WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED MAATS?

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In 1985, Mr Bob Hawke announced the “Priority One” policy aimed at improving opportunities for young Australians entering the work force. The Australian Traineeship System was one of several strategies in this policy. The aim of Traineeships was to provide job seekers with experience, and to break the cycle of “no experience, no skills and no job”. These Traineeships were targeted at 17 - 19 year olds and offered a minimum of combined on and off-the-job training. In May, 1986, 120 trainees commenced their off-the-job training with TAFE, NSW, following a tri-partite agreement between the relevant trade unions, employers and Government bodies. The aim of AVTS was to develop a coherent and unified system of entry level training for the Australian workforce. It embraced all aspects of vocational education and training which led to the development of skills on entry to the workforce. Over the next ten years the number of traineeships has expanded from less than ten to over 90 in 1996 to meet the changing needs of industry. Expansion has also occurred in the number of industry and occupational areas in which traineeships can be offered. The characteristics of trainees has also changed.

Since 1994 people of all ages can now undertake a Traineeship. Trainees now may have their HSC or other qualifications and may have employment experience. Under certain conditions they may be current employees.

The Labour Government of 1994, released a white Paper on employment entitled Working Nation. The aim of Working Nation was to reduce unemployment. A number of strategies were put forward including a significant expansion of Traineeships. Trainees were to be paid a National Training Wage (NTW). The NTW covered trainees of all ages and equity groups. DEET was to market the Traineeships to a wide range of industry areas, with the assistance of NETTFORCE companies. The Traineeships became an important component of the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) and now Modern Australian Apprentice and Traineeship System (MAATS).

The new Federal Government of 1996, decided that the system was not flexible enough to achieve one of its top priorities, ie expanding training opportunities for young people. And so MAATS was born. MAATS has retained the key principles of the AVTS and builds on them. MAATS goes beyond the attributes of AVTS.

MAATS is a key initiative of the Commonwealth Government’s Employment and Training Policy which aims to deregulate and streamline existing training and industrial relations arrangement to make employment based training a more attractive proposition.

MAATS is based on six principles:
industry led system

industry will drive training through “user choice” and greater involvements in determining training arrangements

streamlined regulation

regulation will be used only to underpin resource allocation and funding, ensure quality outcomes and protect parties to training arrangements

expanded training opportunities

structured training will be expanded and extended into new areas

regional and community involvement

stronger links will be developed between schools, training and work and there will be a focus on meeting the needs of small to medium sized enterprises

access and equity

there will be continued opportunities for those disadvantaged in VET to participate and gain quality outcomes

national framework

a national training framework will be established and national training packages developed based on national standards, qualifications and assessment strategies.

The objective of MAATS is to expand employment and career opportunities, especially for young people and to increase the international competitiveness of Australian enterprises through enhancing workforce skills. NSW has endorsed this objective and the six key principles of MAATS.

Traineeships are an important component of MAATS because they represent the characteristics of the system, that is they are

based on Industry Standards

use competency based curriculum

integrate on-and-off-the-job training

utilise nationally portable qualifications at Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Level 1 - 4
Traineeships incorporate the principles of recognition of prior learning

may be delivered using flexible delivery mode with emphasis on workplace delivery

TAFE is no longer the major provider of the off-the-job training, with a large number of private providers delivering both off-the-job and on-the-job training to meet the needs of a competitive training market. Through “User Choice” employers and trainees choose the appropriate training provider to suit their needs. This increased competition amongst training providers demands the provision of innovative and cost effective ways to respond to employer and trainee requirements whilst maintaining educational quality.

MAATS has demanded change in the role of teachers. Innovative forms of educational delivery have blossomed. Mixed mode delivery including block release and self paced or accelerated learning have been introduced. Workplace delivery and mentoring in the workplace are essential components of successful traineeships.

Successful program delivery can only occur with considerable liaison with employers and the ability to remain open minded and flexible in the examination of possible training options. Negotiation with teachers, training staff employers and government departments is constant and a part of the daily working life for TAFE teachers of the 1990s.

DTEC stated in the latest MAATS Information Bulletin of November this year, the Commonwealth has proposed that apprenticeships and traineeships under MAATS be negotiated within the framework of Australian Workplace Agreements which will be established under the new Commonwealth Relations Bill currently before the Senate.

National Training Packages will be developed and endorsed and include competency standards, qualifications and assessment guidelines but not endorsed curriculum or learning strategies. Employers and their employees will agree on a training program drawn from nationally endorsed Training Packages. Training programs will include details of training and wage arrangements and be approved by industry-led local approval authorities. The training program may not necessarily lead to a ‘full’ certificate but could lead to a ‘statement of attainment’.

The bulletin stated that apprentice and trainee wages will be based on time in productive work and not include time spent undertaking on or off-the-job training. The Commonwealth has agreed to pay a ‘top-up’ where necessary to bring this wage up to the minimum level of the National Training Wage.
The Commonwealth has proposed that States and Territories pass 'mirror' legislation to the Australian Workplace Relations Bill to allow a consistent approach nationally to the implementation of the MAATS model. This proposal includes States and Territories abolishing the declaration of vocations and dismantling existing apprenticeship and traineeship industrial and training arrangement.

The Commonwealth has also proposed that the administration of training arrangement, including existing Commonwealth and State responsibilities) be delegated to Contracted Entry Level Training Agencies (CELTAS) to provide a 'one stop shop' for apprenticeship and traineeship administration.

Group Training Companies are to expand their role to include responsibility for increasing the number of apprentices and trainees especially in small business. The Commonwealth Government in the recent budget has acknowledged the important role of group training companies as managing agents to oversee the training of apprentices and trainees. Group Training companies will take the lead in assisting small and medium size businesses making it easier to employ apprentices and trainees and thereby improve their overall business operation. User Choice arrangements for the off-the-job training of apprentices and trainees are aimed at full implementation of user choice by the beginning of January, 1998. The implementation of user choice will enable employers and their apprentices and trainees to negotiate off-the-job training with the provider of their choice. Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships are proposed for school students as an expansion of the vocational education and training in schools.

A MAATS Reference Group, chaired by an ANTA Board member, has been established by the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA Minco) to advise the Ministerial Council on the implementation of MAATS. The Reference Group's report to the September meeting of ANTA Minco contained 23 proposals. The proposals are currently being worked on.

The proposals seek to build on the strengths and tradition of the existing system, but remove the inflexibilities which reduce options and choice at the enterprise level and inhibit effective national recognition of outcomes.

A combination of the User Choice initiative already agreed by Ministers, and the proposed regulatory changes, is at the heart of the reforms. User choice will empower employers to negotiate with training providers who in turn will have a greater capacity to respond to enterprise needs.

The Reference Group has supported the stronger role for schools, Group Training Companies and employers already proposed in the Federal Government MAATS policy.
The Reference Group has put forward proposals to address access and equity issues. These are based on the view that the flexibility of the new arrangements will enable programmes to be tailored to the needs of individuals who are less likely to gain access than others due to race, gender, language and literacy problems, disability or unemployment.

In principle NSW supports the implementation of user choice, however, NSW has not agreed to amend industrial relations and training legislation. This means NSW will retain Declaration of Vocations and links with State awards and amended pay rates. A User Choice Taskforce has been established and will work throughout 1997 to reach agreement on, and to develop, appropriate procedures and arrangements to ensure effective implementation of User Choice by January 1 1998. The User Choice Taskforce will focus on 27 identified unresolved issues, and aims to report on these issues by March, 1997. These issues include:

- costing and pricing
- cost shifting
- access and equity
- resourcing user choice
- marketing strategy
- guidelines for customisation
- a framework for ‘agreements’ between clients and providers
- third party access to TAFE facilities

and the list goes on.

An important part of the MAATS proposals is the establishment of a National Training Framework. Two key parts of the National Training Framework are:

- training packages that incorporate competency standards, assessment guidelines, learning strategies, professional development materials and advise on unit costing and

- official recognition of competency provided through a record in a Skills Passport, a Statement of Attainment or qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

The training packages, which comprise broadly based and flexible competency standards as well as learning strategies and assessment guidelines, would be developed for key industry sectors. Assessment guidelines would provide advise on the ways in which achievement against the standards may be determined in both workplaces and educational institutions. Learning strategies would describe the different ways in which training may be organised in workplaces and educational institutions to assist individuals attain the standards. Training packages would also include:
details on the packaging of units of competency against the AQF for the purposes of awarding nationally recognised qualifications

professional development materials for trainers and teachers and

unit costs that define the public funding parameters for the delivery of the outcomes of the training packages.

The development and implementation of the Framework would be a co-operative venture involving industry organisation, registered private and public providers, State/Territory training and recognition agencies and ANTA.

The November DTEC Information Bulletin on MAATS states that the approach taken to implement MAATS in NSW is designed to enhance the State’s existing high quality apprenticeship and traineeship system and to preserve the current wages and conditions of employment of apprentices and trainees. NSW will implement the objective and key principles of MAATS within existing legislation and infrastructure and ensure that vocational education and training in NSW is flexible, geared to industry needs, broadened to new areas and free of unnecessary regulation and administration.

NSW will continue to work with the Commonwealth and other States and Territories to ensure a consistent approach to training reforms for apprentices and trainees across Australia.