

PREFACE

This report is the culmination of three years of close scrutiny of vocational education and training issues by senators covering education policy areas. This has occurred through scrutiny of the Estimates and through legislation as well as through this reference.

The inquiry has already had a significant effect on the deliberations of Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Australian National Training Authority Ministerial Council (MINCO). The report provides a plan for addressing the concerns about the adequacies of quality assurance in VET. These go beyond the current measures discussed to date through ANTA and MINCO.

This Committee's broad inquiry into vocational education and training has covered many technical and complex issues facing the sector. The extensive terms of reference addressed by the Committee involved a detailed consideration of concerns held by the wide range of stakeholders in the national VET structure. As well as a mass of written and oral evidence, the Committee drew upon the extensive research base on VET. The legislative compact that holds VET together nationally includes Commonwealth and state agencies, employer groups, associations of different occupations, training agencies and institutions, trade unions and trainees.

The Committee noted differences in the administrative cultures and regulatory practices between state government agencies, as well as differences in the attitudes between the states and the Commonwealth to the difficulties faced by the VET sector. Market pressures, which increasingly determine the way VET is delivered, have resulted in widely differing responses from the range of VET stakeholders. Assimilating the evidence provided by such disparate interests has been a challenging task for the Committee.

This report is tabled ahead of a MINCO. A significant issue at the meeting will be the negotiation of a VET funding agreement for the 2001-04 quadrennium, although as this report goes to press no draft agreement has circulated by the Minister. Uppermost in the minds of most MINCO members will be the issue of obtaining sufficient Commonwealth financial support for a sector which has, over the past three years, been forced to fund its growth through finding 'efficiencies' in its operations. This has increasingly resulted in a reduced capacity to provide training of sufficient quality - the detail of which constitutes the main body of this report.

The Committee emphasises that growth funding is essential to improving the effectiveness of the regulatory framework and thus ensuring quality training. This report details the current regulatory deficiencies and recommends changes.

Without sufficient new funding, the sudden and belated recognition by Commonwealth and state governments of ‘quality’ as the determinant in meeting national VET goals will be no more than empty rhetoric.

The Committee is grateful for the assistance given by all those who provided evidence to this inquiry. It also acknowledges the significant and valuable role of its consultant, Ms Gail Cummins, in assisting the Committee during the inquiry and in her contribution to the drafting of this report.

The Committee majority commends its report to the Senate.

Senator Jacinta Collins
Chair

Senator Kim Carr

Senator Trish Crossin

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja