
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee

Inquiry into the quality of vocational education
and training in Australia.

**National Tertiary Education Union
Submission**

December 1999

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Recommendations

The development and expansion of schemes linking VET and higher education study by means of systematic, explicit credit transfer and course articulation should be encouraged and facilitated by both relevant levels of government. Nevertheless, such schemes should be regulated in order to ensure that educational quality and the principles of access and equity are preserved, especially where commercially based (fee-paying) VET provision is involved. This regulation should be achieved by amendment to the Higher Education Funding Act, and should, among other things:

- *limit the proportion of a course leading to a higher education credential which can be undertaken by study in courses leading normally to VET credentials, offered either within or outside the higher education sector by means of credit transfer and/or advanced standing arrangements;*
- *regulate course articulation arrangements between non - higher education institutions and higher education institutions to ensure that the VET components of such arrangements are appropriately accredited and monitored by the normal academic processes of the relevant higher education institution;*
- *encourage articulation arrangements which are a product of joint curriculum design between VET and higher education;*
- *ensure that such arrangements between VET and higher education providers are accessible on a HECS-related or non-commercial (publicly funded) basis at both levels, and are not limited, or predominantly limited, to fee paying students;*
- *ensure that providers are appropriately resourced and funded*

In order to develop a national approach to the provision of vocational education and training, and to foster appropriate co-operative and joint developments between VET and higher education, the Commonwealth should:

- (i) *assume full responsibility for the funding and co-ordination of the public TAFE system;*
- (ii) *develop a national accreditation system for all VET provision, including consistent national standards for accountability, educational quality and financial probity;*
- (iii) *devise and fund schemes designed to facilitate intersectoral collaboration, joint projects, and where appropriate, cross sectoral facilities and institutions*

The Commonwealth should encourage the development of models for cross-sectoral collaboration which suit particular circumstances. It should require institutions embarking on such developments to do so in full consultation with relevant unions and campus student organisations

In the interests of stability, the maintenance of quality and efficiency, the Commonwealth should suspend the implementation of "User Choice" arrangements in VET, and not introduce a broadly based system of competitive tendering as the basic mechanism for public funding in tertiary education.¹

¹ NTEU Submission to the House of Representatives Committee on Employment Education and Training Inquiry into The Role of Institutions of Technical and Further Education (1997), p.4.

That arrangements concerning the placement of trainees with employers be reviewed, with the specific aim of reducing the high level of employer initiated terminations of traineeships.

That the current practice of discounting wage rates of trainees cease, and the appropriate award rate be applied to the work undertaken by trainees in accordance with the relevant work level definitions or descriptors.

In order to address the specific problems related to traineeships where training can be delivered entirely on the job:

- *a practice be developed whereby individual training plans be developed in conjunction with the trainees, and scrutinised by DETYA;*
- *that DETYA undertake regular audits of workplaces where trainees are undertaking on the job training, in order to monitor quality of that training and to assist in addressing any concerns about the appropriateness of the training, the challenge it presents, and its relevance to the career goals of trainees.*

That the programs provided by Aboriginal community controlled colleges be strongly supported by all levels of government, and regarded as a model for the rest of the sector in terms of the educational outcomes which arise from the particular support which is provided to students and trainees.

That the Commonwealth closely monitor the effects of decreased funding on the budgetary practices of TAFE institutions, with the specific aim of ensuring that levels of funding to support of educational programs are not further diminished.

Introduction

The NTEU represents the industrial and professional interests of over 25,000 members. Most of the Union's members are university employees, but the NTEU also covers workers in adult and community education in Victoria, general (PACCT) staff in the TAFE system in Victoria, and employees of professional training and research institutes, university companies and student unions around the country.

The NTEU maintains a close involvement in debates related to education financing, curricula, quality, access and participation, as well as matters related to governance of education institutions. Through this close involvement, the NTEU is able to provide significant analysis of recent trends in higher education, including those which affect the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector and universities providing VET programs.

The NTEU believes that VET and higher education play important differing and complementary roles in provision of life-long learning, and supports the further development of links between the two sectors, and arrangements for consistent credit transfer. The NTEU's policies on "Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning" and "Cross Sectoral Issues" are appended to this submission.

The matters addressed in this submission arise from a number of sources within and outside the union. Direct discussions with representatives from VET institutions and cross sectoral bodies have informed the bulk of this submission, and additional material is drawn from the NTEU's experience in contemporary debates about regulation of universities and tertiary education providers.

The NTEU welcomes the opportunity to contribute to an inquiry of this kind. Our submission does not address all of the terms of reference of the inquiry, but rather is confined to those terms of reference which are of most direct relevance to our members and their experiences. Emphasis is therefore placed on clauses (c), (d), (e), and (f) of the terms of reference.

The Quality of VET

Significant changes in the structure of the VET sector, in conjunction with major shifts in government financing priorities have created a new set of dynamics which impact on the provision of vocational education and training in all states and territories.

