



### Scoping Rail Specific Training: Towards a National Approach

This report provides baseline data in relation to how a small group of CRC participant organisations have approached the task of supporting competence development and maintenance across a number of areas related to safety, compliance and common technical areas such as infrastructure workers. The report draws background information from industry intelligence and literature to identify and raise awareness of contemporary issues which further support the case for national approaches to training and development for the Australian rail industry workforce.

This scoping study has provided a first level review of selected approaches used to develop staff competence in safety, compliance and common technical areas for particular rail industry occupational groups. It has established a *prima facie* case that rail organisations do share a number of common processes, procedures and courses for the development of staff in the areas of rail safety training and common technical areas such as infrastructure workers.

It was acknowledged that issues such as fragmented regulation make a consistent and national approach to training difficult to achieve. However, there was consensus that overcoming these difficulties is essential if the investment being made in training and development is to fully realise its potential to deliver real benefits to organisations in terms of increased effectiveness, economies of scale, and a united voice to the RTOs who service the industry.

Based on the findings of this scoping project, it is possible to confirm that:

- Operators are currently making a range of choices in relation to the ways in which they manage the training function for their workforces.
- Decisions concerning training strategies are driven by a number of factors including cost, efficiency and perceived effectiveness. These factors are all rated equally highly in decision-making processes.
- Systematic evaluation and benchmarking of training effort against other operators or some good practice model were not apparent as key drivers of decision-making.
- Training systems for the rail industry are not only concerned with initial development of competence; the need to ensure that competence is maintained over time is an equally important issue.
- Although operators are combining a number of human resource strategies to build and maintain the competence of their workforces, the rationale behind—and efficacy of—these combined strategies appears to be largely untested. This suggests that the trend is driven by pragmatism and compliance concerns rather than the desire to improve training quality.

- Organisations use a variety of in-house processes, procedures, and training programs—as well as external training providers—to design and deliver programs to meet their identified learning and development needs.
- Training for selected groups of workers is being undertaken in contexts where labour scarcities, a thin training market (characterised by a shortage of training providers and compounded by their wide geographical distribution), and establishment costs (e.g. the design of curricula) add considerably to the expense of training.
- Descriptions of key features of systems used for safety training and the development of infrastructure workers suggest there are considerable similarities between operators in the ways in which their training is organised and assessed.
- Estimates of the extent of company-specific training versus training of a generic nature vary from 50:50 for training in areas such as signalling to 20:80 for some forms of safety training.
- Relationships between the rail industry operators and the national VET system appear vexed. The nature (quality) of this relationship and the apparent inability of the VET system to respond genuinely to the needs of the industry seem to be limiting the vision for national approaches to training.
- While there is considerable interest in adopting national and/or shared approaches to common areas of training need, there remain some barriers/inhibitors. Competitive pressures (i.e. the need for 'company-specific' training) and jurisdictional issues were viewed as limiting factors, but ones which could be addressed.