

Mission Australia Training Providers Conference, Maroochydore, Qld - 31 May 2005

It is a pleasure to be here today at the Mission Australia Training Providers Conference. I see it as a great opportunity to give you an overview of the business of group training and to sell to you the benefit and value of what we do.

Over the past few years, GTA has committed itself to building stronger partnerships with all key stakeholder groups. As the labour and training markets have expanded, so too has the necessity to expand our own horizons and working relationships. In particular, we have committed ourselves to strengthening our close partnership with DEST as well as forging a new partnership with the Department of the Employment and Workplace Relations, with NESAs and by extension with the Job Network.

We have done so because it makes very good policy sense to do so. We would be negligent not to do it in the current climate of national skill shortage. As we all know, we operate in a world of Active Participation and Complementary Programs, Job Seeker accounts, Job Placement Licenses, Customized Assistance, Partnership Building and Regional and Industry Profiling.

In this very busy and competitive world, I want all Job Network Members to understand and appreciate that the group training network can make a significant difference in helping them to improve their own capacity to employ and place apprentices and trainees. Conversely, I want all group-training organizations to understand and appreciate the role which job network members can make to an active and diverse labour market.

Group Training employs on 40,000 apprentices and trainees across the country. Nation-wide – there are some 150 Group Training Organisations (GTOs) with extraordinary grass roots contacts and networks. GTOs cover every metropolitan centre and all of regional and rural Australia. My job and that of Group Training Australia is to represent the collective interests of the network to government and to all key stakeholders.

For those of you who don't know, GTOs are the direct employers of apprentices and trainees and their job is to place the apprentice and trainee with the appropriate host employer. GTOs take care of all paper work connected with employment, salaries, super, work cover and OH&S issues and manage all training needs and requirements. We basically make apprenticeships and traineeships *easier*.

Across the country, GTOs work with over 45,000 businesses, predominantly small to medium sized businesses. They involve themselves in the entire gamut of apprenticeships and traineeships, totalling well over 500 different occupations. While the network's "origins" and base have always been heavily focused on the traditional trades, it is equally comfortable providing opportunities in the retail and service sectors. GTOs also account for nearly one fifth of all indigenous and disability trainees and apprentice placements. We specialise in "community" and business partnership building.

We are also redoubling our efforts in the area of older workers and have very recently completed a joint DEST funded joint project with ACCI which examined the ways and means that group training can better participate in delivering employment and training outcomes to older workers as well as people returning to work from injury.

In this era of "complementary programs" then, it makes good sense for Job Network Members and GTO's to team up.

Policy changes to recent Job Network contracts which now see GTO's treated on an equal basis in respect to referrals and the welcome adjustment to the JPO policy which places GTO's on a level playing field is slowly beginning to intensify activity between the two sectors. The pointy end of this drive to secure a stronger and better partnership between GTOs and JNMs is the DEWR funded joint GTA/NESA national project.

This project is now nearly complete and has been under the excellent stewardship of GTA Project Officer Terry Andison.

Using the 6 case study partnerships from around the country, I am very confident that this project will deliver some very constructive outcomes and hopefully become part of the Job Network “culture” from Contract 4 onwards. Achieving stronger partnerships between the two networks and increased referrals of apprenticeships are both critical outcomes of this Project.

However – this will not happen unless we achieve “cultural and attitudinal” change as well

The gaps in understanding that so evidently exist within and between both networks must be more aggressively dealt with.

Some of the key issues that have come out of the Project to date, include:

- Only a small number (15) of GTO's are currently competing as JNMs
- A higher percentage hold a JPL, but in all partnerships, the GTO has been more than happy for the JNM to make claims from the government for vacancy placements
- Most GTOs will service vacancies other than New Apprenticeships eg temporary positions, labourers, trade assistants and usually will be comfortable for the JNM to assist in also servicing these vacancies
- The diminishing pool of younger workers has seen a trend for GTOs to seek applicants other than the school leaver – typically those on the JNMs books
- About a quarter of the JNMs continue to show little knowledge of group training operations leading to renewed efforts to engage in extensive internal marketing and communications campaigns
- Some JNMs are showing increased interest in the value of localised community supported employment initiatives, as per group training operations; and
- Where partnerships are excelling – both the GTO and the JNM assist applicants in their competitiveness by facilitating training, raising interview skills and providing career information – leading to substantial savings in resource allocation

A very simple key message of the Project has been this - Good partnerships **can** and **should** exist within a competitive labour market environment.

