

Moving On Training Packages

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The final Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages, entitled *Moving On*, opens with a bold, but apparently self-evident statement: 'Training Packages are not the national VET system itself.' Indeed, suggest the authors, it was never intended that Training Packages would become synonymous with VET provision, for there would always be needs not directly connected to a job outcome which could not be dealt with by the Training Package model - general education; career development; employability skills; language, numeracy and literacy; social and cultural skills, and prevocational skills.

Moving On says that we need to rethink the nature of competency, arguing that 'competency is a broader concept than the ability to perform workplace tasks.' (p.14) Taken together, these statements about the need to rethink competency and the importance of not conflating VET with training packages go to the heart of the VET system and could be interpreted as a plea to rethink the whole basis of the system itself. Not surprisingly, no elements of this survive into ANTA's Training Package Work Plan, the document developed to implement the recommendations from the review.

To make the point that the consultants were always going to have difficulty in tiptoeing between the various agendas which were at play during the review process is clearly a statement of the bleeding obvious. In tiptoeing, however, they juggled some interesting and arguably powerful ideas which, if the system had met the challenge, held the potential to position vocational education and the national system well for the future. Indeed, much of the review process was deliberately future orientated.

The authors 're-affirm the potential of the Training Package model, with improvements, to facilitate good labour market and educational outcomes...', highlighting their 'labour market and educational value'. They support their belief that the model deserves perseverance with the statement that, in the first instance, 'almost no-one wants to do otherwise', but also because 'the Training Package model has the potential to produce some very clever products ... with the potential to provide a very effective lever for skill formation in the future'. (p.9) Despite this, say the authors, the training package model 'has yet to win the confidence of many clients and

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stakeholders.' In outlining the areas of concern, the authors point to: a lack of clarity about the purpose and role of training packages in the system, the quality of design (which includes levels of specification and detail), development and review processes, content and the capacity for training packages to evolve to meet changing needs and the quality of delivery. The changes that the authors call for are not minor twiddles:

...although we have confidence in the potential of the model, without major changes to the ways in which Training Packages are currently conceptualised, developed and implemented, the



model will struggle to achieve its purposes, and will ultimately fail. (p.9)

Moving On puts forward a wide-ranging agenda to ensure the model reaches its potential. These include the preparation of a statement to define and communicate the multiple purposes of Training Packages, the need for a sharper understanding of what can and can't be achieved through a CBT system, the need to convey to all stakeholders that Training Packages should not be expected to encompass all learning and development needs, and a streamlining of the endorsement process.

The authors suggest that we need to investigate in more depth the underlying assumptions of Training Packages:

The Training Package model is underpinned by a range of explicit and implicit assumptions about work, work performance, knowledge and skill, teaching, learning and assessment and qualifications. It is some of these assumptions that are in the greatest need of a re-think. (p 14)

In elaborating what they believe competency must include - effective performance in employment, application of skills and knowledge within and across a number of work contexts and contingencies, ability to transfer skills and knowledge within work contexts and within a changing context over time, and (where relevant) a combination of higher order skills - the authors argue the need for a clearer understanding of what competencies entail. Arguably some of these issues have been implicitly picked up in some of the references in the ANTA Work Plan, but unfortunately the Work Plan largely ignores a range of new



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Moving On



interpretive possibilities in *Moving On*.

Why is it that the outcome of the review, heralded as it was by many as a timely intervention which would improve the quality of the VET system, has been so stymied in its final recommendations? Arguably, the complexity of the task set by the consultants was daunting. But a thorough-going re-examination of Competency Based Training and Training Packages could only have strengthened a national system which, despite its shortcomings, is generally held in very high regard. Surely a statement which questions the extent to which the Training Package model has won the confidence of many stakeholders and clients would lead

to a desire to win that confidence by subjecting the basis of the model to a process of further examination and development?

What remains now, ironically, is a Work Plan which is process rather than content focused. And without wishing to be too harsh, perhaps that is the best we could have expected in the current climate.

Having said all this, it is important that those opportunities presented by the Training Package Work Plan are seized by teachers and others in VET, to flesh them out and give them substance. The Work Plan suggests a renewed, if somewhat patronising, focus on the role of teachers and trainers in development and delivery of Training Packages, and implies the

need for a great level of support for 'practitioners'. If this allows an argument for improved resources into areas such as development and design as well as delivery and teaching, then this will enable the system to address concerns around quality.

The Work Plan also attempts to pick up on the arguments in the Report for a 'new settlement' by arguing for a more collaborative approach to the development of Training Packages. Does this mean that ANTA will cease locking teachers out of the training package development process? If so, this is an opportunity which needs to be pursued.

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