14 October 2002

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA   ACT   2600

Dear Sir,

The Group Training Association of Queensland and the Northern Territory (GTA Qld & NT) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools.

GTA Qld & NT is the industry Association for not-for-profit group training organisations employing over 10,000 apprentices and trainees and servicing over 20,000 small to medium sized business in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

We would endorse the National Association's (Group Training Australia Limited) response to this Inquiry and also suggest that the Inquiry read the myriad of reports in the public domain regarding this very subject.

This Association believes that the profile of the skilled trades occupations needs to be raised within the schooling sector.  It is imperative that, if we are to meet the skill needs of the future, trade areas become a desirable option for students and not just something that non-academic students do.

Vocational education is still viewed as an alternative to academic study whereas, in fact, it should be viewed as complimentary.  Until that attitude, both within schools and from the parent body, is changed vocational education will always be seen as a lesser outcome.

The demand for bright willing students to undertake careers in the traditional trade areas is growing and those students undertaking these traditional trade apprenticeships have a career for life.  This is not necessarily so for those unfortunate University Graduates who are unable to find work post University but are considered over qualified for a trade. This anomalous situation requires rectification.

H:/Association/resonsetovocedinquiry

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We would congratulate the Queensland State Government on their recent round of consultations regarding their Green Paper on Education and Training Reforms for the Future and have enclosed a copy of our response to this consultation for your information.

We would recommend the following reports as supporting reading

- Dusseldorp Skills Forum. 2002. *How Young People are Faring – Key Indicators 2002*
- John Pitman, 2002. *The Senior Certificate:A New Deal*
- NCVER, 2001. *Apprenticeship in Australia: An historical snapshot*
- Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2002. *"you value what you pay for" Enhacing Employers Contributions to Skill Formation and Use*
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Group, 2002. *Group Training the Quiet Achiever*
- NCVER, 2001. *Outcomes for apprentices and trainees in Australian small-enterprises*
- Dr. Phil Toner, 2002. *The Occupational and Skill Structure of New Apprenticeships: A Commentary*
- Gregor Ramsey, 2001. *Teachers for the 21st Century, An address to the World Education Fellowship open forum, Old Parliament House, Brisbane*

We await with interest the results of this Inquiry

Yours faithfully

Peter de Medici
Executive Officer

Queensland the Smart State

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING
# REFORMS
# FOR THE FUTURE

# Consultation Submission



# Group Training Association
*Queensland and Northern Territory Inc.*

Queensland the Smart State

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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## Consultation Submission

# Group Training Association
*Queensland and Northern Territory Inc.*

**SYNOPSIS**

*The Association welcomes the opportunity to join with the Queensland Government and other interested parties in considering the preparation of and support to children for their journey to the future.*

*The proposals on getting ready for school and becoming more skilled in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are most welcome. The "getting ready for school" initiatives do provide potential for exposing students, from the outset, to the wide range of potential work, training and study options that can await them as they progress through school. The expansion of computer equipment and associated technologies should provide the means to keep both teaching and learning in step with the wider community.*

*The Association proposes some options for "getting ready for work or further study" that go beyond those apparently envisaged in the consultation questions. They are based on arrangements that are largely community-based, with participation from schools and other parties that can contribute to succesful transition to continuing education, vocational education, vocational training and work.*

*The Association is keen to contribute to this and other initiatives that will make Queensland the Smart State.*

## INTRODUCTION

The production of the "Green Paper", Education and Training Reforms for the Future, is seen by this Association as a most welcome initiative from the Government of Queensland. The document lays out a challenging, but achievable, template for future development opportunities for the young people of Queensland as they move through school to continuing education, vocational training or work.

The Group Training Association – Queensland and NT Inc. represents 22 not-for-profit organisations, employing approximately 800 staff operating from over 49 locations servicing the entire State of Queensland. Group training organisations are the legal employers of in excess of 10,000 apprentices and trainees and provide services to more than 15,000 host employers annually. The group training network is the largest employer of apprentices and trainees in the state and, in some occupations employs in excess of 30% of all apprentices. It also provides related services such as those of a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), New Apprenticeship Centre(NAC), Jobs Network Agency, Jobs Pathway Provider etc).

Group training in Queensland initiated and is still the driving force behind school based apprenticeships and traineeships. It currently provides in excess of 60% of such training opportunities for students throughout the state.

It is from this background that the Group Training Association participates in the consultation process. Furthermore, while this submission focuses mainly on the consultation questions relating to "getting ready for work or further study", the Association has also chosen to offer some brief comment on the other elements of the paper, as follow:

### "getting ready for school"
- The trials of early education programs are a positive step and their evaluation will be awaited with much interest. The influence of the early years of development and socialization cannot be overestimated and a professional assessment of their impact on future learning and life experiences is vital.
  In this regard, the Association is mindful that when students advance to later years of formal education it is normally the case that their future education, training and work options have been significantly narrowed through influence of parents, peers, education and general community attitudes. In some ways this is inevitable and can lead to difficulty in their motivation and interest in some vocations and work pathways.
  Maintaining flexible experiences and broad information giving and advisory services to both students and parents from the outset of, but continuing throughout, the education process is vital to enhancing later options.
  While the early education program trials may seem to some to be too early to be concerned about this type of issue it is suggested that a long range view would show that preparing for school is about getting ready for entry into an environment of teaching and learning that leads to a range of possibilities at the end of (currently) 10 to 12 years of schooling. The more that experience does not have an eye to a broad coverage of work and training options, the less the opportunity later. No time is too soon to start stating and demonstrating the validity of this.

### "ICTs for school & work"
- The enhancement of computer hardware, greater access by students and more professional IT development for teachers is warmly welcomed by the Association.

The advance of information technology equipment and processes cannot be underestimated; nor can the disadvantage suffered by students trying to enter the workforce when they are deficient in relevant IT skills.

The Association would urge that the introduction and maintenance of initiatives in IT are done with the conviction that information and communication technologies are not ends in themselves but constantly evolving processes that require continual updating. Thus, the Green Paper's proposals in this area have to be seen as steps on a journey and need to be accompanied by ongoing commitment to the future. The same has to be said for teacher development and student involvement.

Overall, it is essential in implementing these reforms that teachers and students do not see the processes or the equipment as ends in themselves but, rather, as ever-developing tools that they use in the normal course of study or future training or work. They should contribute to further innovation in both teaching and learning in the school environment.

The bulk of the Association's submission concerns "getting ready for work or further study" and comments on the specific points raised in the Green Paper follow. Generally, the Association supports the general direction of thought in the paper but we offer some additional possibilities that might bring schools into a stronger position of partnership within their communities in assisting those making the transition from compulsory schooling to other options.

## GETTING READY FOR WORK OR FURTHER STUDY
### Comments on Consultation Questions

**proposal one  -   All young people in school, vocational education and training or work**

- *Should young people be required to be engaged in full-time school, vocational education and training or work?*
  The short answer to this question has to be "Yes".
  However, there needs to be recognition of changing patterns of work and living, desirable or otherwise as they may be, and acceptance of arrangements such as those part-time combinations mentioned in strategy two. Full time education, full time training for employment or for the arts or for sport or for other vocational pursuits would be a best option situation. However, unless measures are introduced to reverse the increasing drift from full-time involvement in employment and in education – all in the name of enhancing flexibility – it is more likely the case that part-time combinations will be the norm for those who do not follow the standard school-based educational scenario.
  The underlying issue is that all young people should be usefully engaged, whether at work, in training or in education, and able to participate in a contributory manner in the communities in which they live.

- *Should this apply until young people reach the age of 16 or 17?*
  Such a social contract should extend to whenever the purpose has been achieved. For instance, if the basic underlying principle is to assist the successful transition from secondary school to work, further education or training then that has been effected when an individual does that, not when s/he turns a particular age. On the other hand if such an outcome is not achieved by age 17 years, is the contract terminated and the individual abandoned? Is it not also important for young people beyond 17 years of age to be in full-time school, vocational education and training or work?
  The focus needs to be on what is being sought to be achieved, not on an age as such.

- *Would anyone be disadvantaged by the new arrangements?*
  As per comments on previous question.

### How would the law work?

- *What should be grounds for exemptions if we changed the leaving age to 16 or 17?*
  It may not be appropriate to be as confident as indicated that the age to be used in proposed arrangements should necessarily be assumed to equate to school leaving age. The intentions of the arrangement seem to relate to post-school options following successful transition from school. Given that many of those who have difficulty in transition, particularly early school leavers, also have not enjoyed the learning experience or are uncomfortable in an educational institutional environment it may be the case that a support system, such as that proposed in the Green paper, should not be part of that same

environment; perhaps it should be more community-based (including education). If that were the case there may be no need to change the school leaving age at all!

To build on earlier comments, the purpose of the "youth compact" should be to ensure that those who have left the secondary education system, early or on completion of Year 12, transit successfully to one or more of the identified options. There may be a need to consider more fully what a successful transition may be, given the short-term nature and limited skill acquisition of some of the options (cf. AQF Level 2 traineeships, some casual and part-time work practices). Desirably, the transition should be to an option that is worthwhile to the individual as a person and a reasonably substantial base for ongoing development and contribution to the community.

If the "leaving age" issue and the definition of transition were satisfactorily addressed then there may be no need for a change in legislation nor exemptions or exceptions.

- *Could raising the leaving age to 16 or 17 years negatively affect any other training or employment arrangements for young people?*

  This question does not arise if the "leaving age" issue is addressed.

  A "youth compact" might mean an adjustment to some State and Commonwealth Government programs but this would have to be assessed on the basis of final arrangements determined for youth support. It might be the case that some programs should have special provisions for those in their initial transition from school to post-school options to reinforce, to both participants and the community, the value of the support arrangements.

  In any case, there needs to be significant liaison with administrators of programs such as the Jobs Pathways Program and the New Apprenticeships Assistance Program which already exist to assist transition to post-school options.

## How would we introduce the new leaving age?

- *If we adjust the leaving age to 16 or 17, should the new arrangements start in the Year 2007?*

  From a potential participant point of view, it is difficult to see why there should be any delay in implementation other than those required for clarifying the purpose, administration and funding of any support arrangement.

  The comments in the paper do not advance a case for a specific implementation date, only a description of possible effects on the extension of school leaving age.

- *What are the things the Government needs to consider in deciding on a starting date?*

  See previous comment.

## proposal two - Re-organising senior secondary schooling

- *Should we re-organise the senior years of schooling to include Years 10, 11 and 12 or maintain senior school as Years 11 and 12?*

    There would seem to be value in such a re-organisation as already the option is being exercised for Year 10 students to start transition activity through school-based apprenticeships or traineeships. Following an effective stocktake at Year 10 (see comments below) there should be no reason to delay that for students who have been able to make a clear choice of direction that might involve vocational training or even work (Year 12 completion rates notwithstanding).

    Year 10 would seem to be a point at which the future starts to come more into focus for many young people and it would seem to have a fairly natural connection to the following years.

- *Do you agree with our proposal to use year 10 as a "stocktake" of a student's learning?*

    Stocktake should be a regular process commencing in late primary school and should be undertaken with an eye to possible direction for students when they reach senior years. This is a case of being proactive in the interests of students rather than waiting for problems to develop. A year 10 stocktake would be one step in a process that assesses a student's progress on literacy and numeracy, social skills, demonstrated interest in general education, potential for engagement in additional options eg. school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

    The year 10 stocktake would be focused on setting a baseline for ensuring a student's success in senior school years and in transition from school to work, training or further education.

- *Do some students require this "stocktake" earlier?*

    As indicated, it should be an ongoing process during schooling over several years. Such a process would indicate whether some students might need more regular assessment and assistance. Whatever the case, a flexible approach built on individual needs would seem to be the best option.

- *What can we do to improve coordination between all relevant sectors – school, vocational education, universities and employers?*

    One of the challenges to effective co-ordination of a number of different areas and organizations of interest is the improvement of understanding of purpose and process of each and the ability to create complementary partnerships that recognize the unique contribution that each can make. The Association would be keen to see group training organizations as members of such partnerships and bringing their unique knowledge of the vocational training and the labour market to bear in assisting transiting students.

- *Who should be responsible for driving this improved coordination?*

    If the guiding force in co-ordinated arrangements is that they are based solely on what is best for subjects/clients then there would be advantage in responsibility being vested in a party that can take an independent, holistic view rather than be, consciously or unknowingly, affected by vested interests.

This might be able to be done through an upgrading of the youth function in the bureaucracy, including incorporation of vocational guidance resources, to provide a clear client focus for the support system.

It is a perception at the moment that the career guidance function is currently vastly under-resourced for its primary function, notwithstanding the valiant efforts of those involved in trying to provide advice to students. Unfortunately, the criteria for this position mean that these posts are filled with teachers who have very little experience of the world of work or vocational education and training. In the private school sector, most schools employ one career guidance officer who is overburdened with the workload. In the public education sector, one career guidance officer can be shared between as many as three schools. Furthermore, much of the activity of dedicated career guidance officers is necessarily diverted into other student support functions that divert capacity ultimately from the objectives they are meant to achieve. The end result of this is that students, and their parents, with no real idea of what pathway the student should pursue (whether in continuing education, training or work) present to organizations such as this Association for assistance. *Proper, interactive career guidance seems to be significantly undervalued by governments at all levels and no real progress can be made on "getting ready for work or further study" until this matter is addressed.*

A further point to make in looking at responsibility for co-ordination is the need to review existing structures to avoid duplication or underutilization. In this regard it may be worth considering arrangements involving the Enterprise Career Education Foundation ECEF, (formerly ASTF) which has already been significantly involved in support to schools for assisting transition preparation and in involvement of communities in the underpinning of that assistance. A move towards wider community responsibility, expressed through co-ordination of complementary activity by a range of agencies (including schools) would help to spread the commitment of assistance to young people and provide assistance to schools by allowing them to get on with their primary function of providing professional teaching which should enhance effective learning by students.

In summary, the Association is of the view that the most effective co-ordination will occur when schools are allowed to "stick to the knitting" of professional teaching and creation of an acceptable learning environment for students; Schools would join with other concerned bodies under the guidance of an independent party or structure (eg, youth service, ECEF) charged with the responsibility of co-ordination as such.

- *Should the re-organisation be introduced in 2005 or earlier?*
  It is probably unrealistic to expect introduction earlier as reorganization of the senior school cluster is part of the wider issue of effective transition assistance to students and the Association believes there are several issues surrounding the latter that still remain unresolved. It is doubtful that such resolutions would be achieved in time for all aspects

- *If we re-organise Years 10, 11 and 12 as senior schooling, what are the implications for middle schooling?*
  With reorganized senior years, middle schooling needs to be very much the foundation period for decisions to be taken in senior years. Student learning experiences need to remain as wide as possible, including exposure to options other than continuing formal education such as the potential total array of occupations that could be pursued later in life, vocational education, vocational training (for work, art, sport), work. The aim should be to keep open as many educational and non-educational doors as possible during these preparatory years.

Middle school years also need to be the time during which educational and socialization problems should be identified and addressed. They are the years crucial to formation of attitudes about self, others, relationships, learning, work, sport, society etc. and lay the foundations for future behaviours. They are critical for the delivery of professional teaching services as, arguably, the senior years should see a rebalancing of the relationship between teaching and learning, in favour of the latter. It is suggested that many of the student-teacher and student-school tensions that arise in senior years can be attributed to failure to recognize the need for this rebalancing and the desire for relevant learning on the part of students.

