

Speech to International Forum of Education in Penal Systems

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Latest Developments in the Training Arena

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Today I intend to speak on four main areas:

- I will begin by providing a brief overview of the overarching national strategy for VET and the equity supporting paper
- secondly the National Training framework including Training Packages and the Australian Recognition Framework
- I shall then mention some specific initiatives such as toolboxes, the communications project currently underway and VET in schools
- Then I will conclude by talking briefly about VET in Correctional Institutions and *Working together to break the cycle* – a position paper on VET for Indigenous Inmates.

- **Firstly the National Strategy**

Vocational education and training, like many areas of public policy, has a vision. That vision, set down in *A Bridge to the Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training* states:

“Our overarching challenge is to create the world’s most innovative and best regarded vocational education and training sector”.

This includes:

- ensuring the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry, and
- providing individuals with opportunities to optimize their potential.

To do this, the benefits of vocational education and training must be equally distributed, that is,

- the potential for education and training to improve people’s life chances, and
- to give them security and satisfaction both in work and in life,

must be available to all people on an equitable basis.

The National Strategy has five objectives:

- Equipping Australians for the world of work
- Enhancing mobility in the labour market
- Achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training
- Increasing investment in training
- Maximizing the value of public vocational education and training expenditure

It is the third of these objectives, achieving equitable outcomes, which is particularly relevant here today because the simple fact is that the benefits of vocational education and training are far from equitably distributed and unless concerted action is taken in this respect, the benefits of current reforms to the VET sector are unlikely to flow through to many individuals, who particularly need to access those reforms.

What the National Strategy does is paint the broad picture and outline the reform agenda - including the Australian Recognition Framework, Training Packages and New Apprenticeships.

Beneath the Strategy sit a number of supporting papers, the one I want to briefly discuss is:

- **Achieving Equitable Outcomes**

The paper has three functions:

- to provide up-to-date information relating to the current position of specific client groups in vocational education and training
- to acknowledge that while States/Territories may have differing approaches to achieving equity in vocational education and training some consistent, strategic action across the nation is necessary
- to propose how the accountability and planning mechanisms for vocational education and training can be utilized

This framework for equity is one, which can be implemented using a number of different perspectives. It is equally consistent with approaches based on a philosophy of 'social justices' as with approaches from the perspective of 'managing diversity'. The framework also supplements the focus on selected broad client groups with closer attention to the capacity of the system to respond to particular needs and circumstances.

Prisoners can often fit into equity groups as many have poor literacy and numeracy skills, there is a high proportion of Indigenous inmates and others may have a disability of some sort.

So the national strategy and its supporting papers provide the framework in which the National Training Framework operates.

- **The NTF is central to the VET reforms.**

It provides:

- A more coherent and integrated national approach to VET
- Improved quality of all VET products and services
- National recognition and portability
- Increased flexibility in delivery
- Greater responsiveness to client needs

The national training framework, while profound in its effect and consequences, is based on some very simple propositions:

1. industry has been working to describe the competencies it wants in the workplace
2. the competencies are being mapped to a simple set of qualifications that are recognised nationally, and we're on the way to having them recognised internationally
3. there is now a whole range of people who provide training – TAFEs and private providers who are registered to ensure they can deliver a quality product. This recognition system is now national. We are forging ahead with what we call flexible delivery – in other words, training that is
 - just in time
 - just enough
 - just for you.

Flexible delivery in these terms means that training can be structured in an enormous variety of ways –

- on-the-job, off-the-job or anything in between
- provided any time of the day or night, over 365 days of the year
- on-line and off-line
- self paced or classroom.

This flexibility should provide assistance to prison systems, educators and to prisoners.

The central features of the NTF are:

- Training packages
- New recognition arrangements – the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF).
- **Firstly the ARF, this provides**
 - Streamlined regulation to support nationally agreed reforms and initiatives
 - Improved quality assurance
 - National consistency of systems and operations
 - Mutual recognition of registered training organisations (RTOs), service and products
 - Registration of all training organisations seeking recognition
 - Self – managed recognition – quality endorsed

- **Now to Training Packages**

Training packages providing comprehensive industry standards (including key competencies) and national qualifications will be available across all industry sectors and widely used for delivery and assessment.

Training Packages have the following characteristics

- Assessment against units of competency – not curriculum learning outcomes
- Designed for flexible delivery
- Responsive to the needs of industry
- User friendly for both individuals and enterprises
- Genuinely national and portable
- integrate national products to provide comprehensive national resources for VET
- have components which identify benchmarks for provision and national recognition, and
- non-endorsed components provide tools to guide and assist provision

They are the cornerstones of the National Training Framework.

Together they will ensure that:

- People can develop the skills needed by enterprises and industries using VET products and services
- Training providers are free to respond to changing skill needs of firms, industries and individuals
- Training programs help people develop key competencies, so making them more adaptable to industry needs
- Vocational education and training products and services are developed for all industries
- Qualifications are easily understood by employers and employees and they represent an accurate picture of a person's skills.

