



Chamber of Commerce
& Industry Queensland

Industry House
375 Wickham Terrace
Brisbane Qld 4000

T 07 3842 2244
F 07 3832 3195
info@cciq.com.au

Hotline 1300 138 470
Employer Assistance
Line 1300 135 822

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Mr Robin Shreeve
Chief Executive Officer
Skills Australia
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Shreeve,

As the State's peak business organisation, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the annual update of the Skilled Occupations List (SOL). CCIQ represents the interests of 25,000 businesses across Queensland, many of which operate in rural and regional areas where skill shortages are particularly acute. We recognise the vital importance of skilled migration to Australia's population and productivity agendas.

Skilled migration plays a major role in filling the gap created by declining growth in the workforce and contributes a larger proportion of persons of early working age to the nation's population. CCIQ anticipates that skills shortages will be prevalent throughout Australia over the coming decades as our population continues to age and as the competition for highly skilled labour intensifies in both domestic and international markets. As the natural population growth rate declines and new entrants to the workforce stagnates and even declines, overseas migration is likely to play an increasingly important role in expanding the nation's workforce.

Furthermore, as the Queensland economy recovers from the global economic downturn and recent natural disasters, skills and labour shortages are likely to re-emerge as a major constraint on business growth. CCIQ believes that as a critical component of the independent skilled migration program, the Skilled Occupations List (SOL) should ensure that the medium and long term skills needs of the business community, including in rural and remote areas, are addressed.

As previously communicated to Skills Australia through submissions during the development of the SOL, CCIQ has significant concerns about the methodology applied in determining occupations for inclusion. Furthermore, CCIQ is concerned that it does not adequately reflect the skills needs of Queensland's small and medium sized businesses and the needs of regional and remote areas.

Making a judgement on the relative value of particular occupations and skills to the Australian economy is a highly subjective process, made even more complex by the diverse and regional nature characterising Australian industry. Consequently CCIQ seriously questions this process and the impact it will have on Queensland businesses through an opportunity missed.

We are especially concerned about the potential impact on SMEs. Currently, over 95 per cent of Queensland businesses are regarded as small (employing less than twenty people), with a further four per cent classified as medium-sized (employing between twenty and two hundred people). CCIQ does not wish to see an outcome where SMEs are disadvantaged because the skill shortages they are faced with are not classified as being of "high economic value to Australia".

CCIQ is also concerned about the impact of the SOL on niche occupations and small industries that are already overlooked in Australia's migration programs. Some examples that CCIQ wishes to highlight include occupations within creative or emerging industries as well as occupations that are more specialised such as computer programmers or irrigation technicians. Although these occupations or industries may not be seen as providing high economic value to Australia, many are providing a significant contribution to Australia's competitive edge by enhancing Australia's productivity growth and innovative capacity.

Furthermore the SOL omits many professional "business" skill areas such as entrepreneurship, small business management; and commerce. These skills are vitally important to the growth of our economy and, with the aging population, are skills increasingly in shortage across all industries and regions.

During consultation, CCIQ encouraged Skills Australia to take a broader approach to the development of the SOL and recognise that independent skilled migration plays an equally important role in meeting the current and future skills needs of industry. Additionally, independent skilled migration supplements other migration programs such as the 'Employer Sponsored' and '457 Visas'. CCIQ believes that there must be flexibility built into the system to ensure unforeseen shortages can be appropriately addressed in a timely manner, including those shortages experienced by SMEs, regional communities and small productive industries.

I trust that the Chamber's comments will be of assistance. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this response, please do not hesitate to contact me or Elizabeth Roberts, Education and Training Policy Advisor on (07) 3842 2227.

Yours sincerely



Nick Behrens
General Manager, Advocacy
Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland