



TAFE Development Centre response to the Productivity Commission Issues Paper on the VET Workforce

In this response the TAFE Development Centre (TDC) addresses the specific questions that focus on workforce development and related matters raised in the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper pertinent to the background and brief of the TDC, rather than answer all questions in the discussion paper.

The TDC has responded directly to the Productivity Commission via interview and has also provided supporting information to a combined response by the TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) and TDC.

Background and context

The establishment of the TDC (Victoria) was announced in the Minister of Education and Training's *Statement on Skills and Knowledge for the Innovation Economy* in 2002. It is part of the Government's vision for a reinvigorated public TAFE system, through initiatives to build staff skills, support effective recruitment, and focus on high quality people development for Victoria's TAFE Institutes. The TDC is guided by this vision of a reinvigorated Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, staffed by educators, leaders, managers and specialist staff who enjoy a high status in the community and among professional peers. The Centre's mission is to promote the development and raise the professional standing of people working in the VET Sector.

Since 2005, the TDC has concentrated the design and delivery of its professional programs on the strategic interests of VET providers, and on the emerging practice priorities of VET professionals. TDC views VET workforce development as its area of expertise and continues to adapt programs as training market dynamics change in line with new policy directions. Effective VET workforce development strategies emerge from rigorous analysis of how best to link skills and knowledge to strategic directions and operational demands.

For the TDC, meeting strategic workforce development demands continues to mean working collaboratively with providers and VET professionals to ensure TDC products and services make fertile contributions to the lively interaction between policy and practice.

What is the VET sector?

TDC agrees with the terminology used in the Issues Paper (page 8) referring to the 3 broad definitions defining the sector: 1. VET Practitioners, 2. VET professionals and also 3. General staff as identified in the document. However we would also suggest that independent contractors, Industry Skills Council staff, representatives from peak bodies as well as staff from Enterprise RTOs be included as part of the VET

workforce definition. The TDC has further identified 'specialist' staff rather than general staff as a means of emphasising that important and specialised role that these staff play in an organisation. With a greater requirement for statistics and metrics in current management practices, this nomenclature could also include the business analysts, strategic planners, thought leaders and senior management as well as the staff identified in the descriptor of 'general staff'. The TDC view is that it is important to delineate between these categories so that specific and targeted professional development programs can be applied to meet the discrete needs of these staff.

With the overlap of VET and the blurring of the boundaries with VET provision now occurring in the school environment, registered training organisations (public, private and ERTO), higher education, industry and increasingly off shore, there is a lack of clarity regarding the definition of the 'VET workforce', particularly with respect to educators, facilitators, assessors and teachers. Consequently the TDC agrees with the broader definition.

What implications might a trend towards higher level qualifications have for demand for VET, and the VET workforce?

The trend towards higher qualifications for the Australian workforce will require the VET workforce to also be suitably qualified and skilled to teach and deliver at these levels. With targets of increased enrolments at Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels there will be a requirement for VET practitioners to hold qualifications at AQF levels 5 and 6. With VET Institutes delivering degree programs there is also a requirement for staff to have Masters Qualifications and above. Considerable time and expense will be required to ensure that staff are appropriately qualified and new program areas may require recruitment strategies to ensure the employment of vocationally current practitioners. In some discipline areas the salary differential between industry and teaching pay scales may be a deterrent to increased participation in the teaching workforce.

Anecdotal evidence has also indicated that some trade teachers have moved into teaching as a 'semi retirement' from industry. If this is the case they may not be up to date with the technology requirements for teaching practice particularly at the higher qualification level.

An incentive or process is required to ensure that teaching staff continue to upgrade both their educational qualifications as well as maintaining appropriate industry competency and currency. Where staff teach degree programs in TAFE there is a requirement for them to develop and participate in a 'scholarly' culture as well as maintain all of the educational and industry specific requirements pertinent to the vocational degree they are teaching. There is considerable difference in the industrial environment, work culture, education and previous work history requirements between VET teachers and those required to teach higher education programs in TAFE. The debate about the Certificate IV and Diploma in Training and Assessment providing appropriate skills and knowledge for staff teaching VET qualifications is yet to be fully resolved.



Work force development

The TDC has provided a range of options for the Victorian VET Workforce over the past 5-6 years; designing and delivering workforce development programs for the individual practitioner, the RTO and for the sector. In this way the TDC has supported the individual development needs of practitioners in a timely fashion. It has also provided grant funds to Institutes to allow them to develop projects aligned to both their own strategic vision as well as the Government strategies. And through the provision of sector wide programs the TDC has supported key state and national training policy agendas.

What workforce development options exist for VET workers seeking to develop their VET knowledge and skills? Industry currency? Trainer/assessor competence?

Within Victoria the TDC provides a wide range of programs to build the capability of the workforce:

- TAFE Industry Skills Scheme
- Industry Experts as Teachers
- TAFE Teaching Fellowships
- Professional Learning Series
- Reaching Learners outside the system
- Recognition of Prior Learning programs
- Assessment validation and moderation programs

TAFE Industry Skills Scheme - This program is designed to help TAFE Institutes build and maintain the industry knowledge and skills of their staff. The scheme supports arrangements among TAFE Institutes, enterprises and industry bodies that provide opportunities for TAFE staff to upgrade their existing skills and knowledge or to acquire new or specialised skills in their industry area.

In 2009-10 the TDC funded 18 projects across the state – from microbiology training, hospitality placements, new skills in the building industry, understanding of the new accounting standards, and supply change logistics to a staff placement at Deakin University.

These programs, linked with the overall institute strategy provide opportunities for staff to engage directly with industry. As well as maintaining their own currency it enables them to make and develop important relationships with the industry sectors in their community. To date the TDC focus has been on providing grants to the public TAFE sector. Some examples of projects:

One Institute developed a project to provide industry currency for Health &Community Services staff within 3 priority industry sectors. The aim was to build relationships and identify current and emerging learning needs with a focus on priority skill sets at Diploma level

Another example enabled plumbing teachers to complete accredited training in solar hot water installation. This extended the Institute's sustainability focus by up skilling and qualifying staff from the Industry and Energy teaching division



Industry Experts as Teachers - The Industry Experts as Teachers program provides scholarships to new industry entrants to the TAFE teaching workforce to pay for initial training. In addition, participating TAFE Institutes receive a mentoring fee attached to each scholarship. This program is intended to support industry experts into TAFE teaching to ensure appropriate vocational currency for program delivery, in some cases for new and emerging industry sectors.

TAFE Teaching Fellows - The Fellowship aims to support new TAFE teachers with one to four years experience in TAFE, by providing a comprehensive development program, which builds on their teaching and educational leadership capability. Financial support and direct engagement in professional development activities is provided to the recipients so that over time they can make a significant contribution to the growth of VET teaching professionalism. Since 2005 the TAFE Development Centre has provide support to over 100 TAFE teachers. A longitudinal research study is currently underway to identify current employment and an indication of the benefits of the scholarship to their professional practice and employment.

Professional Learning Series - each calendar year the TDC delivers in excess of 50 professional development programs. These are targeted for educators, specialist staff and leaders and cover a range of topics deemed appropriate to both individual and sector need. A sample of topics for 2009-10 has included the following:

- The Art of Learning Facilitation
- Project Management: The Essentials
- Training Packages and AQTF – Unpacked for VETiS teachers
- Critical Conversations on Transforming VET Practice – a series of 4 facilitated conversations
- Focus on Assessment to develop and validate assessment tools
- Leading in VET
- Exploring strategies for learner engagement
- Skills Reform – the journey so far
- Meeting Customer Expectations in a contestable environment
- Responding to Diverse Learners
- The Leader as Coach
- LEAN Skills
- Spotlight on Excellence – sharing the practice and insights
- International Learners – enhancing the learning experience

These events attract between 60-100 participants per event; evaluations received for each event indicate a satisfaction level above 85%.

Reaching Learners outside the system – the Reaching Learners Outside the System program provides an accredited course in informal learning, *Course in Assessment of Informal Learning* 21658VIC available to teaching professionals, thereby enabling their employing registered training organisation (RTO) to subsequently offer a second course, *Recognised Informal Learning* 21656VIC to clients who have had limited contact with the formal training system. Over the past 18 months the TDC has delivered this program to 850 VET practitioners.

Recognition of Prior Learning programs - This one day program is designed for new and experienced trainers/teachers and assessors to refresh or enhance their skills and knowledge in conducting an RPL assessment and meeting the AQTF requirements. It will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss current RPL practices, debunk any myths or misunderstandings about RPL and obtain credible advice from expert facilitators in both RPL and the AQTF. The TDC played a key role in establishing Skills Stores in Victoria through developing and delivering a training program for VET managers and teachers on contemporary approaches to RPL.

Assessment validation and moderation programs - This one day interactive workshop is designed for VET practitioners and senior assessors and coordinators responsible for quality-assuring assessment. It discusses the characteristics of effective assessment tools and provides a framework for assessment validation.

Workforce Capability

This program aims to foster and promote innovation and strengthen systems and processes that support staff development and workforce planning strategies. It is intended that this is achieved through both Institute-specific projects and collaborative activity with one or more TAFE Institutes.

In 2009 the TDC supported 6 projects across the TAFE sector.

One institute developed an induction program that encompassed adult learning principles, introduced staff to the e-environment, was quality assured and linked to units of competency in accredited courses

Another project mapped current ICT skills of staff in line with their strategic ICT Experience Discussion Paper to identify existing ICT skills of Institute staff. The project will allow the Institute to forecast and plan for future workforce ICT skills

Another Institute addressed trends in practice, service delivery and skills requirements to ensure that the workforce renewal project can be used as an effective change agent. The project aimed to provide a future focus to address historical and cultural issues perceived as barriers to creating an environment of change and adaptability

Are these options adequate? For public and private providers? If not, what other workforce development activities are desirable? How should these be funded? How should they be delivered?

These programs are appropriate and suitable if they are part of a holistic approach to workforce development. To date, the TDC has supported the TAFE sector with limited program support for the ACFE sector but has not provided government funded support to the private RTOs. Private RTOs are able to access the TDC commercial professional learning series and many of them have done so.

There is an opportunity for government to provide ongoing professional development funding support to the wider VET sector as government continues to maintain responsibility for the TAFE/VET system. At the same time this funding support is best targeted to significant matters of policy and practice reform so that programs and services can be delivered holistically and in a targeted manner across the sector.



Programs and services of this nature should continue to be delivered (in Victoria) by agencies such as the TDC.

Is a workforce development plan needed? How might a plan be developed? What would be its key elements?

Ongoing strategies for the development of the VET workforce are required at a strategic, organisational and individual level to keep pace with the changing VET/Tertiary environment and to meet the new and merging needs of industry, learners and government.

A workforce development plan would need to be developed for the specific cohorts within the VET workforce appropriate to their current job function and level. For example, considerable research has been undertaken regarding the levels of professionalism of VET teachers (NCVER). The TDC has also developed a model of practitioner expertise based on whether they are a new entrant, an accomplished practitioner or an educational leader. Targeted professional development programs can then be provided based on this categorisation.

The TDC recommends the development of:

- A state based strategy to allow for specific requirements for each component of the workforce to meet the specific industry and strategic government needs
- Professional competency standards for teachers at each level (e.g. new entrant, accomplished practitioner or educational leader) depending on their vocational area of delivery expertise
- A requirement for a specific number of mandated hours of professional practice to maintain educational as well as vocational currency
- Programs linked to professional practice that accrue 'credit' points that can be used against accredited training programs or to maintain professional currency
- Sector wide funding support directed to employers to ensure a coordinated approach to workforce development in the VET sector. It will be a shared responsibility of government (for the public sector) employers and employees to source and provide a range of workforce and professional development activities and programs.

What sorts of workforce planning activities currently take place within the sector?

In Victoria, the TDC acts as a leader, provider, facilitator and support to (predominantly) the TAFE sector to support their workforce planning requirements. Some recent examples of the support provided include:

- Provision of funding grants to support institute projects under 3 broad headings – Workforce Development, Vocational Currency and VET Practice. Individual institutes are able to access up to \$150,000 pa from the TDC for appropriate projects

- Provision of a Professional Learning Series (as previously mentioned); in 2010 the TDC will provide up to 80 targeted events in metropolitan and regional locations
- In consultation with the State Services Authority, the TDC prepared a report *Actions to build a future TAFE workforce*. The purpose of the report, finalised in early 2009, was to provide an overview of the makeup of the TAFE sector workforce; provide a report of attraction, recruitment and retention challenges reported by the sector; report on current workforce planning initiatives and areas of development; and explore potential strategies to mitigate future workforce risk. The report provides a checklist of workforce planning strategies and actions that an Institute could access to guide the development of their individual workforce development plan
- The TDC has an annual teaching and learning forum (2010 *RISE to the Challenge*; RISE is an acronym for Research, Innovation, Sustainability & Education) as well as providing for 2 knowledge sharing events to showcase best practice examples of TDC funded projects
- Facilitation of the National VET Workforce Development Mangers network - The network was established in 2006 on an initiative of the TDC. The direct objectives of the group (as articulated at the inaugural meeting hosted by the TDC) were as follows: To share information about workforce development and organisational development strategies across jurisdictions and organisations; to foster collaboration between these jurisdictions and organisations and to share strategies and initiatives and recent research. The network has representatives from all states and territories and meets twice per year.
- The TDC supports approximately 25 practitioner networks annually with either small seeding grants, funds to support secretariat expenses or sponsorship of conferences and meetings
- The TDC maintains a *Careers in TAFE* website that provides information regarding teaching opportunities in TAFE. The site provides an easily accessible resource for people working in industry who may be considering a career in TAFE/VET. The site answers the types of questions prospective TAFE employees might ask in considering both teaching roles as well as specialist positions

What types of workforce planning activities do you think can be most effectively undertaken by individual providers, and which types of workforce planning activities lend themselves to a coordinated, overarching approach?

How could any coordinated, overarching approach best be informed, organised and funded?

Effective workforce planning requires consideration of individual professional development need, enterprise need and industry requirements all linked to the state and/or national agendas.

Skills Australia in their Workforce Futures report (2009) identified workforce development as *those policies and practices which support people to participate effectively in the workforce and to develop and apply skills in a workplace context, where learning translates into positive outcomes for enterprises, the wider community and for individuals throughout their working lives.*

Individual institutes and organisations traditionally develop their workforce planning strategies to take account of their specific needs in a variety of environments including their geographic location; their community or industry engagement, their training and delivery patterns in their current and emerging discipline areas any off shore delivery; industry partnerships and in many cases a combination of all categories. Linked to their own strategic directions Institutes either provide their own targeted professional development linked to their strategy and/or liaise with other providers. In Victoria, the TDC has provided professional development programs and grants to TAFE Institutes under the following categories: Workforce Development, Professional Practice, VET Currency as well as a range of services to support networks and conferences. The TDC has also developed and provided sector wide programs that have been linked to Government strategy – recent examples of these programs have included:

- Education for Sustainability – Green Skills Professional Development
- Industry Experts as Teachers
- Embedding Employability Skills
- Coaching and Mentoring

A coordinated approach is required to ensure that all sectors responsible for the delivery of VET programs are considered in the development of an overarching strategy. A number of complex environmental drivers are impacting on the skill profile required of VET practitioners. Most notably, the recent changes to government policies at state and federal levels are driving rapid reforms in the VET and Higher Education (HE) sectors. The merging of educational boundaries, the widening of access and greater participation in tertiary education and recommendations for greater collaboration and partnerships between TAFE and Universities in an integrated tertiary are at the forefront of current debate. Ongoing strategies for the development of the VET workforce are required at a strategic, organisational and individual level to keep pace with these changes and meet the new and merging needs of industry, learners and government.

What organisations are best placed to undertake overarching workforce planning activities?

As the premium provider of workforce development solutions for the Victorian VET sector with well established partnerships and networks with VET and HE providers, professionals and government, the TDC is well positioned to undertake the required workforce planning activities. In Victoria the TDC has consistently provided these activities for the individual practitioner, the RTO and the sector for the past 5-6 years. The TDC has developed strategic links with other organisations in the VET and tertiary



education sector to ensure that the programs and services offered are appropriate, relevant and timely to suit the development needs of the wide range of VET workers. The TDC is perceived by current stakeholders to be neutral in that it is independent of government and not an RTO and thus able to support the requirements of all parties.

Registration of VET Practitioner

Might registration of VET practitioners and/or other professionals have benefits for their professional standing and practice? Would these benefits outweigh potential costs from higher barriers to entry into the VET workforce?

The TDC has no formal position with respect to practitioner registration but supports measures to improve the professional practice and standing of VET professionals. The TDC does recognise that registration could be beneficial in maintaining the quality of educational provision but to be effective, the system needs to be simple, not onerous on the practitioner and not just based on an annual fee; registration in this context could outweigh any perceived disadvantage.

Summary

TDC will continue to provide professional development support and programs to the TAFE providers and across the broader VET sector in line with state and national policy goals. Strong links with Institutes enables the TDC to provide an interpretive role between Government and TAFE Institutes about workforce development requirements across Victoria. This is an important value add which TAFE Institutes believe the TDC has delivered. With strong links to the higher education sector TDC has the capacity and reputation to provide programs and services associated with the workforce development issues emerging from the new tertiary education landscape.

The TDC understands that while VET policy has many common features across jurisdictions in Australia, governments approach policy implementation in ways crafted to respond to the unique characteristics of each state and territory. Distance, demography, settlement patterns, current rates of qualification attainment, differences in industry mix, internal migration flows, immigration flows, the number and nature of VET providers active in any given market – these and many other factors determine which VET policies and programs are deployed.

VET workforce development needs are constantly changing. Consequently, the TDC's emphasis on continuous improvement of products and services ensures that what we do is not static.