When appointed Queensland's Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations two years ago, Paul Braddy said there were several clear objectives which needed to be put in place. They were to safeguard the position of TAFE Queensland, to ensure the quality of Queensland's training system and to ensure the more effective implementation of national training reform.

Interviewed for this issue by Australian Training Review, the Minister gave a wider ranging summary of what Queensland has achieved in the training sector, and what is planned for the future.

"Two years ago," he said, "two major concerns facing government were the decline in traditional apprenticeships and the apparent lack of effectiveness of Queensland's traineeships system."

"Initial steps were to implement the Ten Point Plan to safeguard TAFE in Queensland, underpinned by a review, which made recommendations towards re-establishing TAFE institutes as key instruments of policy in vocational education and training. Also the government implemented the 'Breaking the Unemployment Cycle' initiative, which aimed to create new jobs, by providing incentives to employers to take on additional trainees."

"In addition to major reforms, we have implemented many other vocational education and training initiatives to ensure Queensland is well placed to meet the demands of the new millennium," the Minister said.

According to Minister Braddy these strategies aimed to respond to such key issues in the State as the steady growth in Queensland's population and the increased expectations by industry and individuals of improved access to training. He aims to take account of the expansion of vocational education and training in secondary schools, increasing technological change and the need to support government priorities of increased jobs, economic growth and equitable access as well as filling the major skills gaps identified in the Queensland workforce.
Quality investigation

A major achievement has been the completion of an independent investigation into the quality in training in Queensland’s traineeship system. Recommendations made by Kaye Schofield, following her investigation, have been endorsed in principle by the Queensland Cabinet and, as a result, strategies have been developed and implemented.

User choice arrangements for purchasing training have been streamlined and improved. These include a new resourcing strategy for markets, the role of public funding and the most effective purchasing models to deliver outcomes.

Minister Braddy said his department had undertaken a review of the Vocational Education Training and Employment Act 1991. It is proposed to introduce the legislation into Queensland Parliament this year. The new legislation will fully support the State and national policies, including the introduction of training packages, the National Training Framework, the Australian Recognition Framework and reforms to the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

Touching on the enormous growth in the information technology and telecommunications industry, Minister Braddy said a review of the information and communications industry and related occupations had resulted in a plan for the industry’s contribution to the Queensland Communication and Information Strategic Plan for 1999 to 2004. It&T training is a priority for the year 2000, with $38 million committed to IT&T training delivery along with the development of infrastructure, systems & networks.

Many governmental initiatives aim to create more flexibility in the vocational education and training sector. This is very important in Queensland, given the spread of population, with more than 2600 km from Brisbane to Queensland’s northernmost vocational education campus on Thursday Island.

On articulation and partnership arrangements, the Minister said TAFE Queensland institutes had a successful record in establishing articulation and partnership arrangements with the university sector. Many innovative partnerships with universities have been developed at a local level, demonstrating a desire to ensure access to educational pathways for all communities.

“An excellent example of a partnership arrangement of particular benefit to people in a regional area is an innovative project in Central Queensland, where the Emerald Campus of the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE has joined forces with the Central Queensland University. The two organisations share facilities and the Head of Campus is employed by both organisations.

“While still in its infancy, and currently only providing first year studies towards a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Business, facilities and support will be available for those students who progress their studies via distance education. The partnership is aimed at developing further options for local students doing any level of education beyond grade 12,” he said.

Every year more than 25 000 people who enrol in TAFE Queensland courses have some form of university educational experience. This indicates that more students are going from university back to TAFE, than there are from TAFE to university.

Training packages

The Minister said Queensland had a firm commitment to the training package concept and the implementation of the National Training Framework. Training packages substantially increases the emphasis on outcomes attained from training delivery.

“IT&T training is a priority for the year 2000, with $38 million committed to IT&T training delivery along with the development of infrastructure, systems & networks.”

“When introducing such widespread and challenging national initiatives, some initial teething difficulties are to be expected. The emphasis over the last two years has definitely been on training package development and acceptance, with some delays occurring in training package implementation. This has now progressed to a position of transition to full implementation this year.

“Queensland has worked effectively to implement 40 training packages by the beginning of this year, with the gradual introduction of a further 20. This will expand training opportunities and allow a broader cross-section of the community to participate in vocational education and training. We have also made great strides in developing the industrial relations arrangements to support training packages.

“However, much work is yet to be done in the federal awards area, where the Commonwealth obviously holds responsibility,” he said.
Overseas, TAFE Queensland has a significant track record and reputation for delivering quality training programs across Asia, the South Pacific Region and, more recently, into Europe and South America.

"In Shanghai, TAFE Queensland and the Shanghai Second Polytechnic University are developing joint training programs in International Business, Information Technology, Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering. In Jiangsu, TAFE is associated with the Nanjing Polytechnic College. Students are completing an internationally recognised Diploma of Business, which is studied 70 per cent in Nanjing and 30 per cent here at the Open Learning Institute. This successful model has been expanded to incorporate the involvement of other institutes and study areas," he said.

A major long-term project since 1995 has been an international training relationship with the Sheraton group of hotels. Hotels in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Fiji and China have received training support, involving training programs for the initial staff in all areas of hotel operation, training key staff to maintain the training programs, skill audits and future vocational training initiatives.

The Open Learning Institute of TAFE has co-operative education agreements with business and educational institutes in China, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Singapore and Hong Kong. In Brazil, the Open Learning Institute delivered a program to the University of Pötiguar to assist staff in the establishment of a framework for the introduction of vocational education courses.

The Cooooloo Sunshine Institute of TAFE is working on projects in Samoa, revitalising the Samoan Polytechnic and the Moreton Institute of TAFE is working on an Indonesian project which is providing specialised training for workers at the Freeport copper and gold mine in Irian Jaya.

Criteria, capacity and competence

Should we see the school as a Registered Training Organisation? asks GARY COLLINS

ANY EMPLOYERS BELIEVE the delivery of VET in schools is worthwhile, but there is a concern that the rush by schools to become registered training organisations (RTOs) in their own right is ill-conceived.

The requirements for RTO status for training packages are different from previous arrangements for national training module delivery. The ability of schools to maintain consistency in the ongoing delivery and management of vocational programs is often very limited. Many schools do not have the appropriately trained personnel (with industry experience), to deliver quality vocational programs. Even when schools do have the expertise they are constrained by lack of resources and class sizes that are normally much larger than those found in a typical VET delivery situation. That said, many schools have used innovative ways to introduce vocational programs including partnership arrangements with registered vocational training organisations such as TAFE colleges and other private vocational providers.

The concern for industry is the unbridled haste with which many schools have applied for (and in many cases been granted), RTO status.

RTO status for schools to satisfy the requirements of national training packages is a particular cause for concern.

As previously stated, many schools do not have the industrial knowledge to make determinations on competence against training package criteria.

Brian Grace is a Queensland-based journalist specialising in the training sector.

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