

The Association of Retired Principals of Technical Institutions, (ARPTI) Victoria

POSITION PAPER

MARCH 2021

BUILDING A HIGH QUALITY SUSTAINABLE 'VET IN SCHOOLS' WORKFORCE

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Nov 2020

**A consultation arising from the recommendations that followed the
National Review of Teacher Registration 2018**

The foundations for this paper were presented in the ARPTI paper submitted to the National Review in May 2018. On advice, it is resubmitted as an appendix to this update. Our highlighted opening recommendations from that 2018 paper have not changed:

The ARPTI strongly recommends that national teacher registration processes accept the equivalence of trade and technician qualifications as a foundation for teacher registration.

The ARPTI strongly recommends that the internship model of teacher training that was successfully administered within the Technical Division and is now emerging in some courses be more universally adopted, particularly in relation to the training of practical studies teachers with substantial work experience.

To recruit, a clear pathway for a suitable candidate to secure a teaching / instructor career is necessary.

It is abundantly clear from recent formal¹ and informal² surveys of existing secondary colleges offering a range of VCAL and VETiS studies that the major obstacle to delivering quality courses is the massive shortage of appropriately qualified teaching personnel and the present hurdles to ongoing registration.

Across Australia, 96% of the 404 schools surveyed experienced difficulty in finding qualified technologies teachers. Those shortages result in schools using teachers from other subject areas (84%) or reducing the number of courses available (39%), compromising the quality of technology studies desired by the school and its students.

We note that current reference by schools to technology studies includes 'applied learning' and 'practical studies' as well as 'new technology'.

¹ National Overview Survey conducted by DATTA Australia 2019

² Informal survey conducted in Victoria by ARPTI 2021

The second question in the recent AITSL consultation paper (Pg 19) is:

- ***What additional ways of ensuring appropriately qualified people are available to deliver VET to senior secondary students should be delivered?***

This paper focuses on that question and strongly submits the following.

It is our contention that where Governments intend for students to have access to technology studies they have a responsibility to:

1. Provide training programs to ensure that people with technologies expertise can retrain as classroom teachers,
2. Provide clear and easily accessed pathways for potential technology teachers into that training, and
3. Ensure that registration processes post training are streamlined and accord with system needs.

1. Training

If education systems wish to provide through their secondary schools courses in vocational education, they have a commensurate obligation to ensure at least some adequacy of teacher supply to deliver those courses.

Trained teachers at secondary level have traditionally, and for some time, been delivered through the University teacher training programs. These were never geared to or designed for vocational teachers.

The previous Technical Schools Division recognised and addressed problems of supply and demand, and training and registration, by setting up its own recruitment and teacher training capability. If governments are sincere about real vocational education then the establishment of training courses for vocation teachers would seem a modest investment.

A Vocational Teacher Training College would ensure that there is one specialist institute committed to maintaining the quality of teacher standards in this area:

- Controlling entry into training with respect to both supply and demand parameters and personal suitability, that is “who to train”;
- Determining the course content appropriate to an evolving technological society, “that is, “what to train them in”; and
- Providing the specialist experienced and outstanding vocational training staff and delivering a sandwich course comprising two – three days a week in training and the remainder at a training secondary school. That is, “how to train them”.

Teachers successfully graduating from this type of training would be accorded probationary registration, with full registration at a later date determined by the school principal.

The details of this type of teacher training system are well known and easily documented.

2. Pathways

Principals and administrators from the well established technical school system long recognised that:

Students will prosper when exposed to adults with a variety of real-world experiences. Many students will relate better to teachers or instructors in practical workshop situations than academic and book focused classrooms.

It is facile to assume that the best teacher workforce in a school all come from the same narrow background comprised of school to university to teaching. Opening up teaching to those with experiences and expertise beyond this normal narrow channel can only improve overall educational outcomes.

There have always been successful individuals in the trades, professions and corporate world, who for various reasons seek an alternative and to them more rewarding occupation. Some of these gravitate at a mature age to teaching.

The amount of money to be earned or the prestige attached to teaching, have never been the main determinants of choosing a career in teaching. People are attracted because teaching is an intrinsically worthwhile profession that helps children to reach their potential and contributes to society.

To ensure an adequate supply of recruits into teacher training governments should consider:

- Industry supported advertising campaigns targeted at the technologies sectors and promoting the idea of up-skilling as a teacher,
- Removing or reducing financial hurdles to the transition by giving some recognition to work experience in salary scales,
- Making the path from industry to school transparent and easily navigated for prospective teachers, and
- Establishing criteria for provisional registration when required.

