

Interactive Session “A Place at the Table”
National Group Training Conference - Darwin 2002

Welcome - And thank you for coming along to this interactive session about ...

A Place at the Table

The current “buzz phrase” for “influencing” and being “close to the action”

Our job at the National Association is to represent our members’ interests and concerns and those of the entire network, to all stakeholders, particularly government, and to get some “runs on the board” for everyone involved in the business of Group Training

Group Training Australia has been around for just over 10 years now

Over that time, It has grown from very modest beginnings into a professional national association

The staff who have worked there and, in particular, those there now, deserve our congratulations for working so hard to keep GTA a strong and relevant national association

But “strong and relevant” is of course in the eye of the beholder

And that is what we are here to discuss today

How “strong and relevant” are we, as a sector and as a national association?

Do we have “pulling power”?

Do we wield influence?

Do we have a “place at the table” with those who hold the purse strings and make the decisions?

How do we “present” ourselves to government? – do we do it cohesively or in an uncoordinated, uneven way?

Are we at times our own worst enemy?

How do we “sell” ourselves and our message to government and to the wider community?

There is no one set of answers to these questions – but the issues these questions raise are at the core of what we will be debating today

There are many here who I know have very strong views on these issues and I look forward to hearing those views and please don’t be shy...

The fact that we have some stakeholders here with us today is very welcome – the more the merrier

But before we move into discussion and debate, I would like to lay the groundwork for the discussion with some views of my own to the questions posed

I don’t wish to deliver a long monologue to you as I really think that this session needs to be as open and interactive as possible

But a few opening salvos and thought prompters...

Are we “strong and relevant” as a national association and as a sector?

I believe that we are

Despite all the well documented “travesties” that have befallen Group Training over the past many years – we *still*, as a sector, employ over 36,000 apprentices and trainees nation-wide – or 12-13 % of the total sector

The significant influence that Group Training wields locally in hundreds of communities across the nation is very well documented

The social and training infrastructures that Group Training Organisations have built are second to none

And, as a national association, we are *still* “strong and relevant” –

Yes our membership is not 100 plus these days but the fact is that GTA members employ nearly **85%** of the total number of apprentices and trainees employed under Group Training

Not Bad

And we are “strong and relevant” on a number of other fronts as well:

Our record as a national broker for the New Apprenticeships Access Program remains second to none

We are a strong and active voice on ANTA Steering Committees;

We have a strong and impressive record managing national projects on a range of issues - these have included projects involving Group Training and indigenous, disability and regional apprenticeship issues, corporate governance, women’s professional development and enterprise and career education.

We are building active partnerships, on behalf of the network, with a number of key stakeholders:

We continue to build on our strong working partnership with ANTA

We are engaging The Hornery Institute on a much more regular basis and working together on common areas of interest

We are seeking to establish a close working relationship with EOWA - to better ensure that Group Training is a leader on compliance and issues affecting women in group training

We have re-engaged the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation with the aim of cementing an active “working partnership”

And we are now closely involved with ITABs such as Construction Training Australia and Business Services on specific projects involving Group Training

Most importantly, we are also in the throes of planning, with ANTA, a targeted marketing campaign for the Group Training network which will certainly assist our capacity to influence and impose.

So, I believe, we **are** a “strong and relevant” national association within the context of our sector

But of course that does not necessarily **mean** that we succeed in delivering everything that our members want! (no national peak body does, by the way)

Earlier this year, GTA conducted a Customer Satisfaction Survey

We wanted to find out from you what you really thought of us – what your expectations were – what were your priorities – and what we were doing okay in and where we could do better

It was no surprise to find that the overwhelming number one priority and expectation of members of the national association was effectively lobbying government

Indeed, 70% of all members polled – ticked this box – the other major “priority” area was the marketing of group training

Whilst there were many strong positives said about the work of GTA on behalf of the network – the views on “effective lobbying capacity” were very lumpy – with nearly one third of those surveyed saying they were not satisfied with the lobbying effort

Expectations are clearly high amongst many in the network about what a national association should be able to achieve

And herein lies the nub of the issue...”expectations” – be they realistic or unrealistic

Clearly, in the minds of some in the network, the Association has not met expectations on some fronts – let me list some of the ones that have been run past me

We did not secure appropriate GST relief!

We did not stop the latest ANTA Review into Group Training!

We did not stop the abolition of the completion payment!

We did not ensure that the place of Group Training was protected and secured in the new NAC marketplace!

We have not stopped a continuing decline since 1995 in the value of Joint Policy Funds flowing to Group Training!

We have not secured preferred creditor status in bankruptcy!

We have not ended the obvious discrimination against Group Training Companies in the Job Network! and

We did not stop the government from introducing a new tender approach for the latest NAAP contract round which has effectively dealt some Group Training Operations out of the new NAAP game!

(and we did not secure Peace in the Middle East either!)

There is no denying that these “collective hits” have had a significant impact on Group Training and it only stands to reason I guess that some have looked to the national association and asked the question: “Well, why haven’t you stopped the rot?”

On many of the issues listed, GTA has engaged in a considerable lobbying effort over a number of years – and many of these issues are now back on the table for further consideration

Yes – there has been no “knock-out” blow recorded – but rather a constant “chipping away”

Yet the argument is very simple for some – if we somehow had greater influence, more pulling power and had been sitting at the head of the table - then things would have been different – and some of these decisions would not have been taken.

But for me, it is not as simple as that

First and foremost I believe that for the National Association to be fully effective - the Group Training network itself has to be a strong, active, cohesive and professional collective

As a national network, it is important to have the capacity of speaking with one voice

Yes, I know you’ve heard this pitch before

But we will have a much better chance of getting listened to and influencing decisions and securing our place at the table IF we can do this

Often, I believe, we have spoken with “many tongues” sending many different messages – and we have paid a price

I believe we have let the “few collapses” totally obscure the “many successes” in the eyes of government and stakeholders

We have often gone off and done our own thing – with little time for the bigger picture

We have often failed to engage the bureaucracy in a meaningful way and they us

We have sometimes allowed our own internal problems, be it with the constitution or membership, to weaken our voice to government

We have let others take our place at the table and speak on our behalf but not necessarily in our interests.

We may have done these things – but we cannot afford do them any longer

And I believe there is strong recognition of that

We are successfully moving on from the constitutional issues that have taken up much of our time over these past few years

The direction we are now heading in will, I believe, deliver greater cohesion across the entire network, particularly between State and Territory Associations and the national association

Our membership base remains strong

Our national marketing campaign will highlight the many positive benefits of Group Training to key targeted audiences; and

Our partnership building will strengthen our capacity to influence

And given the rapidly changing face of the Group Training landscape I believe we, both as an association and as a network, are re-positioning ourselves in new ways to seek to influence, remain strong and relevant and be seated “at the table”

The training and employment sector continues to undergo enormous change – and we just have to change as well, without losing sight of our core mission...

So having given you a feel for where I am coming from, I would now like to move into the open part of this session

To get your feedback and to hear your concerns

Over the past week or so in the lead up to this session, GTA has sought the views of individual delegates as to what they believe are the key areas of concern in this whole area

They have been collated and the key issues are listed on the screen behind me

Feel free to use these and refer to them as you ask questions or engage in robust debate

To ensure there remains a bit of order to this – and not turn into a “free-for-all” – we have stationed two “roving microphones” in the room and if you want to join in the discussion please just put up your hand and then fire away – we will try to get to all of you

Once again, thank you for listening and let the debate begin.