

Submission by the South Australian Government in response to the Productivity Commission issues paper: *Vocational Education and Training Workforce*

The South Australian (SA) Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to a number of questions raised by the Productivity Commission on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) workforce given the vital importance of the VET workforce to enhancing training outcomes and boosting productivity in Australia.

The SA Government is investing in people and jobs through its Jobs Strategy, which includes a commitment to create 100,000 new jobs over the next six years, supported by 100,000 additional training places. To deliver on these new training places, the government is considering ways to modernise and improve SA's VET system.

The SA Government's consultation paper, *Skills for all: Productivity and Participation through skills*, outlines a ten-point reform plan for SA's training system. It includes proposals aimed to ensure the training system is responsive to the changing economy, students and employers, and supports more South Australians to get the qualifications and skills that will lead to jobs. The introduction of a training entitlement and the shift in the purchasing power to individuals and employers will make the VET system in South Australia more demand driven. This will have an impact on the needs of the future VET workforce.

The government is currently undertaking extensive consultation on the proposed reform direction that will shape the detail of a White Paper to be considered by government later in the year.

In this context key challenges for the VET workforce in SA (many of which are shared nationally) include the need:

- to develop the capacity to meet the demand for an increase in training (refer page 8 for estimated supply and demand for qualifications in SA)
- to address the age profile of the workforce. In TAFE SA the median age is 52 years
- for the workforce to keep abreast of innovation and new developments in technology as the industrial structure of the SA economy changes and the demands of globalisation and sustainability drive the need for the rapid adoption of new technologies
- for the VET workforce, in some segments, to be able to address the case management and other support requirements that are associated with a proportion of VET participants having complex needs
- for the VET workforce in some segments to support industry and employers with broader workforce development issues
- to ensure the quality of training which is dependent on a high quality VET workforce.

There are important strategic and capacity building issues that need to be addressed in the SA VET workforce. Attempts to address these issues are made more difficult by a lack of accurate data on¹:

- employment in the VET workforce at present

¹ NCVER, 2010, Vocational education and training workforce data 2008: A compendium

- movement into and out of the sector and the career paths of VET staff
- the qualification profile of the VET workforce.

The SA Government urges the Commission to consider three critical and interrelated issues as part of the review:

1. A national approach to collection of VET workforce data.
2. A national framework for workforce development which includes continuous VET professional development and strengthened professional standards which address the need for the workforce to have:
 - up to date technical industry skills
 - technological capability with contemporary learning methodologies and flexible delivery
 - broader workforce development skills for brokering with industry
 - innovation and entrepreneurial skills for operating in a commercial environment
 - skills to support a diversity of learners and their needs.
3. Greater consideration of workforce planning, including the quality and qualification level of VET professionals, as part of registered training organisation (RTO) registration and quality monitoring.

We welcome the contribution this review can make to address these issues.

The VET sector

VET is a complex sector in terms of scope and delivery and the workforce required to support it. One of the key features of VET is the diversity of students, particularly in the following areas;

- age span of students
- industry experience levels
- language, literacy and numeracy skills
- socio-economic status and disadvantage.

People enter the VET sector using a variety of pathways and VET is often also seen as the second chance educational sector. This brings more social obligations than other educational sectors. Segments of the VET workforce are required to address the learning requirements of high need students.

The vocational basis of VET means that contemporary skills relevant to industry and workplace contexts are important. There is a need for VET practitioners to have access to opportunities to refresh and update skills to ensure familiarity with technological developments and changing industry requirements.

This requirement also links back into responsiveness of the training package development process.

Defining the VET sector workforce

The scope of the VET sector for the purposes of the Commission's study should include the VET workforce that are responsible for the skills related to employment outcomes and accredited training outcomes and exclude non-accredited training (for example adult and community education).

The boundaries between VET providers and universities are blurring as VET providers offer more higher education courses and universities move into the provision of diplomas and advanced diplomas. Issues that may arise from this overlap include:

- industrial relations issues
- requirements for higher qualifications of VET teaching staff
- ability to recognise skills and apply credit transfer
- articulation and working with defined learning pathways
- increased credentialing of VET practitioners.

At the other end of the spectrum VET-in-schools delivery is increasing. Working with younger cohorts and responding to the specific needs of young learners are skills that traditional VET practitioners may not have.

In addition, there are increasing pathways from non accredited training delivered through Adult and Community Education (ACE) or other mechanisms to VET and the skills of trainers in the ACE sector needs to also be considered.

