

NETWORK

QUARTERLY | Issue 79 | 2011

NEW HORIZONS FOR GROUP TRAINING





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CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Page 3 | A great local idea goes global |
| Page 4 | GTA news |
| Page 5 | Ebbs and flows of Federal Budget |
| Page 5 | A group training perspective ... |
| Page 6 | New horizons for group training |
| Page 8 | Peeling back the layers of 'Looking Ahead' |
| Page 9 | Final lap for successful pre-vocational program |
| Page 9 | Bridging the divide for basic skills |
| Page 10 | Unlocking the key to apprentice completions |
| Page 10 | Pioneering program brings trades to the classroom |
| Page 11 | Training makes Renee's future mechanically sound |
| Back cover | 2011 Group Training National Conference |

A great local idea goes global

January 2011 marked a new chapter in the life of Group Training Australia's history. For the first time, the GTA Board sent a delegation abroad as part of an education and training mission to Jamaica led by Worldskills International President, Tjerk Dusseldorp.

The Jamaican Government was keen to examine how Australia had established group training organisations that create new employment opportunities, support apprentices to complete their training, and improve the quality of training for apprentices particularly in small-to-medium enterprises.

The mission was extremely successful, and GTA is keen for a substantial and meaningful follow-up with the Jamaican Government. Indeed, I have invited representatives from the Ministry of Education to the Group Training National Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my fellow group training delegates: GTA Chair, Iain McDougall, MEGT CEO, David Windridge, and Hunter Valley Training Company (HVTC) General Manager, Kay Sharpe, who enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to represent and promote the group training network.

The international education and training space has been one that, up until now, GTA has chosen not to work in. That changed with the decision to participate in the Jamaican trip. It is a space which GTA can no longer afford to ignore.

For developing countries in particular, the group training model has much to offer. I have been in contact with representatives from AusAID to discuss possible ways and means where group training can assist the education and training effort in various developing countries.

But it doesn't end with Jamaica.

For some years group training has been building a presence in the United Kingdom. Since 2008, Central West Group Apprentices CEO, Ben Bardon, and his team have been founding partners of the London Apprenticeship Company (LAC) – Britain's first organisation

dedicated to boosting the number of apprentices in London through the group training model. The LAC is set to help more than 1,000 young people into apprenticeships by 2012 in areas such as retail, creative media, plumbing, social care, business administration, hospitality and construction.

The LAC is a landmark achievement in the relatively short history of group training. By promoting the benefits of the uniquely Australian employment and training intermediary model to hundreds of small-to-medium sized businesses in metropolitan London, Ben Bardon and CWGA have effectively positioned group training as a live and viable recruitment and employment model for a whole new audience. CWGA also works in East Timor, providing training opportunities in the tourism and hospitality fields.

Another major Australian group training organisation (GTO), MEGT, has also opened up for business in the U.K.

The presence of group training in the U.K. has come at a critical time in its national skills debate. The new Coalition Government has indicated its desire to review the VET system and to ramp-up its commitment to apprenticeships.

In March, the U.K. Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, the Hon. John Hayes, released *The Wolf Report – Review of Vocational Education*. In his foreword, Minister Hayes writes:

In September last year the Secretary of State asked Professor Alison Wolf to investigate how we can ensure that vocational education provides for progression to higher learning and employment. Alison's report represents a fresh approach. Rather than advocating yet more qualification reform, it recommends that we embrace and extend the forms of vocational learning we know work well, both here and abroad. In particular, Alison identifies Apprenticeships as a key route to skilled employment and national prosperity.

I could not agree with him more. Even more encouraging is that in the recommendations of the report, specific mention is made of examining group training in the context of engaging a greater number of small businesses in training and apprenticeships.



A Jamaican welcome

But it doesn't stop at the door of the U.K. New Zealand has been running a small number of successful industry-based GTOs for just on a decade now. In the past few years, group training has also sought to spread the message to Canada (East Coast Apprenticeships); South Africa (MEGT); and Bhutan (GTA). HVTC has also been active across much of the Pacific and beyond. These are just some of the examples across the network.

For over thirty years, the group training model has been extremely successful in delivering employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities here in Australia. I believe opportunities exist for this model to be seriously examined for export overseas, particularly in the developing world. In the spirit of *Looking Ahead*, the challenge for GTA and the group training network is to see how we can push the outer edges of this envelope.



Jim Barron, CEO
Group Training Australia



LOOKING AHEAD

GROUP TRAINING NATIONAL CONFERENCE

19-21 OCTOBER 2011

GRAND HYATT | MELBOURNE

The 2011 Group Training National Conference – Looking Ahead, 19-21 October at the Grand Hyatt in Melbourne, will be a ‘must attend’ event in the group training calendar.

Conference MC, Ellen Fanning, will again masterfully draw out the key themes and create the environment for a challenging and engaging learning experience.

An impressive line up of ‘heavy hitters’ including Chris Caton, John Hewson, and Philip Bullock will deliver a strong start to the program, along with presentations from both Government and the Opposition.

‘Looking Ahead’ will be an active theme throughout the conference, with time devoted to examining group training within current and future VET landscapes, developing and testing future visions, and looking at practical steps that best position group training for the future.

Registration is now open. The conference program is available at www.grouptraining.com.au.

Get to know ... Dr Chris Caton

The 2011 Group Training National Conference will feature prominent leaders from industry and business. Leading economist, Dr Chris Caton will provide members with the latest insight into the financial implications of economic trends, policy pronouncements and major political developments.



Dr Chris Caton

Dr Chris Caton is the Chief Economist for BT Financial Group. Prior to this, Dr Caton was the Chief Economist of Bankers Trust for eight years, and has also worked for Treasury, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and for an economic consulting firm in the United States.

Chris holds a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and an undergraduate degree from the University of Adelaide.

Early in his career, Chris worked in the Bureau of Census and Statistics, before transferring to the forecasting section of the Treasury, where he remained until late 1976. Chris also held various positions in the prestigious U.S. economic consulting firm, DRI/McGraw Hill. He spent most of this time modelling and forecasting the U.S. economy. In 1990, Chris returned to Australia to head the Economic Division of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Chris has given economic presentations to a wide range of industry groups, including many that are dominated by small businesses. He endeavours to make economics understandable and relevant at all levels and injects a healthy dose of humour into every presentation.

GTA NEWS

Overhaul needed for training, says report

Skills Australia has launched a new report, *Skills for prosperity: a roadmap for vocational education and training*, which examines options for overhauling Australia’s training system and boosting the skilled workforce. GTA has welcomed the report, and says the recommendations recognise the far-reaching steps that will be necessary across multiple sectors in order to generate some five million skilled workers over coming decades. Visit www.skillsaustralia.gov.au to view the report.

Tackling skills shortages in the resources sector

The Federal Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs, and Workplace Relations, Senator Chris Evans, has launched the National Apprenticeships Program (NAP), which will recognise the experience of existing workers and accelerate their apprenticeship to help fill current skills shortages in the resources sector. The NAP is the brainchild of East Coast Apprenticeships and its CEO Alan Sparks. The program was one of 31 recommendations from the National Resource Sector Employment Taskforce (NRSET). Visit the website here: www.nationalapprenticeships.com.au.

New direction for successful group training company

Victorian-based group training organisation, Sunraysia & Murray Group Training (SMGT), has recently expanded its operations by acquiring a controlling interest in the Australian National Institute – a highly respected private education college specialising in the fields of horticulture, business and management. For 28 years, SMGT has been successfully providing employment, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for thousands of Australians. GTA congratulates SMGT on this exciting new venture.

National and State Associations strengthen ties

A new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed by all national and state & territory Group Training Associations. Entitled *Working Partnerships 2011-2013*, the document is the first attempt in over a decade to more clearly and strategically define the working relationship between national and other jurisdictional associations. It looks to cement an acceptance amongst all parties that the GTA network is at its strongest and most effective when it works collaboratively and strategically across all jurisdictions.

