

CHAPTER 6

NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

6.1 Sound national policy is fundamental to the quality of VET delivery and outcomes, and sound national policy can only be made if the national policy structures and arrangements are working well. The national policy framework for the VET system includes the ANTA structures and arrangements and the national objectives and priorities that guide policy making and implementation strategies.

6.2 The establishment of the ANTA structures and associated arrangements was driven by a need to strengthen cooperation and collaboration on VET within the federal system, and to facilitate the establishment of an integrated national VET system, an objective which the Committee fully supports.

6.3 The Committee believes that under the ANTA arrangements and ANTA's leadership, substantial progress toward a national system has been made, but there is much more that needs to be achieved.

6.4 Submissions generally fell into one of three categories - those that strongly support the national policy framework and believe the reforms and the new system are generally progressing well, although some implementation problems are acknowledged; those that support the national policy framework but believe there are serious implementation problems, and those that believe the national policy framework has some fundamental flaws that, combined with implementation problems, are undermining quality in VET.

Effectiveness of national policy structures and arrangements

ANTA Ministerial Council

6.5 The ANTA Ministerial Council (MINCO), comprising ministers from the states and territories and chaired by the Commonwealth minister, is the primary national decision-making body for the VET system. Under the terms of the ANTA Agreement, the ANTA Ministerial Council sets national goals, objectives and priorities for the system.

6.6 The Committee notes that there is often a disparity between decisions of MINCO and state or territory action to implement those decisions. On some occasions, a state or territory will record its dissent or objection to a decision and its intention not to proceed to implementation or to proceed in a limited way, as, for example, NSW did in regard to the implementation of User Choice. On other occasions, although there may have been unanimous agreement at MINCO, implementation varies across jurisdictions. While there is an expectation that, in accordance with the spirit of the ANTA Agreement, states and territories will comply with MINCO decisions, there is no specific clause or requirement for this in the

ANTA Agreement. The Taylor Review of the first ANTA Agreement observes that ministers are responsible for ensuring MINCO decisions are facilitated and implemented in their respective states and territories,¹ but it is obvious that fulfilling this responsibility can be limited by the political, financial or regulatory circumstances of their particular jurisdictions.

6.7 The ANTA Chief Executive Officers, in a critical report to ANTA MINCO, draw attention to serious inconsistencies impacting on the establishment of a national VET system.² These include inconsistencies in the operation of the Australian Recognition Framework, in legislation regulating the VET system, in the recognition and implementation of endorsed National Training Packages, in access to suitable training wage arrangements for New Apprenticeships, in the availability of User Choice, in the application of training agreements, in access by employers to subsidies and incentives for New Apprentices and in how group training companies are recognised and funded.

6.8 Many submissions also refer to the frustration created by interstate differences in administration of VET. For example, Coles Myer state that interstate differences in administration impacts significantly and negatively on the company's involvement with the New Apprenticeship System.³ Wodonga Institute of TAFE mentions interstate inconsistencies in registration and audit procedures.⁴ The ACT Secondary College Principals Association regret the duplication of effort involved in adapting or adopting National Training Packages on a state by state basis.⁵ The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry speak of the need to simplify relationships between state and territory employer incentive schemes to ensure a sense of national coherence.⁶

6.9 These inconsistencies are significant and undermine both the effectiveness of VET and the realisation of a truly *national* system.

6.10 The Committee questions whether sufficient consultation occurs with states and territories, prior to proposals being put to MINCO, to ensure there are not insurmountable difficulties likely to affect a state or territory's ability to implement a decision. There is some evidence in submissions regarding the adequacy of consultative arrangements. For example, the Victorian Government believes the process for agreeing national directions through the various arrangements surrounding ANTA generally works well:

1 R Taylor, *Report of the Review of the ANTA Agreement*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996, p.63

2 ANTA CEOs, *Report on National Consistency*, report to Australian National Training Authority Ministerial Council, June 2000

3 Submission 89, Coles Myer Ltd, vol.5, p.1215. Similarly Submission 115, Sport and Recreation Training Australia, vol.6, p.1847