Employing authorities should actively seek out individuals from commerce and industry with high potential as teachers, and a real interest in the profession; then provide avenues for admission into teacher training under provisional registration.

3. Registration

Teacher registration is fundamental to quality control and in essence is designed to ensure that only teachers that are appropriately qualified, appropriately teacher trained, fit and proper people and most importantly, have the necessary social, emotional and personal qualities associated with great teachers – are admitted to the profession.

Teacher quality and professionalism is the responsibility of the employing systems and authorities, state, catholic or private. A vocational teacher training college is the proper arm of the state authority to uphold and supervise teacher quality and professionalism in the area. This responsibility may be partly delegated (or considered shared) with school principals who are the local administrators of education delivery and thereby responsible for monitoring teaching quality and professionalism.

The registration process should therefore be controlled by both the employing systems and their principals. It follows that principals have a fundamental role in teacher registration.

All new technology teachers as trained above should be granted provisional or probationary registration upon successful completion of training.

Principals and / or employing authorities assess suitability for teaching and make recommendations on permanent registration. Permanent registration should be granted after 12 months on provisional registration based on principal recommendations.

It should be noted that a massive change of culture will be required within some schools to enable the existing staff cohort to accept and embrace vocational teachers with backgrounds strikingly different to their own. The quality of the vocational curricula will be important in establishing parity within the school program, as will be the focus of the school program itself.

Secondary technical school experience has shown the blending of staff from different work experience backgrounds has led to a very rich learning environment for the breadth of student aspirations presented.

Former Director of Technical Education, and member ARPTI notes’the key in a rounded education for the young is to have contact with “practical” training since their lives are going to be associated with those areas of life. It is interesting to note that the focus (in the consultation paper) is on the upper levels of secondary schooling. No doubt that is because the government is focusing on “jobs”. In techs we introduced the kids to practical subjects from the start.’

THE CURRENT TEACHER SHORTAGE, AS EXPERIENCED NOW

As noted above, the current shortage of experienced qualified personnel with teacher training and registration is a significant issue for schools needing to staff practical studies classes, whether in relation to VET provision, junior classes or, as in Victoria, for students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

We note that the Victorian Government response, November 2020 to the 2019 Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways Review led by John Firth would likely see VCAL studies absorbed into an all embracing Certificate of Education. We believe this has the potential to lift the esteem in which VCAL pathway subjects are held, and hence place more pressure on schools to find appropriate staff. Reportedly the perceived lack of esteem has been an issue in some schools in relation to guiding students into the VCAL certificate. However, notwithstanding this we note that the numbers undertaking VCAL have expanded hugely over recent years, rising to more than 25,000 students annually (Jim Williamson, Herald Sun, 28 January 2021). Recent conversations with school personnel demonstrate that VCAL classes are limited due to the lack of staff with ideal backgrounds or motivation.

Jane Boyle, Principal, Brauer College in a letter (February 15, 2021) of support to our submission, emphasises difficulties in attracting and holding appropriate staff in relation to the provision of key practical studies elements within VCAL. There is a ‘lack of teachers who are qualified in the professional aspects of their trade and also have permission from the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) to be able to work in the classroom’. There are difficulties for highly skilled staff to actually meet the

requirements of the VIT.’ A number of staff who are qualified in their trade have been working through La Trobe University to receive an educational qualification that will be recognised by VIT’. Time release has been a cost to the school. The course ceases at end of this year. Requirements impractical. VCAL provision is limited due to staff shortage. Uncertainty of getting a position and working for DET is ‘untenable’. With regard to the VIT and Permission to Teach (PTT) processes, Jane states in relation to some of her staff:

‘The current situation is unworkable. These staff are highly skilled in their areas but the requirements by VIT are impractical. (The school) could offer many more VCAL classes if (we) could find the staff. We have already had to cancel a number of classes (of 25 students). Often these students become disengaged or we lose them from the system.

Kerri Bolch, Principal, Berwick College, provides VET and VCAL studies, and reports that a relatively high proportion of students have a desire to undertake applied learning studies that are offered from a broad range of course options. Instruction in VET subjects is auspiced by TAFE. The college is not a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), but the courses are the same. Applied learning provision is highly regarded and currently when ‘loads’ are being prepared, quality staff opt in.