Valé VET broadband plan

The Federal Government’s \$80 million Vocational Education Broadband Network (VEN) was a casualty of this year’s Budget, with the Government shifting its focus towards the development of the National Broadband Network. The VEN initiative was developed from the 2008 20/20 Summit, and was designed to better connect educational institutions via broadband, and progress the digital education agenda. GTA was a member of a VEN Stakeholder Advisory Group established to oversee its implementation. The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, has announced an alternate \$21.7 million of funding for a four year *National Broadband Network (NBN) Enabled Education and Skills Services Program*, to support the development of online and interactive education and training projects.

Ebbs and flows of Federal Budget

The 2011/2012 Federal Budget delivered some major challenges and opportunities for group training, along with the loss of some existing programs and payments.

Key opportunities included:

- The continuation of the current Priority Employment Areas initiatives including Local Employment Coordinators
- \$101 million for mentoring to support apprentices and trainees
- \$100 million to support new approaches to training to ensure skilled apprentices can gain their qualifications sooner
- Approximately \$20 million to continue the Australian Apprenticeship Access Program
- \$558 million for a new National Workforce Development Fund to respond to skills needs
- Approximately \$182 million to support Language, Literacy and Numeracy programs

However, funding for training under the Group Training in the Trades Pre-vocational Program (GTTPP) will cease from 2012. The funding from the GTTPP was redirected to skills initiatives related to Queensland natural disaster relief. Group Training Australian Apprenticeships Targeted Initiatives Program funding was also discontinued.

Also, funding for standard commencements at Certificate II level under the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive Program will be withdrawn and made available only to apprentices in priority areas including those with disabilities, mature-aged and school-based apprentices.

However, on the positive side, a central component of the Budget, and one which received a large amount of funding, is workforce development. GTA hopes that progress can now be made to define, communicate and implement workforce development strategies, to ensure Australia has the workforce capable to drive productivity and economic growth.

A group training perspective ...

By Jim Barron, CEO, Group Training Australia

The 2011-12 budget signalled the beginning of some major reforms within the sector.

I believe the government's proposed changes to be, in the main, forward-looking and reform-oriented. For a number of existing programs, it is definitely a case of 'out-with-the-old' and 'in-with-the-new'. And make no bones about it, group training has not come out of it unscathed.

The cessation of GTTPP is no real surprise. GTA did well to secure another 18-month contract extension at the beginning of this year. The critical thing here is what comes next. Given the Government's constant promotion of pre-apprenticeships and their importance over the last 2 years, it would be somewhat surprising if pre-apprenticeship funding somehow fell off the agenda.

The cessation of the Group Training Australian Apprenticeships Targeted Initiatives Program (TIP) is also unsurprising. With the substantial change in the labour market since its inception, TIP was becoming, more and more, a difficult ask for many GTOs to secure adequate funding.

The cessation of both the Certificate II commencement payment for trainees, except for those in selected categories, for all employers, and the special group training completion payment for Certificate II trainees, except for those in the same categories, is again reflective of both state and federal government funding priorities in the vocational education and training space.

A number of jurisdictions have already, over the last few years, gone down this path via Joint Group Training Program (JGTP) funding. The trainee categories for which the commencement incentive and special group training completion incentive will continue to be paid include the following: Indigenous Australians, apprentices or trainees with disability, school-based apprentices, the mature aged (aged 45 and over), those in rural or remote areas, and job seekers with severe barriers to employment classified as Job Services Australia Stream 4 clients.

However, many opportunities abound in this new world, and I assure you that GTA will be actively and very strongly, on behalf of the network, promoting the benefits of group training when stakeholder consultations begin for some of the new initiatives.

Let's also not forget in this context the extension of the ACCESS program for another four years at the existing 2011-12 funding levels. This is a significant achievement and should not be underestimated.

... many opportunities abound in this new world, and I assure you that GTA will be actively and very strongly, on behalf of the network, promoting the benefits of group training



New horizons for group training

Group Training Australia has recently taken a bold step into furthering international engagement and spreading the word about group training and its successful model to the world.

Group training organisations and associations from across Australia are currently engaging with countries including Jamaica, Canada, New Zealand, East Timor, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Bhutan.

This issue of *Network* takes a look at some of these growing international partnerships.

