

How institutions respond to Training Packages

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Project objectives

The objectives of this project are to examine the impact of the transition to Training Packages on institutionally based training, specifically:

1. To identify the impact of Training Packages on institutionally based training programs for clients who are not in relevant employment.
2. To identify the policy implications arising from any changes to training and assessment arrangements for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and the implications for industry in their participation in skill formation for new industry entrants.
3. To research and promote strategies used by RTOs to enable clients who do not have access to relevant employment to gain a Training Package qualification.

Definition of institutionally based training

For the purpose of this study, institutional pathways are training and assessment arrangements managed by an RTO, or an organisation under its auspices, that enable a learner who is not in employment, or employment relevant to their learning, to achieve in part or full, a nationally recognised vocational qualification. These training and assessment arrangements may involve some form of work placement that is managed directly or, indirectly, by the RTO.

This definition includes VET in Schools and distance or flexible delivery training arrangements for students who are not in relevant employment. New Apprentices and Trainees, and students who are in employment directly related to their area of study, are not covered by this project.

Project stance

A national reference group, comprising representatives of public and private training organisations, State Training Authorities, national ITABs, the Australian Education Union and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), is guiding this project.

At its first meeting, the group agreed to examine the impact of Training Packages on institutionally based training pathways with a view to *ensuring that this pathway continues to be a valued and credible approach to achieving national vocational qualifications.*

The national reference group adopted this 'stance' to emphasise the importance of institutionally based training to clients in the VET system. In 1999, over 30% of

students enrolled in either Training Packages or accredited courses were either not in the labour force or unemployed (National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) unpublished enrolment data 1999). In addition, an estimated further 20% of VET students are employed, but not in an occupation or industry relevant to the qualification they are completing (Estimated from data in the NCVER 1999 Student Outcomes Survey).

Project methods

The project used two methods to gather information. These were:

1. Case studies

14 case studies of RTOs delivering qualifications to institutionally based students in seven different Training Packages were documented. The Training Packages selected were Administration, Beauty Therapy, Community Services, Horticulture, Hospitality, Retail and Information Technology.

It is important to note that the project did not specifically seek 'best practice' delivery of Training Packages. In most cases, selected RTOs were informally endorsed, either through the State Training Authority, central office (in the case of TAFE), or the State ITAB as being suitable for a case study. Accordingly, the case studies present a snapshot of how RTOs are grappling with the delivery of Training Packages for institutionally based students.

2. Workshops

To broaden the information gathered for the project, a total of eight workshops were conducted in city and regional areas. The workshops were held in Townsville, Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Bendigo and Adelaide. Invitations were sent to State Training Authorities, TAFE Institutes, ACPET members and National and State ITABs. A total of 276 participants attended. Sixteen attendees were from ITABs and fourteen from private RTOs. The remainder were from TAFE institutes or departments.

In addition to the workshops, the project manager met with a number of State and Territory Training Authority staff on an individual or small group basis.

Project products

This project will produce:

1. a set of guidance materials for RTOs on some of the issues for delivering institutionally based training for Training Package qualifications. These materials will draw from the experiences of RTOs in the 14 documented case studies, each of which will also be included in full as an appendix to the guidance materials.
2. a report to ANTA on the findings of the project and recommendations for improving access to Training Package qualifications through institutionally based training.

Project findings

Context for the findings

In considering the findings of this project, it needs to be borne in mind that each industry and Training Package has its own particular issues that are influenced by:

- The extent of change from national curriculum-based qualifications to the new qualifications in each Training Package.
- The period of time elapsed since endorsement and hence opportunity for implementation.
- The extent and culture of vocational training in the industry concerned before Training Package implementation.
- The adaptability of the qualifications in the Training Package to existing educational processes and administrative systems.

Not all issues raised through the project concerned the Training Package product, but rather the funding and administrative systems and the training culture of the industry within which each RTO operates.

The range of responses and questions raised at the workshops indicate that the implementation of Training Packages still has a long way to go in terms of understanding and acceptance. Although attention is being given to professional development and communication, more needs to be done.

The impact of Training Packages on institutionally based training

In the case studies from this project, the transition from accredited courses to qualifications in Training Packages has impacted on training programs, facilities and equipment and relationships with industry. The extent of change has ranged from fine tuning to wholesale changes to the way training is structured and delivered.

In large part, the extent of change seems to be determined by the nature of the Training Package and its relationship to the superseded curriculum. Thus, RTOs delivering the Horticulture, Information Technology and Community Services Training Packages needed to make significant changes to their training programs. RTOs delivering the Administration, Beauty Therapy, Hospitality, and Retail Training Packages did not need to make such radical changes.

RTOs have invested in facilities and equipment to provide industry realistic training and assessment environments. For example, these include network engineering laboratories, upgraded training restaurants, practice offices and a workroom replicating an aged care facility. For many of the RTOs, the transition to Training Packages has strengthened their relationships with local industry. RTOs are also reporting good employment outcomes for graduates from their institutionally based courses. However, Training Packages have raised issues for institutionally based delivery and these are discussed below.

Is employment necessary to achieve a Training Package qualification?

In 1999, ANTA staff examined the documentation for all Training Packages endorsed at that time to determine how many competencies and qualifications were prescribed as only being achieved through assessment in the workplace. Thirty-seven units of competence were identified in this category. However, while this number is low in relation to the total number of endorsed units, trainers participating at the workshops for this project were clearly of the view that there are many more units and qualifications for which it is problematic to develop competence without access to a workplace.

The reasons for this include:

- Lack of resources to simulate workplace conditions.
- The range and complexity of the units of competence.
- Employment or experience in the industry being judged as essential for the development of competence and the collection of evidence for assessment.
- Industry advice that a period of employment and assessment in the workplace is a requirement of the qualification.

Table 1 below indicates the periods of employment or work placement required in each of the 14 case studies. Four of the ten RTOs offering a diploma-level qualification required students to find employment to complete their qualification. All of these RTOs reported that once students enrol in the course, they are able to find suitable employment to be undertaken concurrently with the course. Employment was not required for students to complete any of the Certificate III qualifications.

Table 1: Employment and work placement in 14 case studies of delivery of qualifications in Training Packages by RTOs

Training Package case study	Qualification	Employment		Work placement	
		Period (weeks)	Assessed for qual'n	Period (weeks)	Assessed for qual'n
Administration case study 1	Diploma	no	n/a	1	no - only attendance
Administration case study 2	Diploma	no	n/a	1 day/wk over 30 weeks	yes
Beauty Therapy case study 1	Diploma	no	n/a	yes	no - only attendance
Beauty Therapy case study 2	Diploma	no	n/a	yes	no

Community Services case study 1*	Certificate III	no	n/a	2 weeks	yes
	Certificate IV/Dip	yes*	yes	n/a	
Community Services case study 2	Certificate IV	no	n/a	4-5	yes
Horticulture case study 1	Certificate III	no	n/a		
	Certificate IV/Dip	yes*	yes		
Horticulture case study 2	Diploma	no	n/a		
Hospitality case study 1	Diploma	20 part time	yes	no	no
Hospitality case study 2	Diploma	20	yes	no	no
Information Technol'y case study 1	Dip Software	no	n/a	no	n/a
	Dip Networks	no	n/a	yes	
Retail case study 1	Certificate II and III	no	n/a	yes	yes
School case study 1	Certificate II	no	n/a		
School case study 2	Statement of Attainment	no	n/a		

* In these qualifications, the RTO requires students to be employed in the industry.

Assessing competence in institutionally based training programs

Interpreting the definition of competence

In all workshops and case studies, participants discussed the definition of competence and its application in interpreting competency standards. Questions that RTOs asked include:

- Can the competencies be developed in a simulated environment in the RTO facilities?
- What opportunities for practice are required to reach the performance standard required in a workplace?
- Is a period of employment or work placement required, and if so, for which competencies and for what duration?

Many participants queried whether competence is a standard of performance '... for employment' or, '... in employment?' The accepted definition of competence for vocational training clearly indicates that competence is the ability to perform in a workplace context.

To illustrate this issue, consider the extent of employment that is usually required for trade-based apprenticeships and recognition. What level of skill maturity is necessary for competence in other occupations? If the approach taken with trades

were to be applied to other occupations, it is difficult to conceive how qualifications could be achieved without employment. Alternatively, if aspects of competence such as skill maturity are recognised as principally the province of employment rather than vocational training, there is scope for institutionally based training to deliver competency outcomes.

Assessment methods used in institutionally based training

RTOs delivering institutionally based training are using a variety of assessment methods. These methods include:

- Observation of performance in work placement and in workplace simulations, such as in-house training facilities and community-based projects and scenarios and role plays.
- Indirect evidence gathered through assignments, tests, and workplace projects.
- Supplementary evidence gathered through supervisor reports from work placement.
- In some RTOs, conducting assessments against individual units of competence; in the majority of RTOs, combining units of competence into clusters to better reflect the realities of the workplace.

Management competencies

Workshop participants frequently highlighted management units of competence as being difficult to deliver to institutionally based students. This applied to generic management competencies, eg 'Manage staff'; or specific management competencies, eg 'Manage a wetland' (Horticulture Training Package). Units of competence may also pose ethical difficulties for RTOs to realistically simulate, eg 'Manage complex behavioural situations' (Community Services Training Package).

Students who are not employed in a management position are unlikely to gain the opportunity to practice these skills in a workplace. This was borne out in the case studies. For most RTOs, students are using the workplace for observation of management practices and gathering work-based information for assignments. Some RTOs, however, have decided to only offer management-level qualifications to students who are in employment.

Achieving workplace performance standards

Simulating workplaces

RTOs are using various methods to simulate workplace conditions. These range from scenarios and role plays (eg handling difficult clients, developing business plans) through to practice firms (eg office practice firms) community projects and fully operational services (eg beauty salons and restaurants).

Industry has a mixed view about the validity of simulations for assessing competence. The retail industry believes that competence can only be developed and assessed on the job. Similarly, in hospitality, one state ITAB did not consider

training restaurants in TAFE Institutes to provide the conditions for assessment under realistic workplace conditions.

Some RTOs stated that this is leading to decisions to move away from simulation in preference to students developing these skills in work placement. This raises another set of issues for students and RTOs.

Work placements

RTOs in the case studies for this project are using work placements in a variety of ways (refer also to Table 1), including:

- only a short period of work placement to familiarise students with the culture of the workplace.
- regular periods of work placement to enable students to link classroom learning to the workplace.
- using the workplace as a resource for students to gather materials for assignments.
- using the workplace and industry trainers to deliver training and conduct workplace projects.

All RTOs in the case studies involved students in either employment or some period of work placement. However, while work placements may provide the opportunity for students to develop and apply competencies in the workplace, there can be limitations. These include:

- availability of enterprises in the region (note competition for places with schools).
- ability to redeploy teaching staff into selecting suitable enterprises and monitoring quality.
- legislative and industrial restrictions on time spent by students in work placement.

The quality of work placement can be variable. Students' experiences range from work observation and the completion of only menial tasks, to real learning experiences and opportunities to develop competence. While competencies such as lead work teams are best developed in real workplace situations, few students are given the opportunity during a work placement to put these skills into practice. Similarly, employers are unlikely to allow students to operate specialist machinery that is unavailable to RTOs because of its cost or the potential cost of lost production.

Development of training programs/curriculum

Training Packages specify *what* learners must achieve to attain a qualification. A training program specifies *how* learners will meet these outcomes.

In some of the case studies, RTOs are delivering training based directly on either individual units of competence, or clusters of competence. In others, training programs are a combination of learning modules and competencies.

RTOs are developing training programs to tailor training to suit their client needs and their preferred training and assessment arrangements by:

- incorporating prerequisite units or modules not specified in the Training Package.
- specifying underpinning knowledge linked to competence.
- structuring and sequencing training that takes students through a logical program of knowledge and skill development.
- linking the training program into the RTOs' systems for recording and reporting progress and achievement.

RTOs distinguished other training arrangements from institutionally based training programs, recognising the latter as preparing students for:

- employment in an industry in contrast with on-job training, which is specific to only one enterprise. To do this, institutionally based programs aim to incorporate knowledge and skills that take account of the range of enterprises and work practices in industry.
- further study as well as employment, by developing analytical, problem solving and other generic skills through the learning methods.

A number of RTOs reported that funding directly linked to individual units of competence is restricting the opportunity to incorporate adequate underpinning skills and knowledge in training programs.