Important features for those people in correctional facilities undertaking VET, I would think.

So what are the Benefits of working with the NTF?

The NTF is designed to provide benefits to employers, students and providers.

These benefits include portability of credentials which means that:

- training outcomes are recognised in every S/T
- there is the capacity to continue training when a student moves between institutes or states.

Nationally recognised language, literacy and numeracy competencies are being incorporated into training packages.

These can be stand-alone and/or work to provide a common language for teachers when describing individuals' progress and needs.

As a result of the reforms, registered training organisations will be able to operate in all States and Territories, developing a borderless vocational education and training system. Qualifications and statements of attainment issued by one registered training organisation will be recognised by others and there will be rigorous quality assurance and auditing arrangements in place.

ANTA is working on a number of initiatives to assist in the implementation of the NTF.

- **The development of Tool Boxes is one of these.**

Earlier I touched on flexible delivery. Well toolboxes provide a prime example of some of the modern tools, which have been developed and are continuing to be developed to assist providers in delivering Training Packages flexibly.

So what is a toolbox?

A toolbox is a set of multimedia resources that provides a framework for the development of training programs for the online delivery of National Training Packages.

The contents of a toolbox can be customised by Registered Training Organisations to meet the needs of client groups or particular enterprises. The aim of the tool box is to support RTOs increase their capacity to design and develop training programs which can be delivered online.

Toolboxes comprise:

- Packages of generic resources in a variety of media, including, but not restricted to, video, audio, CD ROM, digital photographs, and animation
- Developer's notes, guidelines, supporting documentation
- Learning materials 'translated' from the Training Package and combined with authoring software to facilitate the development of further, customised materials
- Assessment instruments, which meet the assessment guidelines contained in the Training Package

- **Other Initiatives**

With the reforms mentioned there has been substantial progress towards a comprehensive and responsive national system. However, if Australian vocational education and training is to become the envy of the world, (as per our national strategy), the acquisition of skills and lifelong learning has to become the number one national priority.

There is still much to do to realise this goal.

Two statistics are worth noting. Currently, for those Australians who are 25 and older fewer than 20% are participating in any form of education and 52% of the Australian workforce does not have a post-school qualification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997).

- What is ANTA doing to address this?

In order to meet the challenges of the future, ANTA is continually working towards building better partnerships with our stakeholders, understanding our clients better and thinking strategically in order to be 'ahead of the game'.

A key initiative is the marketing and communications strategy.

We know that ANTA and the VET sector and systems are perceived to be far too complex and bureaucratic.

So for the first time we are using social marketing techniques to assess Australian's attitude to life long learning and skill acquisition and then to try to grab the hearts and minds of all Australians, including industry. We have started with:

- Market research
- Market segmentation

The marketing strategy is helping us understand our client groups better so that we can:

- Tailor our products
- Develop appropriate communications campaigns and
- Reengineer our business around our customer needs.

As I just said, we know that:

- 52% of the Australian workforce does not have a post-school qualification and in the rural sector the percentage is much higher

We also know that:

- on average, those individuals without post-school qualifications,
 - have higher levels of unemployment,
 - lower levels of labour-force mobility,
 - a higher chance of being retrenched
 - lower earnings, and
 - undertake less training than do people with qualifications.

Australia is ranked 15th out of 22 OECD countries in terms of attainment of post compulsory qualifications and is slipping.

In 1996, only 17.8% of employers were undertaking any form of structured training in the workplace – a decline of almost 5% over the previous three years.

We also know that generally prisoners have a lower level of education than the average Australian and so are likely to fit into the above groups both before and after prison.

- **I shall now move to VET In Schools**

VET in schools is seen as one way of better meeting client needs. It could also be seen as a way to stop juveniles ending up in institutions. More and more, people are beginning to see VET in schools as part of the answer to young people's problems and as an important step in lifelong learning.

VET in schools provides a range of benefits including:

- Picking up students in danger of exiting system
- Assisting them to develop life long learning skills
- Developing linkages to future education, training and employment.

Some recent statistics show how VET in Schools is catering to the diverse needs of the student population:

There are 117,000 students enrolled in VET in Schools in 1998 with projected enrolments for 1999 being 128,000.

Approximately 87% of secondary schools across Australia are involved in providing programs for students –a dramatic change since the early 1990s when only a handful of schools were involved.

Nearly 1500 school students have signed Training Agreements as part-time New Apprentices at the end of 1998 and projections are that these numbers will treble to approximately 4800 by the end of 1999.

VET in schools is about facilitating a successful transition from school to work, which will help ensure that the workforce of the future has the skills for the future. The OECD lists the following elements as necessary for successful transition from school to work:

1. Learning pathways and qualifications frameworks
2. Learning in real work settings
3. A broad range of general and vocational skills
4. "Youth friendly" labour markets
5. Safety nets and reintegration
6. Information and guidance
7. Effective institutional frameworks
8. Monitoring tools.