4 Submission 43, Wodonga Institute of TAFE, vol.2, p.380

5 Submission 30, ACT Secondary College Principals Association, vol.1, p.248

6 Submission 125, Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, vol.7, p.2028

While there will always be areas of disagreement and room for improvement, there are adequate opportunities for consultation and discussion, and consensus positions are usually developed.⁷

6.11 On the other hand, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training complain of the complexity of consultative arrangements:

The complexity of the national training system undermines its coherence and direction... The National Training Framework operates through a plethora of working parties and advisory bodies... The governance of many of these groups is confusing and their roles unclear.⁸

6.12 The Committee is concerned that the Commonwealth has, on occasions, taken decisions outside of the MINCO forum, and without prior consultation, which have had a significant impact on state and territory finances and their ability to meet their responsibilities under the ANTA Agreement. The extension of eligibility criteria for New Apprenticeships incentives to employers signing existing employees as New Apprentices⁹ is one example:

... some unilateral Commonwealth decisions have created problems for states and territories. An area requiring particular attention is the impact of Commonwealth attempts to increase apprentice and trainee numbers, where these are not targeted to priority areas or backed up by additional funding for training.... It is vital that Commonwealth initiatives are targeted to areas of national priority, and their impact discussed with states and territories before implementation.¹⁰

6.13 The Committee considers such action by the Commonwealth is a repudiation of the spirit and the terms of the ANTA Agreement.

6.14 The Committee also questions the wisdom of MINCO adopting important policies and strategies for VET to which there is strong dissent from one or more jurisdictions, knowing that this will lead to inconsistencies and confusion in the system. In this regard the Committee is concerned that from time to time the Commonwealth may employ inappropriately its financial leverage in the MINCO forum to obtain agreement to proposals, such as, for example, the 'growth through efficiency' policy, that are not consistent with achieving the agreed national objectives and priorities for VET.

6.15 Lack of cooperation between states and territories is also raised as an issue impacting on sound policy development. The Queensland government is one state

7 Submission 119, Government of Victoria, vol.7, p.1901

8 Submission 139, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, vol.9, p.2442,2463

9 The Commonwealth reintroduced tighter eligibility criteria in May 1999.

10 Submission 119, Government of Victoria, vol.7, p.1901,2

concerned by the lack of interstate sharing of information and the lack of national consistency:

There has been insufficient cooperation between the states in sharing resources and experience with the implementation of [training] packages, undoubtedly the most ambitious element of training reform. Further, the development of industrial relations arrangements to support apprenticeship and traineeship pathways through award variations was not given appropriate priority nationally.¹¹

6.16 According to the Queensland government, ‘traditional approaches to inter-government relations are not sufficient for these purposes [national training reform]. National training reform ought to be conceived as a national business that operates across borders.’¹² New South Wales states it would like to see in the next ANTA Agreement an ‘inclusive partnership’ supporting a ‘balanced relationship between Commonwealth, state and territory governments’ in planning the VET system.¹³ In this context the Committee notes that the ANTA CEOs have begun discussions recently to ensure greater and more effective sharing of information vital to quality and the operation of the Australian Recognition Framework.

6.17 The Committee reiterates its support for the ANTA structure and associated arrangements and its view that under these arrangements and ANTA’s leadership substantial progress has been made toward establishing a national VET system. Nevertheless much more needs to be achieved.

6.18 The Committee believes that in recent years much effort has been directed to achieving reforms that accommodate narrow political purposes, rather than to resolving fundamental legislative and jurisdictional differences that prevent the establishment of a truly national VET system. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

ANTA Board

Membership

6.19 The membership of the ANTA Board has been a matter of debate since its establishment, particularly in regard to the absence of any teachers and professional educators. The ANTA Board’s role is to advise MINCO and support it in all its functions. With members drawn largely from industry, its composition is intended to ensure that MINCO receives high-level formal advice on industry VET needs, and also to provide industry with a key role in providing leadership and advice.

