NATIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES FOR THE WATER INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Access to training and assessment for water industry operations personnel continues to be problematic. With the introduction of national training packages, minimum industry performance standards have been developed. However, it remains difficult for industry to progress its personnel to desired levels of performance, in the absence of suitable training and assessment.

While there are approximately 20 or so, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who have included the water training package on their scope of registration, many of them have not developed, or do not have access to resource materials which support delivery and assessment. And generally, the organisations that have resource materials have in most instances specialized, for example, the delivery of training and assessment for the treatment stream only.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The introduction of training packages was for the water industry, as it was for many other industries, an occasion where for the first time, prescribed industry performance standards existed.

These standards were embraced by enterprise and quickly became a benchmark for operator performance.

The major frustration for industry is that few RTOs have added the water training package to their scope and, of those that have, few have the capacity and capability to deliver in all operational areas. Additionally, there are many RTOs who have added the water package to their scope, who have no supporting learning or assessment resource materials.

Recognising this deficiency, Government Skills Australia (one of 11 national Industry Skills Councils), being the organisation responsible for the development, maintenance and review of the national water training package, submitted a proposal to the National Water Commission, recommending funding be provided to support the development of a set of national resource materials, aligned to Certificate levels II, III and IV of the water training package.

In 2007, the National Water Commission approved funding for this project, under its "Raising National Water Standards" suite of projects.

In November 2007, the "National Learning Resources Project", funded by the National Water Commission and managed by Government Skills Australia, commenced.

A Steering Committee was established, essentially to provide strategic direction and governance. Steering Committee membership was drawn from the Water Industry Advisory Committee.

One of the earliest decisions was – what resource materials will be developed?

Given that the resource materials to be developed needed to support; remote learning, instructor led learning and provide assessment support it became clear that a comprehensive set of resources was required.

Consequently, it was decided that:
1. A suitably comprehensive Learner Resource be developed, that addresses underpinning knowledge and skill requirements, as well as, performance criteria and range statement specifications.
   - This is for use by the learner as either a distance based / self paced resource, or to support face to face delivery.

2. A set of PowerPoint presentations be developed to support RTOs and trainers in the delivery of training.

3. A Session Guide be developed which provides a basic outline as to how the training can be delivered.

4. An Assessment Guideline be developed which gives guidance to RTOs, Assessors, Instructors, Trainers and Trainees.

Initially, we received from enterprise, a lot of existing materials, which were aligned to Certificate II Units of Competence. These materials provided Certificate II Technical Writers with an advanced starting point. The generosity of these donating organisations is greatly appreciated.

Unfortunately, there are few existing materials available for Certificate III and IV; this will necessitate Technical Writers taking on a greater research role to populate the various resources with appropriate content.

When developing resource materials, Technical Writers have been instructed to ensure materials are sufficiently generic, therefore avoiding specific state \ enterprise approaches, technology or work practices.

The project is due for completion by 31 October 2009. At present development of Certificate II resource materials is drawing to a close.

This has involved developing resources for 56 Units of Competence from the water training package. It is planned for a May release of Certificate II resource materials to industry.

Resource materials for Certificate III are currently being developed; these materials are due for completion by August 31, 2009. In total, resources will be developed for a total of 55 Certificate III Units of Competence.

Being developed concurrent with Certificate III resources, are resource materials aligned to Certificate IV of the water training package. Taking into account an additional 14 Units of Competence developed as part of training package Continuous Improvement process; resources will be developed for a total of 33 Certificate IV Units of Competence.

The resource material development process is summarised below:

- Technical Writers develop and submit 1st draft of resource materials;
- Resource materials are reviewed by Technical Review Panel members, comprising industry volunteers – subject matter experts, training practitioners, supervisors, managers, etc.;
- Feedback from Technical Review Panel is evaluated by Technical Writer and modifications to materials made, as required;
- Resource materials are subjected to Quality Assurance process to confirm; Underpinning Knowledge and Skill requirements have been addressed, Performance Criteria has been addressed and, Range Statement needs are incorporated;
- Feedback from Quality Assurance process to be addressed by Technical Writer and necessary changes made;
- Resource materials now undergo editing and proofreading to correct any grammatical and punctuation errors, as well as, to ensure readability and use of appropriate language within resource materials;
- The last step in the process is for materials to pass through the desktop publishing and post production steps, where materials are processed into final presentation format.

2.0 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that industry – enterprise and RTO's alike, are eagerly awaiting the release of resource materials developed in this project. This has been evidenced by the continual requests being received for access to materials developed.

These materials will provide the water industry with a complete suite of resource materials aligned to Certificate II, III and IV of the water training package.

Only 2 years ago this outcome would have been impossible to envisage, as industry struggled to access training and assessment and RTOs also struggled to develop resources for all needs at Certificate II, III and IV.

It should be noted, in fairness to all, that in simple numbers terms the water industry doesn't employ huge numbers of people, and that in many instances, while there is always a concentration of personnel in major urban areas, many water industry employees are located in regional, rural and remote locations.

Not only does this create issues such as commercial viability for RTOs but, also a range of delivery and release issues for RTOs and employers.

It is expected that the availability of resource materials to enterprise and Registered Training Organisations, the single largest obstacle in providing training and assessment aligned to the water training package, will soon be removed.

Of course, these resource materials will need to be updated and possibly new ones developed as new units of competence emerge from future continuous improvement of the water training package. It is intended that sale of the resources to Registered Training Organisations and industry will fund this future work.