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Introduction

In January 2015, the ACT State Government launched AVETARS, an integrated, modern, collaborative software platform to manage the Vocational Educational & Training (VET) program in the state. The single application replaced six legacy systems and eradicated the need for multiple spreadsheets, combining all of the VET functions of the Directorate in one place.

The system was developed by JobReady, a VET specialist software company based in Sydney, with 17 years' experience in developing systems for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and other VET companies, including Australian Apprenticeships Support Network (AASN) providers.

The mission of the introduction of AVETARS was clear – to provide a streamlined and digital platform to manage and administer VET and introduce a highly efficient and paperless management process to reduce “red tape” for the stakeholders and the Directorate in the ACT.

Below we outline the 8 key areas of improvement and cost savings introduced following the launch of AVETARS in 2015, with the associated benefits including reduced manual processing, time saving and increased quality, accuracy and visibility.

1. Contract Auto-Approvals & Set Funding

- a) **Auto-Approvals** - For apprenticeship contracts downloaded from the TYIMS system, AVETARS introduced a highly flexible auto-approval system whereby the vast majority of contracts are auto-approved by AVETARS. Other contracts are “Returned” to TYIMS or flagged for “Follow-up” by ETD if they “trip” certain business rules. The business rules are developed in a configuration panel which allows easy change of the rules if required by ETD for greater flexibility in the future.
- b) **Set Funding** – At the point of contract or training approval, the funding for the individual is set by AVETARS and this process is 100% automated without any requirement for manual intervention. Again, the funding business rules are developed in a configuration panel which allows easy change of the rules if required by ETD for ongoing flexibility.

Benefit: Overall headcount was reduced from 2 to 1 in the Contracts section. Also, AVETARS has delivered far higher accuracy in the application of approvals and funding and a far greater degree of flexibility in the ability to change business rules into the future.

2. AVETMISS Data

Previously AVETMISS files were emailed to ETD by the RTOs and manually validated, with no audit trail which was time consuming and arduous. With the launch of AVETARS, the ACT introduced an AVETMISS compliant platform that allows RTOs to upload AVETMISS files via a self-service portal for both the claiming of funding and national reporting requirements.

The AVETMISS validation report provided by AVETARS is 100% automated with no manual entry, based on the flexible business rule configuration area. The RTO is provided with a very clear report on data "warnings" and "fatal errors" which they can rectify and later re-upload a new file. An audit trail of every upload is provided for troubleshooting and historical purposes. ETD can also now report on common validation failures and types of errors, to support RTOs with improved data quality metrics into the future.

Lastly, national reporting quarterly to the NCVET has become a very simple process as AVETARS amalgamates validated AVETMISS data into a single file, a process that would take previously many days every quarter. Additionally to this, the regular Apprentice & Trainee data collection reporting is also produced in full via a single extraction from AVETARS.



Benefit: AVETMISS data management is highly efficient and streamlined and there have been considerable savings in reduction of manual handling of files and higher degrees of accuracy.

Over time, it will be fast and effective to modify AVETMISS formats and validation rules.

3. Payments

In AVETARS, where possible, payments are made automatically via RTO self-service and AVETMISS file upload via payment triggers. In the last month, over 92% of payments were made automatically, the other 8% required an ETD check where a "follow up" had been triggered.

This has meant that the staffing has been reduced in the payments team, there are considerably less payment errors and the remaining staff have the time to investigate the most "high risk" and questionable claims.

Furthermore, the underlying payments model is highly configurable so as business requirements change, ETD can rapidly deploy revised payment business rules.

Benefit: The payments team has been reduced by 25% in terms of headcount, accuracy has been improved dramatically and there will be low effort and cost in revising payment rules in the future.

4. Variations / Snapshots

ETD developed the ambitious goal for AVETARS to make the process of contract and other variations 100% digital, predominantly managed by stakeholder self-service. Across 22 types of variation, the

variation can be initiated by specified stakeholders, data captured on the self-service area, approval request notifications sent to the appropriate parties by email, approvals performed on the self-service area and successful notifications sent to the appropriate parties.

Another significant improvement is that AVETARS creates a "snapshot" of every record before variation for improved historical recording of data and ongoing visibility of records to "losing" stakeholders, e.g. the previous RTO in a change of RTO scenario. Lastly, at variation, a re-balancing of any funding and payments occurs systematically, automating this once high complex manual process which was prone to error.

When the final release of variations functionality occurs in early 2016, the majority of variations will be managed without ETD intervention, drastically reducing the requirement for administration staff in this areas and supporting a far faster turn-around time on variations.

Benefits: ETD will ultimately be able to reduce its variations administration team from 4 to 2 headcount. ETD and the stakeholders benefit from a modern, faster and more transparent approach to variations.

5. TGA RTO, Qualification and Scope Updates and Workflow

Previously, ETD would manually update changes from TGA in terms of new, updated and superseded qualifications into the legacy system. AVETARS now automates this process of update via a TGA integration and creates a workflow for new and updated qualifications which creates a job for an administration user to accept or reject the change.

Benefits: A process that used to take several days a month in the previous system can now be completed in hours to provide a significant saving of time and increased accuracy and faster turnaround of updates.

6. Self-Service

A core principle of the AVETARS project was to provide as many functions as possible to stakeholders to manage via self-service, decreasing administration at ETD and providing greater visibility which reduces queries to the ETD administration staff. Self-service access is provided to RTOs, employers, schools, AASN providers and students. Common feedback from RTOs that use STA systems in multiple states is that they find AVETARS the most friendly and useful system.

Some of the core functions that have been transformed to self-service include – change of qualifications offered (RTO scope), application for funding/entitlement, simple edits, variations, payments and reporting.

Benefits: Though difficult to measure the tangible benefits, the introduction of a broad self-service approach to VET management in the ACT has reduced administration and queries for ETD and delivered greater stakeholder engagement and transparency.

7. Funding Model

AVETARS has been architected with a flexible funding model that allows reduced effort in the modification of existing or addition of new types of funding. At the commencement of the project, the ETD team devised all the conceivable ways that training could be funded in the future, e.g. by unit completion, by hours, by stages, by weightings etc. and these were developed into a model that can be configured against a program. For example, when the Entitlement funding program was launched

in 2015 in the ACT with very different funding criteria to the existing User Choice, the system was able to be adapted rapidly for a fast and effective roll out of the new program.

Benefits: The AVETARS funding model is highly adaptable which means rapid deployment of updated and new funding models over time.

8. Reporting

AVETARS supports 2 key reporting methods, firstly, a SQL data replication with a Business Intelligence tool and, secondly, JobReady's proprietary reporting software, IQ, that allows for everyday reporting and data extracts and the scheduling for email of reports. The approach has provided ETD with a more rapid, robust and reliable reporting capability to help make better decisions.

Benefits: The AVETARS funding model is highly adaptable which means rapid deployment of updated and new funding models in the future.

Summary

Overall, the introduction has introduced many key improvements to the administration of VET in the ACT most notably:

1. Staff reduction or re-deployment to more high value activities of between 4 to 5 (20%) staff.
2. Faster turn-around times on key processes, such as approvals, variations and payments.
3. Higher quality in data processing, less errors, and less complaints.
4. Modern, self-service approach and increased engagement with providers and stay open for business 24-7 to reduce burden on administration team.
5. Increased transparency and metrics on the business operations.
6. An adaptable system that allows agility for rapid deployment of new functions and rules.
7. Dramatically reduced time producing reports, including AVETMISS and Apprentice & Trainee data collection.

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