The diversity of the sector highlights the need for continuous review and up-skilling of VET practitioners to ensure they have a broad range of skills and experience and are able to deal with more diversity of students and extensive range of qualification levels.

The VET workforce within the labour market

The approach to defining the VET workforce proposed by the Commission (page 8) is broadly adequate however it will be important to disaggregate the workforce between trainers and other staff. Given the significant use of sessional employment arrangements it will be necessary to ensure that information on both sessional and professional VET workers is included.

Inevitably there are likely to be some definitional grey areas between what is considered VET and the exclusions for government and peak industry groups. The former is likely to involve some degree of joint costs and roles and a need therefore to apply allocation rules. The latter can also be associated with an RTO function that will raise similar issues.

VET, the economy and society

The traditional objectives of the VET workforce are to train new entry workers and up-skill existing workers. While these objectives remain unchanged, there is an increasing focus on producing 'work-ready' people under Skilling Australia which has consequential outcomes of contributing to broader community and social development.

The SA Government, in its *Skills for all* reform agenda has identified:

*The central **challenge** for the VET system – and indeed for the whole tertiary education system – is to provide the skills required to enable participation in employment and productivity growth in a way that is more readily accessible, more flexible and tailored to the changing needs of industry and learners.*

The State's skills reform agenda emphasises the objectives of VET to increase labour productivity and to increase workforce participation.

In this context the key objectives of the VET workforce are to provide job relevant training that is of a high standard. Related objectives are that the rates of completion (attainment of competencies) are improved. In achieving these objectives the VET workforce has available a number of skill recognition and training delivery options (for example, workplace based) that could be seen as supporting capability requirements.

For some segments of the VET client population the VET workforce will also have objectives to do with employer and industry engagement, and providing an appropriately supportive learning environment where disengaged learners are concerned.

The VET workforce should be assessed against its capacity to achieve these broader objectives. However, the interpretation of measurement information needs to be given careful consideration to ensure that appropriate conclusions are being drawn from the data.

Key performance indicators would include:

- module load completion rates
- qualification completion ratios
- proportion of competencies through RPL
- proportion of training provided in the workplace
- proportion of students going on to employment or further study
- student and employer satisfaction
- professional development expenditure as a proportion of wages and salaries.

In each case the interpretation of the information to draw conclusions about workforce as distinct from other systemic issues is essential.

The VET Workforce

Characteristics of the VET workforce

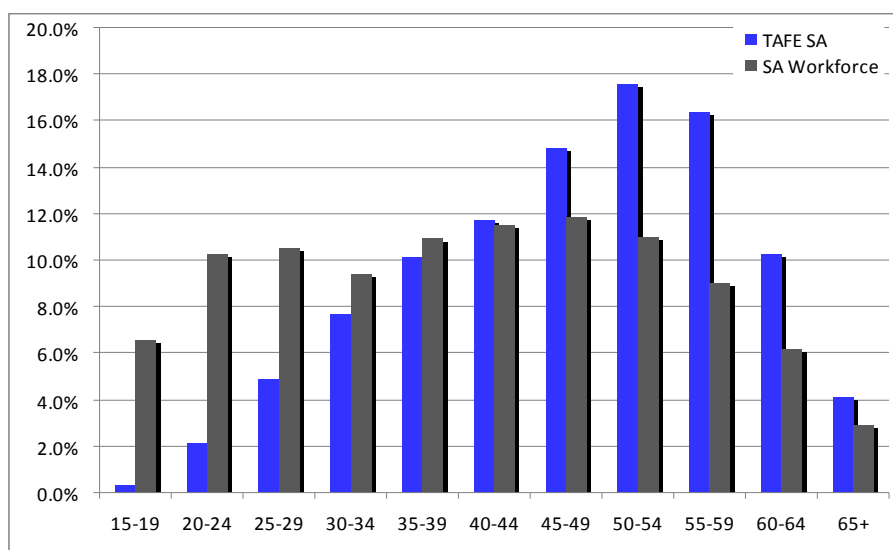
The ageing VET workforce

There are a range of reasons for the older age profile of the VET workforce relative to the total labour force including:

- the time it takes to develop the skills of a VET practitioner, particularly technical experience developed within industry
- conditions of employment, such as the availability of tenure, within public RTOs are very attractive and encourage employees to remain
- within large RTO there are opportunities to be promoted, or undertake projects and secondments increasing the possibility for a long but diverse career.

Provided in Figure 1 below is a comparison of the age profiles of the TAFE SA workforce relative to the total South Australian workforce. The TAFE SA workforce is under represented in the younger age groups (15-39 years olds) and significantly over-represented in the older age cohorts (45-64 years). Approximately 63% of the TAFE SA workforce is aged over 45 years. In comparison, 40% of the total SA workforce is aged over 45 years.

Figure 1: Age Profile of the TAFE SA Workforce



Source: DFEEST (2009); ABS Catalogue number 6291.0 (unpublished labour force data)

Profile of the VET Sector

The profile of the overall VET workforce is difficult to measure as there is no consistent data set in SA and often records are not complete. The SA Government urges the Commission to consider a national approach to collection of VET workforce data as part of this review.

Profile of the public provider

According to a study conducted by the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, SA is the oldest state with the median age of Public Sector employees being 45 years. However SA's public VET provider median age is even higher at 52 years as illustrated in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. TAFE Act Employees by Age (excluding HPIs and casuals)

Age	Total	% of Total	Benchmark % *
15-29 years	39	2.26%	27.9%
30-49 years	709	40.98%	45.7%
50+ years	982	56.76%	26.4%
Sum Total	1730	100%	100%

* Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (6291.0.55.001) Labour Force Status as of May 2009

Further, only 2.26% of the workforce is under 30 years (the benchmark is 27.9%) and 56.76% of TAFE Act staff are 50 years and over, which is double the benchmark (26.4%).

The age profile of TAFE SA Executives also requires attention. As illustrated in Table 2 below 72% are aged over 51 years and 43% are eligible to retire now. Only 13.4% are under the age of 46 years.

Table 2. Percentage of TAFE Act Executives by Age

Age	Percentage
30-35 years	0.0%
36-40 years	4.9%
41-45 years	8.5%
46-50 years	16.9%
51-55 years	33.8%
56-60 years	24.6%
61-65 years	8.5%
> 65 years	2.8%

Therefore, not only does the public provider need to increase the proportion of its workforce in the lower age brackets, action is required to address succession planning for senior management to minimise loss of critical intellectual knowledge.

The general retirement age is identified as 55 years of age, however Table 3 indicates this is not the case based on the average retirement age of TAFE Act staff as being 60.20 years.

Table 3. TAFE Act Average retirement age (excluding HPIs and casuals)

Year	Retirement Age (years)
2008	59.69
2009	61.00
Average of 2008 & 2009	60.20

Another issue to consider is TAFE SA employee turnover rate, which is outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4. TAFE Act Turnover rates by Age (excluding HPIs and casuals)

Age	Turnover rate
All employees	8.5%
30 + years	8.0%
15-29 years	28.9%
30-49 years	9.4%
50 years +	7.1%

The overall turnover rate for all TAFE Act employees is 8.5% however the turnover rate for those aged 29 years and younger is 28.9%. This rate is a concern when coupled with an ageing workforce profile.

The age profile of the public provider presents a challenge for the delivery of core business in the longer-term. Action is required to manage the significant loss of intellectual knowledge that is likely to occur in the next three to five years when the bulk of the workforce will retire. It is also important that this is balanced by focusing on retaining our current employees in the lower two age brackets.

Further information on the approach being taken by the public provider in addressing this is provided on pages 12-13.

Demand Influences on the VET Sector

Demographic and economic change

The size and nature of the VET workforce will be determined by the services that will be demanded in the future. These services will be driven by changes to the population, industry structures, skill requirements of jobs and the expectations of employers in the labour market.

Population Trends

Over the past few years SA has recorded relatively strong population growth. As at December 2009, SA's annual rate of population growth was 1.3%² – the strongest rate in more than 30 years. Despite record population growth, South Australia's population is still the oldest of all the States and Territories and is likely to continue to age more rapidly than the rest of the nation. In 2009, around one in seven South Australians were aged 65 years and over. By 2029, this proportion is expected to grow to around 22%³. SA's older/ageing population will have a significant impact on the State's workforce into the future. On present trends, it is estimated that almost a third (230,000 workers) of the current workforce will approach retirement age within the next ten years. This will impact significantly on the VET sector from both a workforce perspective and a training delivery perspective (that is, the type of training demanded).

Industry Structure

Whilst employment in *Manufacturing* is still significant in South Australia, the industry has experienced a significant contraction over the last ten years along with *Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, and Other Services*.

According to the SA Economic Development Board⁴, the South Australian economy will continue to evolve over the period 2007/08 to 2014/15, with the following sectors expected to become more important in terms of economic growth: mining, defence, energy, construction, traded services, agri-business and advanced manufacturing.

There are two further factors requiring attention from the skill and workforce development system and the VET workforce that go beyond any individual industry; the growing concern over environmental sustainability and the need to raise literacy and numeracy skills in the community to enable greater workforce participation and productivity.

² ABS, Estimated Residential Population, Cat No. 3101.0, December 2009

³ ABS Population Projections, Series B, September 2008

⁴ South Australia Economic Development Board Economic Statement, *South Australia's Prospects for Growth*, March 2009.

In both cases, the VET system, and its workforce will be required to respond in innovative ways to integrate the demands that will arise.

Occupations Structure

The occupational structure of the State's labour force reflects slight variations relative to the national average distribution. The largest share of SA's labour force is employed within the *Professionals* category, representing 20.6% of total employment. In addition, as a result of the State's historical reliance on agriculture and manufacturing activity there is a large number of *Technicians & Trades Workers* within the State (accounting for 13.7% of total employment).

Qualifications

Skill levels in SA are not as high as in other states as indicated by the lower proportion of South Australians with post-school qualifications, particularly at higher levels. This is highlighted in Figure 4 below.

Addressing this challenge is a central aim of the *Skills for all* reform agenda. To increase the number of individuals with higher level qualifications will require greater delivery of higher qualifications and in many cases the upskilling of VET staff to train at higher levels.

Increasing VET participation to include a greater number of disadvantaged learners will require VET practitioners to understand and deal with students with more complex issues.

Figure 4: Skills levels in South Australia

Qualification Level	South Australia		Australia	
	No. ('000)	Share (%)	No. ('000)	Share (%)
Total with a non-school qualification	473.7	58.1	6,724.4	60.3
Bachelor Degree or higher	177.2	21.7	2850.3	25.5
Diploma and Advanced Diploma	68.5	8.4	1,050.3	9.4
Certificate III or IV	161.8	19.8	2,020.5	18.1
Certificate I or II	41.6	5.1	491.9	4.4
Certificate nfd	13.2	1.6	174.3	1.6
Other non-school qualification	11.3	1.4	137.0	1.2
Without a non-school qualification	342.3	41.9	4,431.8	39.7
Total	815.9	100.0	11,156.2	100.0

Source: Skills for all: Productivity and Participation through skills: A consultation Paper

Demographic and economic change

The South Australian Economic Development Board, in its 2009 *Economic Statement*, identified a number of key characteristics of the evolving South Australian economy which impact not only on demand for education and training but on the skills of the VET workforce:

- significant demand on the construction industry in the short to medium term to support large infrastructure requirements (energy, transport, water and social infrastructure) and development construction for the mining and defence industries
- mining as the second fastest growing sector in the state. Growth of this sector will support diversification and organic growth of the manufacturing and engineering services sectors where existing capability is high
- significant defence industry presence with important indirect benefits to the economy in terms of support services and establishment of a critical mass of high-tech workers in SA
- a transformed manufacturing sector – decline in demand in some manufacturing areas (such as automotive) may be offset by mining, defence, energy and construction
- a transformed energy industry with greater reliance on renewable energy sources which will require a significant investment in transmission infrastructure over the coming decade. This will have further impacts on the State's construction industry.

The South Australian Training and Skills Commission produced its inaugural *Five Year Plan for Skills and Workforce Development: Skills for Jobs* in November 2009. The Plan, provides detailed analysis of the impact of economic developments on demand for post school education and training in South Australia. According to the Training and Skills Commission, over the period 2007/08 to 2012/13 it is estimated that an additional 257,000 qualifications will be required to meet industry demand. Of this total, more than 35% is for Certificate III, just under 30% is for Bachelor degree or higher level qualifications and a further 18% is for Advanced Diploma/Diploma qualifications.

The Plan is aligned to state Strategic Resource Allocation Plan which outlines the public funding allocations for VET training.

The structural shifts within the SA economy are occurring in the context of intense pressure from consumers, regulators, government and increasingly international markets to employ low carbon, environmentally sustainable practices and processes in all areas of the economy. A pivotal issue will be the mobilisation of skills that enable adaptation to new practices and processes and the ability to use and realise the potential of technological innovations. This will impact on the VET workforce and amplify the need for continuous professional development of VET practitioners.

SA is also faced with emerging skills shortages as the economy recovers from the global financial crisis, the impact of poor foundation skills on workforce participation and the need to lift productivity to allow the economy to adapt in a changing economic landscape are as great, if not greater in SA compared to other states and territories. This is because:

- the population is older than the national average, which has a bearing on participation and productivity
- skill levels in SA are not as high as in other states as indicated by the lower proportion of South Australian's with post-school qualifications, particularly at higher levels. This is highlighted in Figure 2 overleaf
- there are significant pockets of disadvantage in the SA community characterised by low VET participation and high unemployment.

Figure 2: Skills levels in South Australia

Qualification Level	South Australia		Australia	
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Source: Skills for all: Productivity and Participation through skills: A consultation Paper

Addressing these challenges is a central aim of the *Skills for all* reform agenda. To increase the number of individuals with higher level qualifications will require greater delivery of higher qualifications and in many cases the upskilling of VET staff to train at higher levels.

Increasing VET participation to include a greater number of disadvantaged learners will require VET practitioners to understand and deal with students with more complex issues.

Responsiveness and the VET workforce

It is imperative that training providers and in particular TAFE, as the largest training provider, are able to respond relatively quickly to changing demands of both students and industry.

TAFE can sometimes be slow to respond to rapid changes in the market due to the stability and the maturity of the sector compared to the private sector. Enterprise agreements that are in place also limit the ability of the public provider to rapidly respond to industry demand, for example, by offering weekend classes.

Professional development will be a key factor in enabling the VET sector to be able to respond. It will need different skill sets and a different composition in staff to accommodate the changing VET environment.

The *Skills for all* reform agenda in SA is exploring how governance of the public provider can be enhanced to enable it to more effectively compete in a market based system and increase its flexibility and autonomy.

Recruitment and retention of VET practitioners

With regard to recruitment and development of practitioners able to deliver training in new technologies, the public VET provider is facing the particular challenge of an older workforce with large numbers fast approaching retirement age.

As learning methodologies change to be more inclusive of e-learning and online delivery, the VET workforce will be required to enhance their ICT and e-learning skills including

how to effectively engage and maintain online student communities. There is a need to integrate educational ICT skills into workforce development activities and plans as well as job descriptions. This will have cost implications for VET providers.

It has also been identified that the public system will struggle with replacement of the VET workforce, particularly those with skills and qualifications relevant to higher growth and skill demand areas, such as resources and engineering, in part due to non-competitive salaries and significant transition of qualified practitioners to industry.

Highly skilled practitioners are in short supply at affordable rates. This will impose extra cost pressures on providers to recruit suitably qualified staff or invest significant resources to up skill existing workers.

Sector-specific influences

Government Policy

VET and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds

Demand for VET from learners from disadvantaged backgrounds will increase over the next 5-10 years, mainly influenced by Government's social inclusion policy and changing population profile.

The SA Government, through its *Skills for all* reform agenda has identified the need for the VET system to address disadvantage by ensuring that people, such as women, early school leavers, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those returning to work after child care, who want assistance with entry or re-entry to work can access foundation skills and, where required, learning case management services to link them with other supports that address their specific and individual needs.

The implication of this is that VET providers will be required to provide or have access to a range of wrap-around support services for students of disadvantage. This may mean government will need to include an equity loading into funding sources to allow VET providers to offer wrap around support services for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Impact of commercial pressures

Stronger commercial pressures in the VET sector will require changes to the VET workforce if it is going to be able to respond rapidly. This may include greater levels and diversity of skills, a larger workforce with a different composition, and a greater level of engagement of and participation by industry.

However any change to the composition of the VET workforce will raise a number of competing industrial relations issues, for example, people wanting tenure versus mobility of the workforce.

The commercial pressures will increase the skills and knowledge of the workforce but may mean the size of the VET sector is constantly changing in line with market forces. While stronger commercial focus will increase revenue generating opportunities, greater investment in workforce development will also be required. For the public provider there is a fine balance between having a commercial focus and also being expected to be socially responsible.

Trend toward higher level qualifications

SA currently has a lower proportion of total qualifications in the labour force, and a relatively higher proportion of lower level qualifications compared with the national average. The VET workforce will play a pivotal role in improving rates of higher level qualification attainment in SA.

The table below illustrates projected demand and supply of qualifications in SA from 2007/08 to 2012/13.

Qualification level	Demand	Supply (Publicly funded)	Imbalance (Demand minus Supply)
Bachelor degree or higher	75,000	64,000	11,000
Advanced diploma/diploma	45,000	24,000	21,000
Certificate IV	34,000	35,000	-1,000
Certificate III	91,000	55,000	36,000
Certificate II	9,000	34,000	-25,000
Certificate I	3,000	9,000	-6,000
Total VET	182,000	157,000	25,000
Total	257,000	221,000	36,000

Note: These are taken from Skills for Jobs, November 2009.

