

# Only a trainer?

Barriers vs. benefits of mandatory registration for VET Practitioners.

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Australian Government Productivity Commission Discussion Paper Question:

*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?*

It is an ongoing issue for vocational practitioners to be reminded that they are “only a trainer”, not a “teacher” as it is currently not a requirement for workplace trainers to hold a Bachelor of Education (or equivalent). This has become a bit of a sore spot for vocational practitioners of late, as it creates barriers to obtaining some professional development activities as well as being perceived as a substandard profession compared to teachers. It must be noted however, that teachers are forbidden to work in the vocational sector unless they have obtained a Certificate IV in Workplace Training & Assessment, or the more recent Certificate IV in Training & Assessment.

To some degree the notion of workplace training being considered a substandard practice may be true if the professional standards each role is held to be considered. NSW Teachers are required, upon completion of their degree (and in other special circumstances), to register with, and provide evidence to the NSW Institute of Teachers that they meet these professional standards. It is the responsibility of the teacher as an individual to prepare and submit this evidence. However, for VET practitioners, once they obtain their Certificate IV in Training & Assessment, it is up to the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to monitor their standard of training and assessment. There is no professional body currently, which monitors each trainer as an individual. *See attachment 1.1 for copy of NSW Teacher’s Professional Standards.*

All workplace trainers are required to already have a trade qualification, as it is a minimum requirement under the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) that each trainer has at a minimum, the qualification that they are delivering. Quite a number of trades have their own registering bodies i.e. The Nurses and Midwives Board of NSW. However, these registration bodies do not maintain records on individuals as “trainers” – only as registered trade professionals.

Malcolm Knowles is a philosopher famous for his research and published works on the subject of andragogy vs. pedagogy – the differences between how children and adults learn. Yet, many educators, for both children and adults, disagree with the notion that adult and children learn any differently. Why then is it that VET practitioners are not held in the same regard as “teachers”?

Surely, adult education must be considered as important as the education of children and adolescents – VET is becoming increasingly common in the higher school education levels with many students completing the HSC with a VET qualification, or part thereof.

A valid concern raised by the discussion paper is the potential for creating a higher barrier into the VET workforce. This may reduce the attractiveness of the profession to potential future workplace trainers, especially if the discontinued Bachelor of Adult Education degree (previously offered by the University of Western Sydney), or equivalent, became the new minimum qualification. If this were the case, a lengthy transition period would be required to implement this new standard. But then what about our ageing workforce? Would we expect workplace trainers aged 55+ to go back to university?

Any increase in professional standards would also require a review of salaries offered to workplace trainers. There has been an increasing trend in the use of contracting self-employed trainers, which requires a negotiated fee between the RTO and the trainer. This has the potential to cause a flow-on effect of higher enrolment fees for fee-paying students, and requests to appropriate State Training Services for increased funding for relevant programs. The establishment of a registering body for VET practitioners would also come at a significant cost to the industry.

It has been acknowledged that the mandatory registration of teachers was designed to improve the professional standing of teachers as well as promote consistency within the profession. The NSW Institute of Teachers also has the ability to review and change or establish new standards on an ongoing basis. This is a practice which is lacking significantly in the VET sector, and any changes made to incorporate similar practice/s into the sector can only improve the professional standing and practice of VET practitioners, as well as reassure students that the education they are receiving is being delivered by an individual who not only has the correct qualification, but also meets a high standard of professional practice.

Whilst education is never going to have a “one size fits all” solution, it can only benefit the industry for all educators for children, young people and adults to be held to the same or similar standards – regardless of potential higher barriers into the VET workforce.