

Creating a nationally recognised training package for a growing, innovative sector

Vocational education and training can benefit many businesses in the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector, as CEO of IDT Australia Dr Paul MacLeman discovered. It started with a business problem – how can we spend less time re-training people who move between companies in the industry? Dr MacLeman realised nationally recognised training could benefit all businesses across the sector for whom compliance is key – and set about getting his view heard by Government.



Image: MTPConnect

Working together, Dr MacLeman, the sector Industry Growth Centre, MTPConnect, and other industry stakeholders made a case to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee to form an Industry Reference Committee to guide the development of a modern nationally recognised qualification. Once in place, this qualification will allow employees to transfer skills between companies, and cut down the cost of on-boarding for employers.

With a portfolio of generic medicines and active pharmaceutical ingredients, it's critical that IDT Australia, like other pharmaceutical manufacturing companies, adheres to strict local and international requirements that protect the safety of consumers. Routinely audited by the US Food and Drug Administration and Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration to maintain its Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certification, proof of quality training is paramount.

Having spent months training new staff who already had years of industry experience, Dr MacLeman was looking for a way to make skills portable and recognised across the industry, so he could focus his time on bringing new innovations to market faster and growing his budget.

"Each new employee we bring on board has to undertake weeks or sometimes months of training to learn how our facilities operate, and to comply with GMP certification," said Dr MacLeman.

"There are basic skills everyone working in pharmaceutical manufacturing must know, yet when people move between jobs, or companies hire staff who have already worked in a similar role, they have to re-do the same basic training."



Meeting with other businesses in the industry with the same issue, Dr MacLeman began to investigate options to allow staff to take their skills from one company to another.

Dr MacLeman discovered the training package covering the sector was last updated in 1999; there was effectively no nationally recognised qualification to meet current employers' needs. When Dr MacLeman sought to engage with Government and other pharmaceutical companies to create a relevant and modern nationally recognised qualification, he found he could do this nationally through an Industry Reference Committee (IRC) – a group of industry experts that provides advice on the skills needs of their industry.

In recognition of the importance of this work, the AISC has established a new, short-term Pharmaceutical Manufacturing IRC.

This group is now reviewing and modernising the pharmaceutical training package, to develop a nationally recognised qualification that will suit the needs of employers – expected to be operational in 2018.

“A nationally recognised qualification will cut down employee induction time by two to four weeks – saving money and time by not teaching people what they already know,” added Mr MacLeman.

“Our sector is rapidly evolving, and we need a way to tailor training quickly. The IRC allows us to do this, and know that our input will be fed back to Government and nationally recognised training will be updated accordingly.”

Another key participant in the IRC tasked with modernising the training package is MTPConnect, an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to grow Australia's medical technology, biotechnology and pharmaceutical ecosystem.

MTPConnect is part of the Federal Government's Industry Growth Centres Initiative, and has developed a 10-year strategy to maximise the sector's competitiveness and productivity. One of MTPConnect's priorities is to support advanced manufacturing, including by bridging specific skills gaps.

“The current nationally recognised qualifications are outdated and do not address the specific needs of our industry today, particularly considering increased national and international regulatory scrutiny of GMP for pharmaceutical products,” said Dr Mel Thomson, General Manager Education, Skills and Events at MTPConnect.

“A refreshed national training package will allow the work force more ‘portability’ of skills, giving workers the ability to transfer and take up new opportunities – providing the right kind of skills the industry needs to grow.”

Part of MTPConnect's plan to grow the medical technology, biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors includes making use of Australia's existing manufacturing workforce.

“Nationally recognised skills training will help people from Australia's existing manufacturing workforce re-skill and find highly-skilled jobs not just in pharmaceuticals, but also in the biotechnology and medical technology sectors,” added Dr Thomson.

For more information about IDT Australia, visit <http://en.idtaus.com.au>

For more information about MTPConnect, visit <https://www.mtpconnect.org.au>

About the Australian Industry and Skills Committee

The Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) is an industry/government collaboration focused on simplifying and demystifying the vocational education and training (VET) system, amplifying the voice of industry and building employer's confidence in VET qualifications. The AISC advises Commonwealth and State Industry and Skills Ministers on the implementation of national vocational education and training policies, and approves nationally recognised training packages for implementation in the VET system. The AISC draws on advice from its network of **Industry Reference Committees (IRCs)**, which are made up of people with experience, skills and knowledge of their particular sector. The IRCs work across industry to ensure their advice reflects the needs of employers.

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