Delivering diploma qualifications through institutionally based training arrangements

Although most of the RTOs in the case studies delivered diploma qualifications are doing so through institutionally based training, many teachers at the workshops raised concerns about this qualification level. There are a number of reasons for this and they include:

- the inclusion of management competencies as core units at these qualification levels, as these are more difficult to teach and assess without access to a workplace environment
- the size and complexity of units of competence
- the lack of (or inadequate) prerequisites identified for entry into the qualification

- insufficient specification of underpinning knowledge
- the lack of a clear educational pathway to develop generic skills (eg problem solving skills) which underpin the development of competence at this level
- the extent of work placement or employment which may be necessary to develop competence at this level.

The diploma-level qualifications are of particular concern to RTOs, as these qualifications:

- have traditionally provided the basis for articulation from VET into higher education courses.
- are available to students who enrol directly from school on completion of year 12 and hence have little experience of relevant employment, particularly at management and supervisory levels.
- are marketed to national and international students as an entry point for either management aspirants (eg tourism and hospitality), or para-professional technicians (eg information technology).
- are in almost all cases unavailable through New Apprenticeship arrangements.

For these reasons, an institutionally based training pathway to the diploma qualification must be assured. It was suggested that if entry into the industry can be achieved through a diploma, then the advanced diploma could be tailored more towards existing employees with a strong focus on management competencies. This proposal would not necessarily suit all industries or occupations; eg laboratory technicians and electronic technicians need technical skills to advanced diploma level.

Discussion

As stated earlier, Training Package documentation does not exclude institutionally based training. Yet, there is ambiguity amongst RTOs and industry about whether, and how, this training pathway can enable students to achieve competence at all qualification levels.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- Competencies are expressed in terms of workplace functions and performance. This leads to assumptions that the workplace is the most appropriate environment for training and assessment.
- There is a lack of clarity about the extent of skill maturity required to attain competence.

If institutionally based training is to be more widely accepted, then measures will need to be taken to ensure this pathway is explicitly accommodated and recognised within Training Packages. RTOs will, however, continue to provide institutionally based training, simply because of the demand for access to training and qualifications. If appropriate action is not taken, there will no doubt be louder calls for a dual qualification system (Carnegie 2000, pp 207-211).

The shift from curriculum to Training Packages is designed to leave decisions about training delivery to RTOs to best meet their client needs. However, the concerns about national consistency within the VET system suggest that, at least until there is a shared understanding of competence across the VET system, more guidance is required (Summary of ANTA Ministerial Council decisions in Australian Training, September 2000). The development of more detailed and restrictive assessment specifications in Training Packages is not necessarily seen as the answer (TAFE Directors Australia 2001). Perhaps what is missing from Training Packages, though, is a discussion about training.

As a nationally endorsed set of vocational qualifications for a sector of industry, each Training Package presents a unique opportunity for collaboration between industry and RTOs to give guidance on training to meet the competencies and qualifications. Questions to be discussed and agreed include:

- How might the new qualifications affect existing training and assessment arrangements?
- How can the possible training pathways be developed to meet the outcomes for each qualification level?
- Which industries and RTOs will each contribute to ensure new entrants and existing employees can attain these qualifications?

Unfortunately, the adversarial environment that has accompanied the introduction of Training Packages has often polarised, rather than unified, views between industry and RTOs (eg see articles in the *Campus Review*, March 15-21, March 22-28, April 5-11, April 12-18). The proposal by ANTA to develop a User Guide for each Training Package may provide an opportunity to include more comprehensive information about training for Training Package qualifications in the nationally endorsed documents.

Conclusion

Institutionally based training is continuing under Training Packages. RTOs are using a variety of training and assessment strategies to enable their students to develop and gather evidence of competence. This has led many RTOs into closer partnerships with industry to provide support through advice on standards and the provision of work placements, for example.

Many trainers are positive about the direction of Training Packages, but many are also concerned that the contribution they can make as educationalists has been marginalised. Ownership of national vocational qualifications by industry is a hallmark of Training Packages. Improvements in national consistency and in the

quality of graduates from qualifications in Training Packages are more likely to come about, however, if RTOs are constructively engaged in the debate and development of the system and not simply viewed as a supplier of a predetermined product.

This project will put a number of recommendations to ANTA to ensure that institutionally based training is a recognised and valued pathway to Training Package qualifications.

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