Fact sheet – Vocational training and the AMEP

teaching issues 5

Context

In order to enter the Australian workforce, most AMEP clients need to undertake further education or training. Many undertake training courses through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, which has around 4000 registered training organisations (RTOs). The training programs offered through the RTOs are developed using standards within the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), which provides the basis for a consistent, high quality, national vocational education and training system. AQTF has two sets of standards:

- standards for RTOs; and

- standards for State and Territory organisations registering or accrediting VET courses.

Within the AQTF, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is designed to establish and maintain consistent national vocational and educational outcomes. Among many other objectives, the AQF aims to:

- provide nationally consistent recognition of outcomes achieved in post-compulsory education;

- encourage the provision of more and higher quality vocational education and training through qualifications that normally meet workplace requirements and vocational needs, thus contributing to national economic performance; and

- promote national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Australia.

The courses offered in the VET sector use Training Packages (TPs). RTOs provide these courses that lead to competency-based Certificates I through IV and also Diplomas. Many AMEP clients, completing CSWE III or IV, find it difficult to transfer to VET courses, where the language level is higher and the subject-specific language is new to them.

Consequently, a number of AMEP service providers have offered content-based courses to prepare clients for their future VET study or courses that incorporate VET or other certification. In many contexts, content-based instruction (CBI) has been shown to lead to improved motivation as learners consider they are learning content relevant to their needs as well as learning language. Such CBI is compatible with the CSWE curriculum since it does not specify the particular content context for teaching or achievement of the learning outcomes. Similarly, in the AMEP, instructors have found that clients are highly motivated by courses that meet content as well as language needs.

This fact sheet describes Training Packages and then explores issues around the development and delivery of vocationally oriented CBI in the AMEP.

The nature of VET Training Packages

Training Packages in the VET sector are flexible, national products developed by industry to ensure training outcomes of high quality that meet current and emerging vocational skill needs. These national training resources consist of the following core components:

- Competency Standards (workplace skills and knowledge requirements);

- Assessment Guidelines (advice on assessment of competencies); and

- National Qualifications (a combination of competency units that form a national qualification).

Some TPs also contain some or all of the following optional components:

- Learning Strategies (information on how training may be delivered);

- Assessment Materials (materials to support the Assessment Guidelines); and

- Professional Development Materials (resources to assist trainers, teachers, employers and trainees).

An innovation in the VET sector has been the development of 'toolboxes' and 'learning objects'. Toolboxes are collections of resources with suggested learning strategies and materials to support online delivery of vocational education and training. The toolboxes can be used as developed or can be customised. Learning objects are provided by different organisations to support e-learning. These toolboxes and learning objects are available through the VET Learning Object Repository Network (VLORN) on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework website (see Annotated bibliography).

Issues and strategies for the classroom

State/Territory variation

While the AQTF provides a national framework, implementation of vocational education and training is a State/Territory matter. Consequently, each State and Territory has different regulations and offers a different set of courses. Therefore, AMEP providers and teachers need to consult their State or Territory VET websites in order to be able to find exactly what is certified within their State. A list of State/Territory organisations that accredit RTOs and certify training packages is available on the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website (see Annotated bibliography).

Not all learners are work-oriented

While many CSWE III clients are focused on obtaining work, and therefore the qualifications necessary for a job, others are more interested in settlement and learning about Australia, and realise that it will be some time before they can enter the workforce in a career of their choosing.

Certification

AMEP clients have indicated that they are primarily interested in courses that lead to content/skill certification, rather than courses that lead only to language certification. Several courses currently offered by AMEP providers are bridging courses that help learners to understand the concepts and language of the particular vocational content, without their actually achieving the competencies of the particular TP. Such courses have included childcare, computer training and nursing. In addition, a number of providers have offered courses that lead to particular certification. These have included first aid courses conducted in cooperation with Red Cross or St John Ambulance; learner driver courses, often conducted in cooperation with the relevant State or Territory transport authority; and CSWE III language courses taught in conjunction with Certificate II in Information Technology Studies.

Where certification is not available, some providers have arranged with an RTO to offer 'recognition of prior learning' to students exiting their program.

Which bridging or VET courses to offer?

While AMEP clients may express an interest in pursuing certain VET courses, some may base their decision on what jobs they would like to have later in their lives, rather than on what jobs they are more likely to be able to get in the short term. Others, on the other hand, may set their sights on what jobs are available rather than on jobs they actually would like to have later in their lives. It is therefore crucial that clients understand where particular training will lead in the short term and what pathways are available with such certification.

Another issue of concern to service providers is attracting sufficient numbers of students wanting to take a particular TP. This is especially problematic for small providers, along with the fact that client numbers in CSWE III are so much smaller than in CSWE II or I.

Teachers and service providers have suggested an alternative approach to delivering bridging or VET courses, which involves including generic competencies that occur in a variety of TPs into a general CSWE course. While this does not address learners' desire for certification, it does provide teachers with manageable curriculum content. The AMEP Research Centre has developed resources for teachers and service providers that map a variety of generic modules against CSWE learning outcomes. These resources help teachers choose teaching materials and learning outcomes that meet CSWE reporting requirements, while at the same time ensuring learners have the language skills necessary for a variety of TPs. These resources are available on the AMEP Research Centre website (see Annotated bibliography).

Who can teach the subject matter?

In many institutions, AMEP staff are not certified to teach outside the area of ESL. Therefore, to teach certified TPs, they need to either achieve the necessary content area certification or collaborate with a VET instructor to co-teach. In both cases, learners may, on completion of the course, attain certificates in both language (CSWE) and a VET skill area. With the recent call for the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector to move towards offering Certificates III and above only for VET courses, there is also the possibility of AMEP providers offering Certificates I and II VET courses along with CSWE, without taking away core business from the TAFE sector. AMEP providers would, of course, have to hire certified instructors or have some of their AMEP teachers certified in particular

areas. Private sector AMEP providers would need to either gain RTO status or link with an RTO to offer such joint VET TP/CSWE courses.

Delivery modes

A number of models for delivery are possible within current AMEP contract arrangements:

* stand-alone pre- or vocational course

* elective

* course taught collaboratively with ESL and VET instructors

* units or topics taught as part of regular CSWE courses.

Learner competence

AMEP teachers have raised concerns that, even after taking a VET training course, AMEP clients are not always able to get jobs. A number of hypotheses have been advanced for this dilemma faced by clients, including racism, learners' limited English skills, and limited job availability in the area they've chosen. This situation raises issues for service providers, since teachers and service providers do not want to give clients false hopes about their employability. Solutions recommended include:

* careful education and career counselling of AMEP clients;

* components within VET or bridging courses where teachers and learners discuss the job market and employability skills; and

* invited talks from former clients, both successful and unsuccessful in getting the jobs they want.

Annotated bibliography

Australian Flexible Learning Framework website: http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework website is designed to support e-learning in VET education in Australia. It provides resources such as Toolboxes for use in e-learning, information on professional development and support network forums. One such network is the VET Learning Object Repository Network where contributors provide reusable online learning resources.

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) website: http://www.aqf.edu.au

The Australian Qualifications Framework website provides information about the system of post-compulsory education and training in Australia, up to the doctoral level.

Australian Training Products Ltd website: http://www.atpl.net.au/

The Australian Training Products Ltd website sells a variety of products for vocational education and training, including Training Packages and Toolboxes. Their catalogue provides information about the TP, the certificate level, the copyright holder and the national code for the TP.

National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) website: http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/vet

The NCELTR website AMEP Professional Connections page contains links to useful websites as well as mapping of several TP modules to CSWE competencies.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) website: http://www.ncver.edu.au

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research provides vocational education and training research and statistics. The website contains the results of research across the broad spectrum of the VET sector, including teaching and learning, industry and employers, the VET system and student outcomes.

National Training Information Service (NTIS) website: http://www.ntis.gov.au

The National Training Information Service provides access to current and emerging training market information and products in vocational education and training. The site has a database of VET-accredited courses, competency standards, Training Packages and training providers.

Training packages @ work website: http://www.tpatwork.com/tpPackageStateList.asp

This commercial website lists VET training packages, indicating whether they are currently endorsed or under review.

Williams, A. (2004). *Fact sheet – Enhancing language teaching with content* (teaching issues 3). Sydney: AMEP Research Centre.

This fact sheet describes the nature of content-based instruction, possible topics useful for AMEP clients, and factors that teachers need to take into account in applying CBI.

Yates, L. (2005). *Fact sheet – Generic skills* (teaching issues 4). Sydney: AMEP Research Centre

This fact sheet describes the nature of generic skills and what teachers in the AMEP can do to help learners acquire the generic skills essential for their workplace participation. Many of these generic skills are part of VET sector training packages.

Compiled by Denise Murray
Executive Director
AMEP Research Centre
Macquarie University