

Vocational Education And Training: Its Impact On The Traditional Education Environment

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Until 1 July 1999 the Library Resource Centre I managed was an autonomous operation which serviced the need of the Higher Education and the VET sector of Curtin University - Kalgoorlie Campus. From that date we became part of the Curtin Library and Information Service and will now operate within their environment. I rapidly came to understand that there was little knowledge of the VET sector within my new peer group and so I prepared a paper on the role of the library within the VET sector and how it differed from the Curtin LIS traditional operation.

VET Historical Background

In Australia what we know today as Vocational Education and Training or VET began as Mechanics Institutes, Schools of Mines and Technical and Working Men's Colleges each of whom had a role to develop the skills of Australia's working population.

In 1974 the Kangan report titled "Needs in technical and further education" defined the roles and mission for the education system we came to know as "Technical and Further Education".

As a result technical training in Australia began to develop a different profile, moving from traditional areas to accommodate preparatory and pre-vocational training. Service industries expanded during the 1970's & 1980's and brought into question priorities within a publicly funded training system. Concurrently the need for greater industry involvement in training emerged to ensure the effective skilling of the workforce.

By the late 1980's an extensive network of TAFE Institutes and private providers existed across Australia. Private providers we would all be familiar with are the Australian Institute of Management or IFAP (Industrial Foundation for Accident Prevention).

Industry demand for training increases and two further key education reports were released, the Deveson in 1990 "Training costs of award restructuring" and the Finn in 1991 "Young people's participation in post-compulsory education and training". They consolidated the view that our training system needed to be more demand driven and required comprehensive reform.

As a result ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) was established to

- Develop a federal system of Vocational Education and Training which worked through co-operation of all states, territories and the commonwealth
- Facilitate strategic input by industry

In 1994 ANTA reviewed the implementation of training reform via the Fitzgerald Report "Successful reform" with specific emphasis the relationship between training providers and their two major clients - industry and the individual.

Initiatives which emerged from the Fitzgerald Report which shape VET today include

- Best practice
- User choice

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- Devolution of responsibility for accreditation and standards endorsement
- Quality assurance
- Industry training advisory bodies

Today ANTA advises that the VET sector is

- Capturing the best advice from industry
- Increasing responsiveness to clients
- Simplifying regulations
- Promoting efficient quality training
- Providing equitable vocational education and training opportunities

Organisation

At the top of the VET organisation chart we have

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

This is comprised of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for VET. Our Minister is currently Graham Kierath. The role of the ministerial council is to

- Set National Strategic Policy
- Set National objectives
- Set National Priorities

ANTA (Australian National Training Authority)

A Commonwealth statutory authority with a 5 person board drawn from industry.

Their role is to

- Prepare the "National strategy for VET" and report on the outcomes
- Advise on the distribution of federal funding to states and territories
- Manage and develop the National Training Framework
- Policy review
- Evaluate and review national priorities
- Undertake national initiatives as agreed by the Ministers

STATE AND TERRITORY TRAINING AUTHORITIES

In WA it is the Western Australian Department of Training and Employment. As the states training authority it has a role to

- Plan and accept responsibility for vocational education and training in Western Australia
- Be accountable to the Ministerial Council on National Policy matters

INDUSTRY TRAINING ADVISORY BODIES

These are known around the traps as ITAB's. They are at National and State/Territory level.

Their role is

- Key conduits of advice and information between the VET system and Industry
- Providing a way for industry needs to be articulated and acted upon.

TRAINING PROVIDERS

These are public and private providers. Curtin University, Kalgoorlie Campus VET sector and the Central Metropolitan College are public providers. Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation, IFAP and the Australian Institute of Management are all private providers. In order to be able to receive government funding to present training both public and private providers must be registered or endorsed as quality deliverers of VET training.

Funding

Commonwealth sourced infrastructure funding assistance to the VET sector is provided and facilitated by ANTA through the Infrastructure Program.

Recurrent funding is provided via a mechanism known as profile funding. If you remember I spoke of the ministerial council setting national strategies and priorities. From these two decisions emerges the National Training Profile. Each year public providers bid from their state training authority for the number of hours they wish to deliver within the training profile.

