Shaping Our Future Learning from the Past:

A Retrospective Analysis of Vocational Education and Training throughout the Last 25 Years

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1.0 Introduction

In this paper I aim to deconstruct the current National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-10, to identify its various components and to subsequently account for how this strategy, and hence, how this sector has emerged over the previous 25 years. In doing so, previous strategies and policy will be discussed, the relationships between those who have been offering vocational education and training (VET) in Australia (state/federal governments/private sector) will be analysed and the socio/philosophical bases for past and current approaches will be compared. It will also be necessary to discuss the economic, and political context within which the variety of strategies and policy have developed, within both a local, national and global context.

The following study will reveal both significant change over the last 25 years and in part, a cyclical philosophical basis for the vocational education and training sector, in that there was initially a shift away from concepts and goals related to social responsibility, towards those of economic necessity, and individual responsibility and obligation. However, within 'Shaping Our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-10' (ANTA 2004a), we see a return to concepts of social responsibility, discussed with the new nomenclature of equity and inclusivity.

We also see a significant broadening of the scope of the VET strategy both in the holistic approach that is to be taken and in the far broader goals that it seeks to achieve. While this is a grand oversimplification, and is reliant upon the wording of the policy itself (rather than looking directly to those who developed the strategies), this shift is wholly consistent with an overall movement towards 'third way' political thought in western politics. In part this paper becomes a study of national and international political priorities.

This paper is also a study of scale. We will see governments attempt to equip individuals with the skills needed to gain employment, and also 'business centric' strategies to provide employers with the skilled employees the need. Temporal variations are also evident, in that VET is seen as both responsible for providing the skills immediately necessary for employment (old) and also as being one educational

component in the process of preparing and developing life long learners (new). While changes within the sector have been occurring from its inception in Australia, some 140 years ago, the scope of this paper is to account for the current system on the basis of changes that have occurred since the late 1970s. This paper will identify these new holistic and socially just components of 'Shaping Out Future' and subsequently account for their development through an historical analysis of past strategies and the milieu in which they inhabited.

[While this is a departure from the rigid four-part structure suggested for this assignment, I believe it is the most appropriate approach – that will still address fully each of the requisite components].

2.0 Shaping our Future 2004-10

The document, 'Shaping Our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-10' (ANTA 2004a), is, in effect the definitive statement as to the structure and implementation of vocational education and training in Australia for the next seven years. It is the major contributor to the current form of the vocational education and training sector in Australia hence, the extent to which it is being discussed in this paper). However, this document does not stand alone. It reflects the social and political times within which it was created, it reflects a number of supposed political and economic necessities, and it builds upon it's two immediate forebears and past vocational education and training policy in Australia.

In this section I will identify and discuss the various components of this strategy and subsequently account for the historical development of these approaches in later sections.

Shaping our Future clearly delineates 'four objectives' for 2004-10 (ANTA 2004a, p.2). They are:

1. Industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy.
2. Employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training.
3. Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment.
4. Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.

Within these four objectives we can clearly identify some of the continuing themes (and rhetoric) of VET policy within Australia. Industry is given the paramount position, indicating perhaps a continued 'supply-side' weighting within this strategy document. The VET sector is seen as responsible for countering or managing economic change by supplying skilled troops, equipped to take on the onslaught. I have used this almost militaristic metaphor to reflect the governmental acceptance of the supposed inevitability of the processes of globalisation and resulting economic

and other changes. This is balanced though, through the acceptance that both "employers and workers will be more involved in influencing policy and defining competencies for the work of the future" (ANTA 2004a, p.12).

The second objective highlights a greater flexibility within the concept and implementation of VET within Australia. Both businesses, of all sizes, and individuals are to be catered to, with "products and services that are increasingly customised to meet their particular needs" (ANTA 2004a, p.12). Through this lifelong learning will be facilitated, especially for the purposes of managing inevitable changes faced by existing and new employees. This adequately counters Ryan's complaint (Ryan 2001, p.134) that previous ANTA policy (and the sector generally) "over-preferences business interests". The VET sector here is in effect 'waterproofing' – a safety net – for businesses and employees. Businesses will be able to tap in to a ready supply of appropriately skilled labour, while individuals will be able to continually develop their skills to meet changes within the workforce. The is in line with the concepts of 'mutual obligation' and the 'third way' concept of 'responsible risk takers'

It is really within the third and fourth objectives where we see a significant departure from/improvement to existing and previous VET policy. Vocational education and training is no longer simply about the supply of skilled employees or the supply of skills to employees. The scope of the sector is dramatically increased, with the belief that through "integrated learning and employment solutions … regional economic, social, cultural and environmental development and sustainability" can be achieved (ANTA 2004a, p.13). The skills and the learning and changing environment fostered, will stimulate "local planning and innovation and help communities deal with change and take advantage of opportunities for growth" (p.13). The VET sector has been assigned a proactive role in shaping the economic and social futures for Australia, rather than simply catering to external and internal forces of economic and social change.

The TAFE system, that grew after 1974 replaced a system of technical education that dated back to the 1870's. This was founded on the basis of providing skills in the traditional areas of manufacturing, mining, and agricultural industries. These industries, as much of the workforce was at the time, was dominated by men. In 1996

women made up only one fifth of total apprentices and trainees, however by 2002 this had increased to one third (Keating 2004, p. 112). As the current National Strategy suggests, marginal groups in society have also been excluded from equitable access to and participation in vocational education and training in Australia.

Through the adoption of the concept of communities and through addressing Indigenous Australian outcomes specifically, 'Shaping our Future' is targeting specific population groups. It is also driven through economic and social necessity to provide ongoing training for 'baby-boomers' (older workers), to facilitate their continued and vital role in the workforce of an aging population. We have already seen that the strategy is to be more client driven. It is also to be inclusive. It is trying to shake off the historical perception of VET as providing 'trade-oriented' male dominated opportunities. But it is more than just targeting "people facing barriers to learning" (ANTA 2004a, p.4). This also adequately counters Ryan's complaint (Ryan 2001, p.134) that previous ANTA policy (and the sector generally) "devalues the role of individual students and communities [and] replaces educational goals with a narrow doctrine of vocational competency".

Through the adoption of the 'inclusivity/equity' paradigm the approach is to enable equal participation and access to opportunities for all. Essentially, this is achieved through the delivery of flexible programs that can be tailored to an individuals needs, to improve outcomes for a particular group or region. This is in contrast to former proactive or affirmative strategies based wholly on improving outcomes for people in particular regions or on the basis of gender, ethnicity or disability alone (see Ryan 2002). This breadth is also reflected in the interrelated way that VET and employment is viewed, as being an integral part of society as a whole. The strategy "does not apply just to education and training, but to employment, regional development, environmental sustainability, innovation … [and] social inclusion" ANTA 2004a, p.4). This is an important step, and one that is reflected across State and Federal government policy, and education policy specifically (for example Queensland's 'New Basics'). It also highlights the importance of a national strategy, in that these synergies, and multiple advantages stemming from this coordinated approach would otherwise be missed.

With this now better understanding of the current system of vocational education and training in Australia and the groups which it affects (although by no means complete) we can now move to see how economic and political changes and previous policy have influenced the current form of VET.

3.0 Economic and Political Changes and VET

One recurrent and important theme that is evident through most of the VET literature reviewed for this paper is the role of vocational education and training in mitigating or facilitating change and growth in the face of globalisation and subsequent local reorientations of the business community and the workforce. Hence it is necessary to investigate this issue in more depth, to truly gauge the importance of VET in these processes and the extent to which the VET sector is a product of it's time in this regard.

The literature appears to utilise (blame) global economic forces to justify changes in this regard. However, Chris Hamnett (1996, pp. 1423-4) reveals that "economic restructuring does not occur in a social and political vacuum" and that the "outcomes of global economic restructuring are essentially variable depending on the ways in which restructuring processes are mediated within different states." This highlights the significant role that continued education and training can play in accommodating any change but also the transformative role it can play in immediately shaping it's environment.

In global terms, Australian governments have promoted economic restructuring and the movement towards a free market in a cautious and measured way, and those who have suffered from these changes have been better supported in Australia, through strategies such as those relating to VET. Between 1982 and 1994 levels of social security were maintained in 'real terms' in Australia (Badcock 1997, pp. 245-6, 53). This general shift in Australian policy towards increased integration into the global economic system included the following:

- Economic Rationalism (Badcock 1997, p. 252; Stilwell 1997, pp. 17, 23-4)
- Trade Liberalisation (Badcock 1997, p. 252; Stilwell 1997, p. 17)
- Financial Deregulation (Badcock 1997, p. 252; Marcuse 1996, p. 52; Stilwell 1997, p. 17)
- Labour Market Reform (Badcock 1997, p. 252; Marcuse 1996, p. 52)
- Competitive Public Enterprises (Badcock 1997, p. 252)
- Infrastructure Pricing Policy (Badcock 1997, p. 252)

- Local Government Reorganisation (Badcock 1997, p. 252)

- Tariff Protection Reduction - From 35% in 1969/70 to 10% in 1993/4 (Marcuse 1996, p. 52; Murphy & Watson 1994, p. 575)

- Floating of the Australian Dollar (Marcuse 1996, p. 52; Murphy & Watson 1994, pp. 574-5)

- Reduced Public Expenditure (Marcuse 1996, p. 52)

- Investment in Research and Development (Marcuse 1996, p. 52)

- Foreign Bank Access Relaxed (Murphy & Watson 1994, pp. 574-5)

These changes can be summarised as an opening up of society to external forces of change, with a greater responsibility on the individual to manage their role in society. The role of VET in this instance was to equip the individual with the necessary skills required by the ever changing workplace. The following flow chart (Figure 1) (Farrington 2000, p.7) maps these changes and the resulting effects this had on the labour market and business. The increase white collar work, and the resulting advancements in workplace technologies, has "in turn led to a recognition that increased levels of education and training were required to accompany workplace change" (MACQT ND).
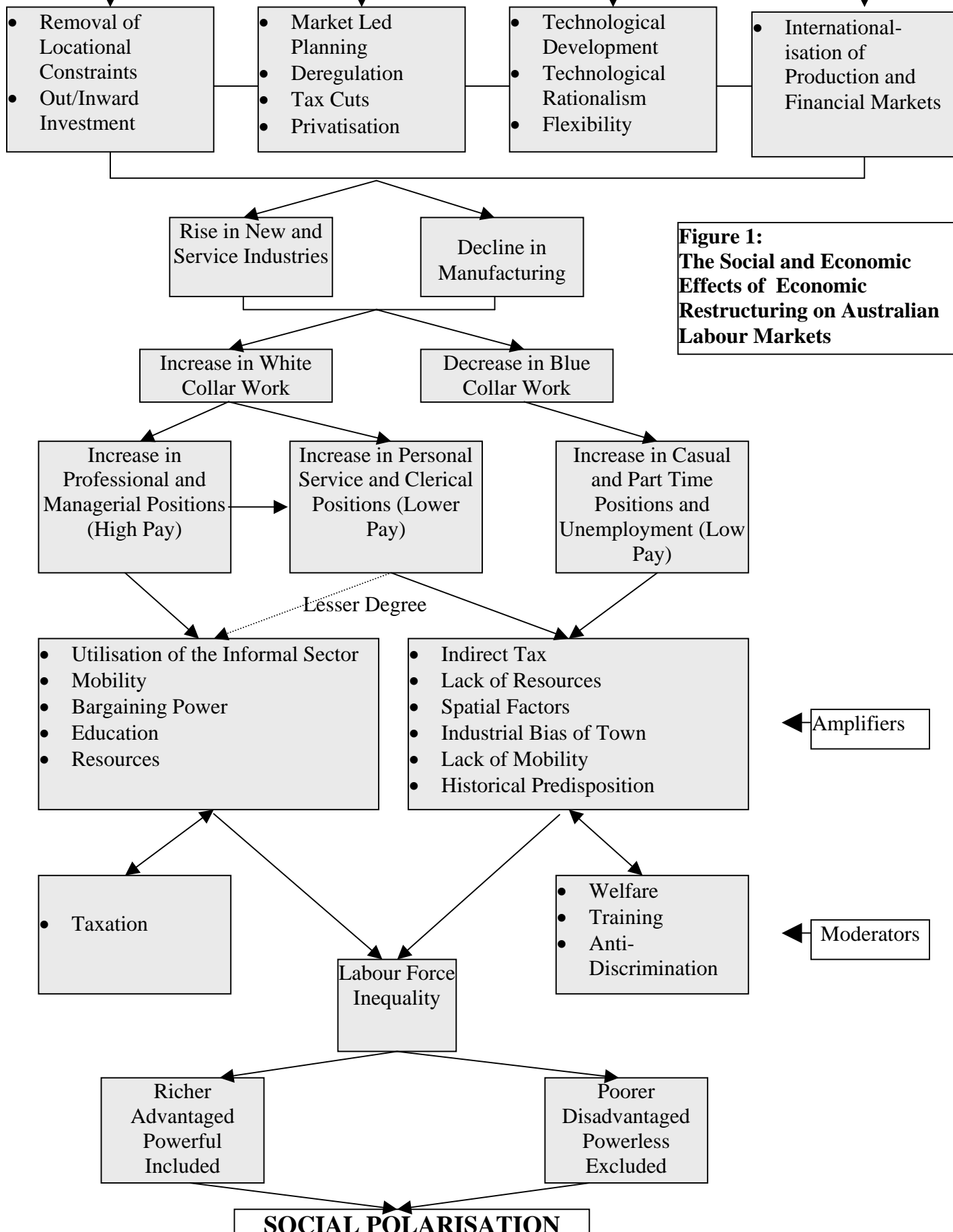
The birth of the modern system of VET in the 1970s occurred in a period Ryan (2002, preface) describes as one with a "commitment to national economic development and growing interest in a more equitable society." Subsequently the 1980s and 90s saw a time of the "growth of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism" (Ryan 2002, preface), which was reflected in policies such as the National Training and Reform Agenda (1987-1996) and the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority in 1992.

The subsequent policy approaches and major reports, discussed in the following section, were developed, in part, in response to these on going changes and to refine the initial system put in place.

GLOBALISATION

Economic Restructuring

- Removal of Locational Constraints
- Out/Inward Investment

- Market Led Planning
- Deregulation
- Tax Cuts
- Privatisation

- Technological Development
- Technological Rationalism
- Flexibility

- International-isation of Production and Financial Markets

Rise in New and Service Industries

Decline in Manufacturing

Figure 1:
The Social and Economic Effects of Economic Restructuring on Australian Labour Markets

Increase in White Collar Work

Decrease in Blue Collar Work

Increase in Professional and Managerial Positions (High Pay)

Increase in Personal Service and Clerical Positions (Lower Pay)

Increase in Casual and Part Time Positions and Unemployment (Low Pay)

Lesser Degree

- Utilisation of the Informal Sector
- Mobility
- Bargaining Power
- Education
- Resources

- Indirect Tax
- Lack of Resources
- Spatial Factors
- Industrial Bias of Town
- Lack of Mobility
- Historical Predisposition

Amplifiers

- Taxation

- Welfare
- Training
- Anti-Discrimination

Moderators

Labour Force Inequality

Richer Advantaged Powerful Included

Poorer Disadvantaged Powerless Excluded

SOCIAL POLARISATION

4.0 Initiatives and Reports on VET

Any organisational group operates within an environment that is, in part, determined by its historical foundations. Previous strategies and former structural orientations of the sector continue to exact an influence upon the continuing operation of the sector and in the implementation of the Shaping our Future strategy. To simplify and add value to the process of reviewing former approaches, I will condense the following argument into a table whereby the strategy/policy/report will be described and it's impact upon the current VET sector generally and the Shaping our Future strategy specifically, will be determined. This table does greatly simplify a continual process of review and reform, and can, in no way, capture the subtly and detail of the process.

Table 1: The Influence of Former VET Approaches on Current Policy

Date	Policy/Strategy/ Report	Description	Significance for Current VET Approaches
1974	The Report of the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (Kangan Report)	The report "defined the roles and the mission of what is now known as the TAFE system" (ANTA 2004b). There was also a reorientation away from "trade and technical training" to more "preparatory and pre-vocational training."	The 1970s were considered to be the 'golden years' of Technical and Further Education in Australia. Much argument for the return to a more student centric approach and the need for lifelong learning is founded on the basis of good practice during this period. However, as Ryan (2001, p.143) argues, one cannot simply "revert back" to former policies, as "the challenge from technology and globalisation is sharper now." I concur with his suggestion that the 'valuable components of the former policies should be adapted to the present situation. This appears to have been achieved within the Shaping our Future strategy.
1986	The National Training and Reform Agenda	This agenda was one component of a system of micro-economic reform. It's aim was to provide "the immediate skills needs of the nation" and to "strengthen the links" between VET and a "modernised Australian economy" (Aeuckens 2000, p.4). Primarily this involved "improving the existing employment related, or industry training, particularly the apprenticeship and traineeship systems." It saw the "implementation of a national system of qualifications and competency based training" (P.9)	Changes within this agenda were limited. While stronger linkages were formed between the workplace, and the skills that needed to be developed, the underlying institutional framework was left significantly intact. The current Strategy sees a very well distributed system of training provision within schools, TAFEs, Universities, other private sector providers and within the workplace. However the issue of continual improvement and learning were not addressed.
1987	TAFE removed from the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission	TAFE was removed from the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and was placed in "a new economically oriented Ministry of Education, Employment and Training … providing economic rationalism to vocational education and training" (Ryan 2001, p.135)	This was a major change for the VET system. The "philosophy of lifelong education was totally eliminated and replaced by a managerialist agenda" on the basis of the old system being only "right for its times"
1990	The National training Board	The board was established to "provide advice and endorse industry based competency standards" (ANTA 1999)	The standardised recognition of study and the endorsement of basic skills knowledge and performance is a vital and ongoing component of current VET policy.
1991	Review into Young People's Participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training (Finn Report)	The Finn Review recommended that there needs to be greater participation of young people in formally recognised education and training . . . so that by the year 2001, 95 percent of 19 year olds should have completed Year 12, or an initial post school qualification, or be participating in formally recognised education or training (Wilson ND, p.180)	The involvement of younger people in VET is a continuing and growing area of the sector. In 2002 the 15-19 year age group formed the largest age group participating in VET with 26.6% of all participants (Keating 2004, p.110). This recognition has been supported through the subsequent implementation of VET programs within school.

Date	Policy/Strategy/Report	Description	Significance for Current VET Approaches
1992	Taskforce, Pathways in Education and Training Report (Deveson Report)	This reported addressed the issue of the provision of further education for students with special needs, and especially disadvantaged youth (Wilson ND, p.180) . Also included an expansion of training systems and the development of "a consolidated national system" (Training.com.au ND)	This focus has been carried across to the new Shaping our Future strategy with the clear provision of inclusive strategies for overcoming "barriers to learning", and has been extended to encompass all groups that may need assistance to benefit from educational opportunity.
1992	Mayer Committee Report on employment-related key competencies	This report "identified a range of seven key competencies which are considered essential for effective participation in the emerging work organization" (Wilson ND, p.181).	This report saw the identification of the needs of the client, extending the narrow view of employer based skills provision. "These key competencies would not only constitute an integral component of the Australian Vocational Certificate but are also essential for participation in further study and in general life" (Wilson ND, p.181).
1992	Carmichael Report on The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System	The Carmichael Report "provided a focus on young people and recommended alternative ways in which young people could enter the workforce via the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System. It acknowledged the current lack of access to a significant number of young people to vocational education and training, and proposed strategies for young people to gain access to quality vocational education and training. (Wilson ND, p.181)	This focus has been carried across to the new Shaping our Future strategy with the clear provision of inclusive strategies for overcoming "barriers to learning", and has been extended to encompass all groups that may need assistance to benefit from educational opportunity.
1994	Fitzgerald Report	This "led to some of the current elements of today's VET system, including: concepts of best practice and user choice, States and Territories taking responsibility for accreditation and standards endorsement, a stronger and more coherent industry-led structure." (ANTA 2004b)	As per previous column, this "led to some of the current elements of today's VET system, including: concepts of best practice and user choice, States and Territories taking responsibility for accreditation and standards endorsement, a stronger and more coherent industry-led structure." (ANTA 2004b)
1995	New Apprenticeships	The provision of apprentice positions within trades identified to be relevant to the economy, with structured training and financial support from the federal government.	New apprenticeships provide the ease of use and flexibility required by an ever changing workforce. The program actively engages industry leaders. This ongoing strategy is wholly consistent with the goals of the Shaping our Future strategy.
1997	The National Training Framework, including the Australian Quality Training framework and Training Packages	This framework "clearly defines the roles of industry, industry organisations, training providers and governments in the VET system."	The program also actively engages industry leaders and training providers. This ongoing strategy is wholly consistent with the goals of the Shaping our Future strategy. It helps facilitate the decentralised provision of training by third party providers whilst ensuring quality and consistency of approach, thereby enabling an holistic and national approach.

1994 saw the first of the predecessors to the current National Strategy. This was the First National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1994-1997: towards a skilled Australia, followed by Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003: a bridge to the future "with the objectives of equipping Australians for the world of work, enhancing mobility in the labour market, achieving equitable outcomes in VET, increasing investment in training, and maximising the value of public expenditure" (GU ND).

The recommendations of the Kangan Report saw the establishment of a System of Technical and Further Education, that from the perspective of goals, is essentially the same as that which is in place today. Micro-economic reform in the 1980's together with a business centric approach saw individual needs and issues of access and equity put on the back-burner, in the rush to equip the Australian workforce with the requisite technical skills. While the 1990s saw a return to a fairer organisational structure, it has only been with the implementation of Shaping our Future, that a fairer structure has been supplemented with truly inclusive goals. Concerns of over involvement, or too great an orientation to the needs of business appear to have been identified in the earlier National Strategies, but there have still been calls for improvement in recent years.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has tried to avoid a simplistic trawl through the variety of reports, strategies, policy documents and other programs related to the development of the current Vocational Education and training sector in Australia. The value here is gained in understanding the underlying motivations for the Shaping our Future strategy, which is in effect the blue print for VET in Australia for the next seven years. Within that report we saw how there has been a shift towards addressing the needs of the individual whilst concomitantly taking an holistic approach that meets the needs of groups of people by region, gender or ethnicity. We have also seen how economic change and resulting political action has created a society where continual and technical, work relevant training is necessary, to satisfy the requirements of a rapidly changing workforce.

This paper has revealed both significant change over the last 25 years with the 'professionalisation of the sector' and in part, a cyclical philosophical basis for the vocational education and training sector, in that there was initially a shift away from concepts and goals related to social responsibility, towards those of economic necessity, and individual responsibility and obligation.

As Ryan (2002, preface) puts it:

> [P]olicy in vocational education has, throughout almost two centuries, oscillated between two poles. At one, vocational education is seen largely as an instrumental adjunct to economic development and the primary concern of the sector is to meet the needs of industry rather than of students. In the second view, vocational education is seen as primarily student centred, with aspirations equivalent to those of liberal education, encompassing goals of individual self-development and the creation of a more equitable society.

However, within 'Shaping Our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-10' (ANTA 2004a), we have seen a return to concepts of social responsibility, discussed with the new nomenclature of equity and inclusivity. We have also seen a significant broadening of the scope of the VET strategy both in the holistic approach that is to be taken and in the far broader goals that it seeks to achieve.

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