There are a range of issues that were captured in the Mitchell Report (2010)⁵ about VET Practitioner Skills and the nine essential skills that VET practitioners require to operate to effectively and support students gain higher level qualifications. Specifically the move to higher level qualifications will mean the VET workforce will need higher level qualifications and this will have extra cost implications for VET providers that will need to be understood and funded.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competencies (RCC)

Shifts in delivery towards more RPL and RCC increase demand for individually tailored learning plans with a consequent change from traditional class-based learning to individual learning. Individual based learning also requires a different skill-set and has the additional challenge of being significantly more time-intensive which may make it difficult to manage the demand.

These shifts in delivery will broaden the range of skills required by the VET workforce and mean the workforce will need to have enhanced skills in assessment, auditing and monitoring.

Business of VET

Use of technology in teaching and learning approaches

Significant impacts and the diversity of delivery methods and technology used within the VET sector, will create complexity and require human and capital investment to ensure technology and workforce skill match student needs.

The critical technology trends influencing the VET sector workforce relate to increasing client demand for flexible learning options, the expansion of broadband networks and advancements in mobile technologies.

⁵ Mitchell, J., Ward, J., (2010) The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development: A report on the National Survey of Vocational Education and Training (VET) Practitioner Skills.

The SA Government has established a target of increasing e-learning within VET by 100% by 2012. It is also important to recognise that not everyone can learn online and that e-learning must be integrated with other contemporary teaching and learning practices (such as RPL and workplace training). Further, learning with technology requires a whole new skill-set, both on the part of the VET practitioners and the learners themselves.

The Horizon report: 2009 Australia – New Zealand provides valuable insight into emerging technologies and their likely impact on teaching and learning. These include:

- practices for evaluating student work that are evolving in response to the changing nature of learning and student preferences for receiving feedback
- ageing learning environments and the capacity to support the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), or enable the sorts of learning support systems being promoted
- the growing need for formal instruction in key new skills, including information literacy, visual literacy, and technological literacy
- the growing recognition that new technologies must be adopted and used as an everyday part of classroom activities, but effecting this change is difficult.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (the Framework) 2009 E-Learning Benchmarking Survey⁶ provides further insight into e-learning and skills of the VET workforce. The survey includes responses from more than 700 RTOs, 1,685 students, 1,500 VET teachers and trainers and 800 employers. Key findings are outlined below:

Student expectations:

- 90% of VET students would like at least 'a little' e-learning in their course
- 59% of students thought the e-learning in their course and the computer skills they acquired had increased their confidence, and would help them get a better job, a promotion or more responsibility in their job
- 47% of students said e-learning was a factor in their choice of course and 42% said it was a factor in their choice of training provider.

Teachers and trainers:

- 87% of teachers and trainers said they used ICT, with a significant increase in the use of newer technologies
- Nearly 60% of teachers and trainers said that e-learning has made learning more interesting and engaging for their students, and more than half said that e-learning has improved their teaching
- VET teachers and trainers most commonly used multimedia interactive e-learning resources, either within the classroom (73%) or remotely (58%).

With increased use of technology in learning, particularly for remote and regional training delivery, it should also be acknowledged that social (face-to-face) learning environments are still critical to the learning experience for many people and mixed modes are essential.

The international dimension

Demand for VET from international students in SA is expected to grow for the next ten years.

⁶ The 2009 E-learning benchmarking survey report <http://e-earningindicators.flexiblelearning.net.au>

For the March 2010 quarter⁷, SA's international education enrolments, (compared to March 2009) increased by 12.7% to 24,547 students. Based on this current growth rate, more than 38, 000 students are anticipated by year end. Enrolments in VET increased by 35.3% for the same period.

While the current numbers are encouraging, the international education sector is yet to experience the full impact of changes to Commonwealth immigration policy, changes to student visa requirements and Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) integrity measures applied to student visa applications have already resulted in a decrease in the number of international student visas being issued. This is likely to translate to a slowdown in international student enrolments and commencements for the public provider in SA.

International students present another learner cohort with specific needs that must be addressed by the VET sector workforce if VET is to continue to be an alternative pathway of study for international students studying in SA. Accommodating the students' needs around cultural differences, language and engagement into a South Australian are issues for the VET workforce.

⁷ Data Source: Australian Education International, International Student Data, online detailed pivot table March 2010.

