

REVIEW OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GROUP TRAINING PROGRAM

The Western Australian Group Training Program (WAGTP) was launched in July 2015 to provide continued support to group training organisations (GTOs) after the Commonwealth Government withdrew its funding to the previous Joint Group Training Program.

The Western Australian Government provides around \$2.95 million funding annually to the WAGTP.

The Department of Training and Workforce Development (the Department) conducted a review of the WAGTP in August to November 2021. A range of stakeholders, including GTOs, host employers, TAFE colleges, registered training organisations (RTOs), industry bodies, unions and support service providers, were consulted as part of this review.

Ten consultation sessions were held between September and November 2021, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to attend meetings face-to-face or online. Stakeholders also had the opportunity to provide written feedback, although the Department received no submissions.

A preliminary report of the WAGTP review's key findings and recommendations was provided to stakeholders for feedback in June 2022. Following this, the Department held further targeted consultations with GTOs and the Apprentice Employment Network WA in August 2022.

Overall, there was unanimous support for the WAGTP to continue and all stakeholders recognised the valuable contribution the program was making by supporting apprentices and trainees from the priority groups.

The key issues discussed in the consultation sessions, findings and recommendations from the review are provided below.

1. Priority groups

Overall, stakeholders agreed that the existing priority groups should remain. Some stakeholders suggested additional target groups such as mature age apprentices, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds, occupations subject to skills shortages and refugees and humanitarian visa holders. There was, however, no support for including additional priority groups, or replacing any of the existing priority groups with new ones, without a corresponding increase in the budget.

A new Job Reconnect program has been implemented since early 2023 to support mature age job seekers and ex-offenders in gaining employment. GTOs are contracted to deliver this program.

Recommendation 1a:

The Department retains the existing priority groups under the WAGTP, and considers the addition of refugees and humanitarian entrants as a new priority group.

Recommendation 1b:

The Department to explore options to address skilling needs of mature age workers.

2. Awareness of the WAGTP

The review notes that not all stakeholders were aware of the WAGTP or that an apprentice or trainee received support from their GTO as part of the WAGTP funding.

Recommendation 2:

The Department develops strategies to raise awareness about the WAGTP with a wide range of stakeholders.

3. Funding

Most of the stakeholders consulted during this review expressed a desire for additional funding for the WAGTP. The review notes that although the WAGTP has a fixed allocation of around \$2.95 million per year, the Department has been making additional funding available on a case-by-case basis, subject to demand and achievement of milestones by GTOs.

Indexation allocated by WA Treasury to the Department can be passed on to the WAGTP for current and out years.

Recommendation 3:

The Department maintains the WAGTP budget plus indexation as allocated by WA Treasury and continues the current practice of assessing additional funding requests on a case-by-case basis.

4. Program objectives

Some stakeholders have suggested focussing the acceptable outcome exclusively to completion of apprenticeships or traineeships whereas others felt strongly about recognising the employment outcome as an acceptable alternative to completions.

Recommendation 4a:

The Department updates the objectives of the WAGTP to reflect the program's intent of achieving apprenticeship and traineeship commencements, completions and/or employment outcomes in priority groups, noting the key focus is to provide support.

Recommendation 4b:

The Department progresses an evaluation of the effectiveness of the WAGTP.

5. Payment structures

Currently 50% of the final payment is claimable for completions of an apprenticeship or traineeship. The other 50% is claimable if an 'other outcome' is attained, which is when the individual has found employment or completed a course through institutional training.

The review found that the 'other outcome' payment category was not delivering the intended benefit, as most GTOs were essentially claiming only the 50% completion payment. The approach to rewarding outcomes at the six-month post program point was ineffective and costly to administer for the GTOs and the Department.

The review also noted the need to recognise GTO effort in supporting an apprentice or trainee throughout their training contract to completion, as well as securing employment, if completing an apprenticeship or traineeship is not possible. It is therefore recommended

that all of the 'other outcome' payment amount be rolled back into the completion payment, representing a 100% increase to the completion payment. For example, a current completion payment of \$600 will increase to \$1,200, accessible by either completing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or gaining employment.

Recommendation 5:

The Department consolidates the 'completion' and 'other outcome' payment categories into a 'completion/employment outcome' category within the current funding envelope.

6. Requirements related to Aboriginal and Aboriginal student at risk (ASR) groups

The review recognised that the requirements in relation to evidence of employing an Aboriginal mentor could be more flexible, while achieving the intended outcome of providing culturally appropriate mentoring.

The review also recognised the considerable effort GTOs made in order to provide support to ASRs, and recommends the \$1,000 payment be made commensurate with when the 'at risk' status is identified, instead of the training contract milestones.

Recommendation 6a:

The Department provides more flexibility in relation to the Aboriginal mentor requirement.

Recommendation 6b:

The Department considers paying GTOs up to \$1,000 commensurate with when an Aboriginal student is identified as 'at risk'.

7. Administration of the WAGTP

Stakeholders provided positive feedback on how the WAGTP was being administered.

Stakeholders raised that the *PowerBI* login required authentication each time and that they would prefer the system to recognise their existing security credentials.

Recommendation 7

The Department considers the most appropriate business process to manage WAGTP claims and payment disbursements.