

To Whom It May Concern

I recently attended an excellent workshop in Sydney discussing the National Skill Taxonomy, and I believe many good ideas eventuated from the group.

The group I was with included four university employees, all academic and all spoke intellectually and knowledgeably.

However, my environment provided a diverse interpretation to the others.

There has been a glaring faux pas on the current Jobs and Skills Shortage List, which I need to address in this submission.

The group had differing views on the potential workings of the National Skills Taxonomy, and it appears that you will not be able to please everyone, however many were on the same page.

I understand that many jobs are evolving, interoperable and evolutionary, and we require flexibility on the role and integrating a road national framework.

However, there are jobs that have remained the same for twenty years or longer and essentially will continue that way for the future. Hairdressers and barbers may have had slight changes to their jobs, but fundamentally it's the same job as before.

The Horse Racing Industry

My role is CEO of the NSW Jockeys Association, I represent and advocate for the interest, health and safety of professional jockeys.

There are many roles incorporated in the racing industry, which employs over 50,000 people nationally. These include: trainers, farriers; veterinarians; breeders; jockeys; stable hands; stewards; trackwork jockeys; barrier attendants administration staff; equine dentist and so on.

Nearly all of these roles have remained the same for many years, there has been changes administratively, and the way stewards review races but all the other roles are basically the same as they were 20 years ago.

The core role of a jockey is to ride a racehorse, and obtain the best finishing position possible. They are professional athletes, requiring a combination of professional skill, mental acuity, and a deep understanding of horse behaviour. Strategy, and tactics on race day, with preparation prior to competition, including studying the form, training and wasting (losing weight)

To be a jockey, one needs to be licenced by each states regulatory body, eg Racing NSW or Racing Queensland. Interstate jockeys can apply for a visiting licence if they ride outside their residing state.

Apprentice jockeys undertake a four-year apprenticeship, to become a professional jockey. They ride trackwork six days per week and ride a few afternoons each week in races.

Seventy percent of our apprentice jockeys in NSW are female.

The basic role of a jockey hasn't changed in one hundred years. It involves a blend of athleticism, quick thinking, strategy and much preparation. The extra media requirements has evolved but that is a side role of being a jockey.

Similarly, the status quo has remained with roles of stable hands, barrier attendants; farriers; trackwork riders etc.

RECOMMENDATION

That for core “fixed” roles such as a jockey, that the National Skill Taxonomy have a classification for jobs that fundamentally will remain the same for many years to come.

A separate classification for the fluid jobs, those emerging jobs in society which are constantly changing and growing.

GROWTH

I quote two paragraphs from the “Discussion Paper”

“Australia’s labour market is under strain. A period of unprecedented growth has resulted in record levels of participation and low unemployment. However, this has not come without challenges. Occupational shortages are entrenched and growing while productivity remains flat, with productivity growth over the decade to 2020 the slowest in 60 years”.

“Operating at this level of employment requires a system that is sufficiently agile and responsive to adapt quickly and efficiently to changing skill and labour needs as opportunities to meet need through increased participation. To achieve this, individuals, unions, employers, and educators must all be aligned in their understanding of what is needed, in what quantities, and when. This can be challenging to achieve”

Unlike many other industries that are experience “growth”, horse racing does not. In fact we have less horses racing today than we did ten years ago. This is based on the number of races held, and number of starters through the year.

With growth in population, we need more hairdressers. Contrary, horse racing is declining, so we don’t need more jockeys. We have an oversupply of apprentice jockeys and an over supply of jockeys.

CLEAR DEFINITIONS BETWEEN ROLES

Not many in our discussion group worked in an industry where the roles of employees were not evolving, nor was the growth.

This is where I brought a different exchange of ideas to the group.

Very few could explain the difference between a jockey and a trackwork jockey (trackwork rider)

There is where it's incumbent in the National Skills Taxonomy to differentiate between the skills, and comprehensively and effectively define roles.

A trackwork rider is not a professional jockey. The trackwork rider works in the mornings, training and galloping the horse to obtain peak fitness. They do not ride competitively, they are not professional athletes, they are not preparing for race day. Using football analogy, they are the trainers, not the footballers who run onto the field and compete against the other team.

Trackwork riders are in high demand, because it tends to be a job that people will generally undertake for a couple of years. Many overseas riders come out to Australia to be a trackwork rider. There is always a need for a trackwork rider and this role should nearly always remain on the "shortage list".

However, we believe there has possibly been an honest mistake from within Jobs and Skills Australia in classifying the two jobs (trackwork rider & jockey) together.

We say this because the current shortage list from JSA has NSW and Queensland as having a "jockey shortage", though there was no shortage in previous years apart from Queensland regional.

FACTS

I converse with my Queensland colleague regularly and they have had horses scratched (not run) due to no jockeys being available, and this has only occurred in far outback Queensland.

However, in NSW we haven't had any horse scratched due to a shortage of jockeys. This is important.

In NSW we have 52,000 horse starters each year, so jockeys (including apprentice jockeys) have 52,000 rides. This is a foolproof barometer on determining if there is a shortage of jockeys. Hypothetically, there are 52,000 bus trips around the Newcastle area in 2023, and not one bus was cancelled due to a lack of bus drivers.

Imagine over a ten year period, there were 520,000 bus trips around the Newcastle area and not one route was cancelled due to the unavailability of a bus driver. Surely, we wouldn't have a shortage of bus drivers in Newcastle, would we?

This is exactly the scenario with horse racing in NSW. Over the past 10 years 520,000 horse running around the racetrack, each of them ridden by a professional jockey. Not one horse has been scratched (not run) due to a lack of jockeys.

In actual fact, we have too many jockeys in NSW. Jockeys who travel long distances to the race meeting, would once have three or four rides per meeting. Because we have so many jockeys, these same jockeys are travelling far distances for one or two rides. Effectively taking a pay cut because of the excess number of jockeys in NSW.

We also have the crazy adoption of letting professional jockeys come here, mainly from Ireland, and the UK, to ride in our races for two to three months for a working holiday then return home.

Unlike the bus drivers who are employees, professional jockeys are self-employed. They are not on a regular wage. Therefore, the additional overseas jockeys who ride in NSW, are effectively cutting into the earning capacity of our local jockeys, of which we already have an excess.

SUMMARY

Could the National Skill Taxonomy please consider clearly and comprehensively defining each job, especially those jobs that are classified as Core or Fixed.

Could the National Skill Taxonomy please consult with industry prior to finalising the shortage & non shortage list. The “mistake” with noting jockeys are on the “shortage” list in NSW may have eventuated because you conversed with the regulatory body (Racing NSW) but not the NSW Jockeys Association.

Finally, could the National Skills Taxonomy relay a message to Jobs and Skills Australia to urgently remove NSW from the shortage list of “jockeys”

Thanks you, should you require any further input please feel free to contact me anytime.