

*What criteria should the Commission use to define the scope of the VET sector for the purposes of this study?*

I feel the VET sector should be defined by nationally accredited qualifications which are recognised by employers in that field. That is to say, in-house training provided by an employer would not be included unless it is training leading to an accredited qualification. Secondary schools providing VET training leading to an accredited qualification would be included, as would accredited training done through a university. Organisations such as the Defence Force, State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Authorities, Scouts, Land Care, etc. should also be included where they provide accredited training.

An individual who has completed accredited training should have an advantage in the job market over an untrained person. From the individual's perspective, it doesn't matter if they have completed some units through their membership in the State Emergency Service, and some units provided in-house by their employer, and some units through flexible delivery at TAFE, and some privately through an RTO, -- as long as the training is recognised.

*Do you agree with the possible approach to defining the VET workforce as all employees of VET providers . . . (etc)*

No. The workforce should be defined as VET practitioners only. Other workers such as general staff and professionals not delivering training should be clearly identified as a separate group. Part of the problem with government-funded training is that a significant portion of the funding may be dissipated into non-essential peripheral roles. Supporting roles are part of the bigger picture but in the case of public money there is a need to clarify whether the trainee or the RTO is the main beneficiary.

*What key objectives is the VET workforce seeking to achieve?*

The VET workforce should be imparting job-relevant skills.

*Should the workforce be assessed against its capacity to achieve those objectives?*

The VET workforce should be assessed against the capacity of trainees to meet performance criteria in real life, on the job.

*What metrics should be used to measure achievement of those objectives?*

Employers should be able to submit feedback, positive and negative, to a central point. Trainers who produce good results should be acknowledged and trainers whose students are consistently perceived by employers to be not competent should be investigated.

*What are the key reasons for the apparent older age of VET practitioners relative to the total labour force?*

People decide to become trainers after they have gained experience in an industry. Becoming a trainer is a way of utilising that experience but doing shorter hours or less demanding work. I understand that the TAFE workforce is older because they require 5 years of industry experience

The VET workforce should be studied in the context of the industry they are providing training for. It would be logical, for example, if training for a female-dominated sector was mainly done by females.

It could be useful to differentiate between training providers providing mainly Cert I and Cert II level training and those providing Cert III and Diploma level training.

It could be useful to analyse the difference between private training providers relying heavily on government funding and those who have a significant proportion of fee-paying students. For example, there are a number of private businesses providing training in office skills that would rely heavily on student fees, with government subsidies as just part of the mix. On the other hand, there are other RTO's that appear to rely mainly on delivering government-funded initiatives.

TAFE provides training in a number of areas that are not covered by the private sector. Presumably, the private sector does not consider such training viable even when there is a demand for qualified people. Where I live, the Cert III and Diploma in Horticulture is an example of local training that is provided only by TAFE.

I'm sure profiling the VET workforce by industry would reveal a number of sectors which are very poorly serviced by RTOs. Our local university no longer offers degrees in music but no one is offering VET Music courses either so now music teachers in our community will have to train thousands of kilometres away. "Market forces" are not filling the gap.

In analysing the profile of the VET workforce it could be worth comparing rates of pay as a trainer with rates of pay actually working in the relevant industry. In Childcare, a trainer gets paid 2 to 3 times as much as a qualified Group Leader. The relativities are probably different in male dominated trades.

*Should publicly-funded and privately-funded RTO's face the same minimum standards?*

Absolutely! What meaning does a qualification have if there are no consistent standards?? My colleagues who hold Cert III and Diplomas (all working in the same centre) have trained at TAFE in different states, through various private RTOs, through an employer-run RTO, through VET programs at secondary school, through RPL, and through credit for an overseas qualification. If there is no minimum standard there is no point even having a VET sector.

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I would like to make some general comments from the perspective of Childcare.

Over a period of time, there was a very rapid expansion of childcare facilities due mainly to the activity of ABC Developmental Learning. Since that company went into receivership, the building of new centres has slowed to a trickle.

The response of the VET sector during the rapid expansion of the industry was totally inadequate and resulted in a high proportion of the childcare workforce being unqualified when there was legislation in place requiring services to have qualified staff. Government regulators allowed exemptions because there were not enough qualified staff available. People with qualifications were then at a disadvantage in the job market because they were more expensive than unqualified staff. Many qualified people left the industry during this time.

TAFE had almost no capacity to respond to the increased demand because there was no corresponding increase in resources to meet the demand but also because the staff continued doing what they had always done.

Private RTO's sprang up promising a quicker and easier path to a qualification. Some of these RTO's have since been discredited by the state department overseeing childcare and colleagues have been left with worthless certificates. This should never have happened. It was obvious, from the beginning, to people with real qualifications, that the training packages on offer were dodgy.

Now we are in a situation where there are childcare workers with Diplomas who have never had an hour of face to face training, who have never been inside a centre other than the one where they work, and who have never had their skills independently assessed. Yes, they have written pages and pages of assignments but what do they actually know and understand about best practice? These are the qualified staff who are now training the newer ones coming through.

For decades the federal government has monitored areas of skills shortage to determine priorities for immigration. Government assistance for training should adopt a similar approach.

Qualified people who have to work with (aka be unpaid trainers for) unqualified staff should be paid more in recognition of the added responsibility. In this way, employers would not be financially rewarded for employing untrained staff.

Assessment should be conducted centrally, consistently, and independently of TAFEs and RTOs. This would relieve TAFEs and RTOs of the cost of storage of documentation, which has become a major deterrent to forming a training organisation. The assessment should include observation of the candidate's work practices in a real setting.

Thank you for your time.