

# Industry Training and Career Path development

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## INTRODUCTION

I have been involved in delivering and developing educational program for over 18 years. My current role is as manager teaching and Learning at Ryde TAFE and I'm tasked with ensuring the integrity of courses across the college to meet the needs of industry and comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework. Judy Bates is Head Teacher of Landscape Construction at Ryde TAFE. Part of Judy's role is to ensure that there is appropriate training at all identified levels and there are education opportunities in place for all members of the landscape construction industry including entry level training through to professional development training using industry specific skill sets.

The Landscape Construction industry is unique. No other industry sector embraces both hardscape and softscape competencies. Let's look at some history to establish why we are where we are currently and where we are headed in the future.

## TRAINING OVERVIEW

In the late 1990's a national standard for education and training was established with the introduction into the primary industries/ horticulture area called the Training Package. While I am sure most of you have heard about Training Packages, I am sure many of you have been confused about what they actually are, their intent and why they are in place. It may appear to some that the training that your apprentices now have is different to that you had. This is especially the case in areas such as Botany, plants and soils.

### *Pre training packages*

Let me go back a little further to pre Training Packages

The qualifications were more general with all students who entered training basically doing the same course until the final year when they specialise in their particular area of employment. There were 3 levels of training:

1. the Trades area which trained apprentices in all the horticulture areas including landscape construction, turf and nursery – this is loosely equivalent to the current Certificate III.

2. the Advanced Certificate – higher level, which was equivalent to Certificate IV and included all the subject areas of the Trades qualifications but at a higher level, however, it was a general qualification with some electives in the final year of study.
3. Diploma – higher again.

These courses were NSW specific. Each State or territory was responsible for the development, implementation and management of courses with validation from industry to ensure courses meet their training needs

### *Training packages*

Then Training Packages were introduced into the Primary Industries area. The development started in about 1995 and the first training package was labelled as RUH98 and replaced the previous qualifications in NSW TAFE's and private RTO's in about 1999. The phase-in was a difficult labour and the progeny was ugly.... This RUH training package was reviewed and gave rise to separate RTC, RTD, RTE, RTF training packages (you will not be tested on this at the end – just a potted history lesson). These have all been hauled back together and the latest training package is AHC (Agriculture, Horticulture, and Conservation) which has just been endorsed. I will come back to this later.

This development was an interesting process and as part of the introduction of the Horticulture training package, the industry was now defined according to industry sectors. In the past there had been the Horticulture Industry which consisted of many sectors, with the training being fairly generalised and even generic. In this new training package, the industry sectors were identified such as landscape construction, parks and gardens, arboriculture, turf, nursery and the training was aligned to each of the industry sectors. The specific training for the Landscape Construction industry was born! Specific Landscape Construction qualifications now exist.

### *So – what are training packages?*

A definition of :

[A Training Package is a set of nationally endorsed standards](#) (Unit of Competence) [and qualifications](#) (based on qualification guidelines) [used to recognise and assess the skills and knowledge people need to perform effectively in the workplace.](#)

What one employer thinks is important in the workplace, may not be the same as another person especially where their core business is different, so while we have a named qualification, it can (up until the AHC implementation) be made up of different Units of Competence.

So now we had in place training that was National – so if you were trained in NSW, that training would (theoretically) be the same as the training in Tasmania, Victoria, etc. However, this has not been the case and has causes some issues especially when students/ employees transfer from one State to another or even one employer to another.

**A Training Package states what competencies need to be achieved but does not prescribe how an individual should be trained.**

The competencies are contained in a Unit of Competence and state what the individual is ABLE TO DO once the outcomes have been achieved.

So taking a Unit from the Landscape Construction qualification such as Implement a Paving Project which states that once finished you are able to:

- 1. Prepare for paving project**
- 2. Set out and prepare the site**
- 3. Co-ordinate paving project installation**
- 4. Check quality of work and clean up site**

The interpretation of this can take many directions and while there is some clarification in the Range of variables and the Skills and Knowledge components, this Unit is still delivered in many different ways and at many different levels.

So, as educators, we are told what needs to be delivered but not necessarily how to do it. You are probably thinking, well, this is your job – and I agree. However, my interpretation of a Unit of Competence may be different to your interpretation or someone with a different background.

We need National Industry Guidelines which state the minimum required and exactly what everyone needs to be able to do. We need each Unit to be defined further with guidelines as to the expected industry outcomes.

**It is the responsibility of the RTO, through its trainers, to develop teaching strategies and assessment methods to meet the needs, abilities and circumstances of learners.**

This is a great outcome but it also allows for many interpretations, this industry is striving for a consistency of training and a minimum standard to be achieved but we do have to cater for the differing needs and abilities of our students (and your employees).

### *What is the purpose of training packages?*

The intent of training packages is to

- enable qualifications to be awarded through the direct assessment of competencies
- encourage the development and delivery of training to suit individual needs
- encourage learning in a workplace environment
- provide a pool of potential employees who meet nationally recognised standards of competence in a particular area.

### *What are the benefits of training packages?*

- Training meets the needs and requirements of industry and standards set by industry.
- Qualifications are consistent and nationally recognised, making it easier for students to move between states and territories and for employers to hire people who have worked for other companies or moved from interstate.
- Students and employees have the flexibility to choose how, when and where the training is undertaken.
- Individuals and businesses are assured of the quality of training and qualifications in areas that specifically suit the needs of the enterprise.

**Training packages are developed by Industry Skills Councils or by enterprises to meet the training needs of an industry or group of industries. Training packages prescribe outcomes required by the workplace, not training or education.**

The bottom line is that these Training Packages have been developed by you, by the industry at a national level. For better or worse, as Registered Training Organisations we have to work with the documents that you, as an industry developed. We need to work together to ensure the interpretation of these TP's is consistent across the Nation.

In early iterations of the Horticulture Training Packages RTO's were not included in the development. Happily this has changed and in the latest TP there has been a more inclusive approach taken

## QUALIFICATIONS – since 2004

I am often asked why there is so much discrepancy in training in the Landscape Construction industry.

Without going into too much detail, the base qualification for Landscape Construction is CIII. In the current Training Package, this qualification has 16 Units for completion of which 8 are core units – that is, you cannot qualify for this CIII unless you have these 8 Units plus 8 other Units. It is these 8 other Units that have brought about a huge inconsistency in training at both State and National level.

It means that currently you can achieve a CIII qualification without doing any plants or soils Units, you can have Units such as *Use hand-held e-business tools* towards a CIII qualification - it is a great Unit but would have to question counting this Unit towards the completion of a qualification at the expense of a Units such as *Implement a Retaining Wall Project* or a Plants or Soils Unit.

In NSW we are 'lucky' in that we have a strong and healthy apprenticeship system – this requires training of 3 years and has allowed us to embed the CII program (with all the underpinning skills and knowledge) into the CIII qualification. So in fact, in TAFE NSW, the apprentices are trained over three years and have to complete a minimum of 31 Units (15 Units from CII and 16 Units from CIII).

The name of this qualification in NSW (and I am not sure that this is the same Nationally) is CIII Horticulture (Landscape).

## QUALIFICATIONS – from 2011

Yes, we have a new Training Package – AHC and with it comes a new set of qualifications. For the Landscape Construction industry there have been three major changes:

1. Qualifications
  - a. There is a specific qualification at Level II – CII in Landscape Construction
  - b. The name of the qualification has changed from CIII Horticulture (Landscape) to CIII in Landscape Construction.
2. A process of continuous improvement has been implemented. This will result in more stability in qualification as TP will not be reviewed and changed every 5 years but modified on a quality improvement basis
3. While the number of Units for completion has dropped from 16 to 15, 12 of these 15 are core Units compared to the existing qualification where there are 8 core Units. That is pretty amazing as the trend is to have qualifications as generic as possible to allow for RTO's to meet the individual needs, abilities and circumstances of learners and employers.

Qualifications from training packages are supposed to be flexible enough that the industry can cope with all the different cohorts and their requirements. This industry has pulled together and said – we want everyone to have the same skills within the qualification Australia wide. This is amazing and is due to the hard work by Landscaping Australia and the dogged persistence of Steve Simpson.

The implications are that the course structure will be more consistent at both State and National level, but that does not mean we can rest on our laurels. All RTO's must work with your industry to determine their specific requirements; we must be vigilant to ensure that we embrace new technology, new industry practices and products. So, like all careers, we as educators also have a responsibility to stay current, to be abreast of the changes, to ensure that we are delivering current industry practice.

