Old Dogmas - New Tricks
Future Possibilities for Apprenticeship Training - qualifications design and pathways

A short reflective paper on the future of apprenticeship, with a special focus on implications for qualifications design and pathways.

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The Group Training Association of Victoria was commissioned by the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) to provide some ‘blue sky’ thinking on apprenticeship – the likely long term challenges to current practices, formats and arrangements, and possible directions able to be mounted in response to these challenges. This paper is presented in response to that remit and aims to raise issues and encourage discussion.

Group Training plays a critical role in relation to skills development across the state particularly for young people. Apprenticeship in the traditional trades is where the network has its origins, but it is also now a significant employer of trainees in industries and occupations that have only relatively recently developed contracted training arrangements.

GTA Vic has been operating since 1985 and is an umbrella organisation representing 23 Victorian member Group Training Companies (GTCs). The companies include industry based group training companies, regionally based metropolitan group training companies, and regionally based rural group training companies.

The core activity of the members of GTA Vic is the employment and vocational training of young people to the levels set out in the Australian Qualification Training Framework. GTCs employ apprentices and trainees (New Apprentices) and place them with host employers to complete their training contract and hence their trade qualification. The network of GTA Vic member companies collectively employ approximately 8,500 apprentices and trainees, some 13% of the state total, making them the largest employers of apprentices and trainees in Victoria.

GTA Vic member companies operate across the state with five companies employing more than 500 apprentices and trainees and the largest employing more than 1000 apprentices and trainees.

As a network we are constantly challenged by the changes that surround us and that affect the environment in which we operate. We are mindful that ‘changes may surprise us but they should not take us by surprise’ and while we are not in the business of predicting the future good practice determines that reflection and forward thinking are essential business tools.

What follows here is a combination of on going issues, speculation, curiosity and ‘imagineering’ grounded by the experience of GTA Vic and its member companies.

First in reflecting on the future of apprenticeship we are confident there is one! We base that belief primarily on two constants: one to do with the model of learning embedded in apprenticeship, and the other to do with applying that learning style to situations where intensive and prolonged skilling for entry to a new occupation is needed.

Over time apprenticeships have proven to be a very robust and resilient feature of the training and skill formation process in Australia (and universally). The system is arguably the best exponent of workplace learning and of utilising work as a learning environment. The style of learning embodied in the apprenticeship – namely, applied learning in a work context - supported through teaching, coaching and mentoring by expert and experienced people is not in question. Its strengths have sustained it through periods of great change in work and the organisation of work. Indeed these elements of learning are becoming stronger rather than weaker in education, training and employment parlance.

We don’t see a challenge to the integrity of the learning style but we do see challenges in its ever widening application and use for other areas of training, different occupations and cohorts of participants.

Since 1999 apprenticeship and traineeship have been included together under the term New Apprenticeship. In this paper there is an emphasis on challenges to the traditional apprenticeship model. Traineeships are an application of the apprenticeship training model to a broader range of occupations and as such have presented challenges to traditional notions of apprenticeship which will be touched on in this paper.
Long term challenges

Apprenticeship has been the vocational training model that has dominated the traditional trades industries in Australia for at least a century. Apprenticeship is something of an icon in employer and training terms; it connects to a long tradition which has in part been one of its on going attractions. Yet in recent times the model has come under scrutiny in a number of areas including structure, skill recognition process, capacity to innovate, responsiveness to changing skill needs and industry demands, and its relevance and appeal to young people in the 21st Century.

Paradoxically recent increases in apprenticeship numbers appear to indicate apprenticeship is more popular and populated than it has been for more than a decade. Is this just an artefact of the term apprenticeship being expanded to apply to a broader range of employment based training activities and participants? And do completion rates also pose problems?

The overriding challenge to apprenticeship is staying relevant in an ever changing employment and training landscape. It needs to be able to cope with who the learners are and the way work is organised. The apprenticeship system has to meet the needs of employers and industries that operate in significantly different ways as a result of new technologies, the way work is organised, and domestic and global pressures. The apprentice of today is generally no longer the 15 year old ‘boy with a bike’ who has left school early ‘to do a trade’. They are a much more sophisticated group of young adults with different expectations from their education, training and career goals. There are also growing numbers of people undertaking apprenticeship who are in age ranges for whom apprenticeship was never designed.

