



AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING WORKERS' UNION

Submission to the Government's Aviation White Paper

To whom it may concern,

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (the AMWU) has organised and represented workers in the Australian manufacturing sector for 170 years. Today, the AMWU represents almost 70,000 members in every Australian city and region. This includes hundreds of members in the Aviation industry – AMWU members maintain, sustain and repair commercial, private and military air fleets. These workers are highly skilled and professional and are essential to keeping Australia's airline industries and defence forces in the air.

The AMWU therefore welcomes the Government's consultation on the development of its Aviation White Paper. Our response to the White Paper focuses on an issue at the core of the AMWU's beliefs about the best way to support and regenerate Australia's general Aviation sector – through the development of its workforce. This is best achieved through industry driven identification of occupations, the delivery of relevant skills in the form of appropriate training qualification products by training institutions, and the national accreditation and recognition of these qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The AMWU's proposal to support and generate Australia's Aviation sector

The AMWU recommends that the Government implement a strategic workforce development plan for the Aviation industry that is centred on an Aviation Engineering Centre of Excellence (AECE). The role of the AECE would be to analyse workforce development needs, map existing skills within the industry and identify gaps in knowledge.

The AECE would have a further active role in collaborating with the Aviation industry to identify supply chains that service the industry, and ensure that a high degree of workforce development flows through the ecosystem and provides workers with broad opportunities for on-the-job training and experience.

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The objective of positioning the AECE as the Aviation industry's central training infrastructure body would be to provide state-of-the-art facilities capable of designing and integrating nationally recognised qualifications, skills pathways and related training products as designed and approved in partnership by industry and unions. It is essential that the AECE be designed and operated in this way so that it can build the skilled engineering trade, technical and engineering workers that the Aviation industry requires to restore it to the highest levels of quality, consistency and efficiency in the post-COVID-19 operating environment.

Delivering this would include:

- The provision of apprenticeships in key engineering trades, with portable and transferrable skills capable of deployment across the engineering sector within and beyond Aviation;
- To provide a pipeline of students into apprenticeships, the delivery of 'Technical Cadetships' that train cadets in generic skills related to the occupations across technical disciplines within the Aviation industry, and 'Engineering Cadetships' that facilitate growth in key engineering disciplines;
- A tripartite governance structure that focuses on a whole-of-industry approach to participation, providing a suitable framework to maximise;
- The involvement of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Aviation industry supply chain that can participate in cadetships that helps to build an industry wide approach to skills and workforce development, as well as build the capacity of local SMEs to increase their participation in the supply chain;
- The development of Aviation precincts for workforce development and skills and technology transfer across the sector (within Aviation and beyond in the broader manufacturing industries); and
- Industry collaboration, including on training and skills product design and on apprenticeship and cadetship placement and exchange programs.

An AECE to expand on industry led workforce development

The AMWU welcomes the recent announcement from Qantas that it will invest in training a new generation of engineers through its Qantas Group Engineering Academy.¹ Qantas has committed to training 300 Aviation engineers per year from 2025, which represents a reversal of decades of quality industry training being whittled away due to businesses offloading their responsibilities to train and skill workers and apprentices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The AMWU also notes that approximately one-third of the engineers graduating from the Engineering Academy per year will be employed directly in the broader industry outside of Qantas. This is a positive sign that Qantas has considered the broader Aviation industry and the necessity of ensuring a structure is in place to supply sufficient numbers of skilled workers to the industry, not just the narrow requirements of Qantas to sustain its own fleet.

¹ <https://www.qantas.com/au/en/about-us/our-company/engineering-academy.html>

As suggested above, skills shortages in Aviation engineering are due entirely to employers in the industry neglecting their duties to train workers and contribute to the sustainability of Australian Aviation engineering capabilities. Subsequently, Qantas' announcement is a first step in the restoration of both employer responsibility to workforce development as a national priority, and a recognition that proper processes must be in place to restore confidence in Australia's sovereign engineering capability. The Qantas Group Engineering Academy is evidence that the industry has accepted its role in rebuilding a sector it has neglected for so long in the interests of maximising shareholder value at the expense of workers' career development and standards of living. However, Qantas' proposal, while a welcome initiative, will produce skills programs that do not align with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). This implies its Engineering Academy will train workers on skillsets and with qualifications that are not portable, nor recognised beyond employment within Qantas or its subsidiary business entities.

Therefore, the position of the AMWU is that supplying the workforce development needs for the whole Aviation industry will require far more beyond this initial proposal for the establishment of a Qantas Group Engineering Academy. As we will explain below, a whole-of-industry skills and training body will be required to restore confidence in the Aviation industry and begin to address skills shortages.

What will be required is an AECE that operates at a sector-wide level with input from, and collaboration between, industry and unions to profile existing occupations, identify additional skills needs and feed this expert knowledge back into the AECE for the development of effective and nationally recognised training products. To this point, the AMWU proposes the establishment of 'Occupational Profiles' for specific sectors, and the AECE would ultimately be informed by such profiling. These profiles would include a national industry framework curriculum or training standard, developed collaboratively by industry and the relevant trade unions. These occupations would generally require a qualification and feature:

- Industry endorsed entry pathways that include non-qualification based pre-vocational, pre-apprenticeship & VET in Schools programs (such as cadetships);
- Specified competency standards and qualification profiles (linked to definitions in industrial arrangements) that directly reflect the capability needed to perform the work associated with the vocation, and to form the basis for skills recognition of existing workers without qualifications or workers transitioning from industries in decline;
- Industry-endorsed National Framework Curriculum and Learning & Assessment Plans including plans for the delivery of learning in the workplace, delivery modes and assessment methodologies;
- Availability for delivery under formal Training Contract arrangements where mandated by industry or otherwise supported by relevant apprentice/trainee regulators;

- Project-centred, formative assessment regimes based on logical clusters of units that reflect the growing capability of the student/apprentice. These would be negotiated by industry with the AECE and other high-quality industry providers;
- Formal nationally recognised Qualifications;
- Skills Clusters (Skills Sets, micro-credentials and other nationally recognised training products) designed to logically supplement rather than represent an alternative to a qualification;
- Priority for public funding for delivery and assessment; and
- A definition of the vocation and associated capabilities designed to promote higher-level skills progression underpinned by higher-level qualifications and/or logical skill clusters. This would support enhanced portability and mobility of skills as well as career progression as occupational requirements evolve.

A Sovereign Skills and Industry Capability Statement for Aviation

The AMWU's proposal for an Aviation Engineering Centre of Excellence as a key policy response to workforce development issues in the Aviation industry calls for the immediate development of an evidence-based analysis of the projected needs of Aviation engineering in Australia for the nation to maintain and secure its sovereign capability in this area. This would ideally entail the development of a Skills and Industry Capability Statement that maps the profile of the Aviation industry in relation to:

- Skills and labour supply and demand;
- Skills and workforce development capability and capacity;
- Workforce qualifications;
- Mapping of supply chains and value flows; and
- Capability building.

The purpose of the Capability Statement for Aviation is to inform the development of a sector-wide Strategic Plan aimed at maximising the ability of local firm participation in the AECE and their ongoing competitiveness as enterprises that grow the overall workforce profile and capability in the Aviation industry. This Strategic Plan would bring together industry stakeholders in the development of the AECE that can build the Aviation industry as an industry whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

For example, many young people are denied opportunities for apprenticeships because there is a lack of diversity in work evident in many SMEs. This does not provide sufficiently broad learning opportunities to develop trade skills to the full industry standards. The AECE would correct this current lack of capacity within the Aviation ecosystem beyond the largest industry players (i.e., Qantas, Virgin). The AMWU acknowledges a major aim of the Qantas Group Engineering Academy to attract women to aviation engineering and related trades. The AECE would work to systematise opportunities for women, minorities and other groups experiencing marginalisation or discrimination across the whole Aviation industry.

The AECE would collaborate with Jobs and Skills Australia on the design of appropriate training packages for delivery within the Australian Qualifications Framework. Implicit to new training products delivered by the AECE would be due consideration of all factors contributing to the sustainability and diversity of a growing Aviation industry, one with broad opportunities for Australian workers to build careers in and beyond the sector in broader manufacturing career pathways.

The AMWU commends positive steps within the Aviation industry to begin addressing these major issues and recommends that the Government address skills and training challenges by identifying sovereign capability aims for the industry, and implementing an AECE to develop a sustainable aviation engineering workforce at the whole-of-industry level.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Thompson', written in a cursive style.

GLENN THOMPSON
ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY