

Vocational Education and Training Workforce

Productivity Commission Issues Paper – June 2010

The author:

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Terms of reference (excerpt from the Productivity Commission terms of reference, 22/4/2010)

This paper addresses the excerpt of the terms of reference as described below.

'.....3. The VET Workforce

The status of VET practitioners as 'dual professionals', deploying both industry and education skills delivered in schools, VET only, dual sector and industry settings, is unique among education sectors, and poses both challenges and opportunities for the VET sector in attracting and retaining staff. In addition, the increasingly commercial environment in which many providers operate creates a significant role for VET professionals who are engaged in organisational leadership and management, but not directly involved in training delivery. The impact of this trend on the required capabilities of VET professionals is of policy interest...

Factors affecting the current and future demand for the VET workforce, and the required mix of skills and knowledge: ...

c. requirement for broader skills in VET professionals as a result of increasing system focus on client needs, including flexible delivery, greater focus on employability skills, catering for a more diverse student base, and partnering with enterprises and communities ...

and

e. the impact of delivery of higher level VET qualifications (e.g. Associate and Bachelor Degrees)'

Introduction

This paper is concerned with issues around the level of training/education required for instructors/trainers who 'deliver' vocational education and training (VET) within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and in compliance with the Australian Quality Training Framework.

'The Australian Quality Training Framework requires instructors to comply with the New Essential Conditions and Standards for Initial Registration and Continuing Registration of Training Organisations have been approved by the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment and come into effect from 1 July 2010.

The Conditions and Standards were revised to strengthen the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and provide additional protection for all students undertaking Vocational Education and Training in Australia.'

(<http://www.training.com.au/Pages/menuitem91cdbaeb7a2bc0e2cd9ae78617a62dbc.aspx> , accessed 27/7/10)

The Federal (and States') Governments' emphasis on increasing the number of school-based VET students does not appear to address the difference between typical school pedagogy and the nature of 'competency-based training'. I think it is well past the time for the industry sector to work with government in providing high quality learning opportunities

for VET students (of any age) rather than simply thrust 'delivery' of a course or program onto students with little sense of appropriate teaching methodologies and learning opportunities.

Furthermore, in my view, the recent 'strengthening' of the AQTF as quoted above, does not provide any sense of the manner in which training and assessment will be enhanced. While I understand that the detail of these matters are the responsibility of the eleven Australian Industry Skills Councils, I believe that this lack of direction in the AQTF is a serious issue for the preparation of a high quality workforce.

I suggest that the basis of the training in VET is skill 'assessment' (rather than 'teaching' and 'learning'). While this may have been (arguably) a satisfactory approach until recent times, my experiences with both adult and school-age students in the VET sector reinforce for me the views that others have relayed to me, and have been mentioned in the press; namely that students with formal VET qualifications are not 'job-ready' even though the qualification is purported to prepare them up to a particular level. I am arguing that it is less the fault of the student and more to do with the nature of the teaching and learning that occurs in the training situation, and I emphasise I mean in the workplace as well as in the training venue such as a TAFE classroom.

I understand that the basis of the 'delivery' of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is still the 'Plan, Do, Review' in relation to the way that an instructor thinks about planning a skill program. I think this is quite inadequate in addressing the wider needs of the variety of students attempting to learn to be job-ready.

I do understand that there is 'underpinning knowledge' in competency-based training, and contextual knowledge, but this is still about the skill to be learned rather than the instructor, or as I think it should be titled, 'teacher', (not 'lecturer'). This is not to say there are not many very committed and successful VET trainers preparing students in an outstanding manner, but this seems to be left to the individual's passion/commitment/moral standing, rather than professional development as a qualified instructor/teacher.

Furthermore, the recent 'strengthening' of the AQTF states:

'Standard 1: The RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations

1.1 The RTO collects, analyses and acts on relevant data for continuous improvement of training and assessment'.

This statement provides no sense of how an audit process could discover how or when an RTO is working to improve its training pedagogy. For example an RTO may well provide feedback sheets and a report on how well training was 'delivered', but how does this translate into measurable 'continuous improvement'?

I think the current approach is too much about the retrospective end of the process, and not enough about the prospective part. By that I mean that instructors need to be more highly trained in the theory of teaching and learning. Simple repetition of a skill (titled 'practice') has its place in learning theory, but repetition for the vast majority of today's students, in my opinion and experience, is likely to produce boredom, poorer opportunities for engagement in learning, and, in too many cases, disenchantment with the respective program.

