

Developing an effective career pathway into Agriculture: The Agriculture Extension Work Placement Program



Australian Government

REEF TRUST



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation



Queensland
Government

QUEENSLAND RURAL JOBS AND SKILLS ALLIANCE (RJSA)

Main Issue

- attract and train new employees to address the current extension staff shortage identified,
- and to implement succession planning for the experienced extension staff that are nearing retirement and have strong networks with farmers in reef catchments.

WORK PLACEMENT

➤ Aim

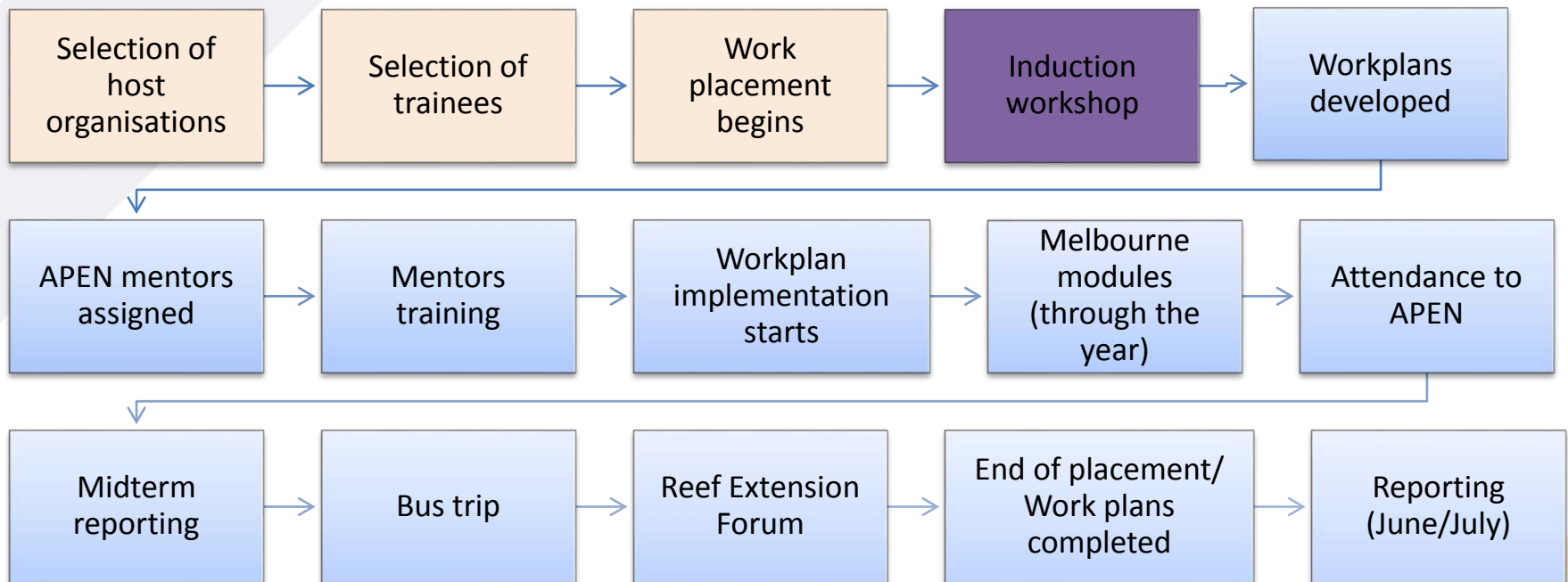
- ✓ Improve trainee's capacity to provide extension support
- ✓ Test and design workplace program
- ✓ Mentoring framework for new extension officers