11 Submission 131, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations [Qld], vol.7, p.2121

12 Submission 131, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations [Qld], vol.7, p.2137

13 Submission 139, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, vol.9, p.2418

6.20 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training was concerned that the ANTA Board, as a major source of national policy advice, has not included training provider representation in its membership. A 1998 House of Representatives Committee report on the TAFE system examined this issue, and recommended that an additional member of the ANTA Board be drawn from directors of TAFE Institutes. The Commonwealth rejected this recommendation, saying:

The Board consults extensively with the ANTA CEOs group which provides a TAFE perspective in the national vocational education and training planning and decision making process. The Government considers that the composition of the ANTA Board should continue to be a matter for collective decision by the ANTA MINCO and that any consideration of direct TAFE representation should be balanced by a recognition that TAFE is not the only provider of vocational education and training.¹⁴

6.21 VET stakeholders obviously do not share the Commonwealth's view, with several submissions to this inquiry calling for teaching and educational expertise to be included on the ANTA Board. TAFE Directors Australia, for example, argue that TAFE has strong grounds for having a voice at the highest levels of policy and implementation:

...This seems highly appropriate, in view of the fact that TAFE institutes were responsible for the delivery of vocational education and training to 1.1 million students in 1998, excluding fee-for-service or commercial programs. By comparison, the current number of Australians in a contract of training under New Apprenticeships is only 206,000. From these figures, it is evident that vocational education is much more inclusive than New Apprenticeships, yet TAFE representatives continue to be excluded from policy and implementation processes.¹⁵

6.22 The Committee notes that a senior state or territory official is a member of the ANTA Board. The Committee considers this is a positive inclusion in Board membership but it does not provide the Board with the teaching and educational expertise that is needed to complement its efforts to construct a national VET system capable of meeting the needs of all its clients.

6.23 The Committee believes the exclusion of teachers and professional educators from the policy development and decision making processes weakens the 'partnership' and 'consultative' basis on which the national VET system is founded. The Committee believes the partnership would be considerably strengthened by the inclusion on the Board of a member with extensive teaching and educational expertise and experience.

14 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Today's Training, Tomorrow's Skills*, July 1998, par.2.26. *Government Response to the Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Today's Training, Tomorrow's Skills*, 30/6/99, p.2

15 Submission 136, TAFE Directors Australia, vol.8, p.2246

The Committee recommends that:

- (a) the membership of ANTA provide a balance between national and state and territory governments, employers, unions and VET provider interests; and**
- (b) at least one member is appointed who is a practising professional VET teacher or educator and who is able to provide the Board with advice based on extensive teaching and educational expertise and experience.**

Strategic focus

6.24 The Committee is aware that the 1995 Taylor Review of the ANTA Agreement found some weaknesses in the strategic focus of the ANTA Board. At that time the weakness was seen to be too great an involvement in detail and operational matters and too little involvement in forward strategy or strategic guidance. The Committee notes the generally positive changes flowing from the Review recommendations. However, ANTA MINCO's seeming disregard for some critical issues prompts the Committee to question the advice MINCO is receiving, and the basis on which items for consideration by MINCO are determined.

6.25 If matters dealt with by ANTA MINCO reflect the ANTA Board's advice, the Committee believes that the Board's strategic focus still needs sharpening. Of particular concern is that the ANTA Board and the ANTA office have been aware for some time of inconsistencies and legal impediments to the effective implementation of elements of the National Training Framework.¹⁶ Nevertheless, these matters were not put before ANTA MINCO as requiring urgent attention, but instead were down played as transitional implementation difficulties. The Committee notes, for example, that a special ANTA MINCO meeting was called to discuss a national marketing strategy, but not to address known, serious problems with the National Training Framework. As one state representative pointed out in evidence to the Committee:

We never had a problem with the marketing strategy as such. Because we had been consistently raising the issues (*raised in the state Department's submission*)... I suppose our concern was that there was a special ANTA Ministerial Council meeting on the marketing strategy, when in fact our view was that there were more important issues that needed to be discussed by ministers...¹⁷

6.26 It was not until its June 2000 meeting that ANTA MINCO decided on action to address the lack of nationally consistent legislation to regulate the VET system, even though this was known for several years to be a fundamental constraint to the

16 See discussion in Chapter 8.

17 Mr P Noonan (Qld Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations), *Hansard*, Canberra, 5 July 2000, p.789

effective operation of the National Training Framework and the establishment of a national VET system.¹⁸

The ANTA Agreement

Industry leadership

6.27 A number of submissions question the national arrangements for determining the policy and national priorities set out in the ANTA Agreement.