Supply of the VET Workforce

Maintaining workforce capacity

Demographic factors

Key factors influencing individual decisions to work in the VET sector include the conditions of employment and the level of expertise and knowledge required to enter the VET workforce. While generally there is no significant difficulty in attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff in key training areas, in high-demand trade areas such as resources and engineering, it is becoming increasingly difficult.

Succession planning is critical along with investing in workforce development to maintain workforce capacity. The VET sector may need to further explore partnering arrangements with industry to share 'members' of the workforce to address skills shortages in specific industries.

Enhancing workforce capability

Technical skills and teaching skills

A combination of teaching, technical and commercial skills are important in terms of workforce capability. Technical skills and teaching skills are equally important in the delivery of VET and both need to be addressed. Rather than one being traded off against the other, any limitations should be addressed through a partnership, team-leadership and mentoring approach. In larger providers it is possible to build teams that have a range of skills to address this issue. It is very difficult for individuals to be highly skilled in all areas.

Increasing qualifications for VET practitioners may produce better outcomes for students in the long-term. However given that VET teaching is usually a second career for many practitioners, a requirement for increased qualifications at entry-level may make it more difficult and limit the attractiveness of the profession. It would make entry into the workforce more difficult. The Training and Assessment qualification is currently an entry requirement and providers should upskill their workforce to meet job needs. If qualification standards increased to enter the workforce, the sector may lose the variety of staff that it currently attracts, particularly those with industry backgrounds.

Industry expects that education and training delivered by VET practitioner are aligned to industry standards therefore practitioners are expected to adopt best practice and maintain the currency of their skills. This is a challenge within a workforce in which many practitioners moved from industry to VET over ten years ago and emphasises the need for a greater focus on initiatives which continuously up-skill and train the workforce to meet industry requirements.

Currently there is no correlation between teaching qualifications (for example Certificate IV) and teaching at higher levels. At higher levels more complex competencies and job roles are covered and often a basic training approach is still used. Higher order teaching skills such as scenario/ problem based learning is often more appropriate. Therefore there could be some requirement that if you deliver and assess at higher levels the teaching qualification and experience should be appropriate.

Availability of professional development opportunities

There are a number of professional development programs available to VET practitioners.

The Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) provides an annual program to the VET workforce which focuses on developing novice and experienced practitioners and organisations meeting regulatory requirements.

The program offered by DFEEST includes twice yearly forums on contemporary and critical practices, regular workshops for skill development and applying national standards and policies and training package implementation. Resource materials are promoted and distributed at workshops. Benchmarking activities occur with other states and there is an increasing use of technology to involve greater numbers of stakeholders in professional development particularly in remote and rural areas in partnership with the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

Raising the capabilities of practitioners in understanding the role of teaching, learning and assessment in workforce planning and development has occurred in partnership with the Department for Trade and Economic Development. Working with clients and enterprises to manage training/learning at work has been essential to support up skilling existing workers and maintaining motivation to participate and complete qualifications. Assessor capability has been enhanced through an action learning project which engaged consultants to run “master classes” and mentor assessors.

TAFE Institutes offer comprehensive programs for their practitioners, managers and support staff using workshops and individual mentoring approaches. Australian Council of Private Education and Training (ACPET) in SA offers workshops to members and non-members focussed around relevant topics and capacity building.

Funding for professional development will remain a challenge. For TAFE SA funding is written into the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for TAFE Act staff with qualifications linked to steps in pay. One percent of TAFE Act staff salaries is set aside for professional development. Of this, half (0.5%) is allocated for capacity building at an Institute (RTO) level and the other half used for bottom-up opportunities.

RTO audits could be strengthened to include evidence that RTO's have workforce development strategies in place, active programs for up skilling, and that individuals are embarking on continuous professional development.

Workforce development plan for the VET Sector

Workforce development planning should be integral to the operation of all organisations. The VET sector should have the ability to develop their own plans as this is part of their core business when operating with industry and employers. The VET workforce itself needs assistance with strategies, tools and professional development so that they can develop competence to undertake their own organisational workforce planning and development and in turn work with industry and enterprises to up skill and achieve better outcomes.

The Department of Further Education, Employment Science and Technology (DFEEST) commenced the development of the *DFEEST Workforce Development Platformto 2010* in 2005 which encompasses workforce development for the public provider. In late 2009 a review of the platform was undertaken and the department is in the process of re-invigorating and reframing it into a new plan, which is more targeted and specific to ensure the objectives are clear to employees.

This will ensure the department meets workforce needs and the current demands of an ageing profile and other competing industry demands. This People and Culture Plan will focus on our ageing workforce and becoming a high-performing organisation.