Jamaica

In late January, a group training delegation visited Jamaica to discuss Australian training models with the Jamaican Government. The mission was led by Tjerk Dusseldorp, Chair of WorldSkills International, and the group training delegation included Iain McDougall, GTA Chair, Jim Barron, GTA CEO, David Windridge, MEGT CEO, and Kay Sharp AM, Executive Director, Hunter Valley Training Company & Chair of the Hunter Youth Mentor Collaborative.

Jamaica is a developing country and, like so many others, is grappling with a number of major economic, financial, social and cultural challenges. This includes the need to reform existing education and training structures, and approaches to better prepare itself to compete in a highly competitive global market as well as to educate and train its youth.

The Jamaican government indicated significant interest in the group training model and how its features may be able to be applied to suit various aspects of the education and training system in the country.



Kay Sharp meeting some local trainers and teachers



David Windridge, Kay Sharp, Jim Barron, Iain McDougall

Canada

Queensland group training organisation, East Coast Apprenticeships (ECA), is helping to bring the benefits of the group training model to the British Columbia region of Canada.

ECA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the SkillSource Apprenticeship Society (SAS) – a business arm of the Resources Training Organisation BC (RTOBC), a not-for-profit workforce development services provider for the resources sector in British Columbia.

Through the MoU, Australian expertise will assist the organisation to expand its services across the British Columbia apprenticeship system. The MoU will also lay the foundation for further opportunities to work together in areas of apprentice exchange, research, innovation, and technology.

The MoU was the result of a visit to Australia by Geoff Stevens, Consultant to the Resources Training Organisation, BC. The CEO of RTOBC, Doug McLaren, then extended an invitation for the management of East Coast Apprenticeships to visit Vancouver in November 2010 to discuss collaboration around the establishment of group training in British Columbia.

The CEO of East Coast Apprenticeships, Alan Sparks, said it has been a great opportunity to work together across the Pacific on common international challenges around skill shortages and the apprenticeship program.



Geoff Stevens, Consultant to Resource Training Organisation, British Columbia (RTOBC), Alan Sparks, CEO East Coast Apprenticeships, and Doug McLaren CEO RTOBC at the Resource Training Organisation in British Columbia

United Kingdom and East Timor

In 2007, Central West Group Apprentices embarked on an expansion of its activities to open up new markets and develop new lines of business. In the year following, it opened the London Apprenticeship Company as the first group training organisation using the Australian model in the UK. This was a joint venture with two prominent London Colleges and two urban regeneration organisations.

Since then, the LAC has traded successfully through a torrid economic downturn and the first wave of austerity measures. The model is working, and is achieving 95% employment and training outcomes one year after apprentices complete their qualification.

On the back of this success, CWGA established Apprenticeship Consulting which has supported the development of 15 Apprenticeship Training Agencies that use the group training model. Five of these companies have purchased the MATE UK product developed to manage their workflow and risk. CWGA also shared its experience with MEGT which has also recently entered the market.

In 2007, CWGA also partnered with the East Timor Development Agency to introduce an internship program for the tourism and hospitality industry in Dili. This program now has over 300 graduates and may be expanded further.

Last year it established a Voluntary Carbon Offset Program in the highland communities around Laclubar in East Timor. The first stage of this project is now completed, which includes the establishment of six community nurseries and 62,000 planted trees in 38 sites.

The second stage of this project is to open sponsorship to other organisations that wish to take positive action against climate change.



London Apprenticeship Company business apprentice, Olivia Heffer, and Deputy Mayor of London, Richard Barnes



Ben Bardon with the Voluntary Carbon Offset team in Laclubar – East Timor

AusAID

Following Group Training Australia's (GTA's) involvement in the Jamaica mission earlier in the year, GTA was keen to continue to explore opportunities for group training to undertake meaningful work in developing countries.

The CEO of GTA, Jim Barron, and CEO of MEGT, David Windridge, recently met with Australian Government AusAID officials in Canberra to be briefed on the current work of the organisation, particularly in Jamaica and the Pacific Islands.

AusAID is responsible for managing Australia's overseas aid program. The objective of the program is to assist developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, in line with Australia's national interest.

Three individual meetings were organised by AusAID, and included engagement with the Pacific Education Team, the Health, Education & Scholarships Branch, and the Caribbean Section.

