Ai Group gets international recognition for apprenticeship system reform

The Australian Industry Group has been internationally recognised for its leadership on apprenticeship and training by the WorldSkills Foundation – one of only five to receive the top honour.

At its recent meeting, the Foundation’s Board of Trustees selected Ai Group’s Engineering Excellence project as deserving WorldSkills Foundation Innovation Lab status – meaning the project demonstrated innovative ways of delivering vocational skills and developing new partnerships between organisations.

The Engineering Excellence project is aimed at implementing widespread systemic reform of the apprenticeship system in Australia. It is based around designing a system whereby apprentices progress through their training and complete their apprenticeship on the basis of demonstrating competence.

A key element of the project is to establish strong links between the apprentice’s training provider and their workplace. While apprentices will continue to receive training and undergo assessment off-the-job, they will also need to satisfy their employer that they can competently perform at work before they progress. Employers will not just consider apprentices’ technical skills. The so-called ‘soft skills’ in apprenticeships will also be assessed in this way. A common concern from employers is that apprentices can pick up technical skills quite quickly, but that may not mean they can display all of the other skills expected of skilled tradespeople; skills such as working and communicating with others, training others to do jobs or planning tasks properly.

These skills can sometimes be given insufficient attention when taught and assessed. The Engineering Excellence project will set a new benchmark for best practice by seeking the employers’ agreement that their apprentices can competently demonstrate these soft skills at work.

Ai Group’s Director of Education and Training Megan Lilly, said: “Ai Group’s member companies expect Australia’s vocational training system to deliver high quality tradespeople, and that is what we are trying to achieve with the Engineering Excellence project. That the WorldSkills Foundation endorses our approach shows that we are at the cutting edge of trade training around the world.”

Chair of the WorldSkills Foundation Board of Trustees, Tjerk Dusseldorp said: “The Australian Industry Group is a prominent and influential peak industry association, well known for its interest in developing a skilled workforce. We are pleased to endorse a project that is designed and managed by the industry itself, and look forward to watching it develop.”

Engineering Excellence is a three year project funded by the Australian Government under the Accelerated Australian Apprenticeship Program. There are 10 pilots being undertaken across Australia, which are being conducted by a mix of public and private providers, some metropolitan and some regional. Some 3,500 engineering apprentices are included in the pilots.

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