# LANDSCAPING MY CAREER

The landscape industry is going through considerable change as we move towards 2020. In particular the generational change, the need to enlighten the public on the need of education and training for our landscapers in best practice programs such as quality and accreditation, communication and technology methodologies surrounding equipment, designs, tendering and quoting awareness to name a few.

Landscaping Australia surveyed the Australian landscape industry in 2010 and identified 13,000 businesses and close to 200,000 employees.

In New South Wales alone there are 4252 Landscaping businesses employing over 70,000 people. The industry has a high number of certificate (apprentices/tradespersons) and diploma and associate diploma level employees. There are a high number of industry personnel with degrees held within the industry nationally, usually at the owner or senior manager level.

There are also many businesses where the owner has not undertaken any formal training.

In the 2010 the National Landscape Industry survey indicated that New South Wales had 35% of its employees with no formal qualifications within the landscape contracting community. Surprisingly 54% had different levels of certificates in horticulture or other related disciplines. 11% held diplomas or degrees various disciplines and were usually the owners of the business. Unqualified and untrained contractors were cited as the main issue with regard to professionalism, quality and business sustainability. The professional landscape contractor is required by legislation to hold a number of licences within the construction industry. Education, training, awareness and career path identification to assist with sustainability and retention policies are extremely important due to the level of training required to meet the licensing criteria.

Because there is a Structural Landscape Licence in NSW which is overseen by Office of Fair Trading, when these unqualified operators realise they are supposed to be licensed they go to OFT, fill out the form and then their application is rejected.

Why, is it rejected?. In order to apply for the Structural Landscape Licence in NSW, you need to have CIII Horticulture (Landscape) as the qualification. So, these people approach TAFE/ RTO's when they find they need a licence to continue operating to find out how quickly they can get the qualification – "been in the industry 5 years!" Some trade for many years and are very successful but when they are 'found out' they come to us for the quick fix.

One recent example was a guy who had a structural landscape for 18 years, he was 'found out'. Interestingly, the client reported him to OFT, not because his work was shoddy, but because the client had asked for a more detailed invoice and he had not supplied it. The OFT advised that he must stop trading as a structural landscaper until he had a licence, even though the quality of his workmanship was not in questioned.

So, how do we deal with this person and others like him whose livelihood is at stake? With this guy he had to undertake a trade test – 8 hours to perform tasks such as timber work, bricklaying, setting-out, concrete, stonework. He also had to do a plant identification test as well as present evidence for a range of other tasks that he would be expected to be able to do to allow us to be satisfied that he was competent at the skills that the NSW Landscape Construction industry have stated they require for a qualification.

In fact this is our standard approach to all the people we get who are trading 'illegally' and want a qualification to get a licence. Some get through easily, others don't and have to attend classes – each person is different.

Given the results of the Landscaping Australia survey and the issues that arose from the results of this survey, LA, decided to apply for funding from the Skills Enhancement Program - Developing Skills for Success and the idea of *LANDSCAPING MY CAREER* was developed. Jim Vaughan and Steve Simpson along with Judy Bates from Ryde TAFE put in an application which is still being processed but we are very confident that the funding will become available soon.

***What is the aim of the project and who will benefit?***

The Objectives of this project are to:

- A. Develop awareness, educational and promotional products (both hard and electronic) suitable to attract new entrants to Landscaping Industry.
- B. Promote the Landscape Industry as a career of choice.
- C. Assist landscape businesses with their retention rates to maintain consistency, business sustainability and lower costs.
- D. Promote career path development and succession planning for business growth and sustainability.
- E. Target ongoing sustainability and growth of the Landscape Construction Industry.

Currently, the professional landscaper suffers from a perceived lack of recognized career path across the industry. With the implementation of the new AHC Training Package in 2011 (with Agrifoods being the Industry Skills Council), now is the time to advise the industry and all other

interested parties that there is a career path available with the education infrastructure to support it.

*Landscaping My Career* will focus on:

1. Attracting Staff - to assist employers to attract staff and employ apprentices,
2. Retaining staff (and support retention strategies) and assist the sustainability of the landscape industry in general.
3. Developing an industry specific career path. Availability of trained staff across the industry is limited due to the lack of information regarding a career path. This does not encourage employees to stay within the industry, the result being that they move to other industries.

