issues. This ISC also noticed a lack of unity within the sporting sectors themselves—a disconnect between the elite and the grassroots, which *Australian Sport* has sought to correctly modify for the benefit of the industry.
- A cultural propensity to fear change—a lack of acknowledgement that the industry needs to change the way it develops and deploys labour across the paid and volunteer workforce.
- A lack of engagement by sport and recreation leadership in taking a strategic view of the development and deployment of skills as enablers to link the industry to preventative health policy.
- Poor linkages between the national workforce development system and industry, such as:
 - skilled sport and recreation educators and trainers to meet the future needs of industry,⁵ and
 - linkages between nationally-recognised vocational education and training (VET) certificates and sport-specific industry training.⁶

A clear set of strategies need to be developed in order to overcome these obstacles. On this front, Service Skills Australia is pleased to report there are ready examples across Australia of individuals and organisations addressing these barriers.

In short, it is the informed opinion of Service Skills Australia that the true road to success in the sport and recreation industry is paved with workforce development. As outlined by Appendix A, a strategic commitment to addressing issues of leadership and volunteer support as top priorities will undoubtedly provide immediate benefits for the sport and recreation industry while simultaneously contributing towards the overarching national goals.

⁵ As described in Service Skills Australia (2009) *The New Deal: Workforce development for service industries VET practitioners*.

⁶ Currently being addressed through a pilot project funded by NSW Department of Education and Training through the NSW Services Industry Training Advisory Body, *Pathways to Participation* seeks to map the linkages between the national VET system and the National Coaching and Officiating Schemes.

Actions: The plan of attack

Having produced a scoping paper for a workforce development strategy for the sport and recreation industry in October 2009 and conducted related consultations with key ministers and members of various National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) during the six months following its publication, Service Skills Australia has encountered two key areas to consider. These key areas—and their associated recommendations for action—continue to hold relevance in the current shifting landscape and are articulated once more in this document to provide additional clarity and direction for driving industry change.

Leadership

Overall, many of the current concerns in the sport and recreation industry could be responded to effectively if the industry committed to a united focus on developing leadership. If leadership was to be effectively planned for and addressed, this would ultimately strengthen the workforce and assist in responding to the following range of issues:

Industry needs to think more strategically about influencing the future direction of the sector and supporting better distribution of services across the country.

The ISC believes that the industry could leverage the opportunities that connect it to other sectors, which will contribute to the achievement of broader national outcomes. Following the demise of some of the broad-ranging national representative associations, strategic leadership of the sector as a whole—especially the case in the skills and labour market planning—is of increasing concern.

Better leadership, long-term thinking and planning to support better attraction and retention of labour (whether paid or unpaid). A key priority is the development of the capacity and capability of the sector's boards and directors.

Leadership skills require development at all levels (i.e. industry, sector, organisation, team and community). The workforce is diverse and has differing priorities and objectives, from the highly-commercial fitness sector to the not-for-profit community recreation sector. Industry has clearly articulated to SSA that the key cohorts are the directors and boards that oversee and strategically direct the firms within the industry. In short, effective governance of our organisations is seen as a critical driver to the sustainability of the Australian sport and recreation industry.

To support the emerging evolution of the industry, leaders who have the capacity to be change agents will be critical.

The industry is often viewed as having a charitable function rather than a commercial function that demands professional leadership. Of additional concern is that the types of organisations dominating in sport and recreation (e.g. micro-businesses) staunchly avoid adopting proactive management strategies.

Taking action: Getting on track for leadership

Unity

At the encouragement of industry, Service Skills Australia advocates that their Sport and Recreation Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) occupy the national position for strategic leadership in skills and labour issues for sport and recreation (with links to relevant state industry bodies with similar workforce development agendas). Given the extensive existing network embodied by the committee members—as well as the myriad contacts these representatives themselves are able to draw upon—the IAC is well-positioned to fulfil such an industry leadership and advocacy function on behalf of the sport and recreation industry.

Workforce planning

The skills and capabilities of sport and recreation organisations need to be supported and developed in order to:

- ensure the effective growth of participation at a grassroots level and high performance pathways
- address (in its entirety) the diverse range of groups that are targeted in the new policy framework provided by *Australian Sport* (including Indigenous Australians and people with disabilities) as well as manage their organisations to meet new KPIs, and
- address and engage in the goals set by the NPHS as a way of contributing significantly to the development of healthy Australian communities.