For example:

Kalgoorlie may bid for 45,000 hours in the hospitality area. They are granted 28,000 hours. These hours are funded at approximately \$11.40 per hour. Thus the funding received in hospitality is \$319,200. If 45,000 hours are delivered, the additional 17,000 will attract no recurrent funds. Higher Education funding is based on the EFTSU, the equivalent full time student unit, which attracts a payment according to the type of discipline being studied.

The other method of funding is via tendering for short courses. These are generally facilitated via DEETYA. Employment programs instigated as part of the federal government's economic strategy aimed at lowering the unemployment rate pour additional millions into the training industry each year. WADT facilitates short courses via industry specific tenders. Each training provider bids to provide training which is aimed at specific industries or courses at specific locations to access these additional funds.

In addition, a public training provider may choose to offer a course or program which is not covered by either of these funding mechanisms. In that case the course must be self funding. These can range from community interest programs such as "Introduction to the Stockmarket" to Certificate IV in Childcare and Early Education Assistants Training.

Course Structure And Accreditation

VET courses are nationally accredited and transferable. We are currently changing from a system of national modules to a new mechanism know as Training Packages. They are an initiative identified by the Ministerial Council as a national priority. Training packages are developed under the guidance of ANTA. Rather than dictating a course structure and outline, they comprise learning outcomes known as units of competence, strict methods of assessment and a set of rules for applying against the Australian Qualifications Framework in order to

achieve a qualification. They encourage a work component in the training. In fact training may be:

- On the job
- Off the job
- During regular work
- By student work experience or work placement
- By work simulation
- Any combination of the above

There is no such thing as a standard list of texts, resources or training materials. I received a list of training packages available for introduction in January 2000 last Monday. This places a heavy emphasis on the institution to be able to produce the necessary resources quickly and economically to be able to commence delivery.

Within the Higher Education system each organisation writes and owns its own courses. They are peer accredited every three years and do not have automatic transferability or recognition within another equivalent teaching institution.

In addition, the Ministerial Council has decreed VET now must implement programs and activities such as:

- User choice
- Block delivery
- Flexible delivery
- Recognition of prior learning
- Recognition of current competency
- Strategic alliances such as VET in schools

There is a large amount of information available via the ANTA homepage to help you understand more. What should be noted is that the VET and Higher Education sectors share many areas of focus: major funding sources (DEETYA); the need to generate funds; forging strategic alliances to gain greater market share and more meet the needs of our clients; and the Australian Qualifications Framework. It is the level of emphasis placed on each of these variables which differentiates the sectors.

Kalgoorlie VET has not responded well to all the change which has occurred since 1994 and so we are currently facing functional review and are being forced to make vast changes in order to reduce costs and increase student enrolled hours.

Impact On The Educational Environment

So how does all of this impact on the educational environment?

- First it must be recognised that the major thrust of VET delivery is about practical skills. This requires a totally different type of basic resources. The library collection has a high emphasis on "how to" materials & AV resources rather than theory and philosophy of any subject. All resources whether they are library, teaching or informative must be current and lead the customer to the required units of competency. Further they must offer different ways in which to achieve that outcome according to the personal abilities of the client.

- Second, there is a need for immediacy in the provision of resources. It is highly possible for us to win a tender to present a training program in Front Line Management aimed at purchasing stores in the mining industry on a Wednesday and for it to be expected for it to commence within 10 days. If we do not have some of the specialised resources (staff to teach, course outlines, learning materials) we must obtain or generate them and have them accessible in time for the course to commence.

Compare this to the higher education sector where the introduction of a new course of study takes a year to proceed through course committees, academic board etc. The planning and introduction of curriculum changes within the state education system is more comparable to the higher education scenario. All this allows plenty of time for the organisation to gather and prepare not only resources but training programs and skills to respond to the new initiative. We find the introduction to Curtin-owned higher education offerings at Kalgoorlie takes on the immediacy of the introduction of VET programs. Because the course exists within the Curtin environment when EFTSU's are allocated to Kalgoorlie no consideration is given to appropriate resourcing being available. My best friends in this case are the Internet to gather information about resources and my corporate credit card and telephone to obtain them.