Issues confronted centre mainly on accessing the number of appropriately ‘qualified’ staff and in particular retaining personnel who may have attained ‘permission to teach’ authority, but are handicapped by protracted processes to obtain extensions. There have been instances of classes having to be cancelled because the teacher cannot continue, even with a fully qualified teacher present. There needs to be an alternative to being required to repeat the VIT processes as if commencing, such as approval by the principal and a Department representative on the basis of demonstrated capacity / performance. Salary wise there is a paraprofessional scale in place but promotion increments are capped according to the underlying qualifications of the personnel.

Greg McMahon, Principal, Hallam Senior College has noted similar concerns as reflected at other colleges. Home to a ‘Trades and Technology Centre of Excellence’, the college has offered up to 17 different VETiS courses as an RTO school. Also, VCAL numbers are high. The major challenge is recruitment of staff with genuine practical / industrial experience for secondary level applied learning, and processes associated with qualifications and registration / PTT for VET subject trainers.

PTT allows short term teaching of VET subjects (maximum 3 years), but not secondary level curriculum. Although sound in their knowledge and teaching capacity, a teacher / trainer cannot teach pending PTT renewal, even, as reported by other schools, with a qualified / registered secondary teacher in the classroom. Renewal is found to be a protracted process. This college is another that would support PPT approval by the principal and a Department representative on the basis of demonstrated capacity / performance. In a large school, managing compliance is a high resource commitment.

With respect to recruitment, John Lyall, Assistant Principal, stated in a letter to Daniel Knott, Director, Northern College of the Arts and Technology, 'We have been advertising for positions recently over the last few years and received one or no applicants. The positions have been advertised in national media as well as in private employment sites and Recruitment-On-Line'.

John also noted impediments to recruitment: 'the cost of tertiary training; a pay scale that does not recognise professional experience in a trade; and the VIT registration process for paraprofessionals. It seems absurd that school students can be sent off-site to a TAFE or private training provider and be taught exactly the same program by someone who cannot be in a school-based workshop'.

Benefits of practical studies

Association Secretary Graham Scott has noted the dictum of member Jack Cunningham that 'applied wisdom' underpinned the whole attitude of Technical Education. We see so much now where the student is treated as an accumulator of knowledge rather than, as in a tech oriented curriculum, being engaged as participants in their learning. The aim was to enable the Student-as-Doer to have the tactile appreciation of what was being accomplished, which meant guiding them to have the appropriate skills and appreciations of the situation in which they were working. Another emphasis was to take students from where they are, rather than where the text book is up to. 'Progress built from within.'

Member George Holmes has noted that when parents were questioning whether their son or daughter should work toward an apprenticeship he "talked-up" apprenticeships by pointing out the following:

- ' 1. If a young person had an apprenticeship, they were employed.
2. Apprentices were being paid while they were being trained.
3. The salary of a person who has finished his/her apprenticeship (*was*) commensurate with that of a university graduate.
4. Most small business owners (had) gone through an apprenticeship - eg mechanics, builders, plumbers, electricians etc, etc.'

'Armed with this information most parents/students chose further Technical education. We should take advantage of every forum to advance the value of applied learning.'

Acknowledgements

ARPTI acknowledges the attached **Richard Riordan MP** letter via member Duncan Stalker. ARPTI acknowledges the work of the **Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA)** and we thank them for their support of our former and current submission. ARPTI acknowledges the recent investigations undertaken by the **Design and Technology Teachers' Association (DATTA Australia)** and we thank them for their support of our submission.

With thanks to all contributors and those in receipt of our submission.

Graeme Seamer
President, ARPTI (Victoria)



1 March 2021

Mr Duncan Stalker
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Dear Duncan

Thank you for contacting me regarding the current situation of education, youth engagement and Trade Training Centres in my electorate of Polwarth

For many years now I have watched with growing frustration the high absentee rates in our schools while fantastic technical and trade facilities sit idle, empty or under-utilised across the region. Numerous meetings with principals and letters to Ministers have resulted in very little change to these expensive but poorly considered assets. The lack of relevant subjects and appropriate access to qualified and experienced teachers continues to hamper the aspirations of many of our young people seeking a vocational training that works for our region's employers. Engaging our youth in meaningful and relevant training would surely be a huge step in tackling the problem of absenteeism and high dropout rates that we are experiencing in rural areas.

With huge job opportunities for our young people and our regional economy booming it does not make sense that our education system does not actively provide the trades and skills that we need. It is disappointing that so much vital infrastructure exists in our region and yet these buildings are not filled with tomorrow's highly trained and sought after employees.

Kind Regards

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