BLUE SKY THINKING

Apprenticeships for the future will be flexible; attractive; available to all; and in tune with change factors.
A little bit of history...

To put the challenges to apprenticeship into some perspective, it is worth looking at how the system of apprenticeship has evolved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then</th>
<th>Now - emerging issues and trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice indentured to a master to learn a craft parents paid for the apprentices’ tuition and ‘keep’</td>
<td>Apprentice enrolled in a skilled trade or occupation through a contract of training. Apprentice is paid to train and the employer is paid to train them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational - high status occupations bound up by a hierarchy of skill levels. A vocation, not just a job.</td>
<td>Struggles with the issues of occupational and social status – less attractive to young people. A job not a vocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All apprentices young and male.</td>
<td>New Apprenticeship embraces males, females and a broad range of ages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited to a number of vocations</td>
<td>Extended to a broad range of trades and other occupations through traineeships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice lived with the master learned craft, social values, and professional values. All the learning took place on the job. Work was the learning site for the theory and the practice.</td>
<td>Apprentices independent of their employer. Work is no longer the only learning site. Theory and practice have been fragmented/ separated; and take place off and on the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct ‘teaching force’ – with the master craftsman as the source of knowledge and authority.</td>
<td>Less distinct ‘teaching force’ with a range of ‘professionals’ including employers, supervisors and RTOs. Source of knowledge and authority diffused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic instruction process with the master as the teacher where learning occurs via observation, emulation, and practice over time. Quality of apprentices regulated by the masters.</td>
<td>Perceived as lacking an explicit theory of instruction and in need of more ‘formal’ approach to guaranteeing quality. Governments and education communities enter as regulators and arbiters of quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed with the master until the master determined the apprentice had achieved their craft – no set time period – set scene for lifelong learning.</td>
<td>Set time periods for apprenticeships. The concept of lifelong learning has diminished. Assessment of skill does not lie with the employer alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then</td>
<td>Now - emerging issues and trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice graduated to journeyman practiced craft in a variety of</td>
<td>Apprentice graduates to tradesperson, and is able to practise as soon as they have completed their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>settings and locations – worked on the creation of a masterpiece to</td>
<td>qualification and satisfied any licensing requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present to the master.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The master judged the masterpiece and decided if the journeyman</td>
<td>Achievement of the qualification regulated by industrial parties and educators. The authority of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could be admitted to the class of master.</td>
<td>the employer is no longer assumed and the employment and training relationship is externally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive practice designed to limit the number of Master Crafts-</td>
<td>Inclusive practice extended to a wide variety of occupations. Ever increasing numbers seen as a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men. The craft/trade responsible for the regulation of supply.</td>
<td>good thing. No guarantee of a job at the end of the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship seen as a social institution – tradesmen begat more</td>
<td>New Apprenticeship seen as an entry to employment and as a stepping stone to other roles not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradesmen! A job for life and the life of your children/sons.</td>
<td>necessarily linked to the initial trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters and apprentices accord primary importance to the development</td>
<td>Employers and apprentices accord primary importance to the development of trade knowledge and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of craft knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity based on handing down craft traditions and traditional</td>
<td>Integrating tradition and innovation in response to constantly changing workplaces/ resources/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills.</td>
<td>drivers e.g. environmental sustainability ‘green’ plumbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonably immune to reform from external groups.</td>
<td>Increasingly vulnerable to external pressures for reform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘canvas’ of apprenticeship essentially comprises four elements – the apprentice (learner); the master (teacher); a body of knowledge (content); the workplace/employment as the learning site (context). Potentially apprenticeship faces challenges to all four elements and it is against this background that we consider some of the likely long term challenges and responses.
The apprentice (learner)

- Gender and ethnic stereotyping have been major features (intended or unintended) of the take up of many apprenticeship opportunities. Simply put, most traditional trades apprentices are young, white males. Efforts to counteract this effect have only been marginally successful and stereotyping limits the potential pool of applicants both in number and diversity.