GTA was keen to begin building relationships with each area of the organisation, learn about their specific projects, and how group training could help them achieve some of their objectives.

GTA will be looking to continue exploring opportunities to help other countries utilise the successful group training model, and the expertise of group training organisations, their employees and apprentices.

Group training apprentices may be interested in visiting the AusAID's Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development website to find out how they can make a difference in a developing country. The program supports skilled young Australians, aged 18-30, who want to live, work and make a positive change in Asia, the Pacific and Africa.

Go to: www.ayad.com.au.



Mission delegates with government officials

Peeling back the layers of ‘Looking Ahead’

The significance and implications of the *Looking Ahead: Future for Group Training* report are being discussed across the country as group training organisations gain insights into the report through tailored workshops.



Melbourne-based Southern Suburbs Group Training (SSGT) recently held a ‘Looking Ahead’ Board planning and strategy workshop to gain personalised insights into the findings of the *Looking Ahead: Future for Group Training* report.

The *Looking Ahead* report is a detailed analysis of the future and evolution of group training in Australia. It allows group training organisations to identify their optimum

business model and the changes needed to manage the shift to a future business environment.

The SSGT workshop started with plenty of enthusiasm from the CEO and directors who were keen to gain a better understanding of the changing business environment they face into the future.

This ‘Looking Ahead’ workshop, led by Michael Spencer from the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR), set the context with an overview of the key findings of the *Looking Ahead* report, followed by a situation analysis, and a review of future opportunities and risk-based strategy considerations.

The workshop then enabled the SSGT Board to produce a statement of intent, define potential barriers and develop an action plan with agreed timelines.

Whilst the meeting started with a statistical analysis of group training’s overall past performance, the layers were peeled away to examine regional and industry performance, specific performance drivers, peer performance, productivity analysis, modelling of future markets and industry growth forecasts.

The strengths and weaknesses of the four business models identified in the *Looking Ahead* report (Corporate, Community, Regional and Industry) were vigorously discussed in relation to SSGT, and the Board worked to gain more clarity around their current and desired customer base and their needs.

One of the keys to successfully adapting to the future business environment presented in the report was an expansion of the focus on the services a GTO offers compared with a sole focus on the group training product.

Positive and challenging discussions ensued, and by the conclusion of the planning day the SSGT Board had a prioritised list of action items. Their work continues on from here, and all agreed it was a Saturday well-spent.

GTA thanks SSGT CEO David Edgar and the Board for sharing their Looking Ahead workshop experiences with the group training network. A video showcasing the highlights of the day is available at www.grouptraining.com.au.

Group training organisations interested in participating in their own personalised ‘Looking Ahead’ workshops should contact Michael Spencer, at michael.spencer@spencerconsult.com.



Michael Spencer and the SSGT Board

Strengths and weakness of models

- No right or wrong business model
- Community model suited to government programs but needs specialist staff, strong networks and performance measures;
- Regional model needs strong presence in regions with market opportunities

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Corporate model | Industry model |
| Regional model | Community model |

Define future state and implications

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    graph LR
      A[Community Service] --> B[Service Provider]
      B --> C[Workforce Development Partner]
  
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Implications of migrating to workforce development partner

- Broad service offer (what do our customers need to be more successful)
- Own the customer interface (but doesn't need to be just your products)
- Targeted service offer (where/when can our business be successful)
- Skills of people, systems (IT, finance, skills, organisational management)
- Measure customer performance: share of HR spend; depth of relationship

Final lap for successful pre-vocational program

The highly successful Group Training in the Trades Pre-vocational Program (GTTPP) was abolished in the May Federal Budget, with funding for training ceasing from 31 December 2011.

GTA expressed disappointment at the decision and views it as somewhat counter-productive to the skills and training agenda recently elevated by both major political parties.

Initially funded by the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (now Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), the Group Training in the Trades Program (GTTP) commenced in the latter part of 2005, with initial contracts running through to December 2009.

The program assisted participants to undertake Australian Apprenticeships in traditional trades under group training arrangements, either by providing the potential apprentices with

pre-apprenticeship training designed to meet employer demand for entry level skills, or by funding part-time school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

It acknowledged the substantial, previously unfunded work undertaken by the group training network in facilitating these activities.