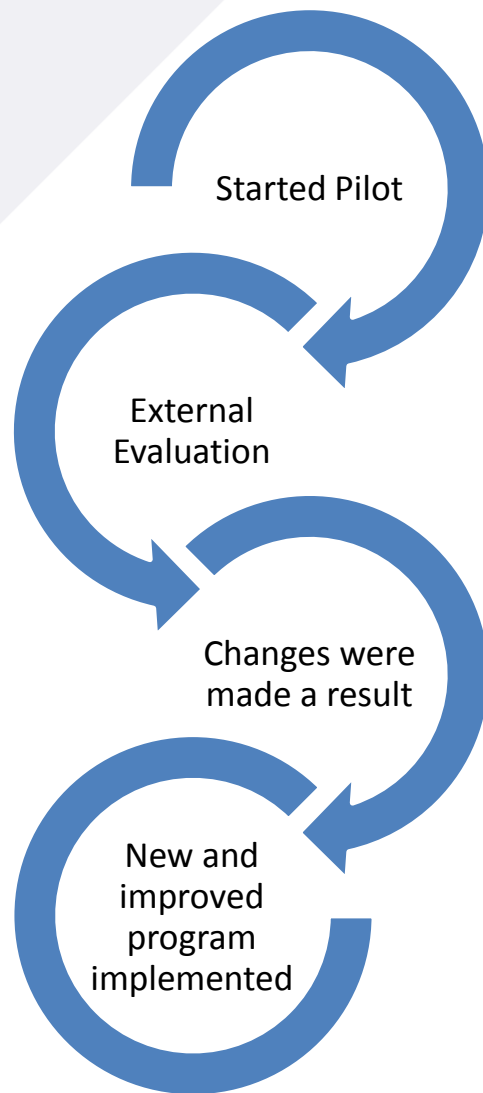


Work Placement Components:

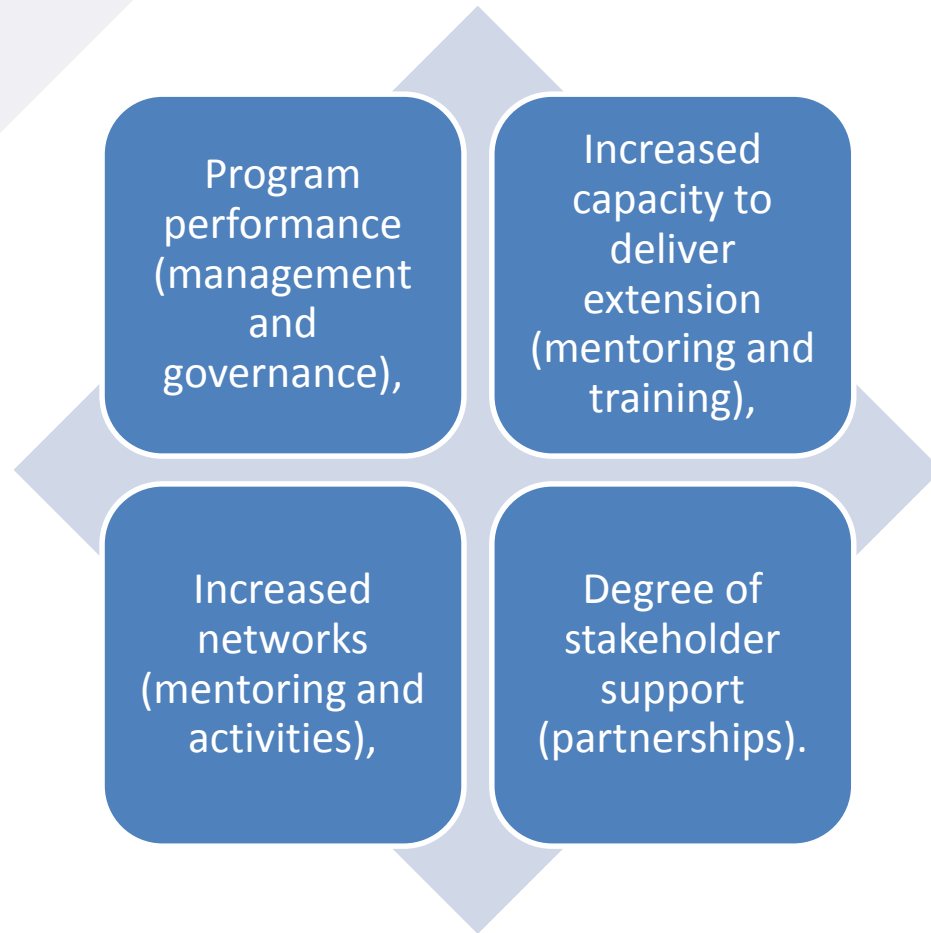


Work Placement Process





Evaluation Dimensions



Program performance

– What worked well:

- ✓ Steering committee
- ✓ Induction
- ✓ Reporting / reflection activities
- ✓ Evaluation framework
- ✓ Flexibility to meet needs

– Areas for improvement

- More formalised structure
- Induction to happen early in the process
- Modify trainee selection process. Ensure candidates' clarity of work requirements