The statement below from the AQTF, in my opinion, is rather a 'lowest common denominator' approach to teaching and learning, rather than providing a sense of vision and aspiration.

'1.4 Training and assessment is delivered by trainers and assessors who:

- (a) have the necessary training and assessment competencies as determined by the National Quality Council or its successors, and
- (b) have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered or assessed, and
- (c) can demonstrate current industry skills directly relevant to the training/assessment being undertaken and
- (d) continue to develop their VET knowledge and skills as well as their industry currency and trainer/assessor competence.'

A more productive way forward would be to ensure that instructors are prepared with teaching and learning theory that is less based on assessment, and more focussed on being an effective 'teacher' rather than 'deliverer.' This may well mean a course that is quite different from Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. While it is a recently revised course, it is still focussed on the skill of the student rather than the skill of the instructor. Would-be instructors need to be provided with some learning theory, some skills to offer learning opportunities in different ways to different students, and some skills in relationship-building; in other words, teacher training.

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is designed to be about a one year course. I suggest that an improved course could include current components of a Diploma in Education course and some parts of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. This would mean some collaboration between key members of Industry Skills Councils and the Universities to produce a mutually satisfactory course – I see this as a healthy thing to do in any case.

On-line qualifications

More disturbing is evidence on numerous websites of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment being promoted as an on-line course where there is no evidence of the would-be instructor demonstrating direct practical instruction. Instead, there are work-sheets, video clips, and telephone help-lines to 'experts'. In my opinion this is a very poor way to try to provide training aimed at effective instruction, let alone aspirational teaching with a passion.

I refer to point 2.4 below.

Standard 2: The RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients.

2.1 The RTO establishes the needs of clients, delivers services to meet these needs, and continuously improves client services by collecting, analysing and acting on relevant data.

2.2 Before clients enrol or enter into a contract, the RTO informs them about the training, assessment and support services to be provided, and about their rights and obligations.

2.3 Employers and other parties who contribute to each learner's training and assessment are engaged in the development, delivery and monitoring of training and assessment.

2.4 Learners receive training, assessment and support services that meet their individual needs.

2.5 Learners have timely access to current and accurate records of their participation and progress.

2.6 The RTO provides appropriate mechanisms and services for learners to have concerns reviewed and addressed where appropriate. Complaints and appeals are addressed efficiently and effectively.

The bigger picture

The sense of students becoming 'job-ready' may have more to do with employer expectations of a sense of 'initiative' being displayed rather than training for a specific job. While it is understood that in Australia there are Training Packages that address entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, it is of interest to consider how instructors/teachers may

well provide the sense of initiative and entrepreneurial attitudes that are desirable to many if not all employers.

In Europe, there is a coordinated effort across OECD countries to focus on VET entrepreneurialism from policy level down to program level:

'Entrepreneurship in Vocational Education and Training

The aim of the project is to identify existing policies and programmes that promote learning about entrepreneurship within vocational training systems.

Entrepreneurship is meant as a combination of mindsets and skills, therefore programmes and courses will be considered that address both aspects. The project focuses on the systems of formal education and training, and on teaching entrepreneurship to young people.

This project considers initial vocational education, taking place in the framework of the formal education and training systems. The levels of education considered are corresponding to upper secondary vocational education (level ISCED 3) and post-secondary non-tertiary education (level ISCED 4).'

(http://www.create2009.europa.eu/press/news_archive/news_singleview/news/entrepreneurship-in-vocational-education-and-training.html, accessed 14/7/10)

It would appear that Europe has similar concerns to Australia if entrepreneurial attitudes are to do with the job-readiness issue that has arisen in Australia. Can we learn from them? Do we need to establish a central dedicated organisation to manage and lead vocational education like the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop)?

(http://ec.europa.eu/education/linkhomepage/linkhomepage334_en.htm, accessed 14/7/10)

References

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http://www.create2009.europa.eu/press/news_archive/news_singleview/news/entrepreneurship-in-vocational-education-and-training.html, accessed 14/7/10

<http://www.training.com.au/Pages/menuitem91cdbaeb7a2bc0e2cd9ae78617a62dbc.aspx> , accessed 27/7/10)

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