The new dynamics involve a greater variety of providers, increased reliance on systems of registration rather than accreditation, competition between institutions both public and private, tuition and materials fees, and significant variation in the modes of training delivery. Accompanying these features is the introduction of trainee wages and the "New Apprenticeship Scheme".

The "New Apprenticeship Scheme" was introduced in 1996 and aimed at increasing the rate of take-up of apprenticeships and traineeships, especially in new and developing industries. A feature of the scheme is a policy of "User Choice", which involves the development of training packages aimed at on the job training. Formally, "User Choice" involves the employer and employees, through a formally agreed training plan (contract of training) of one to four years duration, choosing a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to undertake the training. In practice, the role of the trainee in this choice is often limited to agreeing to the RTO chosen by the employer.

One feature at the centre of debate about the new environment is the increased level of participation in vocational education and training in an environment of decreasing resources from government. This has arisen from the pursuit of the “growth through efficiencies” program and the accompanying “User Choice” arrangements.

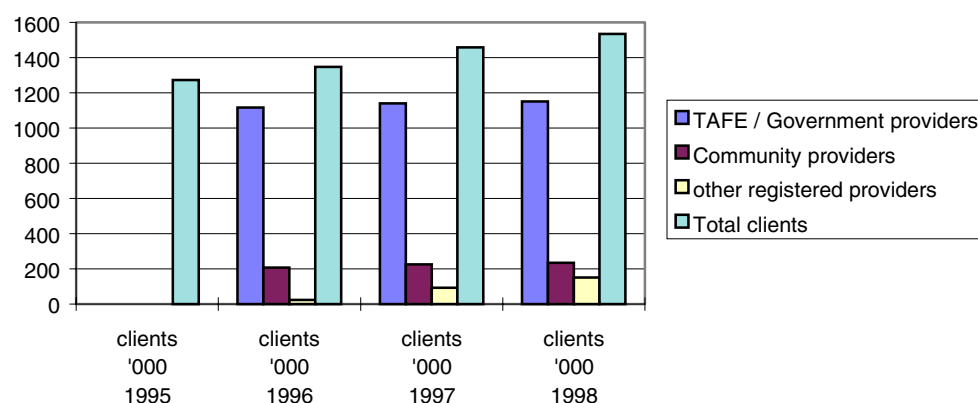
Recent developments which exemplify these changes include:

- increased credit transfer and articulation between VET to higher education, whereby studies undertaken in one sector are recognised in the other;
- the offering of VET in schools;
- a system of competitive tendering whereby private and TAFE providers compete with each other for government approval and funding to provide education and training;

The effects of these changes on the VET sector have been significant and have led to concerns on the part of providers (both public and private), users (employers and students / apprentices / trainees), professional organisations and staff about the quality of VET.

Recent data compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) shows the changes in client enrolments between 1995 and 1998, including the share in enrolments between TAFE, community and private providers.

Table 1: Client enrolments 1995 - 1998

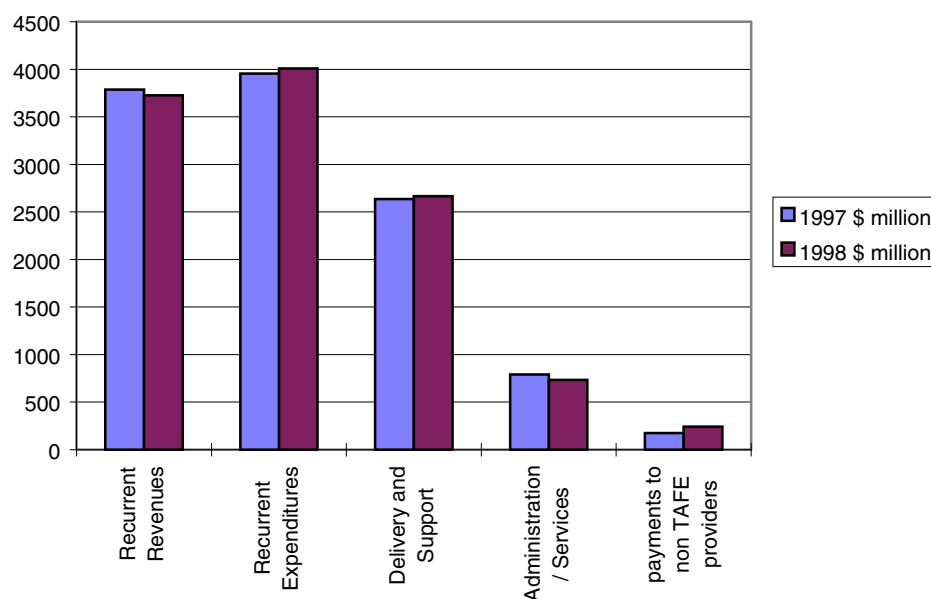


Source: NCVER

As the table shows, between 1995 and 1998 there was an overall increase in client enrolments in the order of 20.6 per cent, or an increase of between 5 per cent and 8 per cent. While there have been steady but small increases in the number of VET clients in TAFE and community providers, there has been a significant increase in those enrolled with private providers since 1996.