6.28 The original 1992 ANTA Agreement included the objective of close interaction between industry and vocational education and training providers to ensure that the training system operates within a strategic plan that reflects industry's needs. It specified that industry would be involved in key aspects of the National VET system, in part through membership on the ANTA Board. As well as Board membership, ANTA's major committees, including the new National Training Quality Council and its predecessor, the National Training Framework Committee, are industry-led.

6.29 The second, and current, ANTA Agreement has an important change in emphasis. Encouraging the involvement and participation of industry has given way to 'building a leadership role for industry in national VET decision-making, with government working closely with industry as a key stakeholder'.¹⁹

6.30 This changed emphasis created some unease among many stakeholders. The unease intensified when the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, the Hon David Kemp MP, stated that an essential feature for the reform of VET was giving 'full ownership' of the decision making processes to industry. The Committee finds it surprising that such power and responsibility should be assigned to a single stakeholder. There is no corresponding assignment to industry of the obligations or responsibilities that could be expected to accompany such a role, no evidence produced of industry's unique ability to undertake this role, and no requirement for any evidence of commitment on the part of industry to the objectives of the national VET system. 'Industry', while assigned a leadership role by the ANTA Agreement, is not a party to the Agreement.

6.31 Submissions question whether this 'leadership' role is appropriate in terms of ensuring due consideration the needs and interests of all VET clients and stakeholders. There is an apparent lack of confidence in the ability of 'industry' to put longer term national considerations before more immediate business considerations. Peoples

18 Mr P Noonan (Qld Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations), *Hansard*, Canberra, 5 July 2000, p.786

19 Second ANTA Agreement: schedule to *Australian National Training Authority Act 1992* as amended

comments that ‘it is a dereliction of public responsibility for governments to hand over ‘full ownership’ to a group whose self interest in these matters is legendary’.²⁰

6.32 The Australian Education Union comments that ‘the irony is that within the rhetoric of an industry-driven system there is evidence of tension between the national policy and structures, often dominated by large business, and local needs’.²¹

6.33 Nor is it clear which part of ‘industry’ is to have the leadership role. ‘Industry’ is largely perceived in submissions as big business or large employers and the extent to which large business employers can represent the views of diverse small businesses is challenged.

6.34 The Committee strongly supports a role for industry in VET but believes the leadership role should be shared by other stakeholders. There is a need to ensure that VET policy and planning is determined with both the economic and social goals of education in mind so that the interests of *all* clients are considered.

Consultative processes

- Consultation with industry

6.35 Despite efforts to give industry a leadership role and to involve industry in planning and development through participation on ANTA, ANTA committees and working parties, and national and State Industry Training Advisory Bodies, there are many submissions claiming that consultation with ‘industry’ is inadequate.

6.36 There are claims, first, that consultation with industry is limited to larger employers and does not necessarily reflect the diverse interests of smaller businesses; and secondly, that what is called ‘consultation’ is often not true consultation: more often it is merely an advisory process that equates to being told what has already been decided, with little attention being paid to the views of those thus ‘consulted’.

6.37 For example, WRAPS Queensland states that ‘ANTA consulting the captains of industry does not necessarily give an industry viewpoint with widespread support - this can only be achieved through widespread consultation...’ WRAPS also maintain that ANTA places unrealistically short time frames on consultation:

This creates frustration in the Department, industry practitioners and RTOs, and fosters the common view that ANTA is arrogant, anachronistic in its approach and out of touch.²²

20 Peoples, K, *A Market for all?*, in ‘Training Agenda: a journal of vocational education and training’, vol. 5, no. 4, November 1997, p.23-25

21 Submission 110, Australian Education Union, vol.6, p.1561

22 Submission 41, Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Advisory Board Inc. (Queensland Branch), vol.2, p.357

6.38 The Australian Council for Private Education and Training view is that the current system has been developed by a top down corporatist bureaucracy of public sector VET (and industrial relations) professionals:

...'Industry' input in most cases has been limited by the nature of the process to large companies ... who could afford to be part of the process. As a result the needs being met are largely those of the VET and industrial relations professionals. That is, training reform has had very little to do with trainees and enterprises at the coal face.²³

6.39 The Victorian TAFE Association asks '...how can one speak with any surety about the views of Industry?...'

...In some industries, where there is unanimity of views, such a conclusion would be acceptable. However, it is well known that in industries with a more diverse cohort of employers it is unsafe to assume that such a single voice exists... The conflicting interests between the needs of an individual employer for whom 'just in time' training may be adequate and their duty as a trainer to provide for the long-term needs of the 'Industry' is clearly apparent.²⁴

6.40 Some submissions express concerns about the role of ITABs in consultative processes. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training believes, for example, that some ITABs are not representative of industry as a whole, and smaller operators with fewer resources and niche operators with particular needs are rarely represented.²⁵

6.41 TAFE Directors Australia comment that there are often divisions between national ITABs and state ITABs. Some state ITABs feel left out of the development of National Training Packages and therefore do not embrace them enthusiastically.²⁶

6.42 The Recreation Industry Training Company argues that there is insufficient dialogue between industry and government on key VET implementation issues and that state and territory ITABs are generally poorly resourced and struggling with forced amalgamations aimed at cutting costs to the point where their resources are spread too thinly to respond effectively to industry issues.²⁷

23 Submission 59, Australian Council for Private Education and Training, vol.3, p.615. Similarly Submission 110, Australian Education Union, vol.6, p.1561: 'The irony is that within the rhetoric of an industry-driven system there is evidence of tension between the national policy and structures, often dominated by large business, and local needs.'

24 Submission 128, Victorian TAFE Association Inc., vol.7, p.2079. Similarly Submission 22, Mr R Seidel, vol.1, p.171: 'Industry is by no means homogenous and the needs of one group of employers can be in conflict with the needs of another group within the one notional industry sector.'

25 Submission 59, Australian Council for Private Education and Training, vol.3, p.622

26 Submission 136, TAFE Directors Australia, vol.8, p.2252

27 Submission 65, Recreation Industry Training Company Ltd, vol.3, p.730

6.43 Inadequate consultation was a frequent complaint in relation to the development and implementation of National Training Packages. Business Skills Victoria, for example, spoke of:

‘...the problematic Training Package development process which frequently does not allow the time or opportunity for strong functional work analysis, broad consultation and field testing prior to endorsement ... The cry is often heard that the timeframes driven by ANTA’s contracts with developers do not allow for longer or better consultation and adequate analysis.’²⁸

6.44 The Committee notes that the ANTA Act does not require ANTA to consult particular interest groups but does name groups with which ANTA *may* consult as it deems necessary. ANTA told the Committee that in the main, it consults through national ITABs and that the national ITABs have different relationships with state ITABs across different industries.²⁹ ANTA acknowledges that some relationships ‘are not quite as fulsome’ as others. ANTA also draws attention to differing interpretations of ‘consultation’, and the possibility that some parties might claim not to have been consulted because their particular view did not prevail.

- Consultation with educators

6.45 In addition to concerns that teaching/educational expertise is lacking from the ANTA Board, many submissions, mostly from TAFE interests, claim that providers are marginalised in VET planning and development processes.

6.46 The NSW Government, for example, comments that the development of training packages by Industry Training Advisory Boards has not generally sought input from those with expertise in the delivery and assessment of vocational education and training.³⁰ NSW argues that the industry focus must be balanced with an increased role for providers of vocational education and training, ‘particularly state TAFE systems, who appear to have been excluded by some aspects of the system....’

6.47 Similarly, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE argues that National Training Packages have been designed by bureaucratic organisations, such as Industry Training Boards, and created by consultants, without input from the education sector and no real understanding of the needs of VET’s major client groups.³¹

6.48 The Australian Education Union argues that TAFE is not just another provider, but rather has the expertise and knowledge to contribute to the formation of

28 Submission 28, Business Skills Victoria, vol.1, p.231

29 Ms M Scollay (Australian National Training Authority), *Hansard*, Brisbane, 17 March 2000, p.103

30 Submission 139, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, vol.9, p.2436

31 Submission 47, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, vol.2, p.448

policy and a broader role to play as a government owned vehicle for policy implementation.³²

6.49 ANTA does not accept that teachers and professional educators have been excluded, claiming this is a misrepresentation:

Throughout this system, we have been concerned to ensure that the education providers, the education system, has got a place in this system, a very legitimate place, and it is in the provision of professional quality teaching and the professional translation of the outcomes and the assessment guidelines into what actually happens in the learning process. That is where that expertise is.³³

6.50 The Committee accepts arguments put to it in evidence that teaching and educational expertise has not been used to best advantage in national policy making and the development of important components of the current VET system, particularly where aspects of VET delivery and assessment are concerned. The Committee considers that such expertise should be sought at the planning and development stage of all VET system components in order to avoid difficulties at the implementation or delivery stages.³⁴

6.51 The Committee further considers that ANTA has had, at times, a deliberate policy of keeping people with a knowledge of the sector away from VET policy and planning. Evidence supporting this conclusion can be found in a speech by the former CEO of ANTA in 1998, in which he speculated on whether it was safe at that time to let a few educationalists back into the decision making process.³⁵ It was apparently not. ANTA indicated about the same time, in calling for applications for three senior project officers in policy analysis and development, that there was no requirement for VET work experience.

6.52 The new ANTA Agreement is an opportunity to restore partnership and consultative arrangements that are inclusive of expertise in teaching and learning, assessment and training delivery in VET policy making, planning and development forums. In putting this view the Committee stresses that it does not in any way support a return to a provider driven or an educationally dominated VET system, merely a system where expertise which is integral to quality outcomes is used to advantage.

32 Submission 110, Australian Education Union, vol.6, p.1588

33 Ms M Scollay (Australian National Training Authority), *Hansard*, Brisbane, 17 March 2000, p.114

34 Training Package development and implementation processes are considered further in Chapter 8.

35 Mr Terry Moran (former Australian National Training Authority CEO), quoted in D Fooks, 'New Year's Honours and Horrors', *Campus Review*, 28 January-3 February 1998

The Committee recommends that:

ANTA make a clear policy statement emphasising the importance of including people with teaching or professional educational expertise and experience in all aspects and at all levels of VET decision making, planning and development processes.

Responsibility for quality

6.53 With quality as a central concern of its inquiry, the Committee was keen to establish where, at the national level, specific responsibility rested for ensuring system quality and outcomes quality.

6.54 The basis for quality in the system is the quality assurance measures contained in the National Training Framework (NTF), but there is no single body within the ANTA national structure that has overall responsibility for quality. ANTA states that:

Quality assurance is a critical component of the management of the national vocational education and training system. The ANTA Board and the National Training Framework Committee (NTFC), the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), states and territories and industry each have particular roles in assuring the quality of key components of the system and of their interaction.³⁶

6.55 ANTA maintains that responsibility for implementing and managing quality assurance measures rests with the states and territories and that constitutionally, ANTA has no right or power to intervene in the way the states and territories run their VET systems or carry out their responsibilities under the National Training Framework.

6.56 While the former National Training Framework Committee (NTFC) had a monitoring and advisory role in relation to quality in the implementation of the whole Framework, this did not extend to policing the implementation of the Australian Recognition Framework. The National Training Framework's effectiveness as the key instrument for quality assurance is discussed in Chapter 8. As the evidence presented in Chapter 8 indicates, there are serious weaknesses in the National Training Framework affecting its capacity to ensure quality in VET.

6.57 The Committee is surprised that the National Training Framework Committee has been replaced, at the instigation of the Commonwealth, by a National Training Quality Council. The description of the Council and its responsibilities and the protocols under which it is to operate suggest that it is little different from the Committee it replaced. It has been given the additional function of providing information and advice to the ANTA Board on the operation of the Australian

36 Submission 107, Australian National Training Authority, vol.5, p.1454

Recognition Framework in each state and territory for inclusion in reports to MINCO.³⁷

6.58 The Committee does not believe this additional advisory function will make the new National Training Quality Council any more effective in ensuring quality than its predecessor because it does not address the fundamental problem: that of trying to create a national system from a federation, where power is divided between the Commonwealth and state governments and between state governments, and where every step has to be negotiated between these levels of power. The new National Training Quality Council, like its predecessor the National Training Framework Committee, has been given power to set standards, but no power to enforce standards.

6.59 It has become clear that substantial reform to the regulatory and quality frameworks for the national VET system are needed. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8 where the Committee recommends the establishment of an independent National Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority (NQQAA), sitting along side ANTA as part of a national regulatory and quality framework for VET.

National Policy Objectives and Priorities

National Objectives

6.60 VET objectives and priorities are set out in the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003, *A Bridge to the Future* (containing mission statement, objectives and anticipated outcomes), and the Annual National Priorities for 2000 (containing national priorities, anticipated national key result areas and performance indicators). These, as did their predecessors, rely heavily on consolidating VET reforms that have been pursued for more than a decade.

6.61 The National Strategy and Annual National Priorities are developed and agreed in line with the principles, roles, responsibilities and other arrangements set out in the ANTA Agreement. An underlying principle of the Agreement is ‘a spirit of cooperation and a commitment to partnership at the national level.’

6.62 The current (1998-2003) National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training lists the following ‘key objectives’ for the national VET system:

- equipping Australians for the world of work;
- enhancing mobility in the labour market;
- achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training;
- increasing investment in training; and
- maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure.

37 Resolutions of ANTA Ministerial Council meeting 30 June 2000, item 4(B)

6.63 As discussed in Chapter 2, the extent to which these objectives are being met is an indicator of the quality of vocational education and training in Australia. The Committee supports the objectives as appropriate drivers of VET policy and provision, but considers that ‘equipping Australians effectively to enable them to fully participate in society’ is a significant omission. This omission has the effect of excluding the broader social and educational goals that should be an essential part of any education and training system.

The Committee recommends that:

national VET objectives be renegotiated to include the objective of ensuring that there is equitable access for all Australians to vocational education and training that enhances their capacity to participate in society and take advantage of emerging opportunities in employment and in further education and training.

National Priorities

6.64 The Committee is required by its terms of reference to consider the appropriateness of the place of New Apprenticeships within national priorities. Annual national priorities are a statement of the key areas of concentration for the national system for a given year. The VET planning working group, which comprises nominees from ANTA, the Commonwealth and state and territory training authorities, develops the statement.³⁸

Place of New Apprenticeships in VET

6.65 In a process separate from the determination of annual priorities, ANTA MINCO agreed in May 1997 that New Apprenticeships were ‘a high priority to be accommodated in the VET sector’. ANTA advises that:

- The National Strategy identifies New Apprenticeships as a key strategy for improving and expanding school leavers’ vocational education and training options and employment prospects.
- New Apprenticeships have been accorded a high priority in both the 1999 and 2000 Annual National Priorities. These Priorities, agreed by ANTA MINCO, are a clear statement of the outcomes to be achieved by states and territories, the Commonwealth and ANTA and what is needed to do so. Under the ANTA Agreement, states and territories are required to respond to these Annual National Priorities in their planning processes.³⁹

38 ANTA, 1999, *Directions and Resource Allocations for 2000, Report to the Ministerial Council, November 1999*, ANTA, Brisbane

39 Submission 107, Australian National Training Authority, vol.5, p.1457

6.66 While the importance of New Apprenticeships is not challenged in submissions, there is a degree of concern expressed in many submissions about the priority accorded to New Apprenticeships within national priorities.

6.67 There is a reaction, in particular, to resources being diverted from other areas of VET and to efficiency regimes being imposed on other areas of VET in order to fund New Apprenticeship growth. The Australian Industry Group, for example, expressed concern at the ‘emergence of information from the various state training agencies that the current focus on New Apprenticeships is diverting resources from vocational training places outside of New Apprenticeship arrangements’.⁴⁰ WINETAC comments that ‘the increasing VET resource allocation to the new apprenticeship scheme is reducing the resourcing available for training through other programs more appropriate to the status of the wine industry workforce. This is limiting the uptake of training in the industry.’⁴¹

6.68 Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE comments that:

Whilst the percentage of students undertaking New Apprenticeships is only approximately 13 per cent of TVI activity, too much attention, policy emphasis and increased funding has been directed towards New Apprenticeships and provides a disproportional view of the impact and importance of New Apprenticeships in the broader VET system.⁴²

6.69 The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), while fully supporting New Apprenticeships and agreeing that New Apprenticeships should be a top priority for Commonwealth and states and territories funding, comments that there are a range of other training pathways which are not encompassed under New Apprenticeships that are also a priority.⁴³

6.70 Not only is there a perception that funding priority is being given to New Apprenticeships, there is a perception that VET reforms since 1996 have focussed largely on structures, processes and arrangements specifically relating to New Apprenticeships and that the imposition of these on the whole of the VET system is not necessarily in the best interests of the majority of VET clients or the national interest. ANTA acknowledges that the commitment to according high priority to New Apprenticeships is reflected in the prominence of New Apprenticeships in national planning processes and resource allocation decisions.⁴⁴

6.71 The focus, particularly in National Training Packages, on employment-based training and workplace assessment is seen as restricting access to training to those in

40 Submission 64, Australian Industry Group, vol.3, p.716

41 Submission 73, Wine Industry National Education and Training Advisory Council Inc., vol.3, p.870

42 Submission 88, Torrens Valley Institute Council, vol.5, p.1191

43 Submission 137, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, vol.8, p.2270

44 Submission 107, Australian National Training Authority, vol.5, p.1457

employment with a contract of training. TAFE Directors Australia argue there is a bias in New Apprenticeships to 'those in work - not the unemployed, not people in regional areas where jobs are scarce and not the traditional access and equity clients' and see this bias as ignoring the vast majority (80 per cent) of TAFE students who come to TAFE for reasons not linked to their immediate employment.'⁴⁵

6.72 It is also clear from surveys that the expectations and intentions of the majority of students participating in VET are not related to their current employment. Evidence from a recent TAFE SA Student Satisfaction Survey, for example, indicates that 89 per cent of all students were not studying for their current job requirements, but in order to obtain a job, get a promotion, change career or for personal interest.

6.73 Another perception is that employment and labour market considerations, particularly the high youth unemployment rate, are driving VET policy, planning and funding to the detriment of the traditional, longer term, broader education and social objectives of VET, and particularly TAFE. The Queensland Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations points out that a major factor associated with the serious problems in the Queensland traineeship system - which were also extending into apprenticeships - was the policy confusion between the employment and training objectives of the program.⁴⁶

6.74 The Committee has some sympathy with the views recorded above. It is concerned that many students may be disadvantaged through lack of access to workbased assessment because they are not in employment or related employment. Although National Training Packages allow for assessment to be made under simulated work conditions, there is often a high cost associated with setting up simulated workplaces, thus access to assessment through this option is also limited.

6.75 Apart from the assessment aspect, the Committee cannot see that a model of VET that seeks to link qualifications to workplace competencies and to award qualifications on the basis of the achievement of those competencies can disadvantage students. Although a minority are undertaking study as a requirement of their current employment, most have employment as the objective of their study. In these circumstances, their studies should be directed to achieving skills and qualifications that meet industry standards.

6.76 The Committee strongly supports the model of combined work and structured vocational education and training on which apprenticeships and traineeships are founded. The current policy of integrating apprenticeships and traineeships into the national VET system is based on the objective of extending the benefits and opportunities of apprenticeship and traineeship training to a wider range and greater number of individuals. This objective owes its origins to the Kirby report in 1974 which introduced traineeships as a means of easing the transition from school to work

45 Submission 136, TAFE Directors Australia, vol.8, p.2252

46 Submission 131, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations [Qld], vol.7, p.2123

in the non-trade occupations and of providing for recognition of the previously unrecognised occupational skills inherent in the non-trade areas, and to the Australian Vocational Training System introduced in 1992 that sought to extend traineeships to industries where little or no structured entry level training occurred.

