

Somerset Outdoor Learning Centre (Camp Somerset)

Submission to IPART Pricing VET under Smart and Skilled Issues Paper April 2013

Somerset Outdoor Learning Centre has been offering outdoor experiences to school students and Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme participants since 1980. As an industry leader with over 30 years of experience, Somerset offers a unique blend of learning experiences and outdoor facilities delivered in a professionally managed outdoor education program. We specialise in providing outdoor experiences for schools and Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme participants.

Somerset operates in an industry sector engaged in outdoor recreation and outdoor education. We regularly experience difficulties in sourcing appropriately qualified and trained staff to run our centre and programs. If Outdoor Recreation does not make it onto the Skills List at an appropriately priced rate, we believe our current experience of shortages of qualified VET trained graduates will be exacerbated by the Smart and Skilled reforms.

Question 4 - Industry groupings - dealing with 'outlier' courses and qualifications, where costs are significantly above or below the base price

Outdoor Recreation is an industry area that would be an outlier course in the sport and recreation models of the IPART paper. The use of an average cost per course based on industry areas is inappropriate, having the potential to inaccurately cluster industries together.

Eg. The national hours listed for outdoor recreation Cert3 (717 and 1000), compared to the national hours for the Cert3 in fitness (350) - shows a potential disparity of in excess of 250% when this model uses a base price presumption with one variable being nominal hours.

Industry groupings need to be analysed to determine these outlier courses, because a base funding would effectively eliminate a course like outdoor recreation from being able to be delivered if it received an average or base level funding as that of fitness.

Question 5 - The best way to group UoCs?

The methodology of broadly grouping of UOC's into areas such as sport and recreation is very simplistic and would be detrimental to the outdoor recreation industry. It is important to include in the methodology a mechanism to clearly identify outlier courses, areas or clusters of units

Question 6 - Student groups that are more costly to train, and why? What additional costs are associated with providing training for these students?

Outdoor Recreation costs more to train than other sport and recreation qualifications because:

1. Student to teacher assessment ratios and contexts for assessment drive the cost of delivery. Eg Abseiling units where teaching and delivery teacher/student ratios are 1:8, drop to assessor/student ratios of 1:2 for assessments, based on the risk, complexity and the environment. Risk in this setting is due to a cliff based activity and effective classroom management of student numbers.
2. Training Package rules require RTO's to assess multiple times in remote settings with small student to teacher ratios, directly affecting costs. Eg. The current SIS10 rules for SISOCAY304A advise "Assessment must ensure the safe guiding of groups on multiple canyoning trips in locations that reflect local conditions and are of sufficient breadth and duration to demonstrate competency and consistency of performance". To assess this subject the environment is remote, group sizes are limited in national parks, it must be assessed multiple times and the ratio of students to teacher cannot exceed 1:2. This is a major cost driver for outdoor recreation as the time for assessment of a cohort becomes very large and when this is multiplied by time involved to prepare and undertake assessments and provide for reassessments.

3. The level of risk associated with a skill based unit also impacts training and assessment costs. If the competency has a high level of practical or complex skills that must be demonstrated and the student must be satisfactory in each criteria then RTO's must assess all components. Multiple Outdoor Recreation units of competence have a large consequence if undertaken incorrectly, so the time it takes for appropriate skill progression to enable students to be deemed safe prior to a point where RTO's can assess them and minimise risk is large. As a result the costs are larger.

Question 7 - Training markets likely to have low levels of demand and high operating costs (these markets may be defined geographically, by occupation or demographically)?

Outdoor Recreation has a small specialised market with high job vacancies and high employer demand. Industry reports indicate that employment in our sector has been steadily increasing, however there is a declining availability of outdoor recreation courses due to the expense associated with their delivery.

It would be damaging if Outdoor Recreation were ignored as a sector because we have high training and operating costs. We believe it should be identified as a specialised course that requires the highest level of funding to ensure there is an appropriate pool of qualified staff who obtain the appropriate skill sets for their community, industry and economy.

The methodology developed must be flexible enough to allow the appropriate amount of funding to deliver an effective course by RTO's, and there should be a clear mechanism, formula and process for variations within these base prices for identified skill areas that meet State, local or Industry needs that would result in a higher or lower base price.

Question 10 - The impact of capacity to pay and/or credit constraints faced by students/prospective students

Outdoor Recreation has a high rate of casual employment and a lower pay rate than many other industries. Staff are also typically much younger.

Many staff are required to have 4 or more skill sets, and since the training package typically only requires students to complete 2 or 3 skill sets to get their qualification, students have to pay extra fees to get extra skill sets to be employable. Eg. A student completing a Cert3 in Outdoor Recreation may obtain bushwalking, canoeing and top rope climbing skill sets, but their employer such as Somerset may require these three PLUS high ropes and abseiling skill sets, so the student has to pay an extra fee for these courses.

Since the student has already completed a full certificate, they are typically ineligible for any government subsidies to complete this training and have to pay full commercial rates for this training. And because of the very high teacher to student ratios for this course (1:2 for some skill areas on assessments that take up to 8 hours) the cost of delivery for outdoor recreation skill sets is very expensive and students are highly unlikely to be able to afford this. Further, because students in outdoor recreation are typically quite young, and are employed in low paying jobs after completion, the willingness and ability to pay for this training is low.

Cert 3 and 4 in Outdoor Recreation in NSW has been subsidised in the past, and without this government funding support Outdoor recreation course costs are likely to not simply double, but potentially increase by a factor of 10, putting the course well out of reach of most students in the first place, and making it highly unlikely (even if they could pay for it up front or receive credit/loans) that those students will recoup the costs of their training once employed.