

**YOUNG PEOPLE AND TOMORROW'S WORKPLACE STRATEGY**  
**ACTU Congress September 1995**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The process of reform in the areas of work organisation, education and vocational education and training has been underway for around seven years. For reforms to occur our support is vital. Some signs are already apparent that reforms are under threat because of reaction from conservative forces and a lack of broad support from the trade union movement and progressive employers.
- 1.2 In considering a strategy for the trade union movement the following issues need to be addressed:
- (i) Promoting a broader understanding of the national training reform agenda;
  - (ii) Encouraging improved participation rates in full time education and promoting the role of education to provide enhanced opportunities for full time employment;
  - (iii) Ensuring that the curriculum for the final years of secondary schooling and vocational training incorporates key competencies;
  - (iv) Securing support and activity by affiliated unions for the introduction of the Australian Vocational Certificate;
  - (v) Improving union and community support for national ITABs as part of the reform process;
  - (vi) Maintaining and extending support throughout industry for the development and application of competency based training;
  - (vii) Improving career and training opportunities generally but especially in those industry areas where they have not traditionally been available;
  - (viii) Improving access and equity outcomes for disadvantaged groups and applying resources to overcome the gender imbalance in regard to training and educational opportunities for women in the workforce;
  - (ix) Addressing the issue of wage rates for young people so as to achieve fair and reasonable pay rates and the abolition of discriminatory age based pay rates;
  - (x) Ensuring that adequate resources are available for VET, particularly the TAFE system;
  - (xi) Addressing issues of articulation and credit transfer.

## **2. PROMOTION OF BROADER UNDERSTANDING**

- 2.1 Most observers and participants in the training reform agenda would acknowledge that it developed as a bureaucratic process involving a level of complexity which makes it nearly incomprehensible to all but the specialists in government, employer and union ranks.
- 2.2 If we cannot gain the support and enthusiasm of rank and file members, their stewards and officials and employers for the need for change and how it can be achieved then it simply will not happen.
- 2.3 The aim of the reform process in general terms is not difficult to comprehend. Broadly it is:
- "To provide relevant and nationally recognised education and training opportunities to the broad base of the workforce so as to achieve a significant improvement in Australia's skill base and better career opportunities for individual workers throughout a working lifetime."
- 2.4 The complexity of the reform process is increased by the involvement of nine separate governments (six States, two Territories and the Federal Government) with a range of political positions plus a variety of employer positions in diverse industry areas ranging from retail and mining to metals and tourism.
- 2.5 In addition to the participants there has been the creation of a confusing number of Councils, Boards and Committees at State and Federal levels all of which manage to produce a multitude of reports on a variety of issues. Most of the reports are unnecessarily long and esoteric on subjects which do not require such an approach to be taken.
- 2.6 Specific actions which are required to address these issues include:
- (i) A range of understandable explanations of the Education and Training Reform agenda and the relationship with work organisation reform needs to be produced for distribution to unions and rank and file members. Unions should encourage membership participation and discussion to promote better understanding of the training reform agenda. Organisations which should be involved in assisting the ACTU and unions to produce such information include TUTA, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). This should be a top priority.
  - (ii) Regular information should be distributed to unions regarding developments in the reform agenda through avenues such as the Workplace magazine, the ACTU Relay service and general correspondence, including the development of model best practice agreements in work design and training arrangements.
  - (iii) Communication and understanding will continue to be difficult whilst there is a proliferation of Boards, Councils and Committees in the education and vocational training areas. There must be further reform of the administrative framework and a national focus for the reform process. The establishment of the ANTA provides the opportunity for a focus for reform. Federal and State Governments need to address this issue.
  - (iv) The ACTU Education and Training Committee performs a valuable function and it should be continued. Initiatives to address specific issues such as the ITAB forum are of practical value and should be extended to other appropriate areas on a regular basis. The ACTU Youth Committee should also meet more frequently to address these issues. Each

State and Territory TLC should facilitate networking and information exchange between union ITAB representatives.

- (v) A broad base of support needs to be built up to promote a common understanding and support for the reform agenda. In particular national employers should be invited to continue to participate in a forum with the ACTU and affiliated unions to enable regular consideration to be given by the industry parties to reform issues.
- (vi) Work by unions should be expedited to achieve by the next Congress access across the workforce to Competency Based Training and the widespread introduction of the AVT system.

### **3. PARTICIPATION RATES - FULL TIME EDUCATION**

3.1 Over the last decade the level of participation in full time education to year 12 has increased significantly. The trend is for greater numbers of students to remain through to the completion of twelve years of schooling. Full time education will lead to greater participation in and enhanced opportunities for full time employment.

3.2 Action which needs to be taken in this area includes :

- (i) The ACTU and unions should support the trend towards higher participation rates in the post-compulsory years of education, particularly in the context of a broad education accessed through a variety of pathways (TAFE, schooling, higher education) which incorporates the key competencies;
- (ii) One aspect of government support ;which directly affects the ability of young people to remain at full time schooling is the adequacy of Austudy benefits. The ACTU should continue to monitor the adequacy of Austudy to ensure that it meets the objectives set down;
- iii) There is a trend for governments to continually increase fees in TAFE colleges and HECS charges in higher education institutions. The ACTU will oppose excessive fees and charges which inhibit young people from continuing full-time education in the post compulsory years.

### **4. CURRICULUM AND KEY COMPETENCIES**

4.1 The ACTU strongly supports a broadening of curriculum at the post compulsory levels of schooling to incorporate the diverse range of needs of students now completing year 12. The changing focus of curriculum to encompass both broad education and vocational elements must continue. There is also a need to develop a national focus in curriculum to improve recognition of Year 12 outcomes.

4.2 The introduction of the national profiles and statements is seen as a critical part of the change process in upper secondary education.

4.3 The inclusion of key competencies in secondary school curriculum is of fundamental importance to achieving outcomes which have substantial educational value and which also prepare young

people more adequately to enter the workforce and to cope with the new work environments which will exist in tomorrow's workplace.

- 4.4 The initiatives taken in the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports to introduce key competencies were at risk due to the decision of State conservative governments in 1993 which refused to endorse continued work for their national introduction and instead referred all further work back to individual States. The Ministers also rejected introduction of the national profiles and statements.
- 4.5 Following the decision of the State Government Ministers there was a strong reaction from many areas opposing the failure to press ahead with the key competencies. Unions, the ACTU, ACCI, BCA, MTIA and other employer groups all publicly expressed strong concern.
- 4.6 Continued efforts were required to turn around the State and Territory governments which opposed the key competencies. The States which formed the majority in opposition were Victoria, NSW, West Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.
- 4.7 Action which the ACTU considered needed to be taken in this area included:
  - (i) Joining with other organisations including employers to make representations to the conservative State and Territory Governments seeking to have them reverse their decision;
  - (ii) Ensuring that the Federal Government maintained its position of commitment to the introduction of key competencies in both schools and vocational education and the continued development of national profiles and statements.;
  - (iii) Encouragement to the State and Territory Governments which supported key competencies and curriculum profiles to press ahead with their introduction in consultation with the Federal and other like-minded State Governments; and
  - (iv) Encouragement to the State and Provincial Trades and Labour Councils to co-ordinate information dissemination and discussion with affiliates on the nature, purpose and introduction of the key competencies.

## **5. COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING**

- 5.1 The union movement has supported the introduction of Competency Based Training as both the basis of the vocational education and training system and its mode of delivery. CBT provides greater access to formal recognition, improved outcomes and industry relevance, greater emphasis on individual needs and a more integrated approach to the learning process.
- 5.2 For young people CBT provides a system of learning that potentially offers shorter training times, increased flexibility in learning approaches and recognition of competence at an earlier age.
- 5.3 The framework for Competency Based Training is now well developed although a number of issues are still to be finalised. ACTU and affiliates will need to closely monitor developments to ensure the key structures and principles of the system are maintained.
- 5.4 A key objective is to finalise development of a unified system of credentials aligned to the ASF and to implement this new system as quickly as possible so that individuals can achieve certification which relates to CBT.

5.5 Actions which will need to be taken by the ACTU and unions include:

- (i) Continuing the process of developing the CBT system;
- (ii) Ensuring all training is based on Standards and Curriculum Council (S&CC) supported competency standards;
- (iii) Ensuring improvements in standards quality through strong union participation in the standards development process in CSBs or ITABs;
- (iv) Recognition of Prior Learning strategies and practices to be established across all industries with access for all employees;
- (v) Ensuring that sufficient workplace based trainers and assessors are available to undertake CBT;
- (vi) Ensuring all vocational education training is accredited and nationally recognised through national qualifications aligned to the Australian Standards Framework;
- (vii) Supporting the effective implementation of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) agreement across all States and Territories, noting failure of States to meet their obligation;
- (viii) Ensuring the resource implications of implementing CBT are met;
- (ix) Maintaining and strengthening industry award classification career paths and provisions in awards and agreements for access to training for all groups in the workplace.