The sport and recreation workforce needs to reconsider its approaches to leadership, governance and management. In doing so, we must successfully promote the professional and commercial nature of the industry while simultaneously acknowledging the significant space held by not-for-profit organisations and members of the public who provide valuable voluntary labour.

Work to be done includes:

Undertake effective planning activity for both the paid and unpaid workforce in order to ascertain the exact needs and nature of the industry, both now and in the future. SSA is aware of the variety of work already undertaken in this area and recommends—as a first step—that this combined intellectual capital be brought together to identify what is clearly understood about the workforce and what gaps exist in our knowledge. SSA has already identified that there is a clear gap in the planning of the volunteer workforce in the sport and recreation industry and argues that this needs to be addressed as a priority.

Industry needs to develop its capacity and capability to identify, develop and deploy leadership talent.

As a priority, **develop the capacity and capability of the industry's boards** to ensure better decision making and governance of the organisations that they represent. This should occur across paid and unpaid directors with a priority placed on the skill and capacity of boards in grassroots organisations.

Undertake effective succession planning activities that build upon the already-existing diverse career pathways across the sport and recreation sectors. Also involved is identifying talent to be developed and promoted for the future sustainability of the industry.

Cultural change

The identification, development and channelling of talent needs to be underpinned by skilled leadership and governance across community/grassroots sport to higher levels. Feedback from the sport and recreation industry to SSA indicates that this is a crucial issue. It is critical for the successful implementation of reform in the sport and recreation industry—specifically for achieving economic and social gains at all levels and achieving the planned increased participation in sport and recreation.

To that effect, industry needs to develop its capacity and capability to identify, develop and deploy leadership.

Work to be done includes:

Clearly identifying leadership capability standards from grassroots business to board level. This can be accommodated through the national training standards (training package) and addressed in higher education via the proposed discipline standards currently being developed by the higher education sector.

Identifying best practice methodologies for developing leadership skills that are relevant to industry. Built on an appreciation of achieving the national standards, these can be used by industry to discuss the preferred approach to skill development with training providers. This can then be promoted and communicated to the education sector, who can support the change in the sport and recreation industry.

Undertaking effective succession planning. This can be commenced via a model career pathway that is built upon:

- an appreciation of industry's needs
- the future priorities of industry, and
- (if customisable) accommodating specific sector/business and jurisdictional needs.

Supporting training for volunteers

Service Skills Australia advocates that responsibilities for supporting the training of volunteers are split between industry and the vocational education and training (VET) system, with government taking a leadership role to set the scene and drive the agenda in partnership with industry. These three bodies have a joint role to flesh out and address this issue.

On this matter, proposed strategies on volunteer labour⁷ need to be conscious of the broader contribution that volunteering in sport and recreation has to the work and personal life of an unpaid worker, as well as to the nation as a whole. To that extent, such strategies should be 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-industry', and should speak to and engage in the broader workforce development agenda. Perhaps more importantly, these activities need to be in harmony to ensure that opportunities are maximised for the industry.

The attraction and retention of volunteers in sport is a critical issue. It is crucial that volunteers (i.e. unpaid labour) are supported by the education and training system. The SSA *Sport, Fitness, Outdoor and Community Recreation Environmental Scan 2010* recognises the contribution that volunteers can make to national productivity and, more importantly, the vital role that they play in sport and recreation. This ISC believes that public funding should be made available for the skill development of volunteers that is:

- cost effective
- delivered in an appropriate format, and
- relevant to an individual's volunteer duties.

SSA is pleased to note that there is already action on this across a number of jurisdictions⁸ and that the Productivity Places Program (PPP) policy allows for the funding of volunteer training.

⁷ SSA is aware of three such proposed frameworks with more to come: the National Compact for Volunteers, the Volunteering Australia volunteer strategy and the Australian Sports Commission volunteer strategy.

⁸ Victoria's Skills for Growth Program and NSW Productivity Places Program are such examples.