Figures on the financing of VET are not readily available for the years before 1997, but the figures between 1997 and 1998 provide an interesting perspective on the shifts in funding levels for the sector as a whole, and also on the changed priorities of institutional management in an environment of declining government resources.

Table 2: VET Funding: 1997 - 98



• Source: NCVET

Government funding fell between 1997 and 1998, at the same time as overall client numbers were increasing. Secondly, while government revenue fell, recurrent expenditures grew, thus increasing the gap between expenditure and income. Thirdly, a marginal increase occurred in revenue devoted to training delivery and support, while at the same time a significant decrease (7 per cent) occurred in expenditure on administration and services. Finally, funding for private providers increased by 38 per cent, meaning that payments to non-TAFE providers for VET delivery increased from 4.4 per cent of total outlays in 1997 to 6.1 per cent of total outlays in 1998.

In Victoria, where the policy of “User Choice” was heavily supported by the previous State Government, funding for TAFE has dropped to 74 per cent of the national average, according to ANTA estimates. According to media reports, the director of one major TAFE institute revealed that operating revenue fell by 12% in a single year, and that consequently operations would be scaled back dramatically.²

NTEU members employed within TAFE institutions in Victoria have provided the following details as examples of the effects of reduced public funding on their institutions:

- an increase in the use of facilities paid for out of recurrent funding for courses provided on a fee for service basis, with no part of the fee being used to cover the costs of infrastructure;
- high turnover of staff: four managers in four years at one institution, arising from the difficulty in managing overworked staff in an environment of inadequate infrastructure;
- reduced numbers of general and maintenance staff, resulting in breakdowns in equipment which are not quickly rectified;

² “Campus Review” December 15 - 21 1999, p.8.

- increased contracting out. For example, a number of teachers left one institution through a program of voluntary departures, and have now returned to the same campus employed by private providers and are using the same facilities as previously at no expense to the private provider;
- one institution with reportedly healthy finances boasts one shovel for the shared use of 20 horticultural students, one hotplate stirrer for the use of 20 students involved in tissue culture classes, and is currently trying to sell 40 pallet loads of out of date fertiliser. The same institution successfully tendered to conduct parts of a viticulture course which was previously run by Charles Sturt University, and is now seeking to rent space and equipment from another institution to conduct the course;
- some institutions are straying out of the business of education into other areas of commercial activity in order to supplement their income. For example, one regional TAFE tendered to carry out municipal library services currently carried out by local government;
- many institutions have ceased to employ equal opportunity officers and access / equity officers as a consequence of reduced funding.

These problems are symptomatic of a sector confronting significant financial difficulties. The Victorian Government says that half of Victoria's major TAFE institutes are in serious financial difficulty, with four on the brink of insolvency. The Minister for Post-Compulsory Education, Employment and Training, Lynne Kosky, has stated that the entire TAFE system was under enormous financial strain due to the damaging impact of excessive competition and government neglect. In addition to the funding difficulties, Ms Kosky said that the department's own audits had revealed systemic problems with the quality of training delivered by many of the institutes.³

Significant doubts exist about the effectiveness of the "User Choice" arrangements, as highlighted by a recent KPMG study undertaken for DETYA. Among the conclusions of that study are:

- 18 months after the implementation of "User Choice", only 50 per cent of employers had heard of the term;
- only 58 per cent of employers (presumably 58 per cent of those who had heard about it) and 38 per cent of providers thought that "User Choice" had been successful;
- both employers and providers reported increased paperwork, and 70 per cent of providers complained of increased bureaucracy and costs;
- three quarters of employers regard 'choice of course content' to be the most important aspect of "User Choice", but only 40 per cent actively involved themselves in content choice;
- 51 per cent of employers prefer to recruit trained people than to train their own workers, while a study by Anderson consulting reported that over 70 per cent of employers prefer recruitment to training workers.⁴

³ "The Age" Monday 15 November, 1999, p.1.

⁴ Study results reported in "Campus Review" December 15-21, 1999, p.8.

Cross sectoral relationships

As stated in the introduction to this submission, the NTEU is supportive of closer relationships between VET and higher education providers. It is important in fostering such relationships that the distinct and valuable work of staff in both sectors is appropriately recognised: closer relationships between the two sectors should not mean that the roles of staff in the respective sectors become conflated.

The first and most obvious factor which has historically differentiated the VET sector from universities is the qualifications offered. Universities have historically offered studies leading to graduate and postgraduate qualifications in professional/vocational and generalist disciplines, while the VET sector provides vocational education and training usually leading to qualifications at Certificate and Diploma levels and below. Universities are self accrediting with respect to the qualifications they offer, other higher education providers require accreditation of their courses, usually by a state government agency, whereas VET providers offer recognised courses, with the authority of the relevant state government.

A second factor which has formed a distinction between the two sectors is the breadth and depth of their programs. VET has traditionally provided courses, with an emphasis on skills and knowledge which can readily be applied. On the other hand, higher education institutions have traditionally offered courses aimed at understanding theoretical principles which provide the foundation for applied knowledge.

Another factor which has historically differentiated the two sectors is the nature of research undertaken, the effects of this on the structure and orientation of the university, the links between research and teaching, and finally the costs associated with providing infrastructure to support the research effort. Universities are more likely to be involved in basic research than VET providers, while the research undertaken by VET providers is more oriented towards defined outcomes within the context of VET goals.

One significant consequence of all of these factors is that the average cost per student in higher education is considerably higher than the comparable measure in the VET sector.

Recent developments have made these distinctions less clear. These developments include:

- increased credit transfer and articulation from VET to higher education, whereby studies undertaken in one sector are recognised in the other;
- movement from higher education to VET with credit which now constitutes the majority of movement between the two sectors;
- the emergent trend for VET providers to offer courses leading to qualifications which have historically only been offered in higher education, arising from the in principle approval by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board of VET Graduate Certificates and Diplomas⁵;
- the emergence of cross sectoral institutions which offer courses leading to both VET and higher education qualifications;

⁵ "Campus Review" August 25 - 31 1999, p.9.

- co-branding of qualifications, usually involving the provision under licence by VET providers of parts of higher education courses;

The differing funding mechanisms applying to higher education institutions on the one hand and VET providers on the other limit the scope of arrangements between the two sectors. Higher education institutions are Commonwealth funded and co-ordination of such matters as the collection of data on institutional performance is similarly handled by the Commonwealth. VET institutions are administered by state and territory governments, and receive funding from both Commonwealth and state sources.

In addition to the differing funding regimes which apply to the two sectors, a range of other legal and administrative obstacles to closer co-operation exist in the form of:

- legislation which governs the operation of institution, with universities being autonomous institutions which are self accrediting with respect to the courses they provide, while VET institutions are not;
- industrial awards and agreements which apply to the sectors;
- the arrangements for employment of staff whereby some TAFE staff are employed directly by state governments, while university staff are all employed directly by the university;
- the type of education provided by the two sectors, with VET providing applied training and universities providing more theoretical content.

The work roles of teaching staff in the two sectors are of necessity different. University staff are appointed and promoted on the basis of their contributions to higher education teaching, research and scholarly activity, while VET teachers are appointed on the basis of contemporary industry experience and formal teaching qualifications. This factor needs to remain in sharp focus in any debate about the forging of closer relationships between the two sectors.

Cross sectoral institutions offer some significant advantages. The co-location of VET and higher education within one institution offers students and staff a wider range of resources such as libraries and research infrastructure, than are available at stand-alone VET institutions. The co-location of staff of VET and higher education backgrounds is similarly advantageous to students who are able to draw upon the differing approaches and expertise of those staff. These advantages cannot be overlooked, and provide a firm basis for the facilitation and support of cross sectoral institutions and relationships.

In considering closer relationships between VET and Higher Education, consideration must be given to the future of the policy of "User Choice". The NTEU foresees distinct dangers in applying this destructive policy to the higher education sector, such as:

- pressure on institutions to lower costs, at the expense of investment in infrastructure, research, attraction and retention of suitably qualified staff, and support services for students;
- the artificial privileging of universities based on perceptions of prestige rather than quality, and the consequential reduction in funding available to smaller and regional institutions;
- a narrowing of course content arising from employer decisions about subject matter which is of most immediate benefit to them;

- limiting the depth and diversity of university offerings as market forces determine the nature of teaching, research and scholarship. In particular, there is a danger that universities will be unable to undertake research and scholarship which has public benefit rather than an obvious market value.

Given these concerns, NTEU supports further investigations on the impact of user choice policies before any extension of `user choice' principles into higher education. These concerns are mirrored in actions of the Victorian Government action in freezing further implementation of `user choice' policies pending assessment of the desirability and efficacy of further competition in the training market. Further consideration also needs to be given as to how best to ensure the maintenance of quality provision in a competitive funding environment.

Many of the abovementioned matters were addressed by the NTEU Submission to the House of Representatives Committee on Employment Education and Training Inquiry into The Role of Institutions of Technical and Further Education (1997). At that time the NTEU made a number of recommendations to address the issues of co-ordination within and between the two sectors, which are reiterated for the purposes of this Inquiry, namely:

Recommendation

The development and expansion of schemes linking VET and higher education study by means of systematic, explicit credit transfer and course articulation should be encouraged and facilitated by both relevant levels of government. Nevertheless, such schemes should be regulated in order to ensure that educational quality and the principles of access and equity are preserved, especially where commercially based (fee-paying) VET provision is involved. This regulation should be achieved by amendment to the Higher Education Funding Act, and should, among other things:

- *limit the proportion of a course leading to a higher education credential which can be undertaken by study in courses leading normally to VET credentials, offered either within or outside the higher education sector by means of credit transfer and/or advanced standing arrangements;*
- *regulate course articulation arrangements between non - higher education institutions and higher education institutions to ensure that the VET components of such arrangements are appropriately accredited and monitored by the normal academic processes of the relevant higher education institution;*
- *encourage articulation arrangements which are a product of joint curriculum design between VET and higher education;*
- *ensure that such arrangements between VET and higher education providers are accessible on a HECS-related or non-commercial (publicly funded) basis at both levels, and are not limited, or predominantly limited, to fee paying students;*
- *ensure that providers are appropriately resourced and funded*

In order to develop a national approach to the provision of vocational education and training, and to foster appropriate co-operative and joint developments between VET and higher education, the Commonwealth should:

- assume full responsibility for the funding and co-ordination of the public TAFE system;*
- develop a national accreditation system for all VET provision, including consistent national standards for accountability, educational quality and financial probity;*

(iii) *devise and fund schemes designed to facilitate intersectoral collaboration, joint projects, and where appropriate, cross sectoral facilities and institutions*

The Commonwealth should encourage the development of models for cross-sectoral collaboration which suit particular circumstances. It should require institutions embarking on such developments to do so in full consultation with relevant unions and campus student organisations

In the interests of stability, the maintenance of quality and efficiency, the Commonwealth should suspend the implementation of "User Choice" arrangements in VET, and not introduce a broadly based system of competitive tendering as the basic mechanism for public funding in tertiary education.⁶

Non Completions, "User Choice" and the National Training Wage

The implementation of "User Choice" has clearly had an effect on the number of private providers delivering VET programs, as evidenced by Table 1 of this submission. One concern associated with this trend is that private providers may not have the same stake in quality educational outcomes as other providers, particularly where the core business of the private provider is not education.

In 1994, reforms to the entry level training scheme led to the introduction of the federal National Training Wage (NTW) related to traineeships in new industries. This initiative was closely linked to measures aimed at alleviating long term unemployment and was aimed at equipping young people and the long term unemployed with the skills necessary to enter and remain in the workforce. This initiative involved the introduction of training packages which could be delivered on the job, new subsidies paid to employers to supplement the wages of trainees, incentive payments and the NTW Award.

The NTW Award provided for rates of pay reduced by 20 per cent based on the estimated time spent in training which was regarded as unpaid. Further changes are being implemented through the "New Apprenticeships" initiative, which includes the following features:

- employer choice of training provider for "their" apprentices or trainees and the ability to negotiate individualised training programs;
- part time apprenticeships and traineeships;
- apprenticeships and traineeships which can commence at school;
- varied proportions of training and work time;

Since the inception of traineeships in 1985, the number of traineeship commencements has increased significantly. In 1997-98 commencements rose dramatically reaching almost 60,000⁷.

One measure of the quality of the new arrangements is the rate of completions compared to the rate of completions under the previous arrangements. Under the Australian Traineeship Scheme, between 1985 and 1993 the average rate of non completion was 39 per cent. This amounted to approximately 8,000 individuals who, in

⁶ NTEU Submission to the House of Representatives Committee on Employment Education and Training Inquiry into The Role of Institutions of Technical and Further Education (1997), p.4.

⁷ Traineeship non-completion, Grey, Beswick, O'Brien and Ray, DETYA 1999, p.8.

1992 – 93, did not complete their traineeship. In 1996, the non-completion rate increased to 43.5 per cent, representing 19,000 individuals. It is estimated that the trend of rising non-completion rates will continue.⁸ In 1997, the non completion rate for first quarter commencements was 44.9 per cent, and based on this it is estimated that the non-completion rate for 1997 will be at least 45 per cent⁹.

When compared to the non completion rates for higher education, these rates are extraordinarily high. The drop out rate between the first and second years of university is about 25 per cent, while the non completion rate for all vocational education and training modules is about 15 per cent.¹⁰ When compared to ABS data on Labour Mobility, the traineeship non completion rate is still high. It is estimated that in the year to February 1998 some 2.2 to 2.3 million individuals commenced at least one job, and that some 0.9 million individuals ceased at least one job which had lasted less than a year. Therefore, around 40 per cent of those people commencing a permanent or casual job can be expected to cease that job within a year, and this percentage *includes* casual employment.¹¹

Significant data exists which explains many of the reasons behind the increasing rate of non completions. A number of types of traineeship have higher than average rates of non completion as shown by the following table.

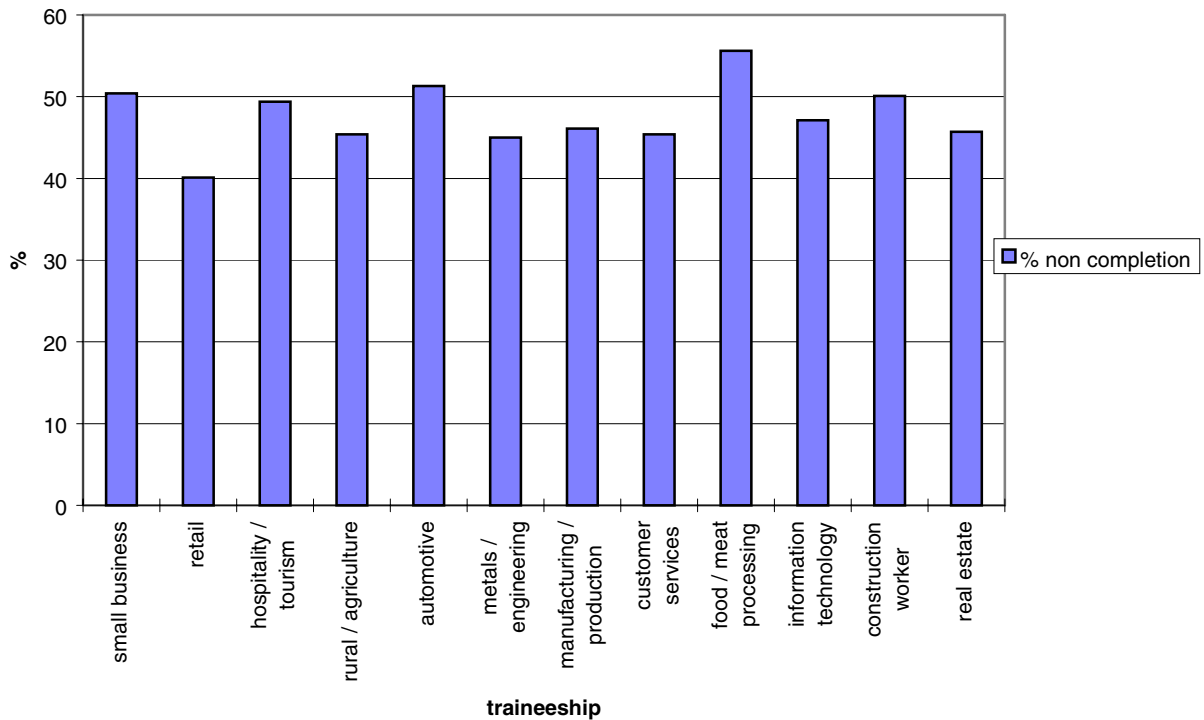
⁸ *ibid.* p.9.

⁹ *ibid.* p.10.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.15

¹¹ *ibid.* p.14

Table 3: Traineeship non completions above national average: 1995 - 96



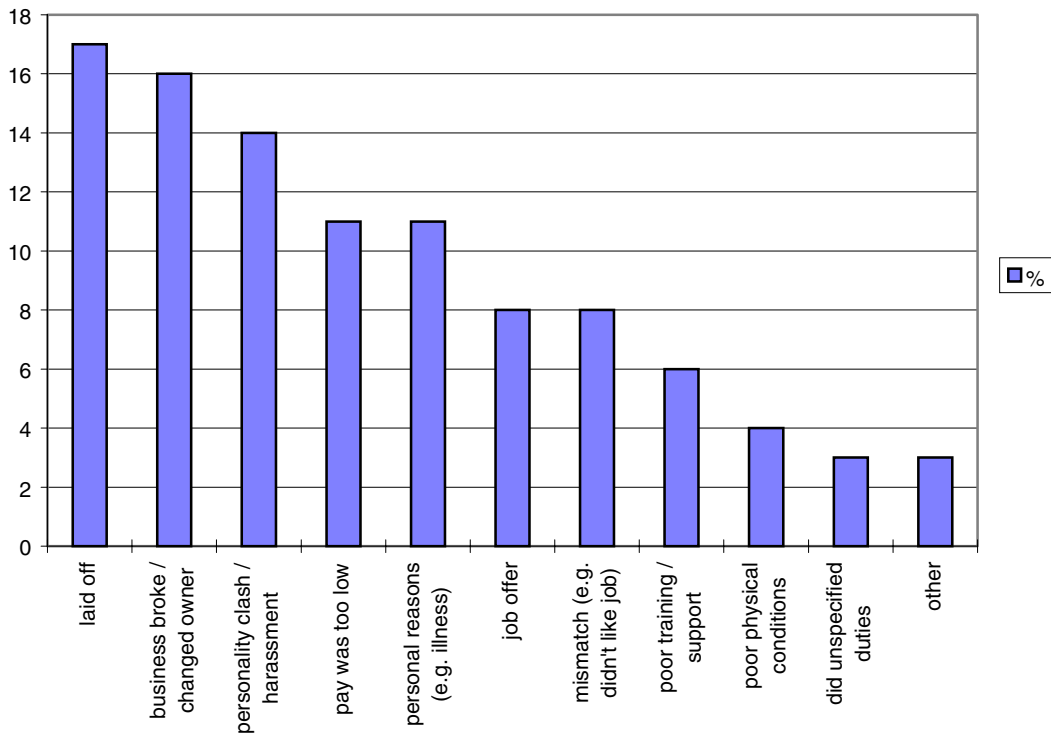
Source: Traineeship non-completion, Grey, Beswick, O'Brien and Ray, DETYA 1999, p. 24.

It is noteworthy that the small business traineeships had a non completion rate of over 50 per cent. The small business traineeships have been criticised in many quarters as being irrelevant to improving the job prospects of trainees as a consequence of being too general nature. Such criticism is easy to understand given that small business traineeships were not restricted to small business but were a means to provide “off the shelf” training which could be used by any small work unit regardless of the actual size of the company involved.

The DETYA study examining non completion concluded that small business trainees are 30 per cent more likely not to complete their traineeship that are other trainees, while hospitality and tourism trainees are even more likely (40 per cent) not to complete.¹² The same study examines the reasons given by trainees for non completion, and provides a useful insight into the problems associated with training arrangements. The following table shows the main reasons given by trainees for leaving.

¹² *ibid.* p.26

Table 4: Main Reason for Leaving Traineeship



• Source: Traineeship non-completion, Grey, Beswick, O'Brien and Ray, DETYA 1999, p.29.

The table data shows that over 50 per cent of trainees left their traineeship for reasons associated with the employer or their employment. This includes the four most frequent responses given by trainees, namely laid off (“they decided that I wasn’t suitable”), business broke / changed owner (“employer went out of business”), personality clash / harassment (“had problems with the supervisor / management”) and pay was too low. These responses suggest that a much greater level of support is needed for trainees in their workplace, and that the level of pay associated with traineeships is in need of review. The DETYA study concludes that given the magnitude of employer initiated separation, further research is warranted in this area.¹³

Recommendation

That arrangements concerning the placement of trainees with employers be reviewed, with the specific aim of reducing the high level of employer initiated terminations of traineeships.

That the current practice of discounting wage rates of trainees be ceased, and the appropriate award rate be applied to the work undertaken by trainees in accordance with the relevant work level definitions or descriptors.

Disaggregated data on the reasons for trainees leaving traineeships voluntarily emphasised the importance of quality training for trainees. 31 per cent of trainees who voluntarily left their traineeship cited insufficient training as being a very important

¹³ ibid. p. 30

factor in their decision to leave. The traineeships in small business, hospitality / tourism, and office / clerical / administration accounted for almost 50 per cent of traineeship commencements in 1995 / 96, and in all three of these traineeships importance was placed on insufficient training as a reason for leaving: 39 per cent in the case of small business, 42 per cent for hospitality and tourism, and 37 per cent in office / clerical / administration. All three of these traineeships are characterised by training which may be delivered entirely on the job.¹⁴

A further measure of the quality of training is the extent to which participants felt that the training was useful: either in terms of the level of difficulty providing sufficient challenge to maintain the interest of trainees, or in terms of them perceiving that the training would benefit their chances of gaining employment. 34 per cent of former trainees found their training 'too easy', while only 5 per cent found it 'too hard'. Those who found the structured training too easy (compared with those who were satisfied with the level of difficulty) were less likely to feel they had benefited from the traineeship (60 per cent compared with 76 per cent), agree the trade off of lower wages for training was fair (56 per cent compared with 70 per cent), and consider doing another traineeship (63 per cent compared with 69 per cent).¹⁵

Recommendation

In order to address the specific problems related to traineeships where training can be delivered entirely on the job:

- *a practice be developed whereby individual training plans be developed in conjunction with the trainees, and scrutinised by DETYA;*
- *DETYA undertake regular audits of workplaces where trainees are undertaking on the job training, in order to monitor quality of that training and to assist in addressing any concerns about the appropriateness of the training, the challenge it presents, and its relevance to the career goals of trainees.*

In recognition of the high level of employer initiated terminations of traineeships, that the Commonwealth facilitate arrangements for articulation and credit transfer between different types of traineeships, with an emphasis on allowing trainees to transfer in the event that their traineeship is terminated.

A Successful Model: Community Controlled Colleges

For the last forty or so years, VET in its various guises has played an important role in delivering adult education to Indigenous Australians. Of particular importance is the role of Aboriginal community controlled colleges in meeting the educational and training aspirations of Indigenous Australians who had not had access to appropriate school education as youth.