## ATTRACTING STAFF

This area is probably the biggest hurdle the landscaping industry needs to cross and the identification of processes and programs surrounding attraction needs to be thought through by the industry in depth as we have considerable competition from other industries. Marketing and awareness can assist to make landscape construction the industry of choice.

From an education perspective, this is as critical for us as it is for the industry. It is far easier to motivate and educate the right people, the people who want to make landscape construction their career, not because it was the only job they could get and are on the look out for something better.

Because we are attracting Generation Y (who in reality will change careers several times during their working life), we need to have an established career path linked to education and training that supports this career path. They need to see that there are places to go once the initial training is complete.

Starting with the right staff, providing the appropriate skills training, and ensuring all staff feel valued and respected are the foundations for a long term partnership between managers and staff.

## RETAINING STAFF

Employee retention matters. Organizational issues such as training time and investment, lost knowledge, insecure co-workers and a costly candidate search aside, failing to retain a key employee is costly.

Most landscape companies do not seem to have retention strategies within their business plan. When employees have been interviewed in various surveys they stated that it is not just money that maintains their employment with the company (company/employer of choice). Many are looking for future development through training in different directions within the company and the ability to advance and earn more money as they grow with the business.

The landscape industry is in competition with other industries such as mining and building and construction that may offer higher rates of pay so the landscape industry needs to step up to the plate and provide their employees with benefits and challenges that can match this competition. These benefits and attractions can be in non monetary form of motivation, it is amazing what a support a word encouragement can do. The issue is that the landscape contracting company management needs to develop these retention strategies and utilise them - it is their responsibility.

So where does education fit in the retention of staff? Based on the NSW system where the Apprenticeship is the starting point for many in the industry, they have to do the CIII course. Considering that many of the people who start an apprenticeship have left school and have NOT gone to university because they are either not academically inclined or they are not interested in higher education, they head off to TAFE thinking that it will be OK because it is a TAFE course. It is not higher education and it can't be that hard because it is related to what I am doing at work every day. This is such a challenge for some that they leave before they have a chance to settle in – this course is challenging, there is a lot to learn, retain, and practice.

Once an apprentice finishes his training – what next?

It is really difficult to encourage our graduates to continue with their studies. They have already given 3 years of their life!!

While there are many post trade training opportunities, I am the first to admit, that these can be better promoted/ marketed.

So, we have to work with industry to develop appropriate training programs (CPD), perhaps putting them together as Skills Sets that build to a higher qualification.

We also have to be cognisant of the fact that many of the apprentices we attract, have come into this industry because they are good with their hands, did not enjoy school very much, and 3 years of training is about as much as they are able to do.

As you know, apprentices get a day a week to attend TAFE and that 'day-off' disappears when they complete the 3 years of training. They are very reluctant to attend at night, their bosses are reluctant to give them more work time off, and so what can we do?

We need to have in place Skills Sets to continue the education but these need to be short, sharp training. It can be in-house training, it can be short courses that build to a higher qualification or the employer can provide incentives for further education in terms of time off, reimbursement of fees, etc.

When an employee is starting to get restless, we have to look at what is causing this. In my experience, the factors most affecting employee retention, are tools, time and training. The employee must have the tools, the time and the training necessary to do their job well – or they will move to an employer who provides them.

Your best employees, and those who you want to retain, will seek frequent opportunities to learn and grow in their careers. Without the chance to try new opportunities, feel they are part of the decision making process, attend industry seminars and be challenged professionally they feel they will stagnate. A career-oriented, valued employee must experience growth opportunities within your organization.

As we move towards 2020 one of the main responsibilities of the employer is to ensure they keep the trained employees they have invested so much time and effort to become a useful and valuable member of the team.

## CAREER PATH DEVELOPMENT

From our National Qualifications we have the qualifications that allow a career path such as:

CII in Landscape Construction → CIII in Landscape Construction → CIV Landscaping → Diploma Landscape Design.

Employees do want a planned, dedicated career path in front of them that can show a result at the end of a time period. Many landscape companies talk about career path development but in the day to day operations and the pressures that are applied, these career paths are not developed resulting in a disappointed employee who may look elsewhere.

### Career Paths

Many of the people in this room have been in this industry all their working life, some for most of it, while for others it may be their 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> industry move.

The traditional view of careers is linear, static and rigid, this is the model that many of us who have been in the industry for many years have worked with.

The nature and notion of traditional careers was based on hierarchical, highly structured, and rigid structures. Past career models had a clear, uni-dimensional or linear direction of prescribed “advancement” or, otherwise known as, promotion.

