

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Getting Technical

Dr Phil Toner, Dr Richard Woolley and Professor Tim Turpin from the Centre for Industry and Innovative Studies (CInIS) are exploring the importance of technicians and tradespeople to innovation performance in Australian research and development (R&D) organisations. This project has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

'It is fairly well understood that R&D can't happen without the assistance and contribution of tradespeople and vocationally trained technicians on the shop-floors and research labs of Australian industry' says Dr Toner. 'However, most innovation strategies tend to focus on researchers and high level "ideas generators", rather than the people who translate the ideas into workable realities. In many Australian organisations, these implementers tend to be technicians and tradespeople such as skilled metal workers, designers, laboratory workers, plumbers, electricians and the like. There is a lack of knowledge about how ideas become reality and the importance of technicians and tradespeople in making innovation happen. In an effort to fill this gap in knowledge and policy, this project will identify strategies aimed at improving the innovation performance of Australia's R&D organisations by ensuring the VET (Vocational Education and Training) sector has the capacity to deliver people with the skills and knowledge required by innovation organisations and research managers.'

The research team will carry out an extensive document review and analysis of employment data to determine the composition and structure of the current Australian R&D workforce, and conduct interviews with technicians, tradespeople and R&D managers. TAFE teachers and industry bodies will also be consulted to determine current and predicted skills requirements for R&D workers.



The project is expected to provide practical input into public policy on VET training and innovation and identify current skills and knowledge of technician and trade occupations. This will assist training institutions to improve training provision for these occupations, leading to increased opportunities for Australian businesses to capitalise on new ideas and inventions.

Project Title: Role and contribution of Technicians and Tradespeople in Australian R&D sites

Funding has been set at: \$116,018

Contact Details: ph.toner@uws.edu.au

<http://www.uws.edu.au/cinis>

August 2009