professional development lines up for competencies

The first structured program to align professional development programs directly to competencies is being piloted in an exciting professional development project at Regency Institute of TAFE in South Australia.

The project flows on from an organisational self-assessment which was conducted at Regency in 1998, using the vocational education and training (VET) sector's A guide to quality endorsement and the Australian Quality Council Framework.

In the self-assessment, professional development was identified as one of the key areas for continuous improvement. A consistent approach to professional development which is incorporated into professional development plans and review processes across the institute is the planned outcome.

The project has initially focussed on the Public Service Management Act (PSM) and weekly paid (WP) staff, although it is intended to be extended to staff covered by the TAFE Act.

According to Linda Dunbar, Regency's human resources manager, it would be a massive task to undertake this project for all staff all at once.

"We've begun with PSM and WP staff because historically their training and development opportunities are usually limited, theory based and poorly integrated into the work place," Dunbar said.

"In the past these staff have rarely gained any formal recognition for their skills," Ms Dunbar said that the project is operating within the framework of best practice in human resource development and management and the relevant national industrial and training agendas.

The 12-stage project aims to achieve:

- A system that formally recognises existing skills as well as providing recognition of prior learning (RPL) and articulation into formal qualifications
- Alignment with appropriate national structures for clerical administrative positions.

There has been an overwhelming response from staff to participate in the pilot project, which is entirely voluntary.

Since its inception, the project has had the full support and backing of Regency's director, Maureen Morton, and management.

"We are committed to the project as a means of securing the future prosperity of Regency," said Dunbar.

"At the end of the day, a happy, effective and skilled workforce, who 'want to be here', is critical to any business—and Regency is no exception.

"However, we are paying more than lip service to this ideal and have backed the project with a considerable budget and the full resources, time and energy required to make it work," Dunbar said.

It is envisaged that the project will be implemented across all PSM and WP staff in 2000, with the pilot scheduled for completion before Christmas.

Consultant Pauline Clark, from Regency Consulting, has been instrumental in taking the project thus far.

"It's early days yet, but I see our initiative potentially leading to a national benchmark for aligning professional development competencies and job satisfaction.

'That other TAFE institutes are now registering interest, is a strong indicator of success,' Linda Dunbar said.

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