- Female participation has been increased through the introduction of traineeships but largely due to traditionally female areas being included in traineeships; and no real progress has been made in getting females (or ethnically diverse young people) into the traditional trades.

- Changing demographics and development of new occupations has increased the competition for a declining pool of youth applicants. The apparent declining interest in apprenticeship by young people has prompted Group Training to ask questions about the structure of the apprenticeship and the training and whether it is still appropriate for the changing youth demographic and their emerging values. And we are persuaded that there are ways to re-orient the apprenticeship to make it better reflect a balanced approach to developing employability skills and providing opportunities to enrich the personal and professional learning of apprentices and enhance their technical skill development.

- Changing cultural and social assumptions about, for example, how long young people are prepared to commit to training, or how long people are prepared (expected) to stay with one employer may mitigate against lengthy, set training models and rewards related to lifetime employment in an industry.

- There is evidence of an increasing need/trend toward the pursuit of higher skill levels within an apprenticeship eg technician, technologist, diploma and degree level qualifications. An examination of skills in demand lists show requirements for post trade qualifications. There is also evidence that the post trade categories can alleviate gaps within some professional ranks.

- Technological changes within industries have/will make apprenticeships more accessible to a broader range of participants. These people will have a range of existing skills and knowledge (developed at work and/or school) and may not require the same intensive and prolonged skilling for entry into a new occupation usually characterised by an apprenticeship. They may also already have the ‘soft skills’ emphasised by employers but not necessarily the opportunity to demonstrate them in a work place.

- Abolishing the age restriction on apprenticeship (1998) has led to a greater spread of age groups in apprenticeship. Over a third of apprentices are now 25 plus and this trend could continue even more strongly into the future with public policy interventions designed to increase work force participation by older people, with training and retraining of older workers. The apprenticeship system has been transformed from one that concentrated on young people to one catering for all age comers.

- Refocussing on different age cohorts may be an opportunity to broaden the skills base of the country and to tap into a new source of talent and not relying on youth alone to replace an ageing workforce.
BLUE SKY THINKING

Apprenticeship qualifications which are accessible and attractive to all groups regardless of age/gender/ethnicity.

Apprenticeship qualifications that recognise combined occupations or parts of occupations to suit the needs of employers and a more diverse range of employees.

The capacity would exist to ‘compose’ apprenticeships across a range of industry accepted trade units.

A range of pre-apprenticeship pathways into all forms of apprenticeship.

Flexibility over the time in which to achieve the qualification; experience and training with a number of employers while gaining the qualification; and occupational mobility as an outcome of skill development.

Shorter qualifications in an area of trade specialisation would exist that had the capacity to be added to other qualifications for full certification and/or licensing.

Mechanisms would be in place to enable apprentices to have experiences involving personal development and professional learning in a range of situations that can be recorded and where appropriate accredited within their qualification.

The creation of an Advanced Apprenticeship for older workers with shorter training programs based on the style of learning in apprenticeship that recognise existing work skills and concentrate on intensive skill development.

Where reengineering of industries is occurring complementary skills that can be adapted to new situations are recognised. The training for the new occupation would be acquired and accredited on the job without the same intensive and prolonged skilling for entry into a new occupation usually characterised by an apprenticeship.
The master (teacher)

- If apprenticeship encompasses higher level qualifications but retains the workplace as the primary learning site it may require differently ‘qualified’ apprentice supervisors in the workplace.
- With ageing instructors/employers/supervisors/teachers supply issues become a challenge and may require new models of training and accreditation to enable more people to operate in the apprenticeship system. For example training current and retiring professionals to be qualified mentors/coaches in their field.
- If, as is likely, increasing numbers of older workers will have to retrain and/or undertake post trade training in order to continue their participation in the workforce it is pertinent to ask is the existing model of apprenticeship the right framework for mature workers? Research shows that apprenticeships, as distinct from traineeships, remain predominantly the realm of young people. This may indicate that those aged 25 and over who are doing an apprenticeship may face particular difficulties training in a system that is historically oriented to the learning styles and workforce entry needs of young people.
- The relationship between the learner and teacher has changed. There has been a loss of ‘authority’ from the master/employer as the repository of all knowledge. Apprentices young and older are generally no longer passive learners and they come with skills, knowledge and expectations that require different approaches to skill and knowledge transfer.
- The importance placed on the workplace as the learning site by the employer and the apprentice will increasingly put pressure on the off the job training to be well integrated with the workplace activity; and for the trainers to be up to date with relevant industries and customer focussed.
- A more diverse ‘teaching force’ presents potential challenges to ensuring the quality of the training on and off the job.

BLUE SKY THINKING

A new qualification for apprentice supervisors in the workplace.

Training and accreditation mechanisms that enable the transition from full time ‘technician’ to mentor/coach.

Teachers/Trainers will undertake regular industry exchanges and will be credible instructors for older age apprentices.

Off the job trainers and on the job supervisors will work closely together to integrate the learning experiences of the apprentice.

Apprentices, supervisors and trainers will act as a community of practice – self regulating quality.

The quality of on and off the job training will be monitored and assessed with equal rigour.

The pace, rate and style of learning in apprenticeship will be tailored to the age, experience and existing knowledge and skills of the apprentice.
A body of knowledge (content)

- Changing perceptions, from apprenticeship being a ‘complete learning experience’ and an end in itself to re-establishing it as part of the learning progression. Historically apprenticeship was part of a ‘perfect learning loop’ – the master taught the apprentice, the apprentice became the journeyman, the journeyman continued learning and innovating to become a master, the master taught the apprentice and so on. Apprenticeship is not necessarily associated with lifelong learning today but it has great application in this context.

- What is the relationship between traditional apprenticeship and the many qualifications now available for consideration and creating pathways between competing qualifications? We have many examples of young people using their apprenticeship for progression to higher level skills including entry to higher education but these are still exceptions and as such easy transition models don’t yet exist.

- Apprenticeships have historically been narrowly focussed in one trade area and current qualifications have perpetuated that narrow focus. The challenge is to address multi skilling with experimentation in a broadly based apprenticeship that allows for the combination of a number of related trades; and provides explicit opportunities to recognise and enhance the development of generic skills.

- Recent calls for shorter training times for apprenticeships are challenging notions of the time it takes for an apprentice not only to achieve certain competencies but also the capacity to apply their knowledge competently and creatively. Shorter apprenticeships might also challenge the trust people have in the credentials of those qualified in this way and lead to a collapse in the qualification.

- The increased use of pre-apprenticeship across industries becomes a prerequisite for apprenticeship. There is a trend towards increasing pre-apprenticeship schemes as the entry/threshold qualification to more trades as a result the skill levels of those starting an apprenticeship may be higher. This may impact on the level and intensity of training in the first and second years of an apprenticeship.
BLUE SKY THINKING

Apprenticeship is synonymous with lifelong learning and learning for life.

Apprenticeship is integrated with and clearly articulated to other qualifications to make it a part of the whole rather than apart from the whole.

Apprenticeships will be designed with continuous learning pathways and logical progression to higher level certificates.

The capacity would exist to ‘compose’ apprenticeships from a range of industry areas and/or trade related occupations.

All apprenticeships will not result in the same level of qualification. The duration of apprenticeships will be flexible according to the level of qualification attained.

Formal pre-requisites such as pre apprenticeship will be required for some apprenticeships. All pre apprenticeship courses will provide time and training credits into full time apprenticeship.

The preparation of young people to reach the standard required for entry into apprenticeship will be a given for education providers.

There will be a mechanism for rolling enrolments into pre apprenticeship.
The workplace as the learning site (context)

- In times of skill and labour shortage there are potential impacts on the apprenticeship system from employers recruiting semi skilled/part trained apprentices into semi skilled work without continued training. The challenge is to leave the ‘door open’ for the completion of qualifications later and to legitimise the possibility of doing an apprenticeship over a longer period because of interruptions.

- There is a need for creative skills policy to drive skill development that takes a wider view of outcomes and doesn’t get hooked on to one feature such as completion of the qualification within a continuous timeframe and with one employer. The continued high levels of concern about non completion can lead to either punitive or incentive based responses to completion that are of limited value.

- The introduction of formal off the job training has extended the ‘context’ of learning beyond the work site. The distinctive feature of apprenticeship is workplace learning and using work as the learning environment. This feature is under pressure from the introduction and increase of formal institutional training as an element of the apprenticeship qualification. Young people can start their apprenticeship while still in institutional learning i.e. school; but older people may not require the same level of institutional training attached to an apprenticeship originally designed for workforce entry level participants.

- Apprenticeship has always been a method of skills transfer integrally connected to employment. The gradual shift in government for the responsibility and regulation of apprenticeship from the employment to the education portfolio challenges the basis of this employment and training relationship. The purpose of apprenticeship is pushed more towards being a mechanism for the delivery of training and away from the dual role of delivering training in employment. It remains to be seen if this may weaken the employer’s attachment to apprenticeship in the future.

- The proliferation of school to work pathways has seen young people combining work with study in many different ways apart from apprenticeship but with apprenticeship as a possible future pathway. Issues emerge where students construct and undertake programs composed of qualifications, which although credible in their own right, do not involve actual workplace learning and when taken together do not amount to a coherent, relevant pathway.

- Change is occurring at an enterprise level in how employers are innovating and subsequently training for their own purposes. This may lessen the need for regulated apprenticeship as the preferred way to acquire skills in the workplace and/or it may strengthen the concept of apprenticeship with employers focussing on training their own human resources in house. Monitoring these possibilities and the impact on apprenticeship and qualification design is a challenge.
BLUE SKY THINKING

Mechanisms exist to enable apprentices to ‘loop’ back in to training after ‘crisis’ periods in industry; and for their experience and learning to be credited towards the completion of a full qualification.

Apprenticeships are designed to enable participants flexible entry and re-entry over the period it takes them to achieve their qualification.

Institutional training is accepted by employers as a key part of the apprenticeship and the off the job and on the job training is fully integrated.

Clearly defined roles exist between apprenticeship as a process of school to work transition for young people and as a mechanism for skilling people for the workforce.

The combination of formal off the job training and workplace instruction is flexibly applied in relation to individual apprentices and their demonstrated knowledge and skills applicable to the occupation.

Employers identify the need for change in apprenticeship and are at the forefront of apprenticeship innovation.
Other Issues

- Many employers know and like the apprenticeship system as a mechanism for replenishing their stocks of skilled workers. It delivers what they want and there may be employer resistance to change in the apprenticeship system. The brand is strong within the traditional trades but the meaning of the brand has changed over the generations.

- Focussing on those situations where intensive and prolonged skilling for entry to a new occupation is needed is a characteristic of apprenticeship. We see some challenges that may erode this concept. One is the extension of apprenticeship (and/or the use of the term apprentice) to include areas of low skill or where intensive and prolonged skilling is not needed. A second is the demise of the standard workplace as a site for that learning; and the third is technological change leading to a loss of occupations in traditional areas.

- The question of ‘death by association’? The move to New Apprenticeship and the combining of apprenticeship and traineeship under the one nomenclature has affected perceptions of meaning, quality and value. The relationship of traditional trade apprenticeship to the performance of traineeships may lead to a need to disconnect the two for the benefit of both.

BLUE SKY THINKING

*The mechanism of apprenticeship remains but it is separately named to reflect the diversity of the individuals and the design of the activities that may be undertaken.*

*The application of the term apprenticeship to similar but different training activities is resisted and apprenticeship continues to be identified with skill rich areas and the need for prolonged skilling.*

*Apprenticeship and traineeship are identified as distinct activities and traineeship evolves a separate tradition of training in a discrete set of industries.*

The ideas and issues in this paper are not an end in themselves. They are provided as a fingerpost to the further generative thinking, research and policy development that the VQA may wish to undertake, in its mission to provide qualifications options which help all Victorians to achieve their career and personal ambitions.