

# VICTORIA UNIVERSITY'S SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S STUDY OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING WORKFORCE

JULY 2010

## CONTEXT

The Federal Government has placed major emphasis on instigating an education revolution. Driving change to the education and training system stands the major focus on the part of both Federal and State Government to raising workforce productivity and participation.

Nationally, the Commonwealth Government has responded to The Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review) by setting targets to expand participation in higher education, particularly amongst Australians from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The expansion in higher education participation has been underlined by a shift to student demand driven funding in 2012 and over enrolment caps being lifted to 10 percent until that point. Commonwealth Government funding will be indexed and sizable infrastructure investment and refinement of student income support arrangements have also been introduced.

At the Victorian level, the State Government has introduced student demand driven funding to vocational education and training (VET) and worked to better support industry engage with the VET system. These reforms, enunciated in *Securing Jobs for Your Future – Skills for Victoria* come ahead of the Government's work to develop an integrated Tertiary Education Plan for the State.

The strengthening of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is also in train. This complements a renewed push to temper historically firm demarcations between VET and higher education programs in favour of a more integrated tertiary education system. In its place a more seamless approach is emerging amongst universities and training providers to the design, delivery and structuring of tertiary education.

Victoria University (VU) is a dual sector institution delivering higher, vocational and further education. We therefore unreservedly applaud the recognition on the part of both Governments that productivity and workforce participation growth is dependent on the delivery of high quality, responsive education and training. The University also supports a significant number of measures instituted by both

Governments to drive the future development of an integrated tertiary education sector.

As the preeminent tertiary education institution serving Melbourne's Western region, VU serves a community that has a history of underrepresentation in tertiary education. Without significant effort to redress this trend, favourable employment outcomes for many in Melbourne's West may be at risk. Current employment growth in the West continues to be reliant on economic sectors, such as manufacturing, that are likely to decline in the medium term. Conversely, employment in anticipated growth sectors, such as professional, finance and insurance services, is disproportionately low amongst those living in Melbourne's middle and outer Western region.

The realisation of these participation and labour market objectives and the refinement of tertiary qualification offerings are significant tasks. Therefore, as part of the wider tertiary education workforce, the VET workforce must be:

- ◆ appropriately skilled to effectively and efficiently deliver new and emerging qualifications to a broad range of students
- ◆ structured appropriately so that there is a sufficient supply of VET professionals to deliver tertiary programs.

## STRUCTURE OF VU'S RESPONSE

VU's submission is structured around four key themes that broadly address matters canvassed in the Commission's Issues Paper. These are:

- A. The role of VET
- B. The VET Workforce
- C. Demand Influences
- D. Supply Influences



## A. THE ROLE OF VET

The VET workforce is now responding to two policy agendas. Firstly, education and training is firmly tied to future economic development. Secondly, there is a renewed focus on building an integrated tertiary education sector as a means to build greater participation in education and employment, particularly amongst groups who have a poor history of participation.

While VET practitioners continue to engage in course delivery and assessment, given this context they also:

- ◆ engage with industry in order to ascertain the skills needed to support future economic growth in specific sectors
- ◆ broker and design customised training solutions to meet the individual needs of employers
- ◆ formulate and deliver teaching and learning that accommodates student and industry need for flexible delivery
- ◆ manage the learning needs of diverse student groups. This will be crucial given national targets to lift education participation amongst lower socio-economic groups and others who have little prior engagement with tertiary education.
- ◆ identify gaps in students' literacy and numeracy and identify opportunities to deliver remedial interventions
- ◆ collaborate with other tertiary education colleagues – the higher education academic workforce – to design and co-deliver qualifications that form a more seamless pathway for students across all AQF levels
- ◆ accommodate impending refinements to the AQF. This will likely include the requirement that all qualifications prepare students for subsequent study at a higher level. For VET practitioners delivering Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas, this will likely require the incorporation of academic research and analysis skills associated with undergraduate-level study into the their courses .

## B. THE VET WORKFORCE

### VET WORKFORCE ROLES

The VET workforce comprises a broad range of professionals spanning teaching, management and administrative functions. These include:

- ◆ VET practitioners (teachers) of varying degrees of experience – focussed on the design and delivery of VET to students
- ◆ VET managers – overseeing operational matters within which VET is delivered including industry engagement, regulatory compliance etc.
- ◆ VET senior leaders – setting strategic directions for VET providers
- ◆ Support staff providing administrative assistance

VU anticipates that the Commission will focus the bulk of its inquiry on VET practitioners (teachers).

The current and future VET practitioner must hold technical knowledge and skills relevant to the discipline or industry area that they are delivering training. However, they must also have the requisite skills required to effectively deliver VET to students. This includes:

- ◆ delivery and assessment within a VET pedagogy;
- ◆ designing and developing curricula and advanced assessments that match industry standards; and
- ◆ capabilities to drive innovations in integrated qualification, program design, delivery and assessment in collaboration with further and higher education colleagues.

### VET WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS

The discussion paper's characterisation of the VET workforce as being majority female and predominantly employed on a part-time basis does not reflect VU's workforce.

The characteristics of VU's VET teaching workforce in March 2010 are described below. This data is inclusive of ongoing and fixed term teaching staff.

#### ◆ PART TIME – FULL TIME SPLIT

- 72% of VET teachers were employed on a full-time basis
- 28% of VET teachers were employed on a part-time basis

#### ◆ WORKFORCE GENDER SPLIT

- 47% of VET teaching staff was female.  
Within the female cohort of VET teachers:
  - 57% were employed on a full-time basis
  - 43% were employed on a part-time basis
- 53% of teaching staff was male.  
Within the male cohort of VET teachers
  - 85% were employed on a full time basis
  - 8% were employed on a part time basis

Figure 1 further illustrates the structure of VU's VET workforce by gender and full-time/part-time status.

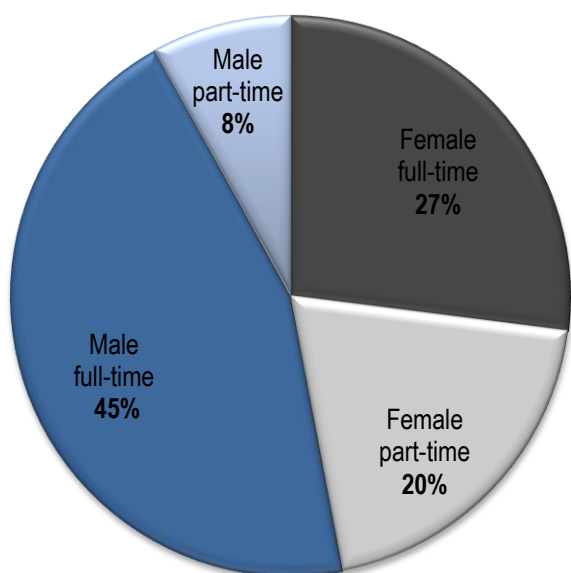


FIGURE 1: VICTORIA UNIVERSITY VET TEACHER WORKFORCE AT MARCH 2010 (BY GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS)

VU believes that its VET workforce profile and structure is comparable to other TAFE institutions. Across Australia in 2009 TAFE institutions delivered 84% of all VET student contract hours<sup>iii</sup>.

Given that TAFE institutions continue to be the dominant providers of VET, any effective policy interventions and increased investment geared towards improving the VET workforce should focus on the developmental needs of VET practitioners and managers working in TAFE settings.

#### VET WORKFORCE'S OLDER AGE PROFILE

Like most public providers of VET, VU seeks to employ VET practitioners with the relevant industry skills and experience to deliver training programs.

The Commission's observation of the VET workforce being predominantly older than the wider labour market is therefore unsurprising. Effective delivery of VET is dependent on VET practitioners having significant knowledge and technical skills in the discipline or industry sector they are teaching in. To develop these requisites, a practitioner is likely to have spent a significant period of time working in their chosen industry.

In this context, the older age profile of the VET workforce relative to the wider workforce is not an issue in itself. The issue is continuing to attract suitable professionals into the VET workforce.

#### VET WORKFORCE QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

Currently, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is the entry level qualification for VET practitioners. In Victoria, industrial relations

peg VET practitioner advancement to the completion of a diploma-level qualification that contains a practicum component

In terms of VU's teacher qualification profile, initial data suggests that a significant proportion of the University's VET workforce hold qualifications at a higher level. Around 50% of male VET teachers hold a bachelor degree or higher. The equivalent figure for female VET teachers is approximately 60%. Bachelor and masters qualifications in education, training and assessment and language education are common.

## C. DEMAND INFLUENCES ON THE VET WORKFORCE

### AGEING WORKFORCE: COMPOUNDING IMPETUS TO CHANGE VET DELIVERY

The ageing of the workforce will deliver two key impacts for the tertiary sector.

1. In the medium term, the size of youth student cohort will likely contract
2. The proportion of existing worker and/or mature age students will increase

Combined with the factors listed in Section A, these shifts will only compound the need for VET practitioners to modify training delivery and assessment practices.

### CHANGING STRUCTURE OF INDUSTRY

While the tertiary sector must build labour force skills to meet needs of emerging industries, this must be balanced against continuing to deliver training that meets current/established industry need.

The balance varies across regions. For example, while finance and insurance services are identified as growth industries, in regions such as Melbourne's West, employment remains dependant on a sizable manufacturing industry. While VU has a role in supporting the expansion of emerging industries within our local community, this must be balanced with supporting the skill needs of traditional industries.

Identifying, balancing and responding to these shifting skills demands is now a crucial demand on the VET workforce.

## D. SUPPLY OF THE VET WORKFORCE

### VET WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Sections A and B outline the core business of practitioners is the delivery of education and training. In order to carry out these functions VET practitioners require:

- ◆ an understanding of how learning takes place and the VET pedagogical approach
- ◆ mastery of strategies that allow them to facilitate learning and deliver assessment in a range of contexts
- ◆ current industry knowledge
- ◆ sound understanding of theory and practice relevant to the relevant industry area

To this end, the professionalization of the Australian VET workforce needs to continue. The VET workforce would benefit from a recognised suite of dedicated qualifications, from Certificate IV level to Bachelor and Master level.

VU is currently working with other interests towards achieving this. The University's action is driven by the objective of creating VET practitioner qualifications that deliver relevant skills to a sufficient *breadth* and *depth* to accommodate the range of VET roles

The recently revised Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is targeted at allowing the beginning VET practitioner to be introduced to the concepts to teach effectively within the VET context. While VU holds that the revised qualification could benefit from the inclusion of supervised teaching practice, the qualification does provide a minimum baseline that sufficiently equips individuals to teach and assess existing programs.

Further work is required to secure a Diploma-level qualification targeted at developing VET practitioners. Such a qualification should allow practitioners with some experience to:

- ◆ consolidate confident teaching and assessment skills
- ◆ design and develop curricula and advanced assessments that match industry standards
- ◆ develop deeper understanding of training packages
- ◆ begin to acquire the framework that allows them to design programs that respond to industry need

A subsequent level of training for VET practitioners at bachelor and/or master levels should be targeted at advanced or accomplished VET practitioners. Such qualifications should incorporate the skills required for negotiating with business and industry, writing competencies and advanced curricula, leading educational services, mentoring beginning and developing practitioners, submission writing and managing education programs.

With government levers calibrated to encourage growth in industry-responsive higher level VET, the need for strong performing advanced/accomplished VET practitioners will grow in the immediate future.

That is why VU is leading the development of qualifications designed to support the development of practitioners to this level through the recent introduction of the University's new Master of Education (VET) program.

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> See Centre for Strategic Economic Studies (Victoria University), *Updating Melbourne's West*, April 2010

<sup>ii</sup> The prevalence of inadequate adult literacy and numeracy skills is demonstrated in the Australian Industry Group's *National Workforce Literacy Project* which in May 2010 reported that 75% of surveyed employers indicated that their business was affected by low levels of staff literacy and numeracy

<sup>iii</sup> National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2009*, Adelaide, 2010.

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