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Dear Coordinator

Youth Jobs PaTH – Employability Skills Training consultation

We refer to the Department's consultation concerning the design of the Australian Government's Youth Jobs PaTH (Prepare – Trial – Hire) program. NSW Business Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on this important initiative.

The NSW Business Chamber is one of Australia's largest business support groups and is the peak business group in New South Wales. We have a deep involvement and long history in the areas of youth engagement, both through our commercial interests in apprenticeships and through our advocacy efforts concerning workforce skills policy. Our Apprenticeship Support Australia business has successfully partnered with more than 80,000 businesses across NSW and ACT and signed up more than 450,000 apprentices and trainees since 1998.

The principal focus of our advocacy efforts has been to improve outcomes for the 70% of young people who do not proceed to university after school. As a result, we have long championed the adoption of programs that adequately prepare and train this cohort of young people for the world of work. An essential component of this preparation is the provision of the foundation 'employability' skills.

As a result, the NSW Business Chamber strongly supports the Youth Jobs PaTH initiative and is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to its design and delivery.

We support the positions outlined in the submission made by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Our contribution to the review is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of the Australian Chamber.

Our response is structured in line with the discussion guide provided by the Department. Where our commentary links to a specific question we have made this apparent. We have, however, additional comments concerning some features of each stage of the proposed design of the program. Where this is the case, our feedback is described as 'general commentary'.

We make our observations based on our experience in delivering apprenticeships; brokering apprenticeship arrangements with employers; the intelligence we gather

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from our membership base of more than 19,000 businesses; and our involvement in various initiatives looking to solve the problem of youth unemployment.

General commentary – Matching to job

Research performed by the Chamber indicates high quality careers advice and guidance is vital to support young people make the best decisions about education and employment. This is especially critical for the cohort of young people who are at risk of being disengaged from work or training: that is, the target group for the Youth Jobs PaTH initiative.

We recommend that participants in Youth Jobs PaTH are required to undertake a thorough assessment of their skills, capabilities and interests as part of the initial block of employability training.

The most feasible way of delivering this matching exercise is via online (digital) means. The Chamber's SkillsRoad website (see www.skillsroad.com.au), for example, provides an end to end careers solution via an online platform. This includes a thorough assessment of a job seeker's personalities, interests and capabilities which is then matched with potential opportunities.

The Chamber recommends the Department consider instituting a similar model which would match the young person's capabilities, interests and personality to potential internship opportunities. This will:

- provide the participant with more assurance about their capabilities, skills and ability to add value to the workplace; and
- reduce the risk of a young person being matched to an opportunity which they may be less likely to sustain a commitment to

As recommended by the Australian Chamber, Youth Jobs PaTH should also provide participants with a clearly delineated path to an apprenticeship or traineeship. The skills and capability assessment should outline the potential apprenticeship and traineeship pathways that the internship options might lead to.

General commentary – providers

As outlined in the Australian Chamber's submission, the role of non-Job Active involved employers in identifying host opportunities should be encouraged. Where this occurs, the hosted outcome fee should be shared.

We also suggest that the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) should be leveraged to identify potential host opportunities and match young people to the opportunities that best match their capabilities and interests. The AASN has extensive reach and connection with business: for example, the Chamber has worked with more

than 80,000 businesses through its Apprenticeship Support operation over the past two decades.

Question 4 – Access

The Chamber notes with some concern the suggestion of mandatory face to face training (with a minimum 25 contact hours) for participants in the program. In our view, this would create barriers to entry for disengaged young people in rural and remote areas, who may have to traverse significant distances to access a TAFE or RTO site.

We suggest the design of the PaTH program should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate multiple modes of training delivery. Participants could, for example, complete part of their training online or (if live contact with a teacher is necessary) via webinar facilities.

This should always be an option for the course components relating to job searching, interview preparation and skills which are foundation in nature, and not vocational.

Question 5 – Limits on access

From a budgetary perspective, it would be reasonable to place a cap on the number of times a job seeker participates in the training. The Chamber suggests that job seekers who fail to proceed to an internship upon completion of their employability training blocks should have their employability skills assessed.

No young job seeker should complete the employability training more than twice, without proceeding to an internship.

Questions 14 and 15 – Employability course structure and inclusions

In terms of the course structure, the training should also encompass the following areas essential to the job readiness of any employee. Many of these areas are not explicitly dealt with in the consultation report:

- **Literacy and numeracy:** As the Chamber has advised in previous research reports, successful transitions into sustainable employment are almost impossible for young people with very poor literacy and numeracy skills. While it is primarily the job of the school system to deliver these skills, the initial five-week training block should incorporate at least an assessment and then a basic refresher course in literacy and numeracy.
- **Communication skills:** Participants should be trained in how to communicate appropriately in the workplace, whether in writing or verbally. This training

should incorporate real-world scenarios so that young people understand how to apply the principles of good communication effectively.

- **Workplace health and safety:** All participants in the program should receive training in workplace safety before proceeding to the internship stage and/or visiting a worksite. Training should be appropriate to the industry at which the participant will be completing the internship: for example, involving education about the safe practices that ensure hazards and accidents are avoided.
- **Confidentiality:** Employee discretion is a non-negotiable attribute in any workplace. Participants should understand the need not to divulge any confidential information they might become privy to during their training.
- **Job searching skills:** We support the Australian Chamber's advice that the job search and interviewing skills component of the second block should comprise no more than a third of the total training provided. Where possible, basic skills aligned to the industry where the jobseeker expects to complete their internship should constitute the majority of the training provided.

General commentary - Delivery of the employability training

The NSW Business Chamber supports the Australian Chamber's proposed two models for delivery of the training.

We suggest, however, that the program is designed to be flexible enough to accommodate multiple models for employability training delivery: particularly models which are industry-led and proven in terms of the results they achieve.

The **Productivity Bootcamp** initiative, for example, is a model which could be leveraged to deliver Youth Jobs PaTH. The program is an 8 week foundation skills initiative aimed to prepare young people for work in construction.

Importantly, the training is **vocational in nature**. Participants are trained in all facets of employability, such as workplace safety training, communication and fitness skills, in addition to training in basic construction techniques in formwork, steel, concrete and general groundworks. They emerge from the 8 weeks of training (which roughly equates to the two block model proposed for Youth Jobs PaTH) with employability skills as well as the basic vocational skills necessary to add value to the workplace from their first day on the job.

The NSW Business Chamber is in the process of finalising a joint venture with Productivity Bootcamp, centred at the organisation's new work site at TAFE Nirimba in Western Sydney. As part of the new partnership, the Chamber will help place participants in employment once they finish the training.

Construction is a key growth industry and job creator nationwide: particularly in New South Wales. In this State, the record \$70 billion infrastructure pipeline represents an unmissable opportunity to break the cycle of youth unemployment and provide the next generation with a sustainable pathway to work.

We suggest the Department capture this opportunity; look to the design of Productivity Bootcamp; and consider partnering with the program to deliver Youth Jobs PaTH.

Productivity Bootcamp would be well placed to deliver the employability training component and, in partnership with the Chamber and using our network, match participants with internship opportunities either with Productivity Force or other businesses involved in the construction sector.

Conclusion

We ask for consideration of these issues in the design of the initial employability training component of the Youth Jobs PaTH program.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with the Department the potential to broaden the training delivery model to involve industry-led solutions such as the successful Productivity Bootcamp initiative.

Please contact Rebecca Burdick on rebecca.burdick@nswbc.com.au or 9458 7267 to arrange an appropriate meeting time or to discuss any other aspect of our submission.

Yours sincerely

Paul Orton

Director, Policy & Advocacy