

# **CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY**

## **Response to the Australian Government Productivity Commission**

### **Vocational Education and Training Workforce Study**

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#### **Introduction**

Charles Darwin University (CDU) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Vocational Education and Training Workforce study.

CDU is the largest VET provider in the Northern Territory. As a dual-sector University it provides training and higher education to individuals in urban, regional and remote locations, offering a range of flexible delivery methodologies.

CDU has a strong interest in the capacity and capability of the future VET workforce. In the context of the Northern Territory with the challenges of distance and remoteness, the future VET professional will need to be flexible, multi-skilled and able to meet the training needs of a changing economic and community base.

#### **Factors affecting the current and future demand for the VET workforce, and the required mix of skills and knowledge**

CDU is happy to accept the categorization of VET Workers into the three categories, VET Practitioners, VET Professionals and General Staff (p. 8 of the Issues paper).

As economic conditions in Australia improve, particularly driven by a growing Resources Sector, there will continue to be growth in demand for a skilled workforce. This is the view of Skills Australia, who estimate, in their document *Australian Workforce Futures: A national workforce development strategy* that around 4.6 million additional qualifications will be needed over the next 15 years due to employment growth. It is also stated that to produce that qualification level, enrolments in Higher Education and VET will need to increase by 3% per annum cumulatively. Many of the new skills and qualifications required will be from the VET sector. Hence, it would seem that there will be a continuing strong demand for VET Workers, and particularly VET Practitioners in the long term.

As Australia's economy becomes more knowledge-based, and continuing technological advances diffuse across industry and the public sector, the demand for higher level VET qualifications (Certificate IV) and above will become more prevalent. Given that under the AQTF, VET Practitioners need an industry qualification at least to the level that they are training and assessing, then they will also need higher qualifications.

VET Practitioners will need a broader skill-set in the future. This is being driven by a closer focus on clients and stakeholders, and greater competition in training markets. Key skills required will be those of facilitation, negotiation and partnership-building. Attributes will include flexibility, an outcomes focus, and embracement of internationalization. As VET becomes more commercialized in increasingly contestable

training markets, commercial skills such as marketing, business development and risk analysis will become essential.

As the tertiary sector (VET and Higher Education - HE) evolves, the number of VET organizations delivering HE qualifications will increase. Hence some VET Practitioners will deliver across both sectors; VET Practitioners with both VET and HE qualifications will be in high demand.

It is noted that VET Practitioners often work in the Senior Secondary Schools environment, delivering VET in Schools programs. Some of the teaching skills required for quality delivery in Schools' programs are different than those required in the adult learning environment. Hence, it is possible that the VET Facilitator of the future could be required to deliver across three sectors, which has implications for the professional education and training for VET Facilitators.

The focus on pathways through VET to HE, and on language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) support, will continue to be critical, driven by the need to continuously develop skills in Australia's workforce. Skills Australia notes that 43.5% of the working age population has low functional literacy skills, and that 49.8% have low numeracy skills. It is known that to increase the participation in the workforce by low SES groups, well specified pathways from Certificates I and II with integrated literacy and numeracy support is essential. Hence there will be a continuing strong demand for VET LLN Practitioners. Also, all VET Practitioners and Professionals will need to have knowledge of the LLN approaches required to improve student outcomes.

### **The current and future supply of the VET workforce**

The current VET workforce is generally recruited from industry and the private sector. A key issue will continue to be attracting skilled workers. The VET 'industry' will need to have a strong value proposition to attract highly skilled people who are in high demand in industry. For Government VET providers, the attractant may not include salary levels, hence the proposition will be about working conditions. These will need to include potential for ongoing professional development, including regular return to industry periods to update industry skills.

Industry will continue to demand more flexible approaches to training and assessment, including work-based, on-line, RPL and gap training. Hence the employment conditions of VET Practitioners will need to align with industry need. Flexibility may suit both the needs of the VET Practitioner and industry.

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