- *Are there other implications related to middle schooling that we need to consider?*
  Probably covered in previous point.

## proposal three - Recording achievement

- *Do you think recording all of a student's achievements, even if obtained outside of the school setting, would be useful for:*

- *young people* - emphatically "Yes!". This is particularly so for those experiencing institutional alienation. Recording, and therefore recognition, of achievements across the board identifies the person as an integral entity and also gives "formal endorsement" to accomplishments important to the student.

- *parents* - Yes. It should help parents to have better understanding of the full range of their children's interests and allow them to identify prospects for encouraging continuing growth and development.

- *employers* - Yes. Hiring decisions made by employers are made on the basis of a range of issues (see below). They are often a mixture of specifically relevant matters such as acquired knowledge and demonstrable skills and attitudinal and related matters such as non-compulsory interests and pursuits eg. in art, sport, community involvement through memberships; in other words, their interest is in a person as a person and their potential to contribute positively in the workplace.

- *vocational education and training providers* - Yes. Again, recording of all achievements will provide cues for more personally relevant approaches in vocational education and in vocational training.

- *higher education providers*? - Yes. Same as previous.

- *What information would employers want to see recorded?*
Clearly, employers want to see information that gives them an appreciation of an individual as a person, the performance they have displayed to date (whether in school or outside it) and the attributes and qualities they exhibit. Most employers are trying to assess the likelihood of best fit between a person and what they (employers) can offer in a work situation. This includes their assessment of the relevance of and confidence in formal educational assessment. This may mean that an employer may not regard as highly as does the education sector, measures of and levels of achievement in some school subjects which the employer does not see as specifically relevant to the employment experience on offer.
In a study on desired employee attributes [1] the following were identified: - loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, commonsense, positive self-esteem, sense of humour, balanced attitude to work and home life, ability to deal with pressure, motivation, adaptability. In the same study [2], employers offered educationists some suggestions on relevance of their contribution to employability of students. These were:
- link skills development to their applicability in a commercial context
- provide more work-based learning options
- be more responsive and proactive
- develop higher levels of literacy and numeracy
- continue to support the development of national consistency in VET programs

- make the "learning to learn" theme more explicit
- provide more information on the breadth of jobs that are available
- help high achieving university graduates keep a realistic perspective on their
    abilities and worth.

In light of these comments, it is suggested that current information provided to employers does not meet their expectations. Any change of reporting arrangements would do well to take these sorts of issues into account.

- *How do you think non-schoolbased activities should be assessed and described?*
    Depends on the activity and who does the assessing. Assessment should be done by whoever is competent to do such and that person will not necessarily be within the school system.

- *Would we require a new assessment framework?*
    Yes. It would be necessary to look at something like a person profile which includes matters relevant to performance as a student but also identifies other accomplishments, interests and qualities relevant to successful transition.

- *Should the recorded achievements be part of the Senior Certificate?*
    See later comments.
    If they were to form part of the Senior Certificate then that would have to be broadened in scope from a focus on academic achievement as a foundation for tertiary study to a statement that lays the basis for consideration for suitable transition options.

- *Or should they be available at any point during Years 10, 11 and 12?*
    There would seem to be value in the recording of achievement being an ongoing process in senior school to facilitate appropriate transition activity during those years.

**strategy one - School as the local coordinator for learning and youth support**

- *Do you think the school should have greater responsibility for students and should be the local coordinator until they turn 16 or 17?*

  The question of youth support is a vexed one. It can involve many fields of discipline, some significantly removed from the primary role of schools in teaching and providing a stimulating learning environment for students.

  Arguably, schools are currently stressed and distracted from this primary role by other requirements of students that are not being adequately addressed elsewhere in the community. These include social welfare, housing, medical, occupational information, peer and family relationships needs. Some of these have been, necessarily, picked up by some schools but would be more appropriately addressed by arrangements specifically available for that purpose. This would be the role of a youth support service that could handle co-ordination with appropriate agencies for assistance to students and administer "youth compact" arrangements.

