

Vocational Education and Training Workforce: Draft Report

Submission to Productivity Commission

February 2011

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc (Workforce Council) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the *Productivity Commission's Draft Research Report – Vocational Education and Training Workforce*.

Introduction

The Workforce Council is an autonomous not-for-profit peak body that leads workforce planning and development in the health and community service industries in Queensland. We undertake a range of workforce planning and development initiatives with industry stakeholders across the health and community services industries. We facilitate more than forty regional networks, coalitions and alliances consisting of industry representatives from across Queensland to work in partnerships to build workforce capacity, prioritise regional workforce development needs and respond accordingly. We work with a range of government agencies, peak bodies, unions and other key stakeholders groups to develop a sustainable systemic response to workforce issues. In addition, the Workforce Council occupies a unique position working closely with the education and training sector through a range of projects and initiatives to ensure industry workforce practices are supported by appropriate education and training services, pathways and programs. In summary, the Workforce Council:

- Provides information and assistance to our industries and industry partners
- Provides advice to Government about a wide range of training, workforce development and sector specific issues and policies
- Supports innovative workforce development strategies
- Brokers quality professional development in regions across Queensland
- Advocates the value of our industries within the Queensland Community
- Develops workforce planning and development products and services

For more information about these workforce initiatives please go to

<http://www.workforce.org.au/our-workforce-initiatives.aspx>

The Workforce Council welcomes the *Draft Research Report – Vocational Education and Training Workforce* and its draft findings and recommendations. The Workforce Council has identified a number of key issues for further consideration to inform the final report. These are outlined below corresponding to the chapter headings in the draft report.

Chapter 2 The VET Sector

The Workforce Council supports the finding that VET will need to expand its delivery with more inclusive structures in learning environments. This will require educators across the blended sectors of industry and education to develop networks with employers to provide experiential learning contexts that support disadvantaged learners. The health and community services industries play a vital role in the delivery of services in areas experiencing locational disadvantage. In this respect, it is most important that learners in these areas are not only able to access appropriate VET opportunities, but that they also see the health and community services as industries where they might make a contribution. It is often the case that health and community services are locally situated yet do not source their labour forces from the local area for lack of skilled workers in their regions. It is most important in this case that VET is not seen as *either/or* in terms of disadvantaged learners and serving industry – for our industries our clients and their futures are fundamental to *local capacity building* to contribute to the VET workforce and address skills shortage in the health and community services in regional Queensland. The public VET sector has traditionally targeted the pre-employment market and this is to the detriment of up skilling the existing workforce and engaging those interested in career change opportunities. It also serves to distance the public provider from the local employers who require the supply of skilled workers.

It is of great concern to the Workforce Council that the public provision in Queensland has not expanded into higher level qualifications in our training packages to provide pathways for workers and job seekers in disadvantaged areas, placing so much of its resources at Certificate III and lower in these regions. Queensland needs to strengthen its Adult Community Education (ACE) profile from a fee for service provision to one that gives real opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas. The Draft Report derives its findings in regard to ACE from jurisdictions which have a stronger public provision in this sector for access and pathways which are supported by the community.

Chapter 3 The VET Workforce

While the draft report's definition of the VET workforce includes "other VET professionals" and "general staff" the report tends to focus primarily on VET trainers and assessors. Within this scope, the Workforce Council recommends that more attention be paid to "other VET professionals" and "general staff". The VET sector is extremely complex and many of the issues pertaining to quality teaching should not be assumed to relate exclusively to trainers and assessors. While there is a need for improvement in the quality of VET teaching through up skilling and professional development of trainers and assessors, their capacity to deliver quality teaching is often limited by complex administrative and management systems as well as competing priorities between commercial "productivity" and quality outcomes for students and employers. While there is general agreement that quality in the VET sector can be significantly improved, it should be recognized that many VET trainers and assessors are professionals with high-level skills and abilities to provide quality teaching. If we lose sight of this fact and place the whole burden of quality in teaching on trainers and assessors we risk overlooking the wide range of influences that impact on quality – these include how the *whole* VET workforce interact to prioritise, administer and deliver training and related programs. This includes people in a wide range of roles such as industry engagement, human resource management, marketing, public relations, IT professionals, employee assistance, instructional designers, online resources developers, careers counselling and life coaching, administration, business development and management.