Taking Action: Getting on track for training volunteers

Access to better skills recognition

First and foremost, the awareness and availability of this process needs to be raised among both paid employees and (unpaid) volunteers. The fact remains that this process needs to be made more accessible to both workforce cohorts as the recognition of skills continues to be fraught with difficulty. From a workforce planning perspective, formal recognition of skills provides an opportunity for the industry to have a greater understanding of the skills available in the workforce for the future, and skill gaps to be more easily identified for future development.

Work to be done includes:

Harmonious links between sport and recreation industry-specific training programs and the national VET system.

Greater incentives for existing workers to access skills recognition, and

Greater simplification of skills recognition for the sport and recreation industry.

Skills recognition needs to be made more accessible to both workforce cohorts (paid and unpaid) as the recognition of skills continues to be fraught with difficulty.

Recruitment, retention and motivation of volunteers

Regardless of the organisation utilising volunteers, there is a desperate need for culture change in relation to the management of volunteers from both national and state/territory organisations. All evidence points towards changes in the patterns, behaviours and expectations of volunteers, and this now needs to be translated back into the business models of sport and recreation organisations.⁹ The ISC has received regular feedback from industry that raises concerns about the capacity and capability of managers to effectively recruit and retain their volunteers. The feedback from industry indicates that this is a priority to address.

Work to be done includes:

Ensure that the variety of volunteering strategies (currently under development) act in harmony with each other and that they seek to address the key issues of effective planning and development of the volunteer workforce and those managers/leaders that supervise and are responsible for their work. Moreover, these strategies should be measured on their effectiveness in delivering a more productive workforce that supports the attainment of the goals in the preventative health agenda and the next generation of sport industry.

Develop and target business development programs and measures that encourage volunteer-utilising organisations (VUOs) to adapt their business models to the emergent patterns and trends of volunteers. This point—clearly linked to the issue of leadership capability—needs to be supported by developing the leadership capability of VUOs.

Encourage volunteer utilising organisations to consult the *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-For-Profit Organisations* as compiled by Volunteering Australia.¹⁰

Training (and qualifying) one's volunteer workforce needs to be actively promoted to the volunteers themselves. In doing so, it is also important to promote career pathways in sport and recreation to volunteers and actively implement easy-to-use flexible learning mechanisms (e.g. online resources).

⁹ This issue is not simply limited to paid employees working in human resources and volunteer management—it applies to all employees.

¹⁰ See Volunteering Australia website:
http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s13_shopping/default.asp?nav_cat_id=8&nav_top_id=Shop3&dsb=11736

Strategic vision

This document proposes that the national goals will be supported when the workforce is demonstrating the following:

Leadership

A common strategic position for the sport and recreation workforce that aims to deliver (over the longer term) a workforce that can deliver outcomes for industry and the Australian economy. A tangible measure of this goal will be the number of stakeholders that the ISC engages with (formally or informally) to assist in the development of the industry's workforce.

Leadership standards and model programs are recognised for all levels in the sector and these programs support the mobility of both the paid and unpaid workforce in sport and recreation.

Greater numbers of organisations (and, in particular, their boards) recognising the value of investing in their leadership as a way of returning back to and developing their organisations.

Volunteers

Greater volume of volunteers moving into careers in sport and recreation.

The skills of a volunteer are recognised and transferable across both the paid and unpaid workforce.

The national education and training system supports and provides opportunities for the volunteer workforce.

Game plan

The national Industry Skills Council proposes this strategy and the issues it identifies as a priority for the sport and recreation industry. While Service Skills Australia recognises that there are other crucial issues for the sector, it is the informed view of the ISC that these other issues will best be addressed if the capability of the industry is geared towards:

- 1** better engagement
- 2** better strategic planning
- 3** better utilisation of its resources, and
- 4** better influence across its sector.

The nation has grand plans for this workforce. More can be realised if the workforce is more effectively co-ordinated and planned as well as better supported through the changes.

While there are many crucial issues for sport and recreation, it is the informed view of Service Skills Australia that these will best be addressed if the capability of the industry is geared to better leadership and utilisation of its (paid and unpaid) resources.

Service Skills Australia will continue to promote and distribute this document to gain industry support during 2010.

The ISC is conscious that the development of the sport and recreation workforce changes and evolves, and proposes that the goals and issues described in this document be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Appendix A

The Pathway to Change

“Towards an appropriately skilled, able and motivated workforce that contributes to the growth and development of a productive and sustainable industry.”





published by Service Skills Australia
2010