  It is the Association's view that schools are best assisted by being able to focus on their primary purpose and supporting them in the addressing of ancillary, but necessary, needs of students that can be better addressed by those more expert in those fields.

- *Do you support our proposal that schools should actively follow up students until they turn 16 or 17?*

  As indicated elsewhere students should be actively supported until they make a successful transition to continuing education, vocational education, vocational training or work.

  That support should be provided under the aegis of a "youth compact" administered through appropriately developed community-based arrangements in which schools would be a participant.

- *Does the school or the Government have responsibility to encourage the completion of a Senior Certificate after people turn 16 or 17?*

  Completion of Senior Certificate should be a means to an end, not an end in itself. Whether people should be encouraged to complete for completion's sake is a moot point, particularly if they have already made a succesful transition from school. It has become something of a statement of holy writ that senior certificate should be completed and that retention rates in schools should be constantly increased. This has a degree of prima facie attraction to educationists and politicians. However, the reality is that for many others than those pursuing tertiary study the non-completion of the Senior Certificate, in itself, does not detract significantly from successful pursuit of careers. In essence, it is the balance of normal subjects, vocational education and vocational training, if any, while a student plus personal qualities and interests which combine to produce successful employment outcomes for this group.

  On the other hand, more broadly-based assessments that go beyond the traditional academic focus of the Senior Certificate would be the basic reference tool for the "youth compact".

  Re the age criteria, see earlier comments.

- *If so, how might this work?*
  Not relevant.

- *Would students, parents, teachers, schools, further education and training providers and employers have to collaborate more to achieve these proposals and, if so, how?*
  Clearly this would be the case. If the notion of a "youth compact" arrangement, administered through a community-based organization, were adopted there would be a need to establish appropriate local structures, possibly based around clusters of schools, that could work in concert with other organizations (eg. ECEF, Area Consultative Councils, service organizations) and involve parents, representative employers, group training organizations, jobs network providers) and professional advisers.

**strategy two  -  More support for young people and teachers**

• *Do you support our proposal to provide individualised assistance to young people at risk of leaving early and not going on to further education, training or work?*

This is clearly essential and is strongly supported by the Association. It is important to emphasise the focus on the individual, rather than a group or the system. (It is sobering to reflect that the Australian Traineeship System was introduced in 1985 specifically to cater for the needs of a limited group of 15–17 year olds at risk of unemployment, because of early cessation of formal schooling, and therefore disadvantaged in the labour market. It came to be seen as a useful more general group approach to dealing with youth unemployment and has thus largely lost its relevance to its original intent. It would be unfortunate if school-based arrangements went the same way.) Whatever is in place needs to be person-orientated and measured on grounds of effective assistance to the individuals who use it.

• *Would the role of youth worker help more students stay at school or enter full-time further education, training or work?*

As already indicated, the Association is of the view that an appropriate response would be a "youth compact" arrangement administered by dedicated personnel focusing specifically on individual rather than system or group needs. This would be best achieved by co-ordination that is community driven and brings together a range of systems and organizations with a legitimate role to play in assisting transition to continuing education, vocational education, vocational training for "normal" work and other legitimate pursuits as well as "normal" work. A "youth worker" concept could fit into this arrangement but would need to be tailored for a broader role than that which might be envisaged at the moment.

## strategy three  -  Making it happen

This strategy acknowledges many of the issues raised directly or implicitly in the Association's comments, including
- improvement in teaching
- community involvement
- individuality of situations
- need for better links with business and industry
- improved career guidance
- flexibility of approach
- professional development of teachers.

Implementation of this strategy will be a major challenge for all concerned and the Association looks forward to working with other parties to meet that challenge in the best interests of the young people of Queensland.

## REFERENCE

(1) Employability Skills for the Future, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002, p.47
(2) Employability Skills for the Future, op. cit., p.53