



Workforce Estimating Conference Streamlined; University Funding Is Not Directly Tied to Workforce Demand

at a glance

Consistent with the findings in our 2006 report, the Legislature and the Agency for Workforce Innovation have taken steps to improve the efficiency and usefulness of the Workforce Consensus Estimating Conference. The Legislature has streamlined the composition of the Workforce Consensus Estimating Conference, which should reduce duplicative agency representation, conflicts of interest, and scheduling conflicts. In addition, the Agency for Workforce Innovation is now providing demand occupations lists for occupations requiring university level degrees to the conference each February. However, a system for linking these demand occupation estimates to the annual appropriations for state universities has not yet been established, primarily due to the difficulty in accurately forecasting long-term workforce needs and the indirect linkage between baccalaureate degrees and employment in specific occupations.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of the actions taken in regard to a 2006 OPPAGA report on using Workforce Estimating Conference results to target university funding.^{1,2}

Background

The Workforce Estimating Conference is responsible for developing short- and long-term information on state workforce needs. To do so, participants review regional data showing employment in High-Skills/High-Wage jobs and project future employment trends. The Workforce Estimating Conference semiannually recommends occupations for Workforce Florida, Inc., to include in officially adopted statewide demand and regional targeted occupations lists. These lists are used to direct state and federal funds to workforce training programs that prepare individuals for targeted occupations that require vocational certificates and some associate degrees.

Our 2006 review examined the operation of the conference and concluded that its composition of agency, legislative, and Governor's Office personnel was unwieldy and created potential conflicts of interest. Our report also examined the feasibility of using the conference process to direct university funding to baccalaureate degree programs that would prepare students for projected high need occupations.

¹ Section 11.51(6), F.S.

² *Workforce Estimating Conference Potential Not Realized; Barriers Can Be Addressed*, OPPAGA [Report No. 06-28](#), March 2006.

Current Status ---

Consistent with the findings in our 2006 report, the Legislature and the Agency for Workforce Innovation have taken steps to improve the efficiency and usefulness of the Workforce Consensus Estimating Conference. The Legislature has streamlined the composition of the Workforce Consensus Estimating Conference. In addition, the Agency for Workforce Innovation is now presenting demand occupations lists for occupations requiring university level degrees to the conference each February.

The Legislature streamlined the composition of the Workforce Estimating Conference. Our 2006 report concluded that the Workforce Estimating Conference would function more efficiently if its composition was changed to be more consistent with the state's other nine official estimating conferences. The state's other estimating conferences generally consisted of professional staff of the Legislature and the Executive Office of the Governor. In comparison, the Workforce Estimating Conference's principal membership consisted of a relatively large number (6 of 10 voting members) of representatives from related state agencies and other public entities. This atypical composition resulted in duplicative agency representation, potential conflicts of interest, and conference scheduling difficulties.

Consistent with our findings, the 2006 Legislature streamlined the composition of the Workforce Estimating Conference. Specifically, the Legislature amended s.216.134, *Florida Statutes*, to standardize the principal makeup of each state estimating conference to include the following members:

- professional staff of the Executive Office of the Governor designated by the Governor,
- the coordinator of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research,
- professional staff of the Senate designated by the President of the Senate, and

- professional staff of the House of Representatives designated by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

This change should help the Workforce Estimating Conference function more efficiently.

Steps have been taken to expand the types of training needs identified by the Workforce Estimating Conference. Our 2006 report concluded that the Workforce Estimating Conference had the potential to use employment demand forecasts made by the Agency for Workforce Innovation to identify training program needs at all levels, but this potential had not been realized. The conference narrowed the agency's forecasts to a statewide demand occupations list that only included jobs that require two years or less of postsecondary training. We concluded that the list could be expanded to include jobs requiring baccalaureate or advanced degrees because the data source used by the Agency for Workforce Innovation to develop its forecasts contained occupations requiring university level degrees.

Consistent with our finding, the Agency for Workforce Innovation is now making demand occupations lists for occupations requiring bachelor's degrees available to the Workforce Estimating Conference each February. Beginning in February 2008, the Agency for Workforce Innovation provided bachelor-degree level demand occupations lists to the Workforce Estimating Conference. While the conference did not officially adopt this expanded demand occupations list, conference principals have stated they would like to continue to have the expanded demand occupation lists provided. The Agency for Workforce Innovation plans to continue to provide a bachelor's degree demand occupations list at each February Workforce Estimating Conference.

A system linking annual appropriations for state universities directly to workforce demand estimates has not been established. Our 2006 report examined the question of whether it was feasible to use the statewide demand occupations list to direct funding for programs that train people for occupations requiring baccalaureate and advanced degrees. While we concluded that this step was possible, we identified two limitations that should be considered in attempting to directly tie funding to workforce demand estimates:

- it takes many years to obtain baccalaureate and advanced degrees, and it is difficult to accurately forecast long-term workforce needs; and
- many baccalaureate degrees lead to multiple occupations and to advanced degrees, making it difficult to identify the number of graduates needed from these programs.

Within these limitations, our 2006 report presented four options the Legislature could consider if it wanted to directly tie university funding to workforce demand estimates. While the Legislature has not created a system for linking annual appropriations for state universities directly to workforce demand estimates, it did appropriate \$4 million to universities based on the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded and their performance in producing graduates in specific undergraduate emerging technology programs.³ These emerging technology programs were first identified by the State University System pursuant to a request by the Workforce Estimating Conference in 2001.

³ Line Item 85, Ch. 2007-326, *Laws of Florida*. The Legislature also targets university funding towards commonly known critical need occupations such as teaching and nursing through a variety of programs such as SUCCEED, Florida!

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