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A number of members — especially in Western Australia — have concerns about targets for training and development effort in enterprises, now that the Training Guarantee Scheme (TGS) has been suspended for 1994/5 and 1995/6. What is an appropriate measure to indicate a genuine commitment to staff development, they ask?

The TGS began in July 1990 after publication of a federal government report, *Industry Training: the Need for Change.* The Scheme aimed to increase the overall level of investment in training, to improve the quality of training through planned programs and to encourage a more equitable distribution of training effort across industry. Implicit in the Scheme's development was the recognition that many organisations dedicating significant resources to training, were having staff 'poached' by others which were not. Under TGS, all employers were required to invest at least a set minimum proportion of salary on training for their staff. For all but the smallest enterprises, 1.5 per cent of payroll was the target for the Scheme's last year of operation.

While the TGS levy forced all employers to contribute at least something, it was a less than satisfactory yardstick for determining real training need in an era of rapid organisational and technological change. Its emphasis on dollars spent, in particular, discouraged proper analysis and often resulted in a focus on demonstrating spending rather than developing real training. The typical example is of costly trips to senior staff conferences accounting for almost all the levy requirement, with virtually no effect on organisational skill levels or performance.

Perhaps a more useful reference point is the regular survey of Australian private and public sector enterprises by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The most recent found that employers were spending an average 2.9 per cent of payroll (or 5.6 employee hours per year), up 30 per cent from an earlier survey. Total training expenditure by Australian employers was assessed at $1.1 billion. But only 25 per cent of employers reported spending anything on training during the survey period. This indicates clearly that the problem of a minority carrying a disproportionate share of the training load remains. Significant gender discrepancies were also revealed in the survey. Organisations with more than 75 per cent male employees spent $235 per employee on training in the survey period; those with 75 per cent female employees spent only $105. Similarly, organisations with less than 50 per cent casual staff provided 6.2 hours per employee in training time, while those with more than 50 per cent casuals allocated only 1.9 hours. The public sector spent an average $263 per employee while the private sector spent $163. The public sector spent more than the private sector on training in all states except Western Australia and Northern Territory.

From all of this, it is apparent that useful measurement of training effort is no easy task. For members who fear they may not get access to training, even where their organisations are purportedly committed to it, organisational targets based on dollars spent are probably not much help. For them, an enterprise commitment to training based on an average number of employee hours per year is likely to prove preferable and more effective. In terms of how much training should reasonably be available, this might vary markedly between organisations. However, survey material quoted above suggests that the 25 per cent of enterprises which are actually training extensively are allocating between 3 and 4 training days per year per employee. This is a useful departure point in adopting meaningful performance indicators.

More generally, the disparity in training effort among Australian employers emphasises again the importance for employees of a wide agenda for negotiation of workplace change and enterprise agreements. All the pronouncements on workplace reform in library and information services emphasise the need for upgrading of skills, development of new work practices and service systems and continuing introduction of new technology. None of this can be effectively achieved without extensive commitment to training of staff. It follows then that adoption of firm indicators to demonstrate organisational commitment of funds for training is a vital and legitimate topic for employees in enterprise bargaining. As such, a training and development policy with firm targets should be sought by members for inclusion in enterprise agreements.