system who need to come out from behind their oak desks, brush the chalk dust from their cardigans, and have a look at the real world.

As I stated in my opening remarks, the introduction of CBT as the basis for reform of the VET system is not occurring as a result of a whim of some union heavies and employer moguls. The reform process is a necessity if Australian industry, and particularly the manufacturing sectors, are to survive in a global marketplace.

The fact is, that what the VET system provided ten, twenty or fifty years ago was appropriate for the time. Employment was stable (most workers would have no more than two employers in a lifetime). Career paths were virtually unheard of and certainly were not available to most workers.

Jobs were tightly defined and demarcated. Workers who were lucky enough to get some form of entry-level training, like an apprenticeship, generally remained in that occupation for their entire working lives. Employers too, operated in a different environment from those operating today. Local markets and products were protected from outside competition by import tariffs and Australia's geographic isolation.

Generally speaking, technological change was relatively slow compared with today and the demand for rapid product change was not there. The training system too, could afford to be purist in its pursuits and attitude. They were the 'good old days'.

Well, the good old days are gone. Australian industry and workers are now operating in a global marketplace. A marketplace which demands a rapid response to accommodate customer needs and technological change. It is driven by internal and external competitiveness to produce the best outcome in the most efficient and cost-effective ways. As a result of this the working landscape has changed. Workers change jobs several times during their working lives.

continued on page 35

Summary by John Foyster

The challenge to our debaters was to argue the proposition that "Australia does not need CBT". After two rounds the debate has only begun.

Ryan's opening case

In his opening sally for the affirmative, Ryan argued that CBT has not been very clearly defined, making it more difficult to argue against. Nevertheless two substantial arguments can be made against it: CBT has been introduced without research backing, and CBT's limited learning philosophy restricts what can be achieved through it. The conflict in attitude towards CBT between industry and education results from these two perceived defects.

Van Berkel's reply

In rebuttal, van Berkel argued that CBT was not introduced into Australia casually, but as part of a reform process responding to universal needs. He identifies CBT as a system which will introduce widespread benefits.

Van Berkel's opening case

In opening his own case for the negative, van Berkel set out to put the introduction of CBT into a context. Central to this context is the need for industrial restructuring, derived from Australia's need to be globally competitive. Industry, van Berkel argues, has been supportive of CBT while the opposition has come from the education sector. Industry's only criticism would be of the slow pace of implementation.

Ryan's reply

Ryan's rebuttal challenged the notion of industry as a monolithic entity. Although van Berkel claimed it was important to understand why CBT was chosen, Ryan couldn't see any explanation in the case put by van Berkel. Ryan further argued that the fact that the introduction of CBT had been tied to the coat-tails of award restructuring, meant the case for CBT is weakened by the abandonment of award restructuring.

COMMENTARY

The debate so far does illustrate why there has been considerable dissension concerning CBT. Progress towards resolution can only be expected if hard questions are faced rather than avoided.

For example, take the question of how widely approved CBT is in industry. The 1995 survey of employers conducted for ANTA showed that only 44% of employers with recent VET graduates had even heard of CBT. It is reasonable to assume that employers without recent VET graduates are even less likely to have heard of CBT. And that not everyone who has heard of CBT supports it.

However, of those employers who had heard of CBT, the survey reported, only one third felt they had a good or very good knowledge of CBT. It sounds as though not much more than 10% of employers regard themselves as having a good or better knowledge of CBT, much less approve of it.

Of course, if you restrict the survey to 'large' employers then the picture is very different: 90% of large employers with recent VET graduates had heard of CBT and about 75% of large employers with recent VET graduates regard themselves as having a good or better knowledge of CBT. This challenges directly the argument for a monolithic 'industry'.

It's not surprising that Casey, coming from the manufacturing sector, sees CBT as he does. But he does have to confront established facts: most employers haven't even heard of CBT, much less see it as the way to save Australian industry.

But Robin Ryan, who is arguing that Australia doesn't need CBT, has yet to offer an alternative. If, after all, Australia does not need CBT, then there must be something in its place.

Or perhaps CBT inflicts damage so grievous that it must be done away with. Nothing has yet been offered in argument.

The place of CBT has been unchallenged for too long; a challenge to CBT assists us all to clarify our ideas.

John Foyster is manager of Core Research, NCVER