Immediacy also relates to clients. Apprentices arrive and enrol one day but they are not due back on campus for three weeks. We must facilitate access to all areas NOW rather than wait. Part time staff can have actually been employed, delivered their course and completed their contract before they appear on the human resource database. Teamwork and creativity are the order of the day.

- Third, there are no such things as terms or semesters any more. Training is presented at any time of the year, on any day of the week. Maintaining service to clients, continuing the normal housekeeping activities, participating in campus wide planning and business and scheduling leave with minimal staffing levels makes each of the managers quite a juggler at times. Fee For Service programs run on Saturdays and Sundays, flexible delivery continues on through semester and term breaks, executive programs have large block release programs in January. Most of these clients are paying large amounts of money for these courses and at times they really do "expect the world". I am expecting FFS executive program students from 16 January next year for an intensive 3 week program. The Library staff will negotiate directly with them on what hours they wish the library to be accessible.
- Fourth, moves towards delivery within the workplace means that a lecturer may present a semester of work to 8 apprentices in a three week block on site at "The Granites Mine" in the Tanami desert. They need to take enough resources with them to be able to deliver the program and to take into consideration all the possible scenarios which may occur. We live by checklists.
- Fifth, flexible delivery is already an integral part of VET programs. Not simply on-line courses, but programs which are delivered without formal lecture programs, start and end dates and which use many different types of resource which the customer must access in order to reach their learning outcomes. Flexible delivery via computer-managed learning is the newest change to impact on us. We will be expected to become facilitators in assisting customers to access their learning programs, teach them to use the software and to move them forward when they have completed a specific learning outcome. My staff will all

attend a "Train the Trainer" 30 hour program before the end of the year to develop appropriate skills in this area.

- Sixth, the range of learners we deal with stretches from University graduates returning to VET to gain practical skills through to basic literacy and numeracy clients who are beginning to feel their way into what is a very frightening environment. This requires a very high level of sensitivity and the ability to change the manner in which you deal with clients instantly. Hard and fast rules often are difficult to apply. Personally I find the literacy students the most rewarding. They approach us as their mentor or special person and the first time they allow someone else to help them we know we have done our job well.
- Seventh, remoteness has placed us into a position of being the only provider of substantial VET training. In the metropolitan area it is possible to have a choice of provider. Our clients, whether Higher Education or VET part-time students, do not live within 40kms of campus. We have clients who drive 150-400kms to receive instruction or use our resources for the formal courses they are taking with our institutions. We have no luxury of being able to direct them to another resource. As a consequence we have developed a much closer relationship with our clients for whom we coordinate access.
- Eighth, the library finds it necessary to maintain a high level of extremely attractive resources. As the VET sector teaches the latest application packages (hospitality, automotive studies for example) we have a good collection of materials in this area. We send around 100 items a week to Bentley and about 25 percent of these currently relate to applications packages, web site building and the languages associated with this process. Our cooking videos are also in high demand. We teach in these areas and are finding that it is necessary to expand our Closed Reserve collection to unprecedented levels to ensure that material remains available for teaching programs. On the other hand Bentley have a large collection of feature films which relieve a boring Saturday night and their education, management and nursing collections take a beating from Kalgoorlie.
- Ninth, with Curtin providing the connectivity to electronic resourcing our service delivery to all students has taken on new boundaries. Geology students access the US Bureau of Mines for the wonderful programs they make available, automotive apprentices are able to directly access information available on homepages for manufacturers to get the latest specifications and information regarding the vehicle they are working on. For students in courses such as Foundation Studies, a program which articulates students into university, the Internet has been a real boost. Web-based assignments are becoming the norm. Next year we hope to be able to provide e-mail access for students as part of the learning process.
- Tenth, flexibility will not only relate to the delivery of courses but over the next year I expect it to permeate all aspects of a very changed organisation. I take you back to the very beginning of this paper to remind you that VET has been directed by the Ministerial Council to respond to client needs and to implement programs and activities specifically for that purpose. We need to have to hand a master list of expertise, courses and resources and to be entrepreneurial in meeting the training needs of every client who walks through our door. We need to present a strong, client focused and highly competent corporate image. Curtin University Kalgoorlie VET sector is changing so WATCH THIS SPACE.