Assistance for the private sector VET organisations is available through ACPET SA, DFEEST, Industry Skills Councils and Industry Skills Boards.

While workforce development strategies for individual RTOs exist, a comprehensive, sector wide workforce development strategy is needed.

Such a strategy should consider the VET workforce's sustainability and growth which articulates education and training requirements for job roles and contexts and provides pathways through VET qualifications to higher education degrees and post graduate courses and builds on current and to be endorsed awards.

The strategy should also include a model for continuous professional development (CPD) which addresses the need for:

- up-to-date technical industry skills
- technological capability with contemporary learning methodologies and flexible delivery
- broader workforce development skills for brokering with industry
- innovation and entrepreneurial skills for operating in a commercial environment
- skills to support a diversity of learners and their needs.

A nationally funded and coordinated strategy would be the most effective approach. . Engaging the states and territories in the planning, development and roll out of such a strategy would provide the most effective outcomes.

Skills, knowledge and abilities

VET professionals require a mixture of technical skills to undertake specific roles whilst having an in-depth knowledge of how the VET system operates. Organisations that support staff being involved in multi-disciplinarily project teams ensures both practitioners and professional staff enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding of the different areas of expertise.

The work required of VET practitioners is becoming more diverse, more subtle and more complex as the nature and delivery of VET continues to change. VET practitioners operate in dynamic and competitive markets and face increased demand from clients for higher quality, more relevant programs, delivered in more flexible ways.

As the VET sector continues to evolve from a supply-driven to demand-driven system, it is increasingly reliant on highly skilled VET professionals with a raft of new skills. This is bringing about new and intensified professional, technical and educational roles for VET practitioners especially at the front line.

Understanding and keeping up with these changes and working in new and more flexible ways are major challenges for the VET workforce.

Given the need for VET professionals to refresh their knowledge or current technologies and industry trends that are relevant to vocational skill requirements the industry and employers have a role alongside VET providers in enabling the development of the VET workforce.

Administrative and support roles

There is an increasing demand for higher level skills and knowledge amongst support staff. Rather than a traditional administrative and client support role, officers are now providing information to students on courses and options. This broader role needs to be recognised and additional training provided as needed. The increase in RPL and different teaching methodologies may put more reliance on support staff to provide technical support.

Institutional arrangements

Regulation of the VET sector

There is a need for a consistent approach and recognition of standards across the VET system. The same minimum standards should be applied across VET providers as transparency will be paramount if the National VET regulator system is to realise the benefits of this approach.

Registration of VET practitioners

While there are potential benefits of a registration process for VET teachers, it could also create another layer of red tape for VET providers depending on how it is applied. If a registration process is to be introduced it could be linked to RTO audit process to ensure compliance is achieved.

Any VET teacher registration process will need to acknowledge the diverse job roles within the VET sector, in particular for trainers and assessors.

Clearly articulating the relevant knowledge and skills that are required to undertake key job roles within the VET workforce is critical to improving the quality of outcomes for the sector, whether it be driven by regulation or other methods.

Engaging the VET sector in obtaining higher level qualifications would benefit the sector, however the promotion of trainers and assessors undertaking skill sets in areas such as language, literacy and numeracy, social inclusion and sustainability may be a more obtainable objective in relation to up-skilling the cohort of the VET sector who do not wish to undertake higher level qualifications.

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment provides trainers and assessors with the 'basic' level of skills and knowledge to operate in the VET sector. There appears to be a gap in articulating the higher level skills and knowledge required by trainers and assessors undertaking a range of higher level roles within the VET sector. This is particularly evident in relation to the skills and knowledge required by trainers and assessors in order to meet the requirements of AQTF Standard 1.2.

VET workforce planning

Within TAFE SA, workforce planning occurs at the institute level (TAFE SA South, TAFE SA North and TAFE SA Regional). Tools have been developed both internally and adopted from external sources.

In addition to institute level workforce planning, TAFE SA has engaged in workforce planning across those educational programs and/or support service areas which have been deemed 'difficult to fill'. Some of the information gathered from a TAFE SA workforce gap analysis is incorporated into Capacity Building Plans as part of up-skilling the existing workforce. These plans are developed annually and funded from a percentage of total salaries across each Institute.

The type and extent of workforce planning occurring in the private VET sector is unknown. As articulated previously, assistance to undertake workforce planning is available through ACPET SA, DFEEST, Industry Skills Councils and Industry Skills Boards however businesses cannot be compelled to participate.