## **6. AUSTRALIAN VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM**

6.1 The Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) was introduced on 1 January 1995.

6.2 The specific matters which need to be addressed to implement the AVTS include:

- (i) At industry and, in some cases, enterprise level unions and employers need to develop a strategy for its introduction. Issues which are required to be addressed include;
  - (a) training must be consistent with S&CC supported industry standards and monitored by ANTA and the S&CC.
  - (b) training contracts in the future must ensure that a continuation of a significant number of opportunities to progress to Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level three and above.
  - (c) the overall proportion of level 2 and level 3 in each industry must be adequate;
  - (d) training needs to incorporate the key competencies, and
  - (e) wage rates and conditions for trainees.

The ACTU and unions should identify a range of key industries and initiate negotiations to address issues relevant to the introduction of the AVTS. ITABs will also need to be

involved in this process. The ACTU will produce a model framework agreement for AVTS introduction.

- (ii) In introducing the AVTS there is a need to ensure that the training infrastructure is adequate to meet the needs of new training demands and that teachers are prepared for the introduction of CBT. We should ensure that these issues are adequately addressed by Federal and State Governments.
- (iii) The most important pathway to acquiring vocational qualifications should continue to be full time employment. However, the AVTS will introduce a range of new pathways to acquire qualifications. One of these is a full time vocational year beyond year 12 - this pathway will be more significant in times of economic downturn. This will require structured training to be undertaken in a workplace environment. The issue of remuneration levels for young people involved in work placements needs to be addressed by the ACTU/unions, employers and the Federal Government.
- (iv) The adequacy of the mechanisms to meet the targets for participation in the system needs to be monitored.
- (v) The workable arrangements for recognition of prior learning (RPL) should be put in place.

## **7. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND WORK ORGANISATION**

7.1 Every young person entering the workforce deserves the opportunity for full time employment and a career. Too often, particularly in lower paid work areas, they are recruited into dead end jobs with low levels of job security and no opportunities for training.

7.2 To achieve career opportunities for young people requires unions to ensure that their Awards and Enterprise Agreements provide for:

- (i) A structure of classifications and work levels which allows individuals to obtain advancement in their industry;
- (ii) Training opportunities which are nationally recognised and which lead to a recognised credential. The training provided should articulate from one work level to that required for higher work levels;
- (iii) Work organisation should ensure that advancement opportunities are available across as well as within occupational streams. Work areas such as trades, production, clerical, stores and technical should be open to all on an agreed basis.
- (iv) Work organisation should focus on team as well as individual roles. Job rotation rather than continuous work on one set of duties should be encouraged. Work change should be introduced with full consultation and agreement and with genuine higher skills and career paths not just intensification of work.
- (v) In some cases individuals require additional teaching in literacy and numeracy if they are to undertake further training. These courses should be provided through the employer in the context of vocational training wherever possible.

7.3 Action which is required to be taken in this area includes:

- (i) There is a need for a better understanding amongst unions and their members as to how work organisations can be improved and career structures should be developed. A range of literature should be produced by the ACTU/unions on these issues. Examples of where unions have been successful in implementing career structures need to be publicised. Enterprises which have introduced good practices in this area should be acknowledged. The ACTU magazine Workplace should be utilised in this area;
- (ii) Unions should be incorporating the need for better work organisation for career structures and training issues into their claims for Award and Enterprise Bargaining. The outcome of these negotiations should address the points listed above;
- (iii) The ACTU/unions should consider holding a seminar on this issue over one or two days to examine the progress which has been made in a range of areas and to discuss the details of matters which inhibit achievement of better work organisation and career opportunities;
- (iv) The unions and governments need to demonstrate that increased skills competence rather than obsession with lower wages will lead to improved enterprise performance. Good examples should be publicised;
- (v) Access and funding for literacy and numeracy training which is integrated with other forms of training should be encouraged.