There are other key policy/program areas that also deserve to be put under the spotlight throughout the life of the project. A key one is with the New Apprenticeship Access Programme (NAAP). As you now, NAAP provides job seekers who experience barriers to skilled employment with pre-vocational *training, support and assistance* to obtain and maintain a New Apprenticeship. NAAP is delivered through a network of Broker and Provider organisations across Australia, in locations where there are job seekers interested in a New Apprenticeship and employers looking to take them on. Participants normally receive a minimum of 150 hours of nationally recognised vocational training that is linked to a New Apprenticeship pathway, followed by up to 13 weeks job search support. If successfully placed into employment, participants receive a further 13 weeks post placement support to assist with their transition to work. NAAP is free and available to job seekers who are eligible, such as an early school leaver or an Indigenous Australian.

Since July 2002, more than 40% of participants who commence NAAP, have achieved and sustained a New Apprenticeship, employment or further education outcome. In 2004-2005, NAAP will provide assistance to around 4,500 disadvantaged job seekers. In recognition of the success and importance of the programme, the Australian government has committed to fund an additional 20,000 commencements over the next four years.

To put it simply – NAAP is here to stay and will continue to grow in importance.

In the new program, Job seekers who have successfully participated in the Work for the Dole program or are receiving intensive support from the Job Network will be given priority access to the additional places. Job Network Members have always been able to refer eligible clients to NAAP and since the beginning of this financial year, the numbers of referrals have gradually increased. However, the numbers still represent only a small proportion of overall commencements.

One reason for this, is a funding anomaly that prevents Job Network Members claiming outcomes for job-seekers who are referred to NAAP and are successful, regardless of the work done with them prior to that referral of their involvement in placing the job-seeker. I understand that DEWR and DEST are currently working together to address this anomaly and to encourage the providers to work in partnership to assist job seekers find and keep a New Apprenticeship.

GTA and group training organisations have been pre-eminent in successfully rolling out the NAAP since its inception some 8 years ago. With the “client for life” approach now upon us – it makes sense to me that a number of Job Network Members should seriously investigate the value of a program like NAAP and in partnering with a local GTO to deliver the program.

Moreover, GTO’s “specialise” in providing short, medium and long term employment solutions – depending on the individual client’s needs. Consequently, I believe GTOs’ represent real and new opportunities for how Job Network Members may “profile” their employment lists.

The understanding and embracing of NAAP needs not only to be happening within NESAs and the Job Network it also needs to be happening at the Departmental level as well. I believe in this new and exciting era of policy and politics in the training and employment areas, the one thing we risk is always a case of too many cooks, a case of duplication, a case of smoke-stacking and a case of territorialism spoiling the party. For that reason it is absolutely critical that both DEST and DEWR know what the other is doing at all times in these overlap areas.

GTOs are committed to long term employment and training solutions – as such they should be active and welcome participants in the Active Participation model. They can help dig people out of the customised assistance / intensive support black hole and offer genuine employment and training opportunities that previously may not have even been on the radar screen of the Job Network Member. Equally welcome is the intense focus on the importance of partnering and the need to investigate hooking up with complementary programs.

The past decade has ushered in enormous policy change in the delivery of employment and training services – in the stampede to totally change the landscape within a competitive environment – some have wondered whether the philosophy of partnering has been an early casualty of fierce and open competition.

In rolling out our national joint project with NESAs, in seeking to encourage job network members to cast their net wider to engage other groups in their community in efforts to find employment and training solutions to their clients needs...

I believe GTA and the group training network are helping to deliver a far more holistic and broader community approach in the delivery of services to job seekers, school leavers, older workers and the disabled.

If you haven’t already, I urge you to contact your local GTO and begin the process of partnership. Accessing our website www.grouptraining.com.au will give you all the information you need about what we do and where you can contact your nearest GTO.