Lifelong learning is about breaking down barriers and replacing them with building blocks. Creating building blocks is not about lowering the standard of our education, but about creating viable steps towards realising various qualifications and levels of attainment, which can be built on in a number of ways. It is also about ensuring that lots of different coloured, shaped and sized blocks fit together.

We need to work out how we can meet this challenge in correctional facilities.

A project undertaken for NCVER, by Dr Bob Semmens and Jenni Oldfield (Jan 99), indicates that VET does improve access to employment, and lower recidivism, but few studies identify how VET assists as there are many variables which affect why prisoners participate in programs, how they respond, the style of training and the support networks available.

The main focus of education and training in corrections seems to be in the following areas:

- Literacy/numeracy – The senate report 1996 cites an educational needs survey, carried out in the Northern Territory, which asked prisoners about the programs that they thought would be in their best interests. The results showed that the majority of prisoners did not request vocational education, but large numbers did request literacy and numeracy programs
- Women in particular, saw vocational programs as being of little relevance and would prefer courses to do with everyday living. However without VET programs, women may return to society older but still without skills and education
- Access to employment courses
- Certificate of general education – overall aim is to allow students a pathway to vocational education, to work and to enhanced participation in society and its flexibility allows it to be integrated into themes of interest, eg, parenting courses Occupational health and safety or the theory components of a variety of industry training programs

Currently training in correctional institutions is mainly the responsibility of Correctional Services departments rather than the State Training Authorities. However, any VET undertaken in prisons should be consistent with the NTF so that prisoners will have a transferable record of their learning outcomes.

Prisons are able to take advantage of flexible modes of delivery and the pathways offered by the NTF so they can integrate VET, personal development and tertiary educational programs. These flexible modes may assist in overcoming, what is often quoted as a problem, the lack of teaching staff/tutors. Other problems cited are lack of supplies, equipment and learning resources. The NTF also provides some answers to these issues.

For example, trainers in correctional institutions are able to take advantage of the toolboxes mentioned earlier to assist in their training.

There is a need for an integrated approach from educators and prison management if programs are to be successful. The reforms introduced to the VET sector should assist prison systems to provide an integrated approach to prisoner learning.

As well as training in institutions, it is important to focus effort on post-release training.

Studies on male and female post-release experience suggest that, despite their best intentions, post release responsibilities and weak social networks make it very difficult for most prisoners to contemplate further study or training.

However, participation in post-release training has the potential to provide significant benefits for ex-prisoners. A number of overseas studies found that participation in VET slightly reduces recidivism without some groups of ex-prisoners. The Ohio

Department of Rehabilitation (1995) found that female offenders who had undertaken vocational education were one third less likely to recidivate than those who had not participated, and recidivism rates for 'serious' offenders were substantially reduced if they participated in education. The study also found that particular courses had more impact with particular groups, for example, Adult Basic Education had more of an impact on older prisoners, whereas vocational education was more successful with younger inmates.

Education and training has the potential to decrease recidivism and prisoner tension by:

- Increasing prisoner self-esteem
- Providing successful re-entry to the community
- Providing viable options for work as opposed to criminal activity
- Enhancing prisoner thinking and moral reasoning
- Occupying prisoners time and allowing individual expression

Now I would like to talk a little about Indigenous Australians in correctional facilities.

As we all know, Indigenous people are grossly over represented in adult correctional facilities and juvenile justice centres around Australia and the situation is getting worse.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training Advisory Council to the ANTA Board has prepared a position paper called 'Working together to break the cycle' which addresses this issue.

In the paper the Council argued that VET in corrections has potentially a dual role to fulfill: firstly, as a preventative measure in the community and secondly, as one important rehabilitative measure for those people who are already in custody.

For this reason, the Council is particularly interested in factors relating to unemployment, incomplete and unsuccessful outcomes from school, unsatisfactory vocational education and training outcomes, and very difficult employment outcomes. While these factors may relate to many Australians, they relate disproportionately to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

ANTA and the Council are of the view that VET in schools can play an important role in prevention, as an incomplete and inadequate education can be a major factor in crime.

In addition the Council identifies five key strategies to redress the barriers:

- Arrest and imprisonment prevention strategies, including appropriate, integrated education, employment and training opportunities in the community
- A statutory right to a minimum amount of appropriate education and training
- Professional development of corrections centre staff
- Cultural training of corrections centre staff
- Appropriate pre- and post-release support and rehabilitation services for Indigenous prisoners

- **To conclude:**

Today I have provided a brief overview of the national strategy, which establishes a framework for vocational education and training reforms and the national training framework including Training Packages and the ARF. I have talked about some specific initiatives such as the communications strategy, toolboxes and VET in schools before outlining some issues relating to training in correctional institutions, in particular, Indigenous issues which VET may assist in addressing.

Hopefully you will want to know more and so I will leave you with the ANTA website address. The website contains a wide range of information about vocational education and training. You are able to read about what is happening at a national level and search for information on specific areas of interest. In addition, it has links to other sites.

<http://www.anta.gov.au>