

SPEECH NOTES - GTA NSW MANAGERS CONFERENCE – SYDNEY 17 / 10/ 03.

There is no doubt that at the national level we are making progress and substantial inroads. But it does take time to establish and cement overall credibility and to be operating at full capacity.

We are more professional, more credible, and occupy a regular place at many tables. However, I still believe that as a network we are yet to be fully cohesive and to be all rowing in the one direction.

Indeed, importantly, I believe there is still no across the board agreement amongst all network members about what EXACTLY our national association is there for.

Is it for Direct Commercial Benefit (instant gratification) as opposed to wider national advocacy? (longer lead times – more slow burners)

Just what is the proper role of a national association?.....How do we judge “value for money”?...

It seems unfortunate to me that we still have to “justify our existence” in some quarters – 100% acceptance is of course the goal of any national association worth it's salt – and it remains GTA's.

So the debate goes on

I greatly appreciate the overwhelming majority of NSW GTOs who have signed up in good spirit to the national network concept.

Of course, there shall always be the “odd” GTO out but I hope over time – all of us can move forward together. At the end of the day – it is up to the combined efforts of the State and National advocates and their respective Boards to make the network concept work.

I would now like to touch on few of the key issues confronting us:

The National Review of Group Training

In some people's eyes, this seems to have gone on longer than most soap operas – minus the drama queens, intrigue and hopefully unexpected shock ending!

But the role of GTA throughout has been well crafted, scripted and acted.

Very **definitely**, without GTA's active engagement, I believe the outcomes of this review could have been very different.

I have no doubt that throughout the long meandering of the Review – the role and contribution of group training to the skilling of the nation has been “upgraded” in the eyes of many.

Yet, the bottom line is that, the review process is **still** to be finished. Uncertainty remains – and that is not good for the network.

Key Outcomes of the Review

The National Standards – they are unquestionably good for the network but will take some time to properly bed down.

The launch of the Standards by Minister Nelson at a joint ANTA/GTA function in Sydney on 30 May was one of the year's highlights.

The New Funding Proposals – as we all know, they are now focused around purchasing “certain outcomes” / opening up the market and possibly bringing into the funding pot – for-profit GTOs, for the first time.

Whilst GTA supports “in principle” the notion of opening up the market – we have consistently stated that this should only be done IF additional joint policy funds are placed on the table by both the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.

Otherwise, we risk GTO's falling over due to increasing financial pressures at the very time when GTOs should be strongly supported given their critical role in maintaining this country's traditional skills base.

Fostering partnerships with stakeholders

These are critical to our network representation and influencing decision-makers. We continue to work very constructively with key partners such as DEST; ANTA; ACCI; AIG; ACTU and Worldskills.

We particularly welcome our new partnership arrangements with DEWR and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. Both of these latter partnerships are primarily focused on the issue of skill shortage

Skill Shortage

This issue continues to grow in importance as a key political and policy issue. Group Training – MUST be positioned to be a key component in policy considerations and solutions – I believe one of the keys to long-lasting policy

solutions will be a revisiting of the application of pre-vocational and pre-employment programs.

The recent weekend Financial Review article – “Australia’s workers go missing” is but the latest example of growing media interest.

Governments ignore this problem at their peril – it is not just the so-called expected consequence of “old economy/new economy” rationalisation – it is about consolidating and in some cases reviving our future skills base.

The level of activity within GTA continues to increase

GTA continues to manage a range of projects – the rural operations project / the new ECEF- MCEETYA framework project / and the GTA-DEST disability project.

The New Apprenticeship Access Program (NAAP) continues to concentrate our minds. We lead the way in securing new apprenticeship outcomes – daylight is a distant second.

The 2nd phase of the 2003 national marketing campaign has been absolutely critical and we hope to lobby for further funds for future campaigns.

It is vital that we are able to roll out ongoing communications campaigns.

In a general sense, I have no doubt that we are at a crossroads for VET.

There is new commonwealth leadership.

There are new pressures and challenges – a new ANTA Agreement and a new 7-year ANTA Strategy.

Where is all “this” heading?

Without the proper national leadership and direction – my fear is that if we are not careful and vigilant, VET could sink lower on the political priority list yet conversely – it can be substantially raised in profile if the right steps are taken and the right noises made.

I have no doubt that it is about time that all governments commit to putting more money into the overall VET Budget. We cannot continue to play second or third fiddle to the demands of universities and schools.

VET funds are being stretched to the limit – we must not allow quality to be compromised in any way, shape or form.

We are still to adequately deal with critical issues such as existing workers / skill shortage / careers advice / VET in Schools / training infrastructure / RPL / and older workers.

Each and every one of these issues represents enormous policy challenges.

It is amazing to think that an issue like VET, that “talks” to potentially over 70% of the voting electorate, can continually struggle to attract significant political cache and import.

Political snobbery at it's worst I believe.....

“Sandstone” over “sandlers and sandpaper”.

Such snobbery must somehow be addressed.

However – one continues to be encouraged by the words of Minister Nelson – when he focuses on the issue of VET – he presents a new and refreshing approach – the trick is to get him to focus on it more.

Indeed, just this week Minister Nelson – writing an opinion piece in Mondays “Australian” said:

Too many teachers and even careers counsellors have actively discouraged apprenticeships in favour of university, contributing to a human and economic toll that includes a 40 per cent drop-out rate and skill shortages in key industries.

He went on:

Schools are undergoing a belated transformation from serving the demands of universities to catering as well for the 70 per cent of young people who do not go directly from school to university. School-based apprenticeships, vocational training and transitions programs should be as valued by society as a PHD.

GTA applauds such strong sentiments.

Conclusion

I believe that the role of group training is unquestioned in the VET agenda – it is just that we, as an Association, need to continue to crank up our activity.

To be even more on the political and policy radar screen,

To be even more involved in general policy debates,

To be even more prepared to take risks from a national advocacy perspective,

To be even more creative in how we sell our message,

To be even more confident of our place at the table; and

Always to be as professional as possible in our strategic thinking and actions on the ground.

END