

NATIONAL TRADE CADETS SHIP SCHEME

**Report of a Workshop hosted by
The Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth**

14 April 2011

Melbourne

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Trade Cadetship Scheme Workshop Overview

Following the announcement of the National Trade Cadetship (NTC) scheme as a Commonwealth Government election commitment in 2010, the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth hosted a national stakeholder workshop, on 14 April 2011 in Melbourne, which examined the opportunities and challenges presented by the new national scheme.

Over 50 senior representatives attended the inaugural national workshop representing a wide range of key stakeholders and client groups comprising:

- o peak employer and employee associations,
- o national and State and Territory education and training certification authorities,
- o State and Territory governments,
- o industry skills councils, group training organisations,
- o peak public and private training provider organisations, and
- o the schools sectors.

The workshop was facilitated by Mr Ross Smith, Strategic Pathways Pty Ltd.

To set the scene for workshop discussions, The Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth highlighted the Commonwealth Government's commitment to establishing the NTC scheme and outlined the current 'state of play' in its design and implementation nationally.

The opportunities and challenges that the scheme presents for employers and industry, employees, and the schools sector was also examined in presentations from the Australian Industry Group (AiG), the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Trade College, North Brisbane.

Workshop breakout sessions provided participants with the opportunity for useful discussion on the key issues confronting the design and introduction of the scheme. At the conclusion of the workshop, six key issues were identified by participants as critical to the successful implementation of the scheme. A summary of these issues is provided in Section 3 of this report.

2. SETTING THE SCENE - WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

2.1 Overview of the National Trade Cadetship Scheme election commitment

Minister Garrett welcomed representatives and thanked them for participating in the workshop and for their efforts in helping to give young people a better education, including one that prepares them for the world of work.

The Minister outlined how the National Trade Cadetship (NTC) scheme is consistent with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG's) commitment that 'all [Australian school]

students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy' and with achieving the COAG targets relating to specific skills and qualifications.

In highlighting the Australian Government's election commitment on NTCs, the Minister stated that the aim of the scheme was to ensure that every student gets the opportunity to maximise the value of their school education. He outlined the strengths of the scheme and reiterated that the scheme would be offered from 2012, initially to students in Year 9, and progressively to years 10-12. An overview was also provided of the two pathways to be offered to students comprising a Foundation pathway and a Pre-apprentice pathway - both delivered by schools; and a work experience component delivered by Group Training Organizations.

The Minister presented a challenge to workshop participants to investigate strategies to better meld, through the NTC scheme, current Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools programs with the Australian Curriculum. Five key areas were identified as needing attention:

- ∂ the divide between competency assessment in VET, and quality of learning assessment in schooling
- ∂ the struggle to obtain credible work experience for students in school complicated by occupational health and safety issues
- ∂ the small numbers of suitably qualified specialist VET teachers in schools
- ∂ the differences across jurisdictions in recognising VET in schools in senior certificates and the confusion this causes employers, and
- ∂ ensuring the cadetship scheme is not just another VET option among other activities already underway in 90 per cent of schools but a structured program under the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Government's role as a facilitator and partner in the design and implementation of the NTC scheme was highlighted along with the some broad principles to govern its implementation. These principles include how implementation of the scheme will:

- ∂ be implemented by building on, expanding, and adding value to existing systems which provide vocational experiences for school students in each State and Territory
- ∂ be part of the national curriculum framework, providing similar opportunities to students in all jurisdictions
- ∂ use Group Training Organisations to ensure high-quality work experience for students
- ∂ use the new AQF framework – it might give students a complete qualification or might just get them on the way', with the pre-apprentice stream structured in such a way that it is easy and practicable to obtain relevant credit from RTOs
- ∂ take account of the proposed Foundation Skills Training Package, which is likely to be approved in some form by NQC/NSC this year.

In concluding, the Minister highlighted the scheme's potential to give students more choices in how they acquire the foundation knowledge and skills to equip them for further study and employment opportunities.

2.2 Presentations on the NTC scheme's opportunities and challenges

The opportunities and challenges presented by the NTC scheme were examined from three critical perspectives comprising employers and industry, employee organisations, and educational institutions in presentations from the Australian Industry Group (AiGroup), the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Trade College, North Brisbane.

Opportunities and challenges from an employer/industry perspective

The capacity for the NTC scheme to lead to the development of a 'deep bridge' from industry to schools and the opportunity that this offers to develop 'different conversations' to be held between schools, industry and the community was presented as an incredible opportunity for the NTC scheme in the presentation by Ms Megan Lilly, Director, Education and Training, AiGroup.

Ms Lilly highlighted the important role the NTC scheme can play as a catalyst for new relationships, and new conversations, to emerge between the key players of industry, VET providers and the schools sector. She believed it was an exciting new initiative which needs the full support and attention of all key stakeholders and a commitment from them to move forward co-operatively and constructively on its design and implementation.

Given the outstanding opportunities the scheme presented, Ms Lilly also outlined a number of key challenges for industry, and for the scheme in general. The need to ensure all programs are nationally recognised and certified to enable students to reach a number of possible destinations from their chosen program, and to ensure they can move seamlessly from education to work opportunities was seen as essential. The importance of neither the VET sector nor the school sector dominating the process was also stated.

The capacity of school teachers to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience they need to deliver the programs, and to work with trainers and employers to ensure a high quality outcome for students was also seen as vital, given this is a new development for which few have been trained.

Language, literacy and numeracy skills were also seen as a significant challenge for the scheme given its proposed expansion into a younger student cohort and a potentially broader cross-section of industries and occupations.

Finally, the issue of 'parity of esteem' between the NTC pathways and more traditional academic pathways was outlined as a continuing challenge. It was proposed that little progress is likely to be made on this critical issue unless school principals see the NTC as part of their core business and it is reflected in school funding agreements. It was proposed that the NTC needs to be embedded in the heart of schooling, not just seen as an 'add-on'.

Opportunities and challenges from a union perspective

Mr Tim Shipstone, Industrial Officer, ACTU outlined support for the broad idea of the NTC scheme as outlined in the election commitment. He commended the strong representation from industry at the workshop, both from unions and employers, as well as the industry skills councils, and the Government for adopting this open and inclusive process.

The key features of the scheme that unions found most appealing were identified. Firstly, the prospect of a stronger, clearer pathway from school into an apprenticeship was fully supported. Mr Shipstone stated that if the scheme works as intended, it will give school aged students interested in the trades an opportunity to get not just a 'taste of a trade' but a clear recognised pathway towards an apprenticeship, and the qualification that underpins it.

Secondly, he highlighted the need for cadetships to be designed and developed in close consultation with industry, through skills councils, and acknowledged the benefits of this involvement for students and employers alike.

The proposal for the provision of work placements with local employers through the group training network was also outlined as a welcomed component of the scheme. He stated that work placements provide a vital link for students to the world of work and to the vocational standards required for a chosen occupation.

The potential of the scheme to also address the need to improve completion rates in apprenticeship training through providing an opportunity for better matching apprentices and employers at the recruitment stage was identified. It was proposed that by giving students an opportunity to find out their areas of interest at the pre-apprentice stage, the cadetship may assist in improving commencements and completions of apprenticeships.

The potential for the scheme to lift the status and profile of apprenticeships in the schools and the wider community was also presented as a benefit.

The areas requiring further attention and debate were then outlined, including the need for quality to be at the forefront of the scheme. The quality features highlighted included having teachers, whether from school or the VET sector, with appropriate qualifications and experience to teach the industry content and foundation skills; ensuring proper teaching and instructional facilities; offering students genuine work placements that offer structured workplace learning; and ensuring cadetships are properly linked to training package qualifications with vocational outcomes supported by appropriate credit and recognition arrangements.

Finally, the need to be clear about the purpose and intent of the trade cadetship was identified as critical, as was the need to be realistic in terms of what can be achieved through the scheme.

Opportunities and challenges from a school perspective

To set the context for discussions on the opportunities and challenges the NTC presents for schools, Mr Terry O'Hanlon-Rose, Chief Executive Officer/Principal, Australian Trade College, North Brisbane and Chairperson, VETNetwork Australia, provided an overview of the goals and actions agreed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians which relate to young people's transitions from school to work.

Mr O'Hanlon-Rose outlined the characteristics of authentic employment-based programs from a 'curriculum construct' and from a 'learner support construct' citing research in this area from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Focusing then on the delivery of employment-based programs, the need for tight safety nets to be in place for those students at risk, good information and guidance to be available, and real workplace experiences with 'real work, real pay and real bosses' were cited as essential features of any employment-based training experience.

In examining critical features for curriculum, Mr O'Hanlon-Rose proposed that it needed to have direct application to work and be seen by the student or apprentice as 'real work' and tied to the competencies of their trade. It was proposed that the curriculum needed to be tied to work credentials meaning that the progress of education and training is accredited.

The opportunities and challenges from a school perspective of the Foundation and Pre-apprentice pathways of the NTC scheme were then highlighted as input for consideration by workshop participants.

For the Foundation pathway, Mr O'Hanlon-Rose spoke of the benefits of gaining employer confidence, and facilitating effective transitions as the key opportunities. Key challenges identified for this pathway included teachers being adequately skilled to deliver workplace skills, the need to link with partnership brokers, industry recognition of teachers skills in this area, and workplace literacy and numeracy skills.

The key opportunities identified for the Pre-apprentice pathway included the alignment of curriculum with industry standards which is designed with, and for, industry, clear articulation to apprenticeships which are embraced by the system, the chance to lift the perception of the VET in Schools programs by employer groups, and to provide job-ready students to industries experiencing skill shortages. The challenges highlighted for consideration included the curriculum design process and how it would work, the need to look at financial models to support the program in schools, and improving teacher qualifications and experience to deliver the programs, including the need for professional development for teachers.

3. TACKLING THE KEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Following the presentations from the guest speakers, there appeared to be broad support for the overall aims of the NTC scheme and a high level of energy was evident amongst the participants to move forward and discuss options on how best to design and implement the scheme nationally.

Break-out sessions focused on identifying the key issues which need to be addressed in order to secure the scheme's future success in providing high quality training options for young people in schools.

In summing up the outcomes of the break-out sessions, six key issues emerged which need to be addressed in the design and implementation of the scheme:

ensure that the nature of the NTC model is clear to all stakeholders, including the terms and language used to describe the scheme.

The need for greater clarity around the purpose of the scheme, its primary target audience and its 'scope and boundary' was identified. It was suggested that a framework or model for the NTC scheme would be useful for all key stakeholders and clients to provide clarity around these key issues, and to further define the key terms and language used to describe it.

ensure that all stakeholders are fully engaged in the design and implementation phases of the NTC scheme to ensure high quality outcomes for clients.

Several key stakeholders groups were identified as critical to engage from the commencement of discussions on the design and implementation of the scheme in order to ensure the delivery of the promise that the NTC pathway be equal in quality, value and rigour to more traditional academic pursuits.

Consensus was reached that the Australian Curriculum and Recognition Authority (ACARA) needed to be fully engaged from the beginning of the process. This was seen as essential to ensure the two paradigms of VET and national curriculum are brought together to deliver high quality experiences and outcomes for young people.

Industry was also identified as a key stakeholder which needed to take a lead role in overseeing the development and implementation of the NTC scheme. The critical roles to be played by VET providers and trainers, the schools sector and the States and Territories were also identified throughout discussions.

build on, and fully utilise, existing VET in Schools programs and resources already being delivered.

In fully acknowledging the success to date of the VET in Schools programs, participants stressed the need for the NTC scheme to build on, and fully utilise, the vast array of programs and resources already being delivered across the States and Territories. It was suggested that particular attention should be paid to industries and occupations where examples of 'best practice' are evident in order to maximise the likelihood of a smooth transition to the new scheme.

ensure that high quality, suitably qualified teachers and trainers are available to deliver the programs.

Strong views were expressed on the need to ensure the supply of suitably qualified and experienced teachers and trainers who have access to an appropriate level of resourcing to carry out the programs. Acknowledging the central role teachers and trainers play in the delivery of the scheme, and the variety of pressures that are placed upon these individuals, the need for timely, high quality professional development opportunities was raised as a key issue to address in the transition to the NTC scheme.

further investigate and clarify the role group training organisations will play in the delivery of the scheme.

The central role of group training organisations in the delivery of the scheme and the need for them to work closely with employers, schools, and VET providers was raised as a fundamental issue. Further clarity was requested on how their role may change under the NTC scheme. It was suggested that there was a need for flexibility to be built into the NTC model to allow other organisations to come forward and assist in facilitating work placement opportunities for young people.

acknowledge the importance of marketing (and branding) in raising the NTC's esteem amongst parents, employers and the community.

Effective marketing (and branding) was seen as essential in order to attract more young people into the scheme and to ensure their parents, employers, and the community, see this option as a 'first class', high quality choice.

4. CONCLUSION

In concluding the Workshop, Ms Lisa Paul PSM, Secretary of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, thanked the participants and summarised what, for her, were the principal messages coming from the morning's discussion. She noted the need for clarity about the nature and purpose of the scheme, the need to find common ground and a shared language, the importance of branding and status, and the need for National Trade Cadetships to be seen as a high-quality alternative.

She was impressed by the level of enthusiasm for what could be achieved via the National Trade Cadetship scheme, and at the same time understood the challenges that faced the Department and all school systems in making it a reality.