On this point, it is also critical to realize that the VET workforce expands well beyond those working specifically in registered training organisations, as it has been defined in the draft paper. The VET sector includes Australian Apprenticeship Centres, Industry Skills Councils group training organisations, centres of excellence, gateway schools, school industry trade centres, industry liaison officers involved in skills formation strategies, job services agencies, careers counsellors, quality and regulation auditors, etc. While the Workforce Council understands the need to set limits to the scope of any study, it is prudent to recognise how the policy and regulatory workforce play a crucial role in shaping the conditions and parameters within which the workforce within VET organisations can function. The VET system is incredibly complex and bureaucratized – without building the capacity of the policy and regulatory workforce to engage with and understand the wide range of factors that influence quality in service delivery, we are unlikely to achieve the change desired.

The finding that "*the intentions of many older VET workers to keep working, and the sizeable inflows of new workers into the sector, should contribute to the aggregate supply of VET workers in the short and medium term*" seems to be made in isolation of rapidly changing broader industry contexts and trends. For example:

1. While entry into the VET sector may typically occur at an older age this does not guarantee an on-going trend. The fact that the whole workforce (outside the RTO sector) is ageing, there is likely to be significant competition from industry to retain ageing workers in industry-based roles. This problem will be confounded in some occupations (eg: nursing) where industry wages are more competitive and tenure opportunities more readily available. Further to this, discussions around the

supply of the VET workforce cannot be held in isolation from the need to retain skilled and experienced workers in industry to support and supervise apprentices, trainees and workers learning on-the-job to ensure that skills and competencies are effectively applied and developed in the workplace.

2. The finding appears to be based on the assumption that enough workers equates to enough skilled and qualified workers who have the necessary attributes to work effectively in VET roles. While retention data may superficially paint a positive picture of the supply of VET trainers and assessors, it may equally suggest that longevity in the VET training and assessment role may be a substantial contributor to the lack of industry currency described in Chapter 8 of the draft report. Further, the rate of pay in the VET sector also provides a wider challenge to attracting and retaining quality staff. Some sectors report that the highly competent and expert workers are not interested in becoming trainers on this basis. This may suggest that VET workforce does not adequately reflect the skills and expertise required to succeed in industry. The comparatively high level of turnover of general VET staff is also indicative of a deeper set of issues that require attention when drawing conclusions about the supply of VET workers.
3. The finding appears neutral in relation to the uneven distribution of VET workers in urban, regional and remote locations. Significant VET labour and skills shortages already exist in rural and remote areas of Australia. While flexible funding models and new modes for remote delivery of training may assist in enhancing the accessibility of VET for students in rural and remote areas, it does not guarantee the supply of a suitably skilled and qualified VET workforce to deliver the training. Of critical significance is the need for the VET workforce to be highly skilled in the use of information communication technologies. While the draft report considers this issue in relation to the professional development needs of the VET workforce, it should also be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions about the short- to medium-term supply of VET workers. As the management and delivery of VET becomes more technology-centric, this may act as a significant deterrent for older workers who may not feel capable or interested in acquiring the depth of knowledge required.

In light of issues such as these, combined with an absence of any recommendation addressing worker supply or attraction, the Workforce Council suggests that more in-depth analysis of the factors that influence the supply of VET workers be undertaken. Currently, it seems that the draft report is underpinned by a broad and generic assumption that there will be an adequate supply of VET workers. Unfortunately, if this assumption proves incorrect, it may undermine any approach to VET sector workforce planning and development.

Chapter 4 Government involvement in the VET sector

The move to corporatised entities in the public VET provider realm must be managed effectively to ensure that the market for small and niche training products and services and in areas of thin demand and supply (particularly in rural and remote areas) is maintained. The public service commitments and obligations embedded in a public provider in most instances will not or cannot be met by competition. For industries like health and community services where delivery of services and enterprises exist in every community; and where regulation of occupational qualifications is high, the requirement to provide publicly accessible education and training is central to maintaining both a local labour force and building capacity locally.

Models of managerial independence and corporatisation within the public VET provider need to be cognisant of significant role that these providers play in the social fabric of communities as well as the profitability of the services they provide.

Chapter 6 Implications of a changing environment for the VET workforce

In the context of a changing environment it is crucial to ensure that vocational education and training is delivered in ways that are relevant to local employers and regional contexts. Both VET workforces and those involved in the delivery of health and community services are strengthened through education and employment of local workforces, especially in regional and remote settings. Building the capacity of the VET and health and community services workforces to generate partnerships that proactively support access and pathways between education and employment in local areas are vital. Students in the pre-employment VET market are increasingly drawn from populations marginalised from the workforce and therefore have significant learning support needs. This has significant implications for the level of resourcing for this market and, in particular, on the skills of and institutional support for VET practitioners to achieve skill and employment outcomes for these students. There needs to be a greater focus on integrating training into the workplace and linking workforce development with workforce planning at an enterprise and regional level. If VET is to play a useful role in the future, the VET workforce will need to develop expertise in workforce planning, integrated workforce development and innovative practice. The Certificate IV in Training and Education does not provide these skills.

The changing environment has also given rise to another critical challenge for the VET workforce in the form of maintaining industry currency in the context of health and community services reform. Not only is the health and community services workforce experiencing unprecedented growth, policy reforms are demanding entirely different ways of thinking and working in the interests of quality improvement. In many cases, this involves a significant paradigm shift (for example chronic disease self management, and increasing focus on primary and preventive health) that may not be reflected in the skill-base or capacity of the current VET workforce. To respond effectively, there is a need for the VET workforce to rapidly acquire and transfer the embedded knowledge in a range of policy initiatives, philosophical and practice frameworks such as:

- Social and cultural inclusion
- Consumer led recovery oriented practice in mental health
- Early intervention and preventative health
- Quality reform in children's services
- Integrated models of service delivery
- Restrictive practices in disability and mental health services

Policies and frameworks of this nature are not necessarily captured in existing training packages and also require the use of very different approaches to learning and teaching than those traditionally used in the VET sector. Further, the size and depth of the policy reform implications are not amenable to the usual cycle of renewal in the Training Package review system. Therefore, an emphasis needs to be placed on approaches to workforce development that enable the VET workforce to maintain industry currency in integrated and seamless ways. This can only be achieved through partnerships between RTOs, industry and industry-based employers, staff and students. Strategies such as workplace delivery, staff exchange, action learning and action research may support the reorienting of VET to off site, online and reflective modes of delivery. Innovative practices are already being piloted to develop partnerships between RTO trainers and assessors, industry-based trainers and assessors and industry-based staff through professional conversations.

Chapter 7 Ensuring workforce capacity and efficiency

Reliable and robust data is fundamental to workforce planning and the Workforce Council would support initiatives to build consistent national evidence-base in relation to the VET workforce. However, it is important to ensure that this initiative is underpinned by close engagement with industry-bodies that have the knowledge and experience in relation to different industry contexts to ensure that the data collected provides a meaningful foundation for workforce planning efforts. Given the broad spectrum of workforces that combine to create and implement VET in Australia, it is important to ensure that data collection instruments and approaches are capable of supporting industry and sector-specific workforce planning. The VET sector cannot be imagined as a sector in-and-of-itself. VET sector workforce characteristics may interact with different industry contexts in a variety of ways and with different implications.

