

# Central Institute of Technology

## Productivity Commission VET Workforce Issues Paper Contribution to Western Australia's response

### Introduction

The Productivity Commission has released the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues Paper and is seeking contributions from States, organisations and individuals.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet has requested that the Department of Training and Workforce Development take the lead in the preparation of a consolidated WA Government response to this national inquiry. Colleges are invited to submit their views on the paper and comments in response to any of its questions as part of the submission being prepared by the Department.

Central has contributed to specific questions in the Issues Paper as part of the TAFE Directors Australia survey. In this response it is not intended to re-address the information provided as part of this survey, rather a more broad based approach will be taken to general issues within the sector, some of which are highlighted or discussed in the Issues Paper.

### Central's contribution to the State response

The following is Central Institute of Technology's contribution to the WA Government response to the Productivity Commission Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues Paper:

#### *The nature of the market*

The training market is an increasingly competitive one. The level of competition is expected to increase in the time ahead. There are inherent features in the public training system (TAFE) that impeded our capacity to compete with private RTOs an increasing amount of the public dollar that is being subjected to competitive processes.

The public system grew out of the schools system and has largely retained the broad educational framework in the way that it operates. Its practitioners remain under industrial awards that are rooted in an educational context, with requirements for educational attainment determining promotions and salary increases. And yet, increasingly the system is required to respond in an industry context, a requirement to which attaches the need for much greater flexibility than is available. Private providers, which have no such philosophical or historical base, have at their disposal a much higher degree of flexibility. As a consequence, the public system is the subject of continuing criticism from employers for not meeting their needs.

The Lecturers' General Agreement, under which the Western Australia public system operates, for instance, continues to have a strong focus on traditional academic practise. This focus can be illustrated by the current progression rules in the agreement. For example, to progress to the level of Advanced Skills Lecturer (an academic leadership position), a lecturer is required to obtain a higher level 'teaching' qualification. Higher levels of professional qualification or skills in the industry disciplines in which people teach, currently account for nothing.

This is at odds with the needs of the market which is characterised by a requirement to have greater flexibility in the training market to support an increase in:

- recognition of prior learning;
- workplace delivery and traineeships;
- the incorporation of on-line technology into training; and
- the diversity of learners and the diversity of contexts in which learning occurs.

There is significant disparity in salary costs and conditions between the public and private sectors, which presents barriers to greater co-operation and collaboration between public and private training providers.

Further, in times of skills shortage, most prevalent of late in areas like the trades, it is increasingly difficult for the system to recruit staff. Salary rates in VET could never be commensurate with those paid in industry. The award framework, with built in rigidities and requirements for particular modes of employment for instance, mitigate against greater and more flexible utilisation of staff in industry, for the purposes of teaching on the job.

### The VET practitioner

It is an acknowledged fact the task of lecturing in the VET system has increased in complexity. With the continuous increase in demand for RPL, workplace delivery and traineeships; the incorporation of online technology into training; and the diversity of learners, the mode of 'only teaching in the classroom' no longer holds currency. However, the Western Australian TAFE Lecturers' General Agreement continues to have a strong focus on traditional academic practice. This focus can be illustrated by the current progression rules in the agreement - to progress to the level of ASL, a lecturer is required to obtain a higher level 'teaching' qualification.

During the last negotiations the concept of 'Flexible Hours' (section 36A) were introduced into the EBA. The context and intent of this section was primarily to provide flexibility in the deployment of 'teaching hours', but, it did not change the overall academic nature of the agreement. Further to this, the introduction of the flexible hours section predated the concept of 'Workforce Development', a new concept, the implications of which are not addressed adequately elsewhere in the current agreement.

The Context Today

**Training WA** (a Ministerial statement of priorities for the WA Training System) outlined the 10-year vision to transform WA's training system:

*The fundamental change to WA's training system will ensure that economic opportunities are taken advantage of and providing industry with the skills they need.*

*Significantly increasing participation in training so people maximise their potential and ensuring greater flexibility for the training system are two key areas of focus.*

*Rather than focus exclusively on training, the new Department of Training and Workforce Development will work with industry, the community and government to:*

- *Maximise utilisation of skills in the workplace to increase productivity*
- *Maximise workforce participation*
- *Promote efficiency and mobility in the labour market, including a seamless transition from training into the workforce*

## **WA Workforce Development Plan Issues Paper**

Skills Australia contends that:

*Reorientating staff to industry outcomes, rather than training outputs requires a major cultural and professional change for many staff*

### **Enhancing the capability of the tertiary education sector | Skills Australia**

With the transformation of the training system, including implementation of the new State Workforce Development strategy, the response from the training sector needs to change quite fundamentally to embrace and achieve this emerging direction. We must therefore ensure that we have a professional workforce that can deliver on all the outcomes of the State's workforce development plan.

The recruitment, training and advancement of our staff in the future must be informed by all these considerations. Issues that need to be considered for the VET practitioner includes the type of practitioner needed to support the future of VET – Workforce Development

*We acknowledge that currently our lecturers must be able to support learning of very different client groups.*

*Workforce development requires knowledge and a range of high-level skills and abilities in order to deliver quality service and outcomes.*

*The 'new practitioner' looks outwards at market needs and seeks to meet those needs.*

*These attributes represent a hybrid mix of educational and business thinking to allow them to work more closely with industry and enterprises. They need to be a strong educator with an equally strong understanding of the enterprise/business.*

### **Quality is the key: Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training | NCVET 2006 | John Mitchell et al**

The VET workforce has a broader role and responsibility, with the need for a firm grasp of the notion of workforce development, and its attendant notions of workforce participation, and productivity, in particular the role that skills play in determining the productivity of an enterprise.

The significance of institutional delivery must not be underestimated, however. Traditional classroom based teaching will always remain an important consideration, supplemented and complemented by the use of technology. There are now higher and different demands from learners, with varied needs, including a wide range of literacy and numeracy requirements. This complexity will not abate. We need to ensure we have, or obtain staff who have, the necessary skills to support and enhance institutional teaching and learning.

At the same time teaching and learning styles need to encompass delivery in a non institutional setting, be it the workplace or the virtual world.

With the concept of workforce development, we will need to ensure that we have staff who can work effectively with employers and industry (establishing a relationship not just with the trainees, but with the people who employ them) on other levels, including guiding employers through diagnostic analysis of their workforce skills as opposed to simply offering an existing training product. Further, as was stated earlier, we need staff who have an understanding of workforce productivity and the role that skills and expertise play in affecting the bottom line.

Serious and honest consideration is warranted as to whether some of our more traditional 'lecturers' currently have the skills needed to undertake such a role, or are ever likely to acquire them.

A critical question for consideration is whether it continues to be reasonable to expect the same person to have the capability to meet such a wide range of requirements and to possess the necessary level of expertise and professionalism. It is suggested that we need to look at the definition of a 'lecturer' given that the term would be very different depending on the teaching and learning environment/situation. John Mitchell's co-authored report on critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in VET (NCVER), uses the term '*practitioner*', which still seems to imply that all skills and attributes reside in the one person.

Perhaps we need to look at different types of staff for different types of work, and skills, qualifications and attributes that are attuned to the types of work that people are doing. Perhaps increased specialisations could have the effect of increasing the professionalism of the VET practitioner.

Other issues for consideration in the context of the VET practitioner include:

#### Product

The product delivered primarily drives requirements of the VET workforce. Within this context, serious consideration needs to be given to whether the current VET product is sufficiently responsive and will appropriately equip students with the capabilities to adapt effectively to the evolving and rapidly changing industry and workforce context.

There is a question over whether Training Packages, while originally designed to respond to industry needs and provide flexibility, still fulfill this purpose. Training Packages, in the main are narrowly focused, with qualifications increasingly aligned to specific job roles and related technical skills, whereas indications are that employability skills, conceptual and higher level cognitive skills are increasingly required in today's workplace. While there has been an effort to integrate employability skills within Training Packages, it is generally considered that this approach has had limited success. The rate at which job roles are evolving, and the number of career changes that individuals are likely to experience, raise doubts about the ongoing effectiveness and responsiveness of Training Packages in meeting the future needs of the workforce. A shift in emphasis to a more broad based approach would be complemented by a greater focus on up-skilling and workforce development, along with increased industry engagement in the training process.

It is timely that a detailed review of the outcomes industry is seeking from training is undertaken, along with the type of product that will best meet these expectations.

#### Registration of VET practitioners

Any proposal to introduce a system of registration for VET professionals, similar to the systems operating in the schools sector is opposed. It is considered that this would further enshrine the 'educational' framework within which the system currently operates.

It needs to be recognised that registration or the attainment of qualifications is not the only way to professionalise the workforce.

The current qualification framework enshrined in industrial agreements and AQTF standards acts as a barrier to attracting and retaining quality industry specialists. Qualified industry specialists are often not motivated to get education qualifications in order to remain within or progress through the VET workforce. This is particularly relevant in skills shortage areas.

It is envisaged that registration of VET practitioners and/or other professions would add to the barriers that already exist for attraction and retention.

### VET Workforce Planning

Central has a current workforce plan that has targeted strategies to improve our:

- *Culture* – where creativity and the exercise of imagination is fostered and staff are able to constructively challenge the norms.
- *Capability* – where there is a focus on enthusiasm and the skills required to meet the varied needs of our students, enterprises, and industries
- *Leadership and Management* – where managers are adept at managing people and resources.
- *Change* – where we are able to anticipate the need for change, and respond accordingly, with increasing agility.

Since 2008 there has been a focus on cementing workforce planning strategies not only at the organizational level, but at the divisional level as well. This has included the alignment of our workforce plan in divisional operational planning. This trend will be continued with the renewal of our workforce plan in 2011.

It is agreed that there may be scope for a coordinated or overarching approaches to workforce planning particularly in relation to the factors identified in the paper like: broad economic, demographic and social change and specific pressures on the training system as a result of changing demands from industry.

### **Conclusion**

For Central the critical issues are:

- Changing the context in which the workforce sees itself operating (“we work with industry; we work for employers”)
- Increasing flexibility and mobility within and between public and private training providers and industry;
- Whether the current product lends itself to being able to easily adapt to meet the ongoing needs of industry;
- Removing barriers that impact on our ability to respond to needs and compete; and
- Engaging industry in the development of our product.