

# YNOT Submission to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training on Training Product Reform

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ynot is the peak body representing the voice of Tasmanian youth

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3-4
The Case for Change.....	4-6
Qualification Design.....	6
Technical Skills.....	6-7
Broadening the Vocational Outcomes.....	7-8
Structure of Core and Elective Units.....	8-9
Training Packages.....	9
Increasing the use of Common Units of Competency.....	9
Skill Sets.....	9
Accredited Courses.....	10
Conclusion.....	10
References.....	11

### About YNOT

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for the non Government youth sector and young people in Tasmania. Integral to the work of YNOT is the youth participatory and consultative structure, the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) which represents the needs and interests of young people aged 12-25 years.

### Our Vision

A Tasmanian where young people are actively engaged in community life and have access to the resources needed to develop their potential.

## Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training on Training Product Reform.

YNOT is the peak body for the broader youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT represents the interests of its members as well as the interests of young people aged 12 to 25 years of age. Integral to the work of YNOT is the youth participation structure, the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF). TYF is Tasmania's peak youth consultative and participatory body.

A key role of YNOT is to advocate for all young Tasmanians to be included in all aspects of society, which gives them opportunities and ability to participate in their communities. This includes ensuring young people have access to relevant study and training opportunities that will provide them with the skills, knowledge and attributes to effectively participate in the workforce. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is one important pathway to employment for many young people.

While not the focus of this submission, YNOT acknowledges that young people can face barriers to accessing VET including financial, literacy and numeracy skills and geographical location. Resources are also another important consideration to be made when encouraging the completion of courses as some cohorts of young people, such as those experiencing homelessness or significant mental health issues, face additional barriers.

VET is predominantly an adult-orientated training system so ensuring there are supports in place, from contemplation to completion of VET, is important to assist young people to enter appropriate training pathways and on to employment (Doomers, et. al. 2017).

In regards to the youth sector, YNOT advocates on behalf of members to ensure they are supported in their roles. Workers often support vulnerable young people and it is important they have opportunities to develop skills and seek further training to support them in their work.

YNOT has previously provided input to the delivery of Youth Work qualifications in the Community Services Training packages. This has included working with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in Tasmania to ensure training is relevant to the youth sector industry by providing feedback on unit content, qualification structure, competency assessment and work placements, as well as the provision of resources to students studying.

YNOT's submission will focus on responding to proposals for Training Product Reforms that support young people pursuing VET training and those aspiring to, or currently working in, the youth sector.

## The Case for Change

YNOT agrees there is a strong case to review the way training products are currently delivered to ensure training products are meeting the current and future needs of students and industries.

The workforce is changing which requires workers to have skills, knowledge and abilities that can transcend across different jobs. While these skills may be identified as future workforce needs, trends such as globalisation, workforce casualisation and technological advancements have been happening for a number of years and have already impacted the skills required of workers from employers (Davies, Fidler and Gorbis, 2011). This includes team work, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving skills, which are not specific to an occupation but can be transferred across different jobs and industries (FYA 2017b).

While these changes impact on all ages in the workforce, young people who have little or no work experience are more likely to have precarious employment and experience difficulty in gaining secure employment (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2017). This makes it particularly important for young

people to be equipped with transferrable skills that can assist them to be more adaptable and resilient in the workforce.

Young people recognise the workforce is changing and that their education and training needs to prepare them for this. Young people understand education and training is important but also recognise the significance of having work experience to develop practical skills. Young people are keen to understand what employers need from them and to show employers what they can deliver, but often need support to identify pathways, options and interpret what this means for them (TYF 2014).

The paper *Training Product Reform: What is the case for change?* provides a good overview of why these changes and trends could make current training products limited in preparing workers and industry.

There is an opportunity for training products to prepare workers for future workforce demands and skill requirements. Having a VET system that provides portability of skills across occupations or how skills developed for one job may overlap to another can help individuals (FYA 2017a). Some VET training products are already being utilised in this way. For example, a recent review of Years 9 to 12 in Tasmania found “students may be undertaking VET units and qualifications as a general preparation for entry into the world of work rather than as preparation for entry into a particular industry” (ACER 2016). This included building confidence and aspirations of young people, particularly for those who may otherwise disengage.

However, YNOT agrees this is not consistent and there has been a gap in the ability of technical units to deliver foundation skills. YNOT supports the review of training products to ensure there is a balance between the needs and outcomes for students. It is important students are able to gain both technical and core skills through their training as both are vital in the workplace.

YNOT also argues that in order to support Training Product Reform, there needs to be clear communication to students, particularly young people, about the opportunities available to them. By presenting information to young people about how skills can be relevant to clusters of different work, they can get a better understanding of different occupations, how they can move between them, what additional skills may open up other opportunities and manage changes in employers and jobs (FYA 2017a). For example, the terms ‘training packages’ and ‘training products’ are not youth friendly terms and may be difficult for students to understand. While they may be recognised by the VET sector and industries, it is important students can understand the terminology used in relation to their education and training so they are able to communicate their skills to future employers. Knowledge among some cohorts of young people about VET pathways is already quite low and this can mean they do not pursue or access the VET system (Doomers, et. al. 2017). Communication about changes and qualification outcomes will be important to supporting any changes as a result of the Training Package Reforms.

In summary, YNOT supports a move towards ensuring there is a balance between training products delivering outcomes for students and industries when the workforce is changing and requiring stakeholders to become more adaptive.

## Qualification Design

YNOT believes qualifications should prepare students with the skills and experience they need to enter the workforce. YNOT agrees that foundational and future work skills should form part of qualifications, especially as future work skills will become foundation skills for many jobs in the future.

Future skills and foundation skills should form part of all qualifications however, there needs to be flexibility to accommodate the needs of different learning cohorts. YNOT agrees with the discussion paper that someone who is assessed as competent at the relevant level in future work or foundation skills would not be required to take units however, there needs to be processes in place to ensure

this assessment could happen effectively so it does not miss students who may benefit greatly from undertaking these units.

YNOT argues there should be ample opportunities to accommodate different learner cohorts. Young people may need extra support to complete VET training (Youth Action, Uniting, Mission Australia 2018) and this needs to be taken into consideration. It is therefore essential different learner cohorts can be accommodated in qualification delivery to ensure outcomes can be met.

While there are opportunities for current units of competency to support learning and assessment of future work and foundation skills, YNOT argues it would not be consistent across qualifications. It may also be difficult to provide focus on skill development for student on these skills, particularly if significant improvement is required.

The benefit of having future work and foundation skills as separate units is that it puts a specific focus on the need to think about these skills. However, moving forward, future work skills will become the current work skills and be seen as foundational for many jobs. Employability skills may be more relevant in the future when the two areas more closely align.

It is important VET teaching staff have the knowledge and ability to teach foundation skills and future work skills. When looking at the education system, only 1 in 10 teachers had recently participated in professional development training focused on supporting students to develop transferable skills for future work (FYA 2017b). It is unclear if this would translate to the VET sector but it highlights the importance of making these professional development training opportunities available so teachers are supported to teach future work skills. This is echoed by young people who want their teachers to have relevant experience and knowledge so they can communicate how content will relate to the workplace and the pathways that may be available after their education and training (TYF 2015).

## Technical Skills

YNOT believes having technical units include more content on underpinning knowledge and theories may be useful for students so they can more easily transfer skills. Within the youth sector, it is important workers have the ability to apply their skills and knowledge across a number of different, challenging and complex situations. YNOT developed the Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania in consultation with sector workers, training providers and academics to be used as a resource for workers in the youth sector to guide their work by identifying key principles (YNOT 2012). It is important workers can understand these principles as how they work in practice may look different depending on the role a worker has.

It is also important workers who are working with young people, particularly those who are vulnerable and have complex needs, have the ability to apply theoretical knowledge and technical skills in their work. Ensuring there is a robust assessment process in place is important, and an independent assessor may form part of this. However, it is also important to ensure there are supports available for students to ensure they have the best possibility of completing assessments.

## Broadening the vocational outcomes

YNOT argues there needs to be a balance between targeted and broader outcomes as both have benefits from students and employers.

### *Youth Sector*

Many workers, despite their engagement with young people, do not identify as 'youth workers' but do view themselves as working within a broader 'youth sector' (YNOT 2012). For example, workers may have qualifications in social work, community services or mental health but find themselves in a role where they are working with young people as the primary client. Qualifications that are not youth

work specific can provide workers with many relevant skills that enable them to work effectively through as there is over lap, such as social work and youth work.

While there are many skills gained through other qualifications, youth work specific training and qualifications are important to support students and workers to develop specific knowledge and skills related to working with young people. An example of how youth work differs from working with older clients is the legalities and legal considerations with working with people under the age of 18. While YNOT recognises Youth Work qualifications can also deliver broad outcomes in terms of roles available within the youth sector, they ensure key aspects with working with young people can be covered.

Feedback from the youth sector in Tasmania is that there is a demand for youth-specific training both in formal and informal training. Currently there are limited options to study Youth Work, particularly in a face-to-face delivery model with only a Certificate IV level offered in this way, and very limited opportunities to up skill. Targeted outcomes for training is important because it enables workers to develop skills that can be unique in working with young people.

YNOT argues the Skill Set model can be an effective way for workers to up skill or begin retraining without significant time or money investment. For example, trauma-informed practice has been seen as essential for working with many vulnerable cohorts and is something that could be delivered as a skill set.

YNOT argues workers, particularly in the youth sector, need to have skills that can transfer across different roles but also require specific knowledge about working with young people. Therefore, there is a benefit for having broader and targeted outcomes for qualifications.

### *Young People*

Qualifications that have a broader set of outcomes that focus on providing students with transferrable skills will enable them to better navigate a changing workforce, particularly for young people (refer to section *A Case for Change*).

YNOT argues moving to qualifications that have broader outcomes means additional effort will be required to communicate the benefits and options for potential pathways. Information about transition to further training, education and employment have traditionally been presented to young people in a linear way that mirrors traditional approaches to training and education where students would get a qualification to pursue a particular occupation or work in an industry.