Training and mentoring

- Outcomes
 - ☺ Trainees' knowledge, skills and confidence have increased
 - ☺ Workplan allowed for individualised training.
 - ☺ Produced a based to fine tuning training products
 - ☺ Strong mentor relationships
- Areas for improvement
 - Consider multiple mentors
 - Outline specific projects to be undertaken
 - Two years program
 - More targeted training (combination of targeted initiatives)
 - Mentor training and support
 - Weekly learning journal
 - Managing mentors time

Core Skills

Technical Skills

Generic
Extension

- Planning effective extension projects and activities
- Client and collaborator engagement (negotiation, social marketing, and behavioural change)
- Extension delivery
- **Evaluation and reporting**

Core technical
skills reef
quality

- Farming in a reef ecosystem
- Nutrient and sediment management
- Farm business mgt and whole farm mgt

Sugar

- Nutrient management
- Herbicide management
- Weed management
- Precision Agriculture**
- Irrigation management
- Fallow management**
- Harvesting
- Varieties
- Drainage
- Soil health
- Pests & diseases
- GIS & data collection
- Economics
- Soil conservation
- Water quality**

Grazing industry

- Soil health
- Soil conservation**
- Improved pastures and forage crops
- Animal health and welfare
- Livestock transport
- Managing the land resource
- Managing grazing pressure
- Improving pastures & forage
- Understanding land capability
- Nutrition
- Cattle husbandry
- Breeder management
- Genetics
- Weaner management
- Weeds & pest management

Stakeholder support

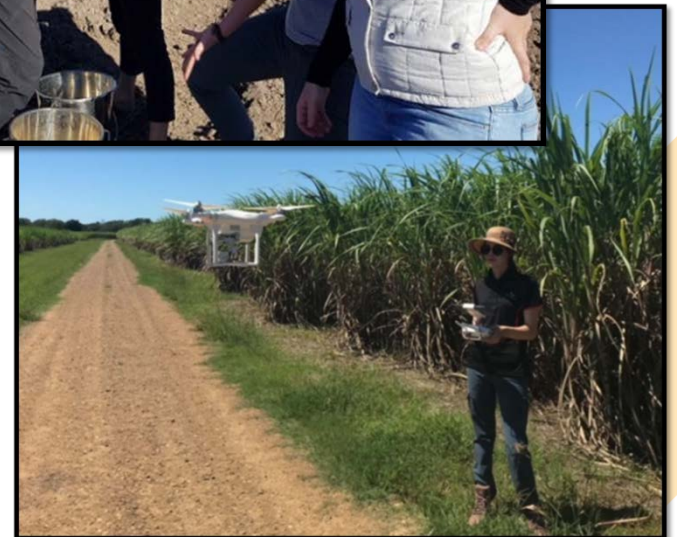
- Outcomes
 - Stakeholders were satisfied with involvement and willing to continue
 - Trust built across organisations
 - Mentors all expressed personal satisfaction
 - Organisational support for trainee
- Areas for improvement
 - Include host organisations in the recruitment and development of the program.

Networks

- Outcomes
 - Increased professional networks
 - Strong network across the group
 - Bus tour/conference
- Areas for improvement
 - Support of opportunities to continue to build and sustain networks

Outcomes

- 5 out of six were offered positions in extension in the program.
- Two more intakes after project



Improvements made

- Induction early in the process
- Training process more targeted to each organisation. Candidates to apply to specific organisation.
- External mentor through APEN
- Outline specific projects to be undertaken
- Mentor training
- More target training including University Melbourne, GIS training, tap into Reef extension training available
- Reef training coordinator support for the Young Extension network

Organisations involved

- Cape York NRM
- Herbert Productivity Services
- Sugar Research Australia (Gordonvale, Burdekin, Bundaberg)
- NQ Dry Tropics (two positions)
- Farmacist (Burdekin and Mackay)
- Agritech
- Resource consulting services (RCS)
- Burdekin Productivity Services (BPS)
- Plane Creek Productivity Services
- Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC)
- Tully Canegrowers



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Conclusion

- The result has been:
 - improved processes to support those who manage work placement programs,
 - better-connections with education
 - and due recognition of the significant contribution of industry partners.
- The program developed new skills in appropriate extension techniques, and helped in improve career opportunities as an extension officer
- The uncertainty of future extension funding

Extension should be recognised as a career path, with a long-term plan for staged and strategically located professional development for the extension staff.

The new version of the program is being delivered through a partnership between Queensland Farmers Federation, the Australian Government, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's Reef Trust Partnership and the Queensland Government.



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