

Writer - Tony Feagan (BFet)

## ISSUE 1

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Inside this issue:

- Cause and Effect – a Think Piece
- Interesting
- New website
- Déjà Vu
- Auditor's Tip
- A Late Entry

I write this edition of the VET Gazette with a renewed vigour following the Christmas New Year break and the anticipation that 2011 will arguably be the biggest year for the VET sector in terms of RTO regulation and audit.

It has also been a tragic start to the new year for many of our colleagues, in particular our fellow Queenslanders. We all looked on with disbelief as parts of our country experienced the most catastrophic natural weather disasters. We can only hope and pray that in the coming weeks and months that there will be brighter days ahead.

From these disasters we have witnessed the higher qualities of compassion, kindness and care for each other, unprecedented in our communities and these qualities makes us all proud to be Queenslanders and Australians.

## Cause and Effect – a Think Piece

Clearly, continuous improvement has become much more important for RTOs as many more companies realise the value of a robust approach to the collection and management of improvement data. One of the keys to improving processes and resources is to understand cause and effect relationships. We often know what the effect is but can't figure out what caused it.

The National Regulator, which is soon to oversee regulation of VET providers, is being introduced as one of many reforms. One of the primary reasons is that the various State and Territory regulators' auditors have written audit reports which highlight enormous variations in the interpretation of the national framework, the AQTF. This short think piece is not a diatribe focussed on regulators, in fact I have enormous respect for the difficult job they do.

This article is more about cause and effect and how we, as a sector, must learn.

I doubt that any auditor in the country will disagree that the most prominent non compliance resulting from audits is to do with assessments, the old standard 8 and the newer element 1.5 of the AQTF. For those who understand and/or practice Pareto's principle, we might say that 80% of non-compliances stem from 20% of the standards or elements and the poor assessment is the most prominent. What is really concerning is that it has been for a long time.

So we have the effect. But can we find the cause? Is there in fact one single cause?

Let us look at some common factors.

Assessments are generally based around a unit of competency or a cluster of units of competency. Since the first training packages were endorsed by the National Training Framework Committee in 1997 (BSA, TDT, ICT and MEA) the format of training packages has not significantly changed. Sure, some terminology has, key competencies have been replaced by Employability Skills etc. but the relationship between elements, performance criteria, the range statement, evidence guide and so on haven't. We are 13 years advanced from these early days but we still struggle with writing assessments based on these 'syllabus' style documents. Millions of dollars have been invested and spent on professional development programs over these years aimed at showing people how to interpret units and write assessments, but we ask the question, 'are we, as a sector, getting better at writing assessments?' Some might say that we are not. Audit findings would certainly endorse that.

If the benchmark (unit) hasn't changed significantly then perhaps we turn our focus on those who develop assessments.

One of the earlier 'train the trainer' courses, BSZ40198 – Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training became the entry level qualification and regulatory benchmark for trainers and assessors. The Certificate IV (BSZ40198) did not include a specific unit showing people how to develop assessment tools. The corresponding Diploma did have a unit which was BSZ507A. TAA04 replaced BSZ98 in 2004 as the entry level and regulatory qualification, TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment did include a specific unit about developing assessments (TAAASS403 A, B etc.). When TAE10 was endorsed last year, it surprisingly had dropped the 'develop assessment tools' unit from the regulatory level qualification and pushed it up to Diploma level making it an elective choice for a Certificate IV.

Whilst there's many discussions and projects based around the 'value' of the content of the Certificate IV qualification, most of these discussions seem to result in the same outcome, that is, that the Certificate IV is adequate as an entry level training and assessment qualification. So if there is a problem, perhaps it is more in the way in which it is delivered or more so, who is delivering it?

Let us look at the education sectors around us. To teach in a school (even finger painting for preps) you require a three or four year undergraduate degree which includes a 'prac' phase. To teach at a university you require a lot more than that, typically, to be qualified at a level higher than what you teach.

But here in the VET sector you can become a qualified trainer/assessor in as little as three or four days.

Some disparity here?

## Interesting

It was with keen interest that I read Gavin Moodie's piece in The Australian (12<sup>th</sup> January) recently, where he outlines that the newly proposed legislation that will underpin the 'powers' of the VET Regulator. These include investigative powers, search warrants, seizure of records, administrative sanctions, civil penalties and criminal offences. It certainly seems to be a step up from what existing State VET laws contain, although the existing ESOS Act does contain this level of authority. While some might think that regulation is already heavy enough, others will no doubt welcome a level of regulation that has the ability to deal with those who simply do not want to comply with established rules.

Moodie goes on to say that enforcement powers, like these are more familiar in legislation on commercial activities than education.

## New Website for WTFH

We are soon to load our new website which will have the capacity to store a large number of supporting documents. Over the years, we have collected a range of research papers, articles and useful templates which we will be posting on the website. These will be accessible to everyone at no cost. Bookmark the website now [www.wheretofromhere.com.au](http://www.wheretofromhere.com.au).

## Déjà Vu all over again

I was doing some reading recently and I came across some old papers from when I studied my Bachelor of Further Education and Training in the late 1990s.

One paper was about NFROT, the National Framework for the Recognition of Training, which was introduced in 1992. It was the pre-cursor to the Australian Recognition Framework and then the AQTF, both targeted at regulation and national consistency.

In the original NFROT agreement there was a requirement for a review within the first 12 months of implementation. So in 1993, a review was done and as a result of that review, some of the standout options for structural reform included the following:

1. *A single authority*—a national authority managing the recognition process
2. *Model legislation*—State and Territory authorities operating under a common legislative framework and / or
3. *Legislative consistency* - State and Territory authorities operating under nationally agreed principles within state legislation

When is the National Regulator due to take effect?

## Auditor's Tip

The changes to the AQTF which took effect a few months ago were not that dramatic. In our last edition of the VET Gazette we outlined in some detail what the changes were.

One of the more covert changes was an addition to condition 1 which reads:

*'The RTO must also explicitly demonstrate how it ensures the decision making of senior management is informed by the experiences of its trainers and assessors'.*

Whilst many RTOs have been doing this, some may have to consider how they will evidence the input from trainers and assessors. The requirement does include the word 'explicit' and a simple search on dictionary.com tells us that *explicit* means 'fully and clearly expressed or demonstrated; leaving nothing merely implied; unequivocal'.

What many RTOs have been doing (and I guess many will tighten up), is making sure that trainers and assessors attend staff meetings and that there's an agenda item for them to have their say. Whilst that is a fairly solid approach, I question a few things.

- How often do these meetings take place?
- What is the obligation for trainers/assessors (especially those removed physically from the RTO or contract trainers/assessors) to attend either directly or by teleconference?
- What happens if the trainer/assessor comes across something important and forgets to bring it to the meeting?

Here's an idea!

Generate a new email account and call it something like [trainerfeedback@yourRTO.com.au](mailto:trainerfeedback@yourRTO.com.au) (or similar) and make sure that all trainers are aware of it and use it. At the receiving end, someone in authority collects and collates the information from the email account and brings it to the staff meeting for discussion, consensus and action.

There's one more thing to watch here!

There's an old adage that goes "if it's not broken don't fix it" which I'm sure most people have heard of. Let's change that slightly and say "if it is not broken, make sure it doesn't get broken". The message here is simple. We want improvement in everything we do, but we must always remain aware of what we do well and make sure we keep doing it well. Capture both the positive and the negative data about what we do and how we do it.

## A Late Entry

One of those websites that many RTO staff bookmark is that of the National Quality Council. The website contains a great collection of policy papers and bulletins across a wide range of topics relevant to all VET practitioners.

In the last edition of the VET Gazette, we summarised the key points of a project which has been underway for some time, called the **VET Products for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**. A bulletin released on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2010 (locate on [NQC website](#)) outlines one of the key topics of the project, redesigning the structure of training packages.

The bulletin outlines that the new design for training packages, which will be slowly implemented by the end of 2012, will mean that the training packages will have simpler language, less repetition and greater consistency. The article goes on to outline that there will be a greater focus on assessment, knowledge and foundation skills. However, the one key point that is of the greatest interest is that the support available to RTOs will include companion volumes which will provide detailed advice on the use and implementation of training packages.

*I always wondered why training packages didn't come with instructions!*

Postscript - This bulletin came to our attention after the *Cause and Effect* article was written. It is clear to see though, that the 'cause' of poor audit outcomes is starting to be addressed in a number of ways.