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KIC answers questions on laws that increases the school leaving school age to 17

Young people turning 17 years of age in 2008 will have to take part in either education, training or approved employment under the State Government's leaving-age legislation.

KIC was asked its opinion:

Does the KIC agree with the changes, is this a step forward in reversing the skills shortage?

KIC supports the changes ... it is a good step forward in that it can help in the long term to provide a larger pool of trained people for commerce and industry. But the support infrastructure will need to be in place to provide for the extra students who will be staying in the education system longer. So work like the redevelopment which has gone on at Gilmore College is a great example of how this might be achieved.

KIC has already laid some of the groundwork for getting access to these people through Kwinana Industries Education Partnership (KIEP) and we expect the legislation will boost KIEP's role as an interface between the education and Kwinana industry.

To make the most of this opportunity it is essential that the educators are aware of the type of training needed by each portion of the industry sector and that students emerge from their courses with the correct skills so they readily integrate with the rest of the workforce.

Is this a positive move for the KIC and Kwinana Industry?

Most definitely ... we have great concerns about both the short term and long term skill shortage scenarios. We are developing several strategies to address the shortages, and this announcement helps with those strategies.

The government obviously shares this concern and is taking what it considers to be the most appropriate action.

What sort of benefits are to be had by such a plan?

When kids leave school early, they need a bridge to get them into gainful careers. If by the time they leave school they have a traineeship or part apprenticeship under their belts, everyone wins.

What other solutions does the KIC recommend to curb the skills shortage?

This depends on what you mean by the skills shortage ... shortage of trained people, shortage of applicants or shortage of opportunity? The skills shortage is a complex arrangement of factors. People automatically think about the trades shortage when they think of industry. This is only part of it. Industry needs receptionists, payroll and human resource officers, safety officers, nurses, as well as engineers and managers – you name it.

Educating students only fills one level of the shortage demographic.

Local unemployment levels are ridiculously high given the current and future shortages envisaged. So where will the shortage to be filled from? Immigration and interstate migration will have a roll, but we have a large unemployed population right here! Many need the motivation, many need the skills, and many need a flexible employer. There are probably many potential workers who are unable to get jobs because they need more flexible arrangements with employers. Our members realise that employers will have to adopt more flexible arrangements in the future (e.g. job sharing, part time hire opportunities, etc) as the demand for more people to not only staff the expanding industry sector, but to replace the retiring baby boomers.

KIC members encourage all employers to adopt more flexible work practices, so that people in the community who have skills but not the time to work full time can re-enter the workforce.

