

The Vocational Education and Training workforce



July 2010
SSA's submission to the Productivity
Commission Issues Paper on the Vocational
Education and Training Workforce

Introduction

The role of Service Skills Australia

Service Skills Australia (SSA) is the Industry Skills Council for the service industries. Skills councils are the recognised national bodies providing advice on industry training and skills development needs to government and industry.

SSA represents the tourism, hospitality and events, sport, fitness and recreation, and retail, wholesale and personal services sectors.

SSA is an independent, not-for-profit body, managed by industry members and funded by the Australian Government to:

- develop a culture within the service industries which promotes and enhances the skills development of its workforce,
- develop policies, programs and services, including industry training packages, that support industry needs in relation to skills and workforce development,
- achieve quality skills outcomes throughout the service industries, and
- produce quality workforce development information and use industry intelligence to inform decision making.

The Vocational Education and Training Workforce

The New Deal

In response to growing concern from industry about Australia's VET system, in 2009 SSA undertook a series of research and scoping activities under the project *The New Deal*.

As part of this project, SSA enlisted the University of Ballarat to undertake a research study which sought to explore and develop a workforce development strategy for the service industries' VET practitioners and to ensure that it has the capability to respond to the current and future training and skill needs of its industries. The project involved an examination of the service industries' current VET workforce and consideration of existing strategies, relevant outcomes of research and recent work undertaken by various stakeholders.

Many of the subjects covered in the final report 'Workforce Development for Service Industries VET Practitioners' correlate with the questions posed in the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper on the VET workforce. SSA would therefore refer the commission to the report, a copy of which is enclosed with this submission.

Following is a response to some of the points raised in the issues paper and also a summary of how SSA's New Deal research project addresses those issues.

VET in the education sector and the economy

This skills council believes there is a need for greater recognition of the professional duality of skills - industry and pedagogy.

In the past 10 years the growth in demand for teachers and trainers has led to the broad acceptance of such people not having to have formal teaching qualifications.

The VET workforce within the labour market

For the purpose of this submission, SSA agrees with the terminology used in reference to the three broad groups of employees identified. However, it is recommended that a better name for VET practitioners should be discussed to improve the image of the occupation; 'Vocational educators' is one possibility¹.

SSA disagrees with the exclusion of government and peak industry group employees from the definition of the VET workforce. VET is industry-led and primarily government funded; it is therefore crucial that they be included, although maybe not to the same degree as direct employees.

Furthermore, SSA notes that there is a clear separation between higher level skills and the identified urgent need for Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills in almost all states. Any discussion of 'the workforce' should cover all the participants in each of the categories detailed in Box 2 (page 8) of the Commission's paper. We consider that the issue should focus not on the term or status of employment, but on whether a person is primarily employed in the VET sector.

Educational delivery is only one part of the VET sector. It requires all of the identified to remain productive and efficient.

Implications for the VET Workforce

One of the eight key themes of SSA's 'Workforce Development Strategy for Service Industry VET Practitioners' outlines the improvements required for the VET workforce.

Based on the analysis of the nature of the VET workforce compared with the attributes desired by industry, learners and the practitioners themselves, the report suggests ways in which the VET workforce for the service industries needs to improve. Furthermore, the report also states that, at a national level, there may need to be more attention paid to diversity in the VET workforce – particularly to teachers/trainers who are indigenous and are from different countries of origin or ethnic backgrounds².

The report suggests ways that such a VET workforce development strategy can be evaluated. One of the priorities of the suggested strategy relates to understanding the nature of the workforce. This will include gathering robust data on the workforce and using it to understand the workforce and improve future planning. The strategy also identifies the attributes of the 'ideal' VET practitioner.

¹ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009

² The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009 (page 94).

In 2009, SSA also initiated a research project on the issue of completion rates. The issue of completion rates, and their use to measure the effectiveness of training in our industries is of ongoing concern to our sectors. We are aware that this issue is of interest to a range of stakeholders and note references in Skills Australia's Workforce Futures as a way of improving productivity and increasing skills deepening.

This year we launched a project to explore this issue from the perspective our industries. SSA is working with John Mitchell and Associates to undertake a project that will interrogate current AVETMISS data collections and undertake a trial with three RTO's (public, private and Enterprise) in the retail industry. In undertaking this work we are seeking to gain a clear understanding of the reality of completion rates for our industries and also contribute to the emerging thinking in this area.

Further information on this project can be found on the SSA website via the following link: <http://www.serviceskills.com.au/completion-rates-for-the-service-industries>

Characteristics of the VET workforce

SSA's research has revealed that the VET workforce is diverse but overall more likely to be older than younger - but very few RTOs had 51% or more of their staff above the age of 51. The oft-reported 'greying' of the VET workforce was not reflected in our data³.

The nature of the training workforce for the service industries would appear to support the suggestion that the workforce of private VET providers is younger than the TAFE workforce.

Within and between industries, SSA and the University of Ballarat's research revealed that VET practitioners in TAFEs teaching tourism, hospitality and events qualifications are predominantly populated by 'baby boomers', whereas trainers at enterprise RTOs were generally between 25 and 35-years old. The age of trainers in the sport and fitness sector training workforce varied widely and trainers in the community pharmacy sector were generally part-time and of mature age. Further information on the demographics of the VET workforce and the reasons for the differences can be found on page 27 of the Workforce Development research report⁴.

SSA believes that a subset of the VET workforce that requires further attention is that of the role that supervisors play as trainers. There is a need to identify the core skills required for supervisors as managers of training.

Data issues

As well as specific workforce issues, SSA believes that data collection strategies should also look at the issue of planning, with a view to addressing the question of what systems, processes and policies need to change to reconfigure a VET workforce capable of meeting a 3% growth prediction.

SSA's 'Workforce development for service industry VET practitioners' paper states that additional data needs to be collected to inform future workforce planning and development activities. The data collection needs to be informed by the uses to which the

³ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009.

⁴ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009 (page 27).

data will be put, and so further consultation should take place before future surveys are undertaken⁵.

Business of VET

With regard to the utilisation of new technologies, page 47 of the 'Workforce Development for Service Industries VET Practitioners' research report details the ideal skills, qualification and attributes that practitioners in specific industries, and the service industry in general, should have now and in ten year's time. The report suggests that a blend of business, technology and instructional design skills would contribute to the profile of the ideal VET practitioner⁶.

Please also refer to page 98 of the enclosed research report, which lists the opportunities and challenges at national, RTO and individual level. One challenge is identified as being remotely-located practitioners having restricted access to both collegial support and institutional support for professional development. Elsewhere in the report (page 51), a case study of a specific RTO describes how they had used partnership arrangements to deliver services in remote states, but subsequently moved to employing its own staff in all locations⁷.

SSA firmly believes that Training Packages remain the most appropriate basis for vocational training arrangements. This belief is based on the fact that Training Packages clearly describe skill and outline work standards. Furthermore, this view is widely supported by industry.

In June 2009, the National Quality Council (NQC) released a report entitled 'VET Products for the 21st Century'. The report presented a policy framework and was based on the feedback of over 500 VET stakeholders throughout Australia. The report notes widespread support for the use of Training Packages:

"During the consultation process, businesses and industry indicated strong support for the continuation of Training Packages and accredited courses as a single national framework.

The increasing flexibility of the latest Training Packages is also highly valued. This is perceived to enable training and assessment methodologies to be better customised to meet the diverse needs of employers and individuals⁸."

The international dimension

Erica Smith of the University of Ballarat's paper 'Pedagogy not political point scoring: How training providers teach international students' notes that occupations such as 'cooks and hairdressers' are often mentioned disparagingly in the debates over appropriate courses from international students as though these jobs are somehow less worthy than other occupations (Birrell, Healy and Kinniard, 2007⁹). Yet the shortage of chefs is well-

⁵ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009.

⁶ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009 (page 47).

⁷ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009

⁸ National Quality Council, VET Products for the 21st Century, June 2009

⁹ Birrell, Healy and Kinniard, 'Cooks galore and hairdressers aplenty', 2007

documented, and western economies continue to move away from primary and secondary industries (Triplett and Bosworth, 2004¹⁰).

The conclusion of Erica Smith's paper notes that the pedagogical, curricular and pastoral 'additions' provided for international students in the RTOs researched for the study represented a considerable investment in the success of the students. A 2007 survey of international graduates from Australian VET and higher education courses (Australian Education International, 2008: 3) indicated that 67% of international VET graduates were working, either full-time or part-time, and 26% undertaking further study; of those working, 84% were working in Australia, compared with 69% of international higher education graduates. The retention rate into the Australian economy and society from VET programs was therefore high¹¹.

Further details on the numbers of international students enrolled on VET courses can be found in SSA and the University of Ballarat's work on Workforce Development for Service Industry VET practitioners. Of particular interest may be the results of survey which revealed that 15 respondent RTOs had enrolled substantial numbers of international students¹².

Supply of the VET workforce

Enhancing workforce capability

SSA has recently started to undertake a stock take of the pedagogical training available for trainers and assessors within the service industry.

SSA and the University of Ballarat's research into the VET workforce has found that workforce development occurs predominantly on two levels. The individual teacher can be committed to personal and professional development and display a strong 'disposition' towards learning and maintaining currency. The RTO can also be committed to developing the capacity of the organisation through the provision of targeted professional development that is integrated into the structure and planning of the organisation in tangible and observable ways. A third level – state and national – is also important.

Workforce development for the VET practitioner, as reported through the case studies that informed this research study, is best undertaken when there are conditions that allow the RTO perform a number of actions, listed on page 74 of the report. The desirable attributes for VET practitioners are also detailed and the report describes these as including a mixture of affective talents such as empathy and patience, blended with deep industry experience and a predisposition to learn and to teach in responsive and pedagogically informed and inclusive ways.

The suggestions for improvement of the VET practitioner workforce in these industries included:

- A more effective blend of industry experience and training expertise when recruiting staff;

¹⁰ Triplett and Bosworth, 'Productivity in the US services sector: new sources for economic growth', 2004

¹¹ Erica Smith, University of Ballarat, 'Pedagogy not political point scoring: how training providers teach international students' 2009

¹² The New Deal, Workforce development for service industries VET practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009.

- A more formal approach to professional development plans which allow staff to document their achievements and set career goals for the future;
- Close liaison between traineeship trainers and company training personnel;
- Higher level VET teaching qualifications that included attention to discipline-specific pedagogy;
- Encouragement for teachers to undertake higher level industry qualifications, where available;
- At least a rudimentary understanding of a second or third language where there are significant numbers of international students;
- A flexible smorgasbord of staff development activities, able to be customised to meet local needs;
- The use of technology to support professional networks and conversations;
- Support for teachers to access demonstrations by international industry experts e.g. master florists, master chefs;
- Close attention to developments in the industry and to individual companies' requirements; and
- A stipulated industry currency requirement that offered 'back-to-industry' programs that were structured to reduce anxiety on the part of the teacher, and have an assessable component¹³

The document also outlines a vision for staff development as a component of workforce planning and describes the desired nature of VET practitioners for the industry. It details a number of examples and recommendations based on case studies undertaken as part of the research project.

Institutional arrangements

Please refer to Theme 7 of SSA's Workforce Development for Service Industries VET Practitioners (page 95), which outlines a vision for appropriate leadership and management development and a flexible, fair and supportive work environment. The theme also identifies the conditions to support workforce development.

Further information on this subject can be found on page 63 of the same research report, under the heading 'Staff development as a component of workforce planning'.

Employment and work practices

SSA's position on these issues is best described in the Workforce Development for Service Industries VET Practitioners research paper. Please refer to Theme 4 (Recruiting and retaining the people we need, page 93), Theme 7 (Appropriate leadership and management development, and a flexible, fair and supportive working environment) and Theme 8 (Identifying, planning and developing development programs for the needs of the VET workforce: at national, RTO and individual level).

¹³ The New Deal, Workforce development for service industries VET practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009.

Regulation of the VET sector

In 2009, SSA's board approved a suite of projects designed to address our stakeholders' ongoing concerns with quality in education and training. This project, (called the New Deal) sought to determine the place of this Industry Skills Council in quality delivery, the skills of our VET workforce and strategies for complimenting the current AQTF requirements.

Flowing out of the New Deal reports was a set of recommendation that have become known as our Quality Implementation Framework QIF. The components of the QIF are:

1. Identifying best practice and industry preference for training facilities
2. Rewarding educators for developing both their pedagogy and industry skills (vocational competence)
3. Identifying quality training resources

SSA is currently implementing the framework and feedback from stakeholders indicates that whilst in the first instance, this framework is not in itself a regulatory mechanism; its outputs can certainly contribute evidence to regulatory frameworks. Our scoping and research activity in 2009 to develop the Quality Implementation Framework demonstrates industry's willingness to contribute to the development of quality providers.

With regard to the suggestion of a register for VET practitioners, page 96 of SSA's Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners paper states:

"... It is suggested that maintaining a national register of practitioners at these levels might be too much to undertake, and that instead the standards should be available for RTOs to use in performance management and promotion activities, and when applying for 'tick' status... and for individuals to use in job applications or when applying for national awards. SSA could develop standards and/or a training program for 'Service Skills workplace trainer' for those not involved with the delivery or assessment of nationally-recognised training¹⁴".

Lessons from other sectors and other countries

Chapter 3 of SSA's Workforce Development for Service Industries' VET Practitioners paper provides an extensive overseas comparison of the VET system of the United Kingdom. Please refer to page 19 of the enclosed report.

Contact

If you require any further information on any of the above comments, or have any further questions relating to this submission, please contact SSA's Research Writer, David Squires, on 02 8243 1200 or dsquires@serviceskills.com.au

¹⁴ The New Deal: Workforce Development for Service Industry VET Practitioners, prepared for SSA by the University of Ballarat, December 2009