KEEPING OUT OF THE REVOLVING DOOR

The proprietor of a small business before entering politics, the Hon Dorothy Kotz, who at the end of 1996 took office as Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education and Minister for Youth Affairs in South Australia, had also been involved in devising curricula and working in regional development. We asked Minister Kotz for her own views on training people for employment in industry, in this exclusive interview with Australian Training Review.

"I'm sure you're aware," said Dorothy Kotz, "that it's not necessarily an individual who devises ministerial strategies. A whole host of people have been involved in putting together a long-term approach to look at the employment problem.

"And the employment problem is one which many very intelligent people have put a lot of thought into for many years and not necessarily come up with the answer.

"It's not one of those areas that will have a short-term answer. There are certainly many positive things that can be done—in terms of looking at the end product—in this case, putting jobs on the market for young people.

"The youth unemployment figures are totally unacceptable right across the country. Unfortunately there are areas we have inherited over a period of time. I think we've managed to diminish some of them over the past three years in South Australia, with the government's approach, but they are nowhere near acceptable.

"I have a passionate desire to look at an outcome that means we are not only going to give young people the opportunity to be trained in a whole range of areas and to gain greater skills than they have ever had before, but there has to be a job for them at the end of all the training—so there is a future for young individuals, for all people in this country.

"In the past we have seen training programs for training's sake—and I don't want to deride the many areas which did a great deal of good work—but we have certainly had training for training's sake, which meant that some of the unemployment figures were made to look better than they really are.

"The only people who benefit from that are governments—in the short term—because it appears that they are doing something. I don't want to be involved with training schemes that are fluffy, unsubstantiated and have no real accountability, because all these schemes are going to be backed by tax-payers' money.

"So there has got to be a focus on each of those areas as part of the concept when you put a training strategy together, which is that there has got to be—whatever you do and however you do it—a definite outcome of jobs.

"Now having said that, the other thing that has got to be included is that government is not going to do this on their own. It is a matter of industry and community and governments getting together right across the board, because this is too massive a project for any one group or any one government. All of these areas have got to be brought into this, and it's only by that complete co-operation that you are going to have any opportunity at all of creating jobs at the end as your objective."

TRAINING FOR SAY'S FUTURE

Where do you see schools coming into this? Do you think that schools should be linked to industry?

"This is an area we are actually attacking. The education department already has put together quite a few million dollars in programs."

Is that the $30 million announced recently by Premier Olsen?

"That was the general employment strategy. There are different programs coming out within that general strategy and $12.7 million has been set aside for education and work programs.

"This is extremely important because I think there has been a massive gap in the area for many years, inasmuch as we used to have technical schools that fitted in between the "I'll-get-a-job-when-I-leave-school" and a university career with tertiary education.

"That area of technical skilling got taken out of the system to a great degree and I believe it has increased the gap between secondary schools and tertiary education.

"I think that this is where people in the past have looked at the situation and come to the conclusion, very correctly, that industry needs to be linked with the workplace, with government and involvement in where industry's needs are and the relevant curriculum to be developed to suit the industry.

"Schools in the past have attempted to move towards this thinking, in minor ways and to the best of their ability, although there was not a great deal of resources thrown into this area."
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"They attempted to give students work experience in what type of career paths might be open to them. But it has never been a co-ordinated course. They may have had a look, but they have fallen into that gap when they left school. They may have been picked up by TAFE colleges or SkillShare programs, but they have gone into the revolving door of training schemes."

Does government have a role in helping this process?

"Absolutely. That’s why this strategy we are looking at through the education department is tailored to bring in government support—to assist with an area that has not been filled before—that direct link between students who are still completing their subjects, but a curriculum that links into the industry in that area to give them another look at the career path open to them. So I think this is a very important step. It is one that completes the link up at this stage.

"In South Australia we already have an example of a secondary school linking its curricula to local industry, in Salisbury High School. It is working very well."

**SMALL BUSINESS**

You are familiar with all the problems of training in small business that arise from small staff numbers and multiskilling. Can government help?

"Yes. Partly with employment packages, partly with exemptions from payroll tax and to some extent exemptions from WorkCover, so the government takes on the liability."

**PERSONAL GOALS**

"I had other experiences through my life that also help. Education has always been of great interest. I wrote and ran remedial programs for children and was chair of the SkillShare program for five years, through the TAFE Avago program, which was lauded nationally for achieving a 71 per cent success rate in employment.

"We were also the first to introduce self-learning modules, apply them to the basic areas and bring them along to development in courses. It was wonderful working with people who were full of ideas and were able to pxH together a curriculum of a very high standard."

When asked what she wanted to achieve personally in vocational education and training in 1997 in South Australia, Dorothy Kotz replied: "I’d like to think this is the year we can take a big leap forward, so that by the end of the year we are successful in taking our youth unemployment figures down and encourage more of our young people to continue their education."

Carol Cheshire

The Hon. Dorothy Kotz, MP. Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education and Minister for Youth Affairs, South Australia

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