## **8. IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR ITABS**

- 8.1 ITABs have become an important part of the emerging VET system and their significance will continue to increase through coming under the umbrella of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).
- 8.2 From the union perspective it is critical that ITABs become more effective and better able to represent the industry's viewpoint. The ITABs represent a critical vehicle for union participation in the system and for providing direction within their industry sector.
- 8.3 The ACTU supports the need to reform the ITAB structure to improve their capacity to operate in the ANTA environment.
- 8.4 From the union perspective there are a number of actions which can be taken to improve ITAB performance.
  - (i) Unions need to ensure they fully support their ITABs and that they nominate representatives who are both committed and competent;
  - (ii) Unions need to ensure they provide sufficient backup for their ITAB representatives;
  - (iii) ITABs must be involved in the accreditation of vocational courses and must ensure that courses are accredited consistently with NFROT principles.
  - (iv) The ACTU should encourage ITABs to consult with education providers in the development of training and competency standards.
  - (v) The Training Liaison Officer network should be utilised to promote more effective involvement of unions in ITABs.

## 9. GENDER INEQUITIES

- 9.1 Women have historically experienced a range of discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere. Some progress has been made in removing the worst of the discrimination in areas such as wage rates, employment opportunities and sexual harassment. However, there is a good deal of work yet to be done before genuine equality is achieved.
- 9.2 The fundamental key to improving the position of women within the vocational education and training system is to ensure that women share equitably in the structural reform process. In effect this means a re-arrangement in the distribution of resources to ensure that women will have equal access to and participation in:
- (i) The AVTS
  - (ii) Accredited training for their industry/sector;
  - (iii) RPL processes across industry:
  - (iv) Non traditional courses.
- 9.3 A range of groups are disadvantaged in access to the education and training system. These groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those with disabilities, people from remote locations and those from a non-English speaking background. Particular programs and funding need to be directed to achieving equitable access to recognised vocational education and training.

Actions which will need to be taken in this area include:

- (i) Specific gender equity targets will be needed to ensure equal access and equal recognition of training in the workplace. These should be negotiated by unions on an industry by industry basis.
- (ii) Historically women's work and skills have been undervalued. In the establishment of competency standards in work areas which have traditionally been occupied by women (eg. secretarial/clerical), special attention must be paid to the need for proper recognition of women's skills.
- (iii) Unions should work to reduce the barriers to women's participation in training by ensuring training takes place in working time or that suitable arrangements are provided to enable working mothers to participate ie. paid childcare.
- (iv) For many workers, adult and community education is their pathway to further training and career development. The ACTU will continue to support the provision of such courses by the public system which provide a base for more vocationally orientated streams.
- (v) Unions need to ensure adequate access to training provision and career development opportunities are provided to part time and casual employees - 75% of whom are women.
- (vi) Disadvantaged students may take longer than the specified time to complete university courses. The ACTU opposes any measures to increase HECS payments which further disadvantage these students.



## 10. JUNIOR WAGE RATES

- 10.1 Wage rates for young people have been the subject of considerable attention from a range of interests over recent years. The general direction of the proposals from employers and some governments has been to argue that wages for "juniors" are too high and should be lowered to reduce youth unemployment. The ACTU/unions have responded to the debate and overall have successfully defended current standards - the community does not accept the proposition that wage rates for young people should be lowered to assist with economic recovery.
- 10.2 Whilst there is little community support for wage reductions for young people it is also probably fair to say that proposals for wage increases which were not clearly seen to be related to higher value in the workplace would similarly not be supported by large numbers.
- 10.3 In broad terms the position taken by the ACTU/unions in regard to wage rates for young people has been to :
- (i) reject propositions that rates should be lowered;
  - (ii) support action to seek to remove age based pay rates, and
  - (iii) endorse negotiations for modifying youth wage rates to take account of the introduction of competency based training and the AVTS
- 10.4 A further area of change as part of the post compulsory years of schooling has been the introduction of structured training in the workplace. Year 11 and 12 students in several States are now undertaking more substantial periods of structured training in workplaces as part of their school year. Students in a full time Vocational Year following year 12 will also need to undertake part of the year in structured training in a workplace. The intent of the ACTU Executive decision in this area has been to provide for remuneration which recognises the costs involved in attending the workplace.
- 10.5 Whilst a young worker can be as productive as an older worker Federal and State Governments, plus most employer bodies will be opposed to any increase in pay rates for young people which either do not relate to increased work value in the workplace or else have the effect of making the employment of young people made less attractive relative to the employment of adults.
- 10.6 The specific actions which are proposed in this area include:
- (i) The ACTU should produce a guide to affiliates to assist in the negotiation of AVTS Implementation Agreements.
  - (ii) Identifying the key industries and in some cases enterprises where the AVTS is to be introduced. Initially these negotiations will concentrate on Levels 2 and 3. In these identified areas affiliates should negotiate a total proposal for wage rates of young workers which takes account of:
    - (a) the clear stand of ACTU and unions which regards training time as properly included in wage negotiations and rejects the view that it should be regarded as "unproductive" and unpaid;
    - (b) changed training arrangements and training time both on and off-the-job;