Awareness of VET pathways is already low among some cohorts of young people (doomers, et. al. 2017) and there are concerns in Tasmania from across industries, schools and community about students learning about pathways after Year 12 through an online resource (ACER 2016). This has also been raised by young people across Tasmania who want to hear from training and education providers, and employers, about the opportunities available to them and where different pathways may take them (TYF 2015).

Having qualifications that provide students with a broader set of skills and therefore employment outcomes will assist them to become more resilient and adaptable in the workplace but requires an important shift in the way information is presented to young people.

### **Structure of core and elective units**

YNOT argues the number of core units and elective units required to create the structure of a qualification does not need to be consistent across all qualifications. However, lower level qualifications, such as a Certificate I or II level should have a focus on core units and less on elective units.

For example, currently, a Certificate II in Community Services requires students to study five core units and select four elective units from 17 available through the training package. While this provides the opportunity for students to select areas they may need additional training in, it does not guarantee this outcome. YNOT argues Certificate I and II should provide students with a good coverage of foundation, technical and future work skills and therefore focus on core units. Similarly, YNOT does not believe there needs to be a set number of units for technical, foundation and future work skills in each qualification as the focus should be on the outcomes gained by students. Having a specific number does not guarantee this but ensuring all three areas are covered is important.

If the current flexibility in selecting from a number of elective units, it may be useful to employers to understand how narrow or broad the elective units undertaken are. For example, in the Certificate IV in Youth Work qualification in the Community Services Training Package, there are narrow and broader electives. *Support the rights and safety of children and young people* is an elective unit but is arguably a consistent unit needed when working with young people. In comparison, *Visit client residence* is an elective unit that would be more specific to those workers who are working in roles where visitation to young people's residences is required (*Visit in client residence* is also part of other training packages for qualifications such as Certificate IV in Massage Therapy and Diploma of Nursing). Having an additional way to group electives based on narrow or broad outcomes may be useful to assist employers and students understand the content of a qualification.

YNOT does not believe it is necessary to include a minimum number of units from other training packages as it is more important any units available relate to the qualification and will provide students with relevant skills.

### Training packages

Training packages provide a good overview of the qualifications, skill sets and units that may be relevant to workers in an industry; however, the way the information is presented can be difficult for students and potential students to navigate.

YNOT believes *Training Packages are still structured in a way that reinforces* linear employment pathways and does not easily communicate training needs for foundation skills and future work skills. A framework that groups units and *qualifications based on the skills they* deliver could be a way to support students and employers to understand the transferrable skills gained from a qualification. The Foundation for Young Australians has developed '7 job clusters' as a way to communicate how a set of skills can lead to different job opportunities (FYA 2017c), which is a good example of how a similar framework could be applied to the VET sector. For example, for each 'job cluster' they outline technical skills and future work skills often required in the area and jobs across different industries that link to the job cluster. This approach could also enable opportunities where students could undertake relevant units from other training packages.

### Increasing the use of common units of competency

YNOT agrees there can be a benefit in using common units to increasing transferability among qualifications, particularly for foundation skills and future work skills.

### Skill Sets

YNOT argues Skill Sets can be a valuable opportunity for workers to refresh their skills and knowledge or up skill in specific areas. The benefits of delivering training through skill sets include; lower cost to students and/or workplaces, less time required to complete compared to a qualification, and targeted to needs of an industry within a geographical area.

YNOT has previously worked with an RTO to identify youth work Skill Set units to be delivered as part of subsidised training. There are limited, low-cost opportunities for youth work related training so

these opportunities were well received. YNOT consistently receives feedback from the youth sector about the demand for more opportunities, such as skill sets, for workers to undertake professional development.

YNOT supports making the availability of Skill Sets to those who already have a qualification or can demonstrate capabilities to undertake the training due to Skill Sets being delivered in a short time frame. For example, a student currently studying a qualification who could demonstrate core skills may benefit from undertaking Skill Sets simultaneously as additional training opportunities.

### Accredited Courses

YNOT does not use accredited courses and they are not widely used within the youth sector. This is because the Community Services training package are primarily used and promoted.

However, YNOT acknowledges accredited courses may be beneficial to other industries and sectors. According to the discussion paper, 'accredited courses are designed to facilitate flexibility and responsiveness within the national training system and address niche or emerging skills needs'. Given the workforce is changing and is requiring workers to be more flexible and adaptable to workforce needs, it is important the ability of training to adapt to needs both in training packages and accredited courses.

YNOT agrees that it is important to ensure accredited courses are not too broad and focus on outcomes currently not delivered by an existing training package and there may be more opportunities to ensure these align. Clearer information about accredited courses could be made available to communicate to potential students, particularly if they will have a narrow focus on specific outcomes.

### Conclusion

YNOT believes the proposal for training product reform to focus on technical, foundation and future work skills will work towards providing students with transferable skills that a changing workforce is requiring. There needs to be a balance in how qualifications are structured to ensure there is coverage across these three areas and the ability to deliver both broader and targeted outcomes. YNOT argues it will be important to communicate how units and qualifications with broader outcomes will lead to different pathways as young people, in particular, want to ensure their study and training is relevant to opportunities in the workforce.



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