

2003

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
TO
PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE:
REPORT ON THE INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN THE ACT**

**REPORT NUMBER 3
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

TABLING STATEMENT

Circulated by

Katy Gallagher MLA
Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services

Mr Speaker, on 28 August 2003 the chair of the Standing Committee on Education, Ms Karen McDonald, presented to the Assembly her Committee's report No3, *Pathways to the Future: Report on the Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in the ACT*.

This is an important report for several reasons. It is the report of the first inquiry held into vocational education and training within the ACT since self-government.

The Inquiry provided an important opportunity for all vocational education and training stakeholders to publicly contribute their views and concerns to an inquiry. I am very appreciative of the fact that so many took the time and effort to do so.

The inquiry also provided a very valuable opportunity to reflect on the major advances made in vocational education and training in recent years, to acknowledge the achievements and look for areas where improvements can be made.

Mr Speaker, vocational education and training in Australia has come a long way in a relatively short time. All Australian governments have seen the need to give priority to workforce skilling, growth in vocational education and training, competency based training, a national accreditation framework and entry level training.

Since 1996 the drive has been to develop a national approach to training, to grow traineeships and to have more vocational education and training in schools. In 1997 the first nationally recognized training packages were introduced. In 1998 New Apprenticeships arrangements were introduced, as was the Australian Recognition and Qualifications Framework. In 2001 the Recognition Framework was revamped into the Australian Quality Training Framework.

More recently, this Assembly passed legislation to establish the ACT Tertiary Accreditation and Registration Act, which is to take effect on 1 November. This reflects our determination to ensure that the quality of our training continues to be of a very high standard.

Mr Speaker, the ACT has a robust and vibrant vocational education and training system. The effectiveness and efficiency measures compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research show that the ACT is among the leaders in the provision of vocational education and training services in Australia.

Our rate of participation in vocational education and training, the one measure where we are below the national average, reflects the Territory's unique industry structure with the predominance of government services and lack of manufacturing. Our success in introducing vocational education and training in schools is also a factor since participation statistics do not yet include this effort.

Customer satisfaction surveys show that student and employers in the ACT have a satisfaction level above the national average. All in all, the ACT has a vocational education and training system of which it can be justifiably proud.

Mr Speaker, there are, of course, areas where we must strive to do better. This is not surprising given the rate of change in vocational education and training in recent years. In this regard, the Committee's report provides a very valuable indication of the concerns held by the stakeholders in the system. While many concerns expressed during the inquiry point to a need to better communicate what are the current arrangements and policies, they also point to areas where consideration should be given to making improvements.

The Committee has made thirty eight recommendations. The Government agrees or agrees in principle with twenty seven of them. The Government has noted a further ten recommendations. In only one case – a recommendation involving quality assurance – does the Government not agree.

Of the ten recommendations that the Government has noted, most would require the Government to commit to provide additional funding to an unspecified level. The Government notes the point of view put by those appearing before the Committee or who made submissions that gave rise to those particular recommendations. The Government will take the recommendations into account in an overall budgetary context.

The Government does not agree with recommendation twenty two, which is that government colleges not be required to have registered training organization status with the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services taking on this role for all government colleges.

The registration of training providers and the associated audit requirements are key components in the ACT's focus on a quality vocational education and training system and in the national system of quality assurance. It is in the best interests of students – as well as for the general image of vocational education and training and schools in particular – for individual colleges to remain formally responsible for the quality of the training they provide. Moreover, it would not be appropriate to discriminate between government colleges and other registered training organizations including non-government schools.

Mr Speaker, the Government acknowledges the views and concerns expressed to the Committee during the course of its inquiry. The Government also appreciates the effort the Committee has made to represent these views and concerns in its recommendations.

As I said at the beginning, the opportunity provided by the inquiry for Government to hear what stakeholders have to say about vocational education and training arrangements is a valuable one. The report will inform work to enhance our training system so that the ACT continues to be among the leaders in vocational education and training in Australia.

There are many things we can improve on – and should do so as part of a commitment to continuous improvement. But we should not lose sight of the fact that we have a robust and high quality vocational education and training system that I think is possibly world class. We are certainly among the leaders in Australia in this regard. This is a sentiment that I was pleased to see echoed by the Standing Committee in its media release when the report was tabled.

The Government will continue to give priority to increasing the skill base of the ACT workforce, to maximizing opportunities for people to undertake relevant vocational education and training and to maintaining the quality of our training system.

Mr Speaker, I thank the Committee for the contribution its inquiry has made to improving vocational education and training in the Territory. I am also very grateful for the time and effort of all those people who made submissions to the inquiry and appeared before the Committee.

I commend to the Assembly the Government's response to *Report No 3, Pathways to the Future: Report on the Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in the ACT*.

Ends

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
to the**

**ACT Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Education
Report No 3**

**PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE:
Report on the Inquiry
into
Vocational Education and Training In The ACT**

**Tabled by
Katy Gallagher
Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services**

25 **November 2003**

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Education resolved on 9 May 2002 to conduct an inquiry into Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the ACT. The inquiry was conducted under the Standing Committee's responsibility to examine matters related to early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education, non-government education, arts and culture, sport and recreation.

The Committee's report was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 28 August 2003.

The Standing Committee adopted terms of reference for the Inquiry which were to inquire into and report on VET in ACT high schools, colleges, post-college, registered training organisations and adult and community programs, with particular reference to:

- i) the effectiveness of the administration and promotion of VET;
- ii) current programs and the extent to which they satisfy demand and the community's needs;
- iii) unmet need and gaps including service provision and areas not currently involved with VET programs;
- iv) the role of industry training advisory bodies; new apprenticeship centres; and group training companies;
- v) the role of career advisory and placement services; and
- vi) any related matter

OVERVIEW

The Standing Committee's report is important for several reasons. It is the report of the first inquiry held into vocational education and training within the ACT since self-government.

The inquiry provided an important opportunity for all vocational education and training stakeholders to publicly contribute their views and concerns to an inquiry. The Government is very appreciative of the fact that so many took the time and effort to do so.

The inquiry also provided a very valuable opportunity to reflect on the major advances made in vocational education and training in recent years, to acknowledge the achievements and look for areas where improvements can be made.

The ACT has a robust and vibrant vocational education and training (VET) system of high quality and responsiveness. It rates well by comparison with other jurisdictions and continues to grow in significance as a valuable pathway to skill acquisition and employment. Government is committed to ensuring that the ACT's VET capability does continue to grow.

A hallmark of the ACT VET experience is the willingness on the part of all involved to embrace innovation, to commit to delivering services to the highest standards and to

press for continual improvement undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and common purpose.

The ACT VET achievements are a tribute to the commitment demonstrated by all involved including the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), private and community based registered training organisations, senior secondary colleges, industry training advisory boards, industry peak associations, unions, group training companies and staff of DEYFS (DEYFS).

Government is committed to continual improvement and there have been many changes in the VET environment over the past few years; changes driven, in large part, by the recognition by all jurisdictions of the imperative for Australia to have a nationally consistent, high quality and relevant VET system. The ACT has embraced the changes.

Since 1996 the drive has been to develop a national approach to training, to grow traineeships and to have more vocational education and training in schools. In 1997 the first nationally recognized training packages were introduced. In 1998 New Apprenticeships arrangements were introduced, as was the Australian Recognition and Qualifications Framework. In 2001 the Recognition Framework was revamped into the Australian Quality Training Framework.

In the past twelve months Government has introduced new quality assurance legislation for VET and higher education, funded and supported the development of new industry training advisory arrangements and provided funding to establish a career advisory support service for all schools. DEYFS' Training and Adult Education Branch has also been restructured to provide an enhanced capacity to focus on local needs.

The search for cost effective improvements will continue and the Government appreciates the work undertaken by the Committee to examine the ACT VET scene. The recommendations contained in the report are welcomed.

In accepting most of the thirty eight recommendations, the Government's responses also provide information to show the extent of policy and arrangements already associated with the particular issue. Where the response is to note a recommendation the Government has done so where agreement would have committed the Government to the provision of undefined levels of funding in advance of a Budget.

One recommendation has not been agreed; it deals with quality assurance issue associated with colleges in their role as registered training organisations. The Government is committed to maintaining the quality of VET delivery and believes that it would be counterproductive to differentiate between registered training organisations in terms of accountability and reporting. It would not be in the best interests of either student outcomes, the general image of VET or the image of VET delivery in schools.

Government thanks the Committee for its report and is grateful to the members of the VET community who invested considerable time and energy in putting their ideas, views and concerns before the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INQUIRY

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Government provide greater investment in VET for secondary schools and colleges.

Noted

ACT Government schools are funded and staffed to provide a complete curriculum and, in the case of colleges, this includes VET. ACT non-government schools receive Territory funding in accordance with a formula that recognises the three way funding partnership with the Commonwealth and parent/school community.

Annual funding from the Australian National Training Authority in the order of \$700,000 is provided to ACT government and non-government colleges for the administration and support of VET in schools. This recognises, in part, the additional responsibilities associated with being a Registered Training Organization (RTO).

In addition, in the 2003-04 Budget the Government has provided \$0.5 million per annum to develop and enhance careers advice support to government and non-government schools.

As registered training organizations, colleges also have access to specific VET professional development funds.

The Government acknowledges that there is growing interest in VET in the high school sector with a number of innovative partnerships between schools and industry being launched in the past few years. The Government supports the structured move of VET into high schools and will consider the needs of high schools with respect to VET in the 2004-05 Budget context.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Government give consideration to increasing the User Choice funding allocated to training programs delivered to apprentices in the building and construction industry and other affected industries where the materials used to deliver training are disposable and cannot be re-used.

Agreed

The level of funds provided to registered training organisations through the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS) programs are set for each individual qualification through a process of research, review and consultation with registered training organisations.

Funding is set to cover expenses related to the delivery of the qualification and are reviewed annually. Rates can be adjusted to ensure they are in line with current requirements and at a level sufficient to maintain training market viability. Rates vary

considerably according to the complexity of the qualification, its duration, and associated costs of delivery.

Funding provided by each jurisdiction are regularly scanned and consultation undertaken with registered training organisations. The next round of review and consultation is scheduled to commence in November 2003 and will take account of the views expressed by the Committee.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that:

- a) the Government investigate, in conjunction with the community sector, a means of providing incentives in that sector to encourage the uptake of entry-level trainees and to encourage training for existing community workers; and*
- b) the Government investigate additional funding for VET programs in the community and youth sector generally.*

Agreed

The Government is committed to ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to undertake VET to meet individual and industry needs.

The New Apprenticeships through User Choice program is a nation wide partnership between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments, employers and employees to improve the skills of the Australian workforce. Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments jointly fund the training.

In relation to entry-level trainees, the Commonwealth provides an employment incentive of up to \$4000 and the ACT contributes a similar amount for the training. In the case of the community services sector, DEYFS will consult with that sector to gauge the impact of the Commonwealth employment incentives.

In relation to existing workers, there has been considerable promotion over the past year to increase the number of existing workers undertaking VET opportunities via the New Apprenticeships through User Choice program. This has been done in consultation with industry. For most qualifications in this sector, \$1500 is available to support training of existing workers. An exception is the three-year Diploma in Youth Work, where \$3,900 is available per qualification.

In the case of the community services sector, the number of qualifications being funded has tripled over the past three years.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that:

- a) *the Government investigate, in consultation with the community sector, the claim that most workers in the community and youth sector are unable to afford VET course fees; and*
- b) *should this investigation show that the cost of courses is acting as a significant barrier to access, provisions be implemented to remove this barrier through some form of subsidy.*

Agreed.

Registered training organisations receive an amount per qualification from the department and a fee from the student. There is consensus in the training industry that some form of student fee is essential to ensure that students value the tuition, and that they are motivated to complete the course. The fee structure is designed to do this and to ensure parity between public and private providers.

For apprentices and trainees there is a student fee of \$250 payable on commencement of a New Apprenticeship. The registered training organisation may negotiate with the apprentice/trainee to pay this by instalments or the employer may pay the student fee.

For programs where the student is not an apprentice or trainee, specific student fees range from \$50 up to \$680 depending on the length of the course. The fee most commonly charged is around \$250 and, again, this fee may be paid by instalments or by the employer.

The guidelines under which registered training organisations operate provide for generous fee concessions to be granted. These concessions include a fee reduction of up to 50% for equity target groups such as women returning to the workforce, people with disabilities and indigenous people. Concessions are also granted to people receiving various forms of benefit payments from government.

Where concessions are granted, the funding provided by the department is increased to take account of the impact on the registered training organisation.

DEYFS will consult with the community services and youth sector to investigate the impact of fees on the take up of VET in those sectors. The investigation will also take account of other policy implications including the need for fee equity across occupational groupings.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that:

- a) *the Government investigate extending funding for training to existing workers, especially in those industries where there is a very low base of trained workers; and*
- b) *should this investigation prove a need for existing worker training, that a transparent application process be established for affected industries to apply for funding to meet this need.*

Noted.

Registered training organisations are encouraged to sign existing workers into apprenticeships across a broad spectrum of qualifications. It is necessary however to balance supply and demand to ensure that funds available for training are allocated to meet the greatest need in accordance with identified ACT training priorities.

The cost of training existing workers is a shared cost and can be funded from a combination of public and private sources. The employer, for example, can negotiate with a registered training organisation and potential contributing agencies to put together a funding package for their existing workers.

Where the ACT contributes to the funds provided for delivery to existing workers, the rate is set following extensive stakeholder consultation including registered training organisations, industry training advisory groups and New Apprenticeship Centres.. In many cases, New Apprenticeships contracts of training for existing workers do not involve ACT funding.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Government investigate Queensland initiatives surrounding government-sponsored training for community/childcare workers that have been in the sector for more than five years and assess the potential costs and benefits of similar provisions in the ACT.

Agreed

The Commonwealth sets the policy surrounding the incentives payable to existing workers and defines those eligible for traineeship funding. Several industries have difficulty with traineeships delivering a lower level qualification than what those industries believe is required for their working environment.

The Queensland government legislated in 2002 to the effect that childcare workers who wish to be employed as group leaders must work towards a diploma level qualification. This was an outcome of several government agencies and industry agreeing on the qualifications required for employment in that industry.

The diploma qualification is funded by the ACT, as are other childcare qualifications. The rate of take up of these qualifications, and any inhibiting factors are being investigated in consultation with the ACT childcare industry and training providers. Options for improving the situation will also be considered.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Government:

- a) investigate measures to expand the availability of IT industry placements in the private sectors;***

b) increase the amount of IT industry placements within the ACT Public Service; and

c) where industry placements are not possible that practice firms or other practical methods be utilised.

Agreed in principle.

The Government recognises the value of having VET as closely linked to on the job experience as possible.

It is a Government priority to provide access to work placements for VET students wherever possible.

The Student to Industry (SIP) program, jointly sponsored by the Commonwealth and the ACT, has proved successful in finding placements for students in ACT businesses. Between the 2002 and 2003 school years there has been a 50% increase in IT industry placements for school students with ACT businesses.

There is a mix of government, defence, retail, community services and information technology sectors in the current employment base in the ACT. In this overall context, DEYFS will continue to work with the public sector to negotiate access for trainees and apprentices to the wide range of opportunities available. Where work placements are not practicable for secondary college aged students, practice firms are created, providing a valid industry recognised alternative to actual workplaces.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the Government investigate the provision of increased funding support for IT courses that are directed towards vocational outcomes for the over-50 age group.

Agreed

It has long been a national VET priority to ensure that policies and programs acknowledge the need to produce outcomes for the mature age worker.

It has been recently agreed at Ministerial Council level that persons over the age of 45 be regarded as a specific target group and, accordingly, that funding be made available for such groups for VET purposes. ACT registered training organisations have been made aware of the requirement to include this group in their training provision.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the Government investigate the implementation of a public transport subsidy for young apprentices and trainees, or better publicise any existing subsidies that apply to trainees and apprentices, including the consideration of extending the student concession to this group.

Agreed.

The issue of public transport support for young apprentices and trainees was examined some years ago following representations by the CIT student union. As a result, concession eligibility was extended in 2000 to people who hold a Centrelink *Health Care Card - Low Income* (HCC).

Previously this group was not eligible for concessions, as members do not receive a financial benefit from the Government. Eligibility for this type of HCC is based on their low income (currently set at \$336 per week). The main focus when including this group for concessions was that the majority of first and some second year apprentices would become eligible for public transport concessions. The funding for this concession is part of the general concession program administered by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

DEYFS will ensure that information about eligibility for this concession is made available to apprentices and trainees at the time of their signing their training contracts.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Government:

- a) implement a renewed policy focus on "at risk" people involved, or wanting to be involved, in the pursuit of VET programs;***
- b) provide adequate resourcing to administer and manage the development of programs for "at risk" students or the incorporation of appropriate VETIS courses into such a program; and***
- c) establish a working party to discuss and progress issues surrounding the development of programs to aid the transition from high school to college and the role of VETIS in assisting "at risk" students (and that the working party be made up of a wide range of representatives from across the education, training and youth sector).***

Agreed.

Government has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting people 'at risk', particularly young people and school students through Budget funded initiatives and a wide range of intra and inter-agency programs. In addition, DEYFS has recently restructured the delivery of student support services to provide for greater coordination of services for and focus on students at risk.

The value of VET in supporting and assisting people at risk is widely acknowledged. In the case of schools, in addition to engaging students in VET activities, schools have been active in promoting school-industry training partnerships in recent years that have a specific focus on "at risk" students.

Government high schools and colleges are currently collaborating on strategies and priorities for working closer together in providing VET opportunities to high school

students. The youth sector and industry, as major stakeholders, will be consulted in the development of these strategies and priorities.

Any resource issues surrounding VET in high schools will be considered within the 2004-05 Budget context.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Government instigate measures that will ensure that all learners requiring some degree of literacy or numeracy support are able to access this support in a timely and expeditious manner.

Agreed

By implementing the Australian Quality Training Framework, a set of nationally consistent standards for VET, the ACT has a built in requirement to ensure learners can access literacy and numeracy support. It is a condition of registration that learners are supported in this manner by registered training organisations. Compliance with this requirement is monitored through periodic audits by the ACT Accreditation and Registration Council.

The ACT Government allocates approximately \$750,000 per year, through its VET budget, for specific programs for training people with specific learning needs, with literacy and numeracy needs being a key element.

In the case of government schools, schools use student test data to identify students in need of specific literacy and numeracy support.

Registered training organisations recruit students for these programs through general marketing activity and through contacts in community and youth service organisations. In addition to these specific programs, there is a general provision for additional literacy and numeracy tuition for all government funded VET programs. Registered training organisations apply on a case-by-case basis for this assistance.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the Government ensure there are culturally appropriate support and mentoring services available for Indigenous students and other students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds undertaking VET programs in the ACT.

Agreed.

Government notes that the Committee's report lists the many and varied planning documents and action plans developed and resourced by government and is supportive of the efforts to date. Work continues on improving outcomes for equity groups including indigenous people and people from a non-English speaking background.

The 2002-2004 ACT VET Strategic Plan has strategies to ensure equitable outcomes for all people in training. The plan promotes customisation of training for equity groups and the availability of assistance to students from those groups. The ACT Indigenous Action Plan 2003-2005 further focuses on learners' needs as a distinct equity group.

Registered training organisations are aware that the ACT VET strategic plan gives priority to ensuring equitable outcomes for all groups. As outlined in the response to Recommendation 11, funding is available to registered training organisations for this purpose.

Registered training organisations provide courses specifically designed to accommodate the needs of persons of culturally and linguistically diverse background. For example, nineteen Indigenous young persons were placed into traineeships between June 2002 and August 2003 in a pilot program. Mentoring and pastoral care was provided by the placement agency, helping to ensure that students successfully completed their training and were offered fulltime employment. The success of the pilot program has encouraged another round of traineeships to be arranged.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that:

The Government undertake an audit of the workload of vocational teachers, taking into account the difference between VET and other courses in schools; and

Should this audit uncover a great disparity in the respective workloads of VET and non-VET teachers, that steps are taken to apply more resources so that workloads are more equitably distributed.

Noted

The issue of teacher workloads, along with other staffing and timetabling issues, is a matter that receives regular consideration by DEYFS. For many teachers of VET courses, the VET component is only part of their overall teaching load. Should evidence be provided which shows that the workload of VET teachers differs significantly from other secondary teachers, the resource implications for schools can be considered by DEYFS.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Government establish a working party (comprised of relevant stakeholders) to:

- a) investigate feasible, economic and efficient means of providing broad and regular access to industry experience opportunities for vocational education teachers;***
- b) develop, in consultation, a professional development strategy for teachers involved with VET in schools, which emphasises the importance of***

mentoring and strengthening the relationships between college VET teachers and teachers from CIT; and

- c) that industry experience should be flexible to meet the demands of teachers, while at the same time giving them the relevant experience they need to teach courses.***

Agreed.

The Government acknowledges the importance of college VET teachers maintaining industry currency.

Maintaining industry currency is a component of the Australian Quality Training Framework which all registered training organisations are required to address to keep their registered status. Compliance with this requirement is subject to periodic audit by the Accreditation and Registration Council.

All ACT colleges are registered training organisations. They ensure that their VET teachers undertake a range of industry experiences. The electrical VET teachers, for example, have undertaken professional development in obtaining the Green Card to facilitate return to industry. Hospitality VET teachers manage restaurants and cafes in their schools.

The Government agrees that through partnership arrangements professional development programs can be streamlined to ensure that identified gaps in industry experience and training can be met.

The newly formed ACT Industry Training Advisory Association (ACTITAA) has been commissioned to undertake a project to develop and implement a strategic plan to coordinate partnerships between college VET teachers and industry experts to provide opportunities for innovative programs and increased maintenance of registered training organisation outcomes.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the Government undertake an urgent effort to identify and recruit qualified vocational relief teachers.

Noted

The recruiting focus of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services has been on recruiting permanent teachers with VET qualifications rather than on recruiting casual teachers. The need for casual teachers with VET qualifications is included in departmental advertising. Options are being explored for professional development for casual teachers, which may include VET teaching and assessment competencies.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that the Government:

- a) investigate mobility requirements of VET teachers; and*
- b) consider training interested high school teachers as vocational teachers and including Workplace Assessor Training in the pre-service training given at the University of Canberra's Education courses.*

Noted.

All teachers recruited since July 1999 are covered by an agreed range of mobility arrangements. There are benefits to individuals, to schools and to the government school system in encouraging staff mobility. It is essential in growing the capacity of the schools to expand the VET offering that opportunities are available to a greater number of teachers to be involved in this area. Also the ability to provide an arrangement that ensures that teachers can readily access a range of experiences to enhance their skill base is unique to the ACT.

The mobility arrangements include an option to extend the placement of a specialist teacher, such as a VET teacher, if there is no other suitable teacher available. This allows time to encourage and assist other teaching staff to gain the required qualifications and skills or to recruit additional teachers.

During 2003, DEYFS provided training support to high school teachers to ensure that there would be a greater number of teachers able to apply for vacancies in the VET area. Also the annual Teacher Recruitment program highlighted the growth in the VET area and has identified a number of high quality potential applicants.

Further, DEYFS' need in the VET area have been included in the recruitment feedback to teacher training institutions. Steps have already been taken to include VET qualifications in pre-service teacher courses and course convenors are actively encouraging students to take on a VET component.

As part of the department's recruitment feedback to teacher training institutions discussions concerning the possibility of pre-service teacher courses including VET qualifications have taken place between the department and the University of Canberra. Course convenors are actively encouraging students to take on VET courses.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the Government examine the proposal to encourage high schools and colleges to co-operate in sharing qualified VET staff.

Agreed

The response to recommendation 10 indicates that government high schools and colleges are collaborating on strategies and priorities for working together to provide VET

opportunities to high school students. The effective use of staff will be an important consideration in those deliberations.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Government fund, develop and implement a comprehensive VET communication strategy that:

- a) identifies individual communication strategies specifically targeting the different audiences involved in the VET sector (ie teachers, providers, learners, particular industry/employers etc) and articulates how best to provide information to these groups;***
- b) provides a centralised information point through both a telephone number and a website portal;***
- c) encourages other relevant bodies and organisations to renew efforts in promoting vocational education;***
- d) affirms TAE's role as a leader, facilitator and communicator in the VET sector;***
- e) raises public awareness and positively influences community attitudes about the value and status of vocational education programs;***
- f) contains identifiable outcomes and related performance measures; and***
- g) is reviewed regularly to measure performance against stated outcomes.***

Agreed.

Communication and marketing is a critical part of the agenda of the ACT VET Authority. It is also an important component of work being undertaken nationally through the Australian National Training Authority for the ANTA Ministerial Council.

The VET Authority is alert to the need to ensure that its communication strategy is multi-faceted and that each component is "fit for purpose". The Authority's communication activities are varied and range from conducting the highly successful annual ACT Training Excellence Awards to involvement in the annual careers markets, distribution of brochures, media coverage for service product launches through to focused advertising on radio, television and bus promotions.

In late 2002 and early 2003 the Authority undertook a very successful marketing campaign focusing on New Apprenticeship opportunities. The campaign included direct marketing to registered training organisations as well as to the general public. A substantial increase in the numbers of New Apprenticeships resulted. Significantly research undertaken by the marketing firm indicated that the campaign had been effective in prompting discussion about VET as an education option.

The ACT is participating in national work being undertaken under the auspices of a Ministerial Council to develop a VET communications strategy. A national training website (training.com.au) has recently been launched in the ACT which is a one-stop shop for all information about the national training agenda. One of its key attributes is that it provides consistent explanations in straightforward terms. Further development of the site is progressing. The site also has links with each jurisdiction's website for local information.

The ACT website and telephone service are currently being reviewed to ensure ready access by clients.

Government has asked the Authority to review its communications strategy to take into account the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that Government review the operation of the system within TAE for liaising and communicating with its clients at its premises with a view to improving the accessibility of departmental officers. The review should consider the re-introduction of a shopfront.

Agreed.

The accommodation for DEYFS' Training and Adult Education Branch is to be refurbished in 2004. The need to ensure effective liaison and communication with branch clients will be taken into account in the design work.

The maintenance of a shopfront facility however is not considered necessary. With the creation of Commonwealth funded New Apprenticeship Centres in 1998, the role of the branch changed considerably. The New Apprenticeship Centres are responsible for the apprentice and trainee recruitment function previously carried out by the branch.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the ACT Government lobby the MCEETYA taskforce, ANTA MINCO and/or other relevant bodies to enable schools to undertake RTO reporting in a manner that is not excessively resource-consumptive.

Agreed in principle.

A critical component of the Australian Quality Training Framework is the maintaining of high quality service delivery. Quality assurance compliance by all registered training organisations must be rigorously monitored in the interests of students.

The ACT has recently demonstrated its commitment to quality assurance through the passing of the ACT Tertiary Accreditation and Registration Act, which comes into effect on 1 November 2003.

ACT colleges are registered training organisations and, as such, must fulfil the same quality assurance requirements as other registered training organisations. Colleges were resourced to implement the new standards through the allocation of funds from the Australian National Training Authority for VET in schools. With the standards now established in colleges, the processes required to maintain them require fewer resources than were required in the initial establishment.

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that the Government consider allocating additional resources to colleges to meet the additional administrative, delivery and promotion costs associated with the provision of VETIS.

Noted.

The response to recommendation 1 refers to the funding arrangements for colleges including the funding provided to colleges for activities associated with the administration and support of VET in schools. In addition, around \$370,000 in Commonwealth funding and administered by the Capital Region School to Industry Association, (a cross education, industry management committee), is available each year to facilitate school to work structured workplace learning programs.

Recommendation 22

The committee strongly recommends that the Government investigate the feasibility and the costs and benefits of transferring the responsibility for AQTF compliance to DEYFS, possibly by making the department the sole RTO covering all colleges.

Not Agreed

The Government's response to recommendation 20 emphasises the criticality of jurisdictions maintaining the high quality of training delivery required by the Australian Quality Training Framework.

ACT government schools operate with significant degrees of devolved authority. It would be inconsistent with these arrangements to shift responsibility for maintaining registered training organisation status away from those providing the training to a central bureaucracy. Making the department responsible for the VET activity of non-government schools would, likewise, be most inappropriate.

Requiring individual registration sends a clear signal to training providers that the Government values high standards and accountability for VET outcomes for young people in the Territory. The Government believes that there is considerable risk involved in diluting responsibility for maintaining quality training. Taking such an approach would not be in the best interests of students.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that the Government commit itself to the better management of the tender process for selecting VET providers and programs by:

- a) conducting a formal review that identifies weaknesses in the current tender processing system and proposes strategies to overcome any identified weaknesses;***
- b) formally consulting with RTOs and other stakeholders as to their needs in relation to the tender process, including consultation about appropriate timeframes and the most suitable times of the year to commence and finalise tenders;***
- c) establishing a higher performance target (beyond 80 per cent) for the percentage of tenders successfully determined within 50 days of tenders closing; and***
- d) more detailed reporting of the time taken to determine successful tenders with a breakdown of the percentages of tenders concluded within say, 30 days, 50 days, 70 days, 100 days and over 100 days.***

Agreed

A revised Skilling ACT tender process for 2003 has been implemented which will significantly streamline the process.

Training and Adult Education Branch reviewed the program as part of a continuous improvement process in the latter part of 2002. Extensive consultation with registered training organisations and other stakeholders occurred in the late 2002 and early 2003 in relation to the tender process and the timing of training purchases. As a result of this negotiation a thorough revision of the process was undertaken, and a new process commenced in July 2003. The actual performance level of negotiating training contracts within 50 days is now 100 per cent.

With the new more flexible approach, applications for funding are processed within twenty one days of receipt. A new performance monitoring regime will include a measure of time taken to fill purchase orders and will be available in the same way as registered training organisation performance measures.

Recommendation 24

The committee recommends that Government specifications for programs put to tender/user choice clearly identify the social obligations that the provider will be expected to meet and that meeting these social obligations be an explicit part of the decisions made for funding.

Agreed.

The revised Skilling ACT 2003 tender process referred to in the response to recommendation 23 sets out social obligations in the tender documentation.

Recommendation 25

The committee recommends that the Government investigate, in consultation with stakeholders, the inclusion of quality measures in tender specifications for all VET program funding.

Agreed

The revised Skilling ACT 2003 tender specifications referred to in the response to recommendation 23 sets out the quality measures associated with the training required.

Recommendation 26

The committee recommends that:

- a) the Government investigate whether RPL and RCC processes are, on the whole, being applied fairly, based on appropriate guidelines, as well as what measures, if any, can be instituted to reduce the cost associated with processing RPL and RCC applications; and***
- b) that if the cost cannot be reduced that the Government consider a scheme to provide funding for a number of RPL/RCC applications for the financially disadvantaged.***

Noted

Where some of the competencies in a qualification are subject to RPL/RCC, the funding provided to a registered training organisation for a qualification is for the full qualification and makes no assumption about the existence of RPL/RCC.

In those cases where RPL/RCC is relevant, a registered training organisation is required under the Australian Quality Training Framework to ensure that the evidence is relevant,

accurate and current. Where the evidence is substantiated, the student is not required to undertake that training. The payment to the registered training organisation however assumes that all training necessary for the qualification is required and no payment from a student is required for RPL/RCC processing. The concessions policy referred to in the response to recommendation 4 would apply in the case of eligible persons.

DEYFS will examine whether a standard approach by registered training organisations in the processing RPL/RCC applications would be useful.

Recommendation 27

The committee recommends that the Government:

Affirm its commitment to industry engagement and consultation on VET issues via non-departmental consultation mechanisms (ACTITAA and other industry sources); and

Continue to consult with industry players and existing ITAB networks to refine and finalise the new arrangements under which ACTITAA will operate.

Agreed

The Government's commitment to industry engagement and consultation on VET matters is amply demonstrated by its prompt action to fund the ACT Industry Training Advisory Association when the Commonwealth withdrew its funding for local industry training consultation. Key stakeholders were closely involved in the creation of the new advisory body.

The VET Authority, whose membership includes industry representation, has a strong vested interest in ensuring that the new arrangements for obtaining industry input into VET matters are robust. A member of the new Association is on the board of the Authority. The Authority has established a service agreement with the new advisory body and will continue to support the Association to ensure that the new industry training advisory arrangements are working well.

Recommendation 28

The committee recommends that the TAE continuously keep all stakeholders informed of the key roles held by various personnel as well as when changes to staffing occur.

Agreed. This information will be regularly updated on the TAE website

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends that the Government undertake to provide additional professional development opportunities for TAE staff with a particular emphasis on direct industry experience.

Agreed

It is important that staff involved in administering the ACT VET system have a sound understanding of industry viewpoints and priorities.

Staff have close contact with industry in many ways including through regular and detailed contact with the ACT Industry Training Advisory Association and its member Industry Training Advisory Boards. There is daily consultation with registered training organisations and New Apprenticeship Centres on a wide range of industry issues. Furthermore, industry advisors work closely with branch staff in the quality assurance audit process for registered training organisations.

Through these and other interactions, branch staff develop a sound understanding of industry views and priorities within their area of responsibility. DEYFS however will continue to be alert for opportunities to provide staff with further exposure to industry.

Recommendation 30

The committee recommends that the Government instigate proposals to better and more formally manage complaints made regarding VET issues, in this regard the committee recommends the investigation of:

The model employed in Queensland in relation to its Apprenticeship and Traineeship Ombudsman;

The establishment of a single point of contact for complaints; and

The effective promotion of the complaints management regime once implemented.

Agreed.

Effective methods of handling complaints in relation to VET have now been introduced at a national and local level.

In June 2003 the Commonwealth and state/territory ministers jointly launched a national VET complaints hotline, as part of an agreed national *Code of Good Practice for Responding to Complaints about VET Quality*. The new ACT VET Act 2003 and the Act Tertiary Accreditation and Registration Act 2003 have explicit provision for the handling of complaints.

There is now a single national complaints hotline and the contact officer directs the call as necessary to the specific jurisdiction. The hotline is advertised on Commonwealth New Apprenticeship brochures, as is the ACT number for local complaints.

DEYFS has also recently introduced, and is promoting, a single complaints process for the department and brochures have been distributed to explain the arrangements. Where a complaint is made through Canberra Connect, the caller is directed to the DEYFS complaints contact officer for registration and further action. The DEYFS has a comprehensive list of contact officers including for VET complaints.

DEYFS will look for opportunities to promote the national VET complaints network and to raise awareness of client access arrangements for VET clients and providers.

Recommendation 31

The committee recommends that the Government consider the provisions and policy settings similar to those outlined in the Victorian Government's 'Knowledge and Skills for the Innovation Economy'.

Agreed

The Victorian document '*Knowledge and Skills for the Innovation Economy*' outlines many valuable policies aimed at introducing flexibility into a large and diverse TAFE system.

The Canberra Institute of Technology already has many of the freedoms and flexibilities aspired to in the Victorian document. For example, CIT has a delegation from the ACT Accreditation and Registration Council to accredit courses in new and emerging industry areas not covered by the national training packages. This provides for a flexible and speedy response to innovative training needs.

Furthermore, the 2003 funding and planning agreement between DEYFS and CIT has been amended to ensure a more flexible and collaborative response capacity to planning, delivery, accountability, and reporting in future agreements. The directions outlined in the Victorian document will be considered in future arrangements.

Recommendation 32

The committee recommends that the Government examine and review the efficacy and suitability of the purchaser/provider model as it is applied to the public VET provider, CIT.

Agreed

Government believes that the formal relationship between the CIT and DEYFS needs to acknowledge the unique situation that exists within the ACT with there being only one major public VET provider. The informal relationship has been based for some time on need to take advantage of existing collaborative opportunities and synergies. It is time that the formal relationship recognises this as well as CIT's role as a public training provider.

The Government's response to recommendation 31 advises of steps taken to introduce a more flexible and collaborative response capacity to planning, delivery, accountability, and reporting.

Recommendation 33

The committee recommends that the Government acknowledge that there are few efficiency gains to be made at CIT.

Noted.

Recommendation 34

The committee recommends that the Government investigate the feasibility as well as costs and benefits of consolidating the number of CIT campuses across the ACT.

Noted

Recommendation 35

The committee recommends that the Government investigate measures to improve the presentation and external image of CIT campuses.

Noted

This is a matter for the CIT to consider within the context of its capital works program and priorities as part of the continuing planning process outlined in the ACT VET Infrastructure Plan.

Recommendation 36

The committee recommends that the ACT Government raise ongoing problems associated with NACs (identified in paragraphs 4.91-4.95) at ANTA MINCO and MCEETYA with a view to providing a better national system that gives relevant, up-to-date information and support to apprentices and trainees.

Agreed

The Commonwealth established New Apprenticeship Centres in 1998 to provide a 'one-stop-shop' facility providing integrated and streamlined apprenticeship and traineeship services to employers and job seekers. In 2002 the Commonwealth undertook a review of the effectiveness of the NACs. From this review changes were made to the contract requirements, such as giving NACs greater flexibility in some aspects of service delivery including contact visits. New NAC contracts were let in mid-2003.

The Government is working with the Commonwealth to ensure that the New Apprenticeships Centres meet the needs of the local ACT industry and community. To this end, DEYFS has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of

Education, Science and Technology, and an MOU with each of the three ACT New Apprenticeships Centres to ensure quality of provision and coordination of effort.

The Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services will write to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for the New Apprenticeships Centres drawing his attention to the concerns raised by the Committee.

Recommendation 37

The committee recommends that the Government investigate the claims raised by the MBA that apprentices are funded to a far lesser extent than trainees with a view to ensuring equity between trainees and apprentices in the system.

Agreed

The claims raised by the MBA will be addressed by DEYFS as part of the regular review of New Apprenticeships funding. The next review is scheduled for November to December 2003.

Recommendation 38

The committee recommends that the Government:

- a) undertake an audit of careers advisory services in high schools, colleges and CIT, and in conjunction with teachers, set appropriate benchmarks for service levels across all schools;***
- b) investigate the appropriateness of including career and work planning in the core curriculum of high schools and colleges; and***
- c) investigate measures to improve and maintain wide ranging, up-to-date industry knowledge in those teachers undertaking the role of a school careers advisor.***

Agreed.

The Government provided funds in the 2002-2003 Budget to review ACT careers advisory services. The 2003-04 Budget provided funding to establish a Career Education Support Service to service all ACT High Schools and Colleges. Recruitment action is currently in train to staff the new service and it will be operational by the end of 2003.

The service will be responsible for improving the capacity of schools to provide career advisory support services including by identifying, developing and promoting the use of advisory material; working with teachers and other key personnel to enhance advisory services; and supporting the development of a network of careers advisors.

As the response to recommendation 14 indicates, the newly formed ACT Industry Training Advisory Association has been commissioned to undertake a project to develop and implement a strategic plan to coordinate partnerships between college VET teachers

and industry experts to provide opportunities for innovative programs and increased maintenance of registered training organisation outcomes.