Under brokerage arrangements, the program was managed by Group Training Australia in Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and metropolitan Sydney, with other locations managed by other brokers.

Under GTA's brokerage, between 2005 and 2009, approximately 5,500 participants were assisted under the program. These included 3,000 students assisted to take up part-time school-based Australian Apprenticeships through employment with group training organisations; and 2,500 participants who successfully completed accredited pre-trade training, with 800 of the training participants transitioning to full-time trade apprentices and a further 15-20% of course participants employed under other arrangements.

In June 2009, the program was restructured and renamed the Group

Training in the Trades Pre-vocational Program, with the funding schedule revamped in January 2010.

Funding approximately 1,000 trade training places per annum, the restructured program retained the pre-trade training and full-time employment outcomes, but eliminated funding for school-based placements.

The revised program was valued highly by the group training network over other training programs because it enabled group training organisations to design programs and conduct training on short notice in order to meet industry demand at any point in time.

Employment outcomes under the 2010 funding arrangements are only recorded after six months' employment, so some are yet to be measured. However it is expected that some 50% of participants will articulate to a payable employment outcome – comparing more than favourably with other government-funded pre-employment programs.

GTA is hopeful that the benefits of pre-apprenticeship training will continue to be recognised by government when making decisions about the allocation of funds for skills development.

Bridging the divide for basic skills

Along with the mathematical skills critical to electrical occupations, participants in the four-week program also receive training in occupational health and safety, electrical theory, applied electricity, and workshop practices.

It has been nothing short of a sensational success to date, with 100% of graduates commencing with the EGT as apprentices following the program.

Mathematics forms an integral part of electrical theory, which is built around algebra and trigonometry – key components to understanding the concepts of electricity.

EGT Operations Manager, Gary Livett, says that some school students fail to understand the importance of

mathematics, and its role in learning an electrical trade.

“When these individuals make an application for a pre-apprenticeship they are unable to meet the minimum standards for the maths component.

“As a result, their aspirations of becoming an electrician through the pre-apprenticeship system are dealt a severe blow.”

“By adding maths coaching to the other essential elements of the GTTPP, many apprentices get the skills they need to begin a promising trade career.”

GTTPP funding was provided by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



Students undertaking the GTTPP program

Western Australian group training company, Electrical Group Training (EGT), has utilised the Group Training in the Trades Pre-vocational Program (GTTPP), and additional mathematics coaching, to enhance the chances of individuals gaining an electrical trade.

The EGT pre-vocational initiative offers a number of short training courses that allow students to acquire the basic skills necessary to enter and succeed in an electrical apprenticeship.

Unlocking the key to apprentice completions

Group Training Australia has identified the key features and support services that drive apprenticeship completions in a new discussion paper.

The paper follows consultations with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and is titled: *The Four Pillars Model for Australian Apprenticeships Support Services*.

It outlines the typical profiles of both apprentices and employers, and the levels of support and encouragement needed, at different points of time, for each group to have better chances of success.

The report says that the critical service points that are essential for ensuring the best fit between the apprentice and employer include: school to work transition; sales; administration; and mentoring.

School-to-work transition:

This transition is critical, particularly in finding the best fit between the apprentice and the employer, and managing the expectations of each party. Schools are still an ideal place in which to nurture, and from which to recruit apprentice candidates, notwithstanding that about a third of apprentices are now 21 years and over when they commence an apprenticeship.

Sales:

Conventional employment practices should be shifted to a more contemporary model that engages the apprentice workforce, and best manages their development. Increasing apprentice loyalty is required to navigate the two year watershed when, research suggests, apprentices will leave their apprenticeship if the experience is found wanting.

Administration:

Structuring a contemporary employment experience may begin with ensuring that the parties have been well informed at the outset. There are a range of pre-requisites that employers should meet to ensure that their apprentices will have a decent employment experience including employer eligibility, appropriate mentoring arrangements, and complaints resolution processes.

