Terry Moran

First, it is important to recognise the size of the vocational education and training sector. Of the 18 million population of Australia, some 12 million people are working age (15 to 64). Of these, 8 million are employed, and some 1.3 million people are undertaking government funded vocational education and training. This compares favourably to the university sector where 643,000 people are undertaking Higher Education courses. Further, vocational education and training is serviced by a wide variety of providers including TAFE, private providers, industry, and adult community education providers.

We must also recognise that employment patterns are changing rapidly with stagnant employment in production industries, such as process manufacturing and food processing, (industries which are typically strongly represented in VET) and strong employment growth in service industries, such as community services, health, education, sales and personal service, and computing. The challenge for the VET sector is, therefore, to respond to the training needs of industries which have:

- high levels of training, declining employment shares and poor growth prospects (such as engineering/mining and building/construction)
- low levels of training, increasing employment shares and good growth prospects (such as tourism and hospitality and health and community services)

If we ask: “Is VET expanding to increase the pool of skilled people?” then we know that:

- projections of industry demand suggest that a significant expansion in the number of people with qualifications will occur over the next decade
- the qualification profile of the workforce differs significantly across industry sectors
- unskilled employees with no post school qualifications are being replaced by skilled workers
- effective planning of training needs must reflect industry demand, age profiles and qualification profiles

**NEED TO OPTIMISE POTENTIAL**

The future system will ensure that the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry, and to provide individuals within the Australian labour force with opportunities to optimise their employment potential. Australia will need:

- a highly skilled workforce
- a flexible and responsive system (especially to the needs of enterprises)
- a user friendly system, for both individuals and enterprises
- a genuinely national system of high quality

**NATIONAL STRATEGY**

ANTA is currently engaged in preliminary work on the National Strategy 1998-2003.

The objectives of the National Strategy are:

- equipping Australians for the world of work
- enhancing mobility in the labour market
- achieving equitable outcomes
- maximising the value of public expenditure on vocational education and training

The real challenges to be achieved in the development of the strategy include overcoming the complexity and lack of transparency of the system, the lack of a genuine national system, and working within constraints placed on providers to respond rapidly to new technology.
THE ROLE OF TAFE

I see the role of TAFE in VET as enormously important. TAFE Institutes are responsible for delivering a large proportion, 94% of Annual Hours Curriculum (AHC), (82.5% of clients) of VET in Australia - over 268 million hours a year to 1.3 million students in 1132 training locations.

TAFE institutes are central players in government meeting its economic and social goals and they offer a unique and positive educational experience for their students. They also play an important role in community development more generally. However, in the increasingly competitive environment we operate in, TAFE must be allowed to embrace all the opportunities this type of environment offers. TAFE autonomy must be seriously considered in this context. The increasingly blurred state, national and international borders will also add pressure for TAFE reform.

Interestingly, for 45.8% commencing students at Bachelor level or below, their basis of admission was the satisfactory completion of the final year of secondary education at school. Only 28.5% of VET students reported Year 12 as their highest school level completed, although an additional 37.5% of VET students reported that their highest school level completed was not known.

MAJOR POLICY INITIATIVES

The National Training Framework will deliver a more coherent and integrated national approach to VET, improved quality of all VET products and services, national recognition and portability of qualifications, increased flexibility in delivery and greater responsiveness to client needs.

The central feature of the National Training Framework are Training Packages and the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF).

Training Packages integrate national products to provide comprehensive national resources for VET. These include endorsed components:
- competency standards, links to qualifications and assessment guidelines which identify benchmarks for provision and non-endorsed components
- learning strategies, assessment materials, and professional development materials

The Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) aims to provide streamlined regulations to support nationally agreed reforms, improved quality assurance and national consistency of systems and operations. It is based on:
- mutual recognition of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), services and products
- registration of all training organisations seeking recognition
- self-managed recognition or quality endorsement

The ARF creates a more level playing field between private and public providers, and encourages diversification of recognised products/services, thus building a more competitive environment. It also enables RTOs to take responsibility for specific delivery/program content, supporting individual client needs, including Training Programs for New Apprenticeships.

User Choice, an important component of New Apprenticeships, signifies a strong commitment to promoting responsiveness in vocational education and training. It has three essential elements:
- significantly greater market power to individual clients to negotiate with individual registered training organisation
- increased responsiveness on the supply side of the training market
- outcomes which are compatible with public expenditure constraints and efficient use of resources

If you want information on ANTA and the issues and initiatives raised in this article access the ANTA home page: http://www.anta.gov.au

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ANTA