USER CHOICE at work in the Northern Territory

Wendi Masters

The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority (NTETA) is responsible for implementing and administering user choice in the Northern Territory.

Wendi Masters of NTETA talks about the application of user choice in the Northern Territory. The NT approach has been designed to make user choice easy for people to understand, administer and use.

DEFINING USER CHOICE

User choice is a system for providing training which allows individual clients to have a greater choice in what sort of training they require. It aims to make training delivered off the job more responsive to the needs of industry and individual enterprises by linking the decisions about training directly to those who use it. User choice applies to training for apprentices and trainees.

WHO IS THE CLIENT?

The client of user choice could be an individual employer (working with their apprentice/trainee), an industry group, a group of employers, or a remote community or group of communities.

USER CHOICE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Although the idea of user choice has been endorsed and accepted by the Northern Territory, choice at the individual level will not always be possible due to small numbers of participants and training providers.

To avoid these problems, user choice in the Northern Territory will operate in a particular way. For those apprenticeships and traineeships that have high numbers, full user choice will apply. This means that the client will be able to have their individual choices—at the very least they will be able to choose the particular training provider they want.

For those apprenticeships and traineeships that have low numbers, NTETA will manage the user choice process. NTETA will appoint industry brokers who will “choose” the provider on behalf of industry collectively. NTETA, in consultation with industry training advisory bodies, has identified the apprenticeships and traineeships where full user choice will apply and those for which the process will be managed.

As the user choice system develops and training packages become available, clients will increasingly be able to make choices in a number of areas. These include the content of the training program and how the units of competencies are sequenced. Clients will also be able to make decisions about the timing, location and way that the package is delivered. Other choices will look at who conducts the assessment and how the training is assessed.

Employers will also be able to negotiate to buy flexible training over and above what is publicly funded.

FUNDING

There are now policy guidelines for the funding of apprenticeship and traineeship training under user choice.

Different funding rates have been established for each individual apprenticeship and traineeship program based on a points system. These rates take into account the different complexities and costs that are associated with each program. They also pay for the services expected of the registered training organisations by NTETA.

Instead of paying for the number of hours that an apprentice or trainee studies, NTETA will actually pay for them to achieve a competency or qualification. It does not matter how, when or where they achieved it.

NTETA is buying a number of services from registered training organisations to help the apprentice or trainee to become competent. These include training that is needed off the job, course notes and materials, liaison and feedback with the employer and helping the employer to develop an on-the-job training plan if they need one. Other services could be monitoring programs, assessment and regular reporting of the student’s progress to NTETA.
Pert has been chosen by the Australian National Training Authority as the venue for the 1998 Australian Training Awards, an event which recognises excellence and outstanding performance in vocational education and training by individuals and organisations throughout Australia.

In announcing the venue, the Western Australian Minister for Employment and Training, Cheryl Edwardes, said she was delighted that Perth had been chosen to host the awards for the first time.

"I join with my colleague, Western Australian Senator Christopher Ellison, Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, in expressing our enthusiasm that Perth will host the premier event in the Australian vocational education and training calendar this year.

"The Awards, to be held in the Showroom at the Burswood Convention Centre on Thursday, 12 November, are the culmination of a series of State and Territory events which bring together the cream of Australia’s training talent,” she said.

Mr Stuart Hornery AO, Chairman of the ANTA Board, said that “ANTA is looking forward to staging this major event in Perth.”

"The fact that Perth was chosen as the host city is testament to Western Australia’s ability to consistently attract major events to their world-class facilities.”

"Last year’s event held in Melbourne attracted a record 1,000 people and guest of honour was the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr John Howard,” said Mr Hornery.

“This is a tremendous honour for Perth and I am sure the Awards will be a great success,” Mrs Edwardes said.

“The Awards enable those people who have achieved excellence and made a commitment to vocational education and training to be recognised and deservedly rewarded for their achievements,” Mrs Edwardes said.

A Training Update Seminar will be held during the day of the Awards. The seminar will provide the latest information about vocational education and training policy and directions.

The funds are given to registered training organisations so that they can provide assistance to the employer in a number of ways. These include helping them to prepare training plans, liaising with them throughout the program, and providing assessment of trainees or apprentices. When an employer needs some extra off-job training, they can negotiate with the registered training organisation for extra funding.

Another feature of the funding policy guidelines is that services will cost extra for delivery outside the major urban centres. Regional service delivery will cost a loading of 10% on top of the usual rates, while remote delivery will cost an extra 20%.

These funding policy guidelines were introduced on 1 January 1998 as a trial for a 12-month period. During that time, NTETA will monitor their effectiveness and get feedback from registered training organisations as to whether they have been successful.

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