The organizational hierarchy was the ladder to climb on. As a result, career success was evaluated via the rate of upward mobility and external indicators of achievement such as salary and social status. Stability of structure and clarity of career ladders implied clear career paths, which were mostly “linear”.

In contrast, by the end of the twentieth century, the nature and notion of careers has been altered significantly. Careers have become transitional, flexible, and the dynamics of the restructuring blur the tidy and former routes for success, whatever success may be! We are now dealing with employees who experience different ways of defining career success - it can be a sideways move, change of direction, of organization, of aspiration.

People can (or have to) choose across these options, and there is no single way for reaching success, hence the term “multi-directional” career paths. This does not stop in the actual career path undertaken, but also correlates to the evaluation of career success and we now have multi-options criteria for assessing success in career. These can be inner satisfaction, life balance, autonomy and freedom, and other measures of self perception. All these have entered the formula, alongside the traditional external measures of income, rank and status.

So what is happening is that those of us who have followed the linear career path (perhaps with the odd deviation) are trying to put in place a career path that, if following on what we believe to be the way to go, is no longer appropriate for the generation that we are employing, educating and training.

While we need to have a basic linear path in place, we need to have options for those entering this path from a side street – we need reliable RPL processes in place, we need different options for delivery such as workplace training and assessment, we need flexibility in our approach without compromising the training in any way. I firmly believe that the traditional Apprenticeship type system of 3 years of training sets up a good base for further study. Even if the employee decides to move in a different direction and possibly completely out of the industry, at least we have given them some skills that will assist them through their working life. I know this is little consolation to the employer who has funded this process.

# SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THE INDUSTRY AND EDUCATORS HAVE IN COMMON

## Generational Change

As we look around, many companies across all industries are losing the senior members of the company (baby boomers) because they are retiring. In some instances family members such as the sons or daughters are taking over the management and day to day running of the business.

Hopefully these people have been through the landscape trade and trained correctly, but this is not always the case – they may well bring other non landscaping skills to the Company such as management, HR and rely on the employment of the right people to do the landscape construction work. This generational change in most cases is the loss of the person that set the business up in the first place and has all the development and operational history.

From an educational perspective, we are facing the same challenges. Attracting teaching staff who have the competencies and the ability to educate is difficult – at Ryde in 2009 we advertised for Full-time teacher, received only a few applications and not one of the applicant passed the trade test. On a positive note, we have some excellent part-time teachers who are doing ‘their apprenticeship’ and in the fullness of time will become excellent full-time teachers.

As we move towards 2020 this generational change has to be planned and staged to ensure a seamless transition for continuity and sustainability of the business. This is a big challenge facing our industry.

We are also dealing with Generation Y and there are many studies around about this group. But the reality is that we are dealing with them, we need to get to know them.

## Communication Change

Surely this is one of the biggest challenges within any industry today, to maintain awareness of new innovations and technologies that may relate to your business. We also need to ensure the education and training of the younger generations coming through the business can benefit the company.

There are many areas where traditional communication has been replaced with technology for skills such as quoting, tendering, costing, design, productivity, marketing and awareness as well as internal accounting and management efficiencies and operational processes. Business

now is done in real time with high levels of competition that stretch margins. New technologies and productivity improvements can improve those margins. The advent of things such as the social networks with Twitter, Facebook, U-Tube and a raft of others, that change daily is changing the way we operate and attract custom in a professional way. This in itself is a new career path opportunity within the landscape industry.

It also challenges the traditional teaching/ delivery techniques; we can no longer use the 'chalk and talk' techniques because we lose the students – they are used to being stimulated, used to doing several things at once. We have to integrate these communication techniques to deliver the training, this presents its own set of problems with teaching staff, resources, etc. Having said this, there are still many of the TAFE students who do not have regular access to a computer or cannot use a computer to research information.

## CONCLUSION

The Landscape contracting community is only just commencing to develop awareness of the availability of structured education and training programs. Promotion and awareness will be instrumental in achieving acknowledgement from the wider community including school leavers of a valuable career path in landscape contracting.

Let us work together at a National level to implement training programs that will attract the right people, will be so interesting and exciting that these fabulous young people will want to make landscaping their career and have the structures in place that allows them to follow a pathway that is full of opportunities and rewards.