A recent report, "Making a Difference: The impact of Australia's Indigenous education and training policy" (Robinson & Bamblett 1998), details the progress in Indigenous education over the last ten years, with a specific focus on the role of Aboriginal community controlled colleges in VET. The report deals with the results of a survey of students who completed programs in Aboriginal community controlled colleges in 1997.

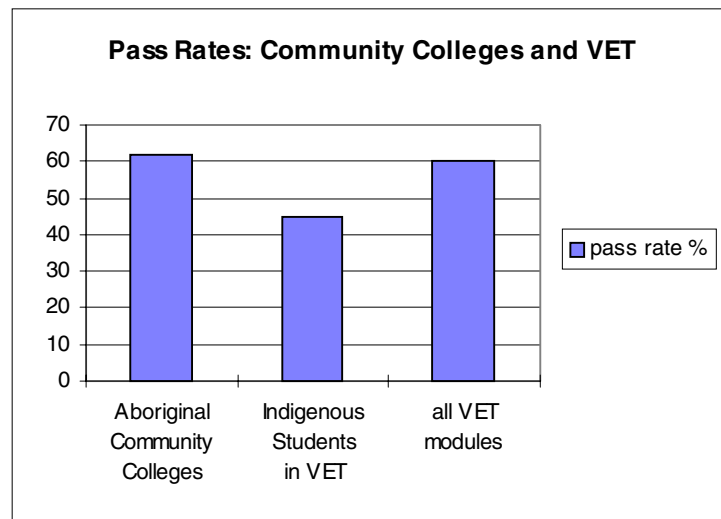
¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 32

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.34

The report details the large proportion of students from the most severely disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled in these colleges. Many of these students have little or no prior educational experiences and come from communities with extremely high levels of unemployment, ill health and contact with police and the judicial system, for example:

- 20 per cent of the respondents reported a background of serious alcohol abuse;
- 15 per cent reported forms of drug abuse other than alcohol;
- 46 per cent had not completed year 10 schooling (compared to 28 per cent of Indigenous Australian students in the VET sector as a whole);
- only one third had experienced employment in the three years before 1997.

Despite the overwhelming level of disadvantage faced by these students, the pass rates from the VET programs in Aboriginal community controlled colleges were higher than outcomes for Indigenous students in the VET sector as a whole. The following graph compares the pass rates of these colleges with the VET sector as a whole.



- Source: "Making a Difference: The impact of Australia's Indigenous education and training policy" (Robinson & Bamblett 1998)

As the graph shows, the pass rate achieved for Aboriginal community controlled colleges is higher than the pass rate for Indigenous students in VET, but also 2 per cent higher than the pass rates for all students / trainees in VET nationally. The report attributes this to:

"...the additional support and more accommodating environment provided for Indigenous students in Aboriginal community controlled educational organisations."

Other significant findings of the study include:

- fewer than 20 per cent of students were employed while undertaking their course, rising to 36 per cent some four months after completion of the course;
- 13 per cent of students obtained a new job or were self-employed after the course;
- 11 per cent became Community Development Employment program (CDEP) participants on course completion;

- the remainder of those employed reported either a promotion or better performance in their job as a result of their study;
- one third of participants continued study within the sector;
- 24 per cent undertook further education and training outside the sector;
- 21 per cent reported that the training had been a major factor in helping them sort out their lives;
- around 15 per cent said the training had helped strengthen their cultural identity;
- over 36 per cent said the training had made them more confident.

These outcomes are impressive when one considers the extent of social and educational disadvantage faced by the students concerned. The specific observation of the study that the success rates were attributable to the level of support provided to the students, is of relevance to the sector overall. It is likely, if funding levels and priorities continue to change in the current manner, that success rates will also decline. Conversely, it could be argued that increase levels of support to TAFE institutions will result in a higher success rate than that currently achieved nationally.

Recommendation

That the programs provided by Aboriginal community controlled colleges be strongly supported by all levels of government, and regarded as a model for the rest of the sector in terms of the educational outcomes which arise from the particular support which is provided to students and trainees.

That the Commonwealth closely monitor the effects of decreased funding on the budgetary practices of TAFE institutions, with the specific aim of ensuring that levels of funding to support of educational programs are not further diminished.

Conclusion

The introduction of a more competitive environment for VET has resulted in the exposure of the sector to pressures which ultimately affect quality and outcomes. As the structure of the VET sector is a product of Commonwealth, state and territory governments, remedies to the problem of declining quality will require a degree of co-ordination currently lacking within the sector.

In addition, the overlap between VET and higher education is becoming more significant, yet there remain barriers to articulation and credit transfer between the sectors. The NTEU advocates a more productive relationship between VET and higher education, and maintains that the most effective way of achieving such a relationship is for the Commonwealth to assume responsibility for co-ordination of VET, consistent with the recommendations contained herein.