- (c) the introduction of competency based training and the level of competency and work value;
  - (d) the potential for accelerated skill development with CBT; and
  - (e) the fact that when an individual is assessed as competent the rate for that level should be paid in those cases where it is not already being paid.
- (iii) As part of a program to expand CBT into new industries and areas the wage structure should be competency and work value based in the future rather than age based. If an individual is at a lower level in so far as competency standards are concerned then an appropriate rate could be struck. When an individual undertakes a structured CBT course it would be expected that skill development and value would be accelerated and wage levels would reflect this outcome. When an individual is assessed as competent the full rate for the job should be paid. The overall package negotiated for access to training and wage levels should be more beneficial than current arrangements.
- (iv) Where structured training is made available in the workplace for full time students then the appropriate remuneration should be based essentially on costs incurred. However in these circumstances the tests which must be met are :
- (a) No displacement of employees;
  - (b) Workplace training which is necessary within the scope of the curriculum;
  - (c) A duration of no more than 240 hours in a calendar year;
  - (d) The training must be part of a structured course leading to nationally recognised credentials;
  - (e) Unions to be consulted; and
  - (f) Training should be free to the trainee.

## **11. RESOURCES**

- 11.1 Achieving the National Reform Agenda requires that adequate resources are made available for Vocational Education and Training to ensure :
- (i) That the systems expand to meet the targets set out in the Finn and Carmichael Reports;
  - (ii) That adequate training and development provision is made for teachers and trainers involved in the training reform process.
- 11.2 It is desirable to expand the number of exchange programs between industry and public and private institutional training providers to ensure familiarity with current workplace organisation and practice to assist workers to develop the teaching/training process.
- 11.3 The ACTU notes that TAFE, as the major provider within the Australian Vocational Education Training (VET) system, plays a critical role in providing guaranteed access to relevant vocational pre-vocational programs for all Australians, including those excluded from the workplace and others suffering disadvantage.

- 11.4 The ACTU asserts that TAFE must be maintained and developed into an even more effective and flexible national system, and calls on the Australian Government to lead the strengthening of TAFE and prevent action by States to dismantle or privatise the system. In its role as the major public provider, TAFE and associated public providers should not be subject to any application of ANational Competition Policy" which would inhibit the capacity to fulfil community service obligations.
- 11.5 Congress reaffirms its declaration made at the 1989 Congress that VET accessed through private and community providers should be properly accredited and, further, Congress reaffirms its support for the full unionisation, with the establishment of fair wages and conditions through Awards for private providers and the community sector of VET.
- 11.6 AIn association with TAFE the ACTU calls for core public provision in schools and universities to be protected from any negative impact associated with ANational Competition Policy.@
- 11.7 The ACTU will oppose excessive fees and charges in TAFE which act to inhibit participation in vocational educational training.
- 11.8 The ACTU to seek to ameliorate the HECS surcharge on individuals undertaking a second undergraduate degree as, particularly in terms of economic downturn and rapid structured change, the surcharge can fall unfairly on individuals whose initial choice has become unviable.

## **12. ARTICULATION AND CREDIT TRANSFER**

- 12.1 Essential to the education and training reform agenda is the development of a variety of pathways to achieve qualifications. This means the ability to move between institutions, full time and part time courses, on and off the job education and training and different disciplines without repetition and inefficiency. Recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, national competency standards, key competencies and a national system of qualifications is the key mechanism for achieving this. The interface between schools, vocational education and training and higher education must be to enable recognition of prior learning and competencies achieved in entering the higher level courses.
- 12.2 Universities must provide adequate and appropriate articulation and credit transfer arrangements, and allocate sufficient student places for persons who enter under these arrangements. In addition, the question of financial disincentives to training and retraining at the university level should be addressed.

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