

04 August 2010

Dr Patrick Laplagne  
Assistant Commissioner  
Education and Training Workforce Study  
LB2 Collins St East  
Productivity Commission  
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Mr ~~Laplagne~~ *Patrick*

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is Australia's largest and most representative business and employer organisation. ACCI represents the interests of 350 000 employers across the country and in a wide range of industry sectors. ACCI presents a robust and independent voice in the national skills arena that stems from the depth and breadth of ACCI's membership base which covers all sectors of the Australian economy.

The Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector plays a critical role in the development of the skills and knowledge essential to meet the human capital needs of the Australian business community. The VET sector provides a diverse range of educational outcomes, from language, literacy and numeracy and foundational skills development, to traditional trades training and professional and paraprofessional qualifications.

The range of applications in VET delivery and the breadth of industry coverage in VET make it hard to define what makes the modern VET practitioner.

The range of providers in VET and the modes of delivery also create some difficulty in defining the VET workforce. VET in Schools and Australian School Based Apprenticeships have practitioners who may more readily see themselves as teachers in the schools system as opposed to VET trainers. Enterprise RTOs may have trainers who consider themselves to be part of a business operation rather than as trainers; some private and public RTOs operating as dual sector providers may have staff delivering

VET qualification who see themselves as being more akin to higher education tutors or lecturers.

The VET sectors cover a broad range of very diverse occupations and roles. Along with those engaged in the actual delivery of training, there are specialist administrative staff, auditors, project managers, workplace supervisors, advisors in peak industry bodies and Industry Skills Councils, public servants and other ancillary roles that support VET practitioners in the delivery of training. Many of these support and ancillary staff have highly specialised roles that have skills that are specific to the VET sector, such as administrative officers specialising in AVETMISS reporting and AQTF Auditors.

At present, there is no targeted and consistent collection of data on the VET workforce. The NCVER report, *Vocational education and training workforce data 2008: A compendium*,<sup>1</sup> identifies the lack of data on the total VET workforce a barrier to workforce planning in VET and states that:

*We know little about the movement into and out of the sector and the career paths of VET staff. Nor do we understand much about the qualifications—teaching and vocational— VET staff hold. This type of information is important if there is to be a national approach to building a more ‘professional’ VET workforce.*

The Australian VET sector provides skills and knowledge development to provide learners with vocationally specific skills that will aid their entry into the workforce or increase their skills level as required by their employer.

ACCI considers that the centrality of business and industry is the core premise in VET. The purpose of VET is to prepare students for the rigours of the workplace and provide them with the skills and knowledge to allow them to actively participate in the Australian workforce and effectively contribute to productivity growth in the workplace.

Professional development for VET practitioners is often heavily focussed on VET practitioners in public providers and rarely is based on the industry or training delivery area of the practitioner. Research from the NCVER<sup>2</sup> shows that while TAFEs provide 70 per cent or more of VET delivery in Australia, TAFE staff account for only about 16 per cent of the overall VET workforce.

ACCI sees the need to strengthen the industry based knowledge and skills of VET practitioners. Some VET practitioners in public and private providers have not been

---

<sup>1</sup> NCVER, *Vocational education and training workforce data 2008: A compendium*, 2008, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2218.html>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

directly employed in their teaching discipline field for a number of years. In order to ensure that VET practitioners have up to date and relevant skills that mirror industry practice, it is necessary to ensure that teachers and trainers are exposed to current industry practices through release to industry programs.

For the VET sector to deliver high quality training outcomes that meet the needs of the Australian business community, it needs VET practitioners with up to date skills and a strong pedagogical base that facilitates the transfer of knowledge from the trainer to the learner. ACCI sees strong benefits to the Vocational Education and Training workforce in the upskilling of tradespeople with the training and assessment qualification. This will increase the available pool of people with recent industry experience and training qualifications.

There would also be considerable benefit in establishing a national professional development strategy that concentrates on knowledge and skills development in their industry area along with developmental pedagogy to assist VET practitioners in delivering skills and knowledge to learners.

The Australian VET sector needs to be at the forefront of vocational skills development in Australia. The industry led nature of VET and the nationalised training products and standards mean that the skills will be directly relevant to industry practices and training can be consistently implemented across the nation.

Yours sincerely



Mary Hicks

Director, Employment, Education and Training