The Workforce Council seeks clarification on the recommendation that "The National Centre for Vocational Education Research should consider the information required to allow the critical determinants of quality teaching to be investigated quantitatively, and consider the best means of capturing student and industry satisfaction with the VET workforce". Similarly, in the Conclusions (p.8.10) it is asserted that "determination of the level and type of training that is required, at least initially, to be an effective trainer and assessor would be informed by rigorous quantitative evidence which linked outcomes to trainer and assessor characteristics".

While the aim is to build an evidence-base, there must be sound evidence, or at least a sound theoretical proposition, to justify investment in quantitative investigations of trainer

and assessor characteristics and teaching quality in VET. Quality teaching is a fundamental of education and there is a host of research on the determinants of quality outcomes for learners. Notably, most of these are qualitative in nature. Workforce Council recommends a more appropriate investment would be in platforms for supporting and mentoring from those successful teachers to those less successful, either self identified or identified through a robust performance management system. Quality teaching must take account of context and these are variable across Australia, across industries, across workplace cultures.

It is noted that, on the one hand, the recommendation refers to the determinants of quality teaching, yet on the other “the best means of capturing student and industry satisfaction with the VET workforce”. With respect to the latter, there may be potential to incorporate consistent quantitative feedback mechanisms across the VET sector. However, this should only be undertaken within a broader framework of continuous quality improvement that supports the VET workforce through providing constructive feedback in conjunction with approaches to professional development that enable them to utilise this feedback effectively. In this respect, drawing from models that have been piloted in the higher education sector would be of benefit. For example, Delvin, Brocket & Baker (2008) argue that:

To date in Australia, there has been a tendency to place an uneven reliance on quantitative indicators of teaching quality, partly because they are seen as objective and reliable and are relatively simple to gather and collate... Alongside other criticisms, the national quantitative indicators provide inadequate data for institutions to interpret the data contextually to provide explanations of, or make changes to, their own teaching and learning performance. (p. 5)

Heeding lessons from research already undertaken is critical to avoid a repeat of old mistakes, simply because the VET sector is imagined to be different from other educational contexts. While there are differences, the similarities should not be ignored. Embedding any efforts to capture consistent quality indicator data in a framework such as that provided by Delvin et al (2008) is critical if the data is to be of use in driving continuous quality improvement rather than simply describing “where we are at” with no additional utility.

This framework must also be highly sensitive to, and accommodating of, different industry, regional and local contexts where positive student outcomes may take very different forms. These cannot necessarily be reduced to “satisfaction” measures. For example, in the Health and Community Services there may be a mismatch between employer expectations, student expectations and policy expectations, particularly in the context of the major policy reforms taking place. If the VET workforce is responding effectively to policy expectations, employers could claim to be “dissatisfied” with VET student outcomes because they are still struggling to understand these expectations. Similarly, if the VET workforce is not responding effectively to new policy expectations, employers may claim to be “satisfied”, meanwhile student outcomes are not

appropriate to meet new and emerging policy guidelines that demand different kinds of philosophical and practice frameworks.

Finally, it is necessary to distinguish between satisfaction with the VET workforce and satisfaction with student outcomes. Driving a national agenda to quantitatively measure satisfaction with the VET workforce is only likely to alienate the workforce, particularly trainers and assessors who appear to be “singled out” as solely responsible for student outcomes. The agenda should be to improve the quality of student outcomes, with quality teaching and other workforce issues as an important component of that, along with the structure and suitability of competency-based training packages, the effectiveness of management and administration systems, the suitability of policy and regulatory conditions, etc. Given that the assumption that there will be sufficient supply of VET workers in the short-to-medium term is already tenuous, it would be irresponsible to introduce initiatives in the name of “consistent quantitative data” that are likely to create yet another pressure on the VET workforce.

Managerial Independence

The Workforce