INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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This submission is presented to the select committee by a cooperative of RTOs operating predominately in the Hunter Valley.

This group works together on an informal basis to develop strategies to improve the quality of products and the ongoing viability of the organisations. There are 5 organisations involved - 4 are not for profit community based organisation and 1 is a private provider.

The major issues the group would like to raise in this submission are as follows:

Smart and Skilled Application process
Administration of the contract, in particular the data systems
Regional boundaries
Students with prior qualifications and eligibility
Student fees
Qualifications not funded at all

SMART AND SKILLED APPLICATION PROCESS
That the tender application was flawed in as much as it did not provide organisations an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity in terms of the quality of services provided particularly with certain student cohorts of in areas of specialised service delivery.

That the concept of user choice was lost in the tender process particularly as large out of area providers were often successful over experienced locals with an existing customer cohort.

Once the tender was awarded and the issues for local providers became clear, the handling of the uproar and concerns was not done particularly well by the departmental staff. There was no logical information fed back to providers to explain why RTOs with a proven track record of excellence had been replaced in some cases by larger providers who had never operated in our region. Some in fact we're approaching local providers to enquire about trainers and venues.

ADMINISTRATION
The administrative issues in terms of the systems used to enrol students and submit claims are burdensome and inflexible making it difficult to easily recruit and enrol students particularly when quick turnaround is needed between enquiry and start of training.

The multiple systems interface and the impact of errors in submission means that time spent on submitting data has more than doubled.

The requirement to supply a USI prior to commitment id being generated is also causing issues for some potential students again blocking easy enrolment and start of training. Where a student is experiencing difficulties in creating a USI the commencement of training is delayed, often creating payment issues for RTOs.

Currently the enrolment process and submission of applications needs to occur a week before a course starts so that processing can be completed and data submitted. This means that any latecomer students cannot be processed quickly enough to start a program on time causing issues for the trainer, student and RTO in terms of extra cost as a student cannot start a SAS program until the commitment has been gained.

REGIONAL BOUNDARIES

Regional boundaries are also blocking user choice for students and employers who prefer to use a particular RTO.   In one instance an RTO was not allowed to enrol a student becuase she resided 5km outside their regional boundaries. She was required to enrol with another RTO not of her choice, the enrolment process is not yet complete more than 2 months from the first enquiry.

STUDENT FEES

The fees are also a barrier for students in particular trainees on traineeship wages. Employers used to a much lower fee structure and limited resources are also less likely to want to engage trainees under the current system of fees.

The arrangements for transition fees for students moving from the ATTP system to SAS also placed a burden on such students particularly those on longer contracts not aware of the changes at the time of indenture.

QUALIFICATIONS NOT FUNDED AT ALL

Some qualifications have no providers under SAS. This means that an employer wanting to place a new entrant trainee can only do this under the fee for service model currently used for existing workers. This includes many of the local government specific qualifications causing further hardship for local councils particularly in rural and remote areas. The specialist local government training institute operating from the Hunter to councils all over the state did not receive a SAS contract at all and can offer no funded training within this sector at considerably disadvantage to councils and their ratepayers

PRIOR QUALIFICATIONS & ELIGIBILITY

Ineligibility of students with prior qualifications at certificate IV or higher does not take into account a number of issues that unfairly limit access to funded training particularly for students with a disability.

For example one of our RTOs attempted to enrol a student who had completed an IT qualification 15 years ago. He was a person with a disability accessing a program through a Disability Employment Service provider in Certificate II in Cleaning in order to find work. The pre-existing qualification is obsolete and he does not have the currency to work in IT.

Similar situations have been discussed on our group such as with people who no longer work in a particular industry due to injury or because the jobs no longer exist. Their pre-existing qualification is worthless and prevents them from accessing a funded program other than a traineeship. This means that a disadvantaged person who is looking to gain skills to move into a skill shortage area area such as aged care or disability work cannot be assisted to make this change under SAS. While we support the concept that precludes people with current and useful pre-existing qualifications, the system does not enable a person with a valid reason to seek funded training from appealing their ineligibility due to prior quals in situation such as those raised above.