Mentoring:

Mentoring should not be limited to apprentices, but extended to all employers. Ensuring employers are aware of the behaviours necessary to provide adequate support and engagement is essential, as is the understanding of the learning requirements the apprentices must meet. GTA advocates that staff of intermediaries working with employers and apprentices should undertake a nationally recognised training program that focuses on mentoring.

To view the paper go to: www.grouptraining.com.au.

Pioneering program brings trades to the classroom



Raimo Vuorinen, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, Keryn Ackland, Leading Teacher, Horsham Primary School, John Ackland, CEO Skillinvest, Leonie Stanfield, GTA

A ground-breaking Victorian program which allows primary school students to engage in a hands-on learning curriculum has been awarded the 2011 Group Training Australia (GTA) Partnership Award.

The award was announced at the Career Development Association of Australia Conference in Cairns. It recognises and promotes effective and innovative collaboration between schools and group training organisations.

The winning program, the 'Primary Technical Schools Program', involves a partnership between WORKCO, and Horsham Primary School.

It gives students in Grades 5 and 6 the opportunity to improve their basic skills by adding practical experience in technical and trade-based areas into the school curriculum. It engages the students with hands-on learning, visiting guest speakers, and industry tours.

The program was designed to improve the retention rates, literacy and numeracy skills, and future aspirations of students from a low socio-economic area with a significant Indigenous population.

Horsham Primary School has seen vast improvements from students, particularly in school attendance, as well as increased social skills, co-operation and team work.

Following a successful pilot program in 2010, the program is now a key part of the school's strategic goals, curriculum and timetabling.

Group Training Australia CEO, Jim Barron, said the program gives students a taste of the trade careers available to them later in life, while allowing them to continue to improve their basic skills in a fun and practical way.

"This is a pioneering program that will pave the way for more hands-on learning within schools, and will no doubt assist students to determine the right career pathway for their future."

Horsham Primary School Leading Teacher, Keryn Ackland, said the program opens the minds of the students, and allows them to understand and explore several careers early in their schooling.

"Children's early experiences influence their later life chances. Career education needs to begin in primary school. We need to raise expectations, broaden horizons and develop self-belief that anything is possible," she said.

Training makes Renee's future mechanically sound

A mature-aged apprentice is breaking new ground in one of the country's key areas of skills shortage.

Renee Arnold, a 35 year old diesel mechanic from Broken Hill, is a prime example of the benefits of up-skilling, and taking advantage of the careers available in the resources industry. She is employed by Career Employment Group (CEG), and her host employer is South Australian Caterpillar dealer and service provider, Cavpower.

Renee has trodden a well-known path for many young people – she tried to enter a trade when she left school but was not accepted, so she moved into unskilled labour, before retraining and excelling as a mature-aged apprentice.

A former production line employee at an automotive parts plant in Adelaide, Renee was made redundant following the closure of the Mitsubishi plants.

With a strong interest in mechanics, but no prior mechanical training, Renee took an opportunity to begin an apprenticeship following a recruitment drive to find more workers for the South Australian mining industry.

She said undertaking her apprenticeship has given her an enormous sense of self-worth and satisfaction, however it hasn't been without some challenges.

Renee said it took some time to adjust from working in a production line to undertaking an apprenticeship.

"It was a bit of a culture shock. After working in a factory for such a long time, I really had to switch my brain back on and get back into learning mode after 15 years of not having to worry."

Renee is also a mature-aged apprentice working in a male-dominated trade. In fact, she was the first female diesel mechanic employed by Cavpower, and has carved a path for another young

female diesel mechanic recently hired by the organisation.

"I think you are listened to more as a female in a male environment. You stand out, and are often scrutinized more than the younger male apprentices. But I've not encountered any negativity at all."

Renee is going into her fourth year as an apprentice and has now been transferred to Cavpower's Broken Hill branch, which is in her home town. She will complete her studies in 2012.

"Now that I am moving into my fourth year, I am being given more responsibility and working on bigger jobs. It's very satisfying."

CEG says that Renee is one of its top apprentices, and an inspiration to other mature-aged apprentices and females considering working in youth-orientated or male dominated traditional trades.



As a mature-aged apprentice, you are there because you want to be. You have made a decision, and weighed up all the odds, and you are more inclined to want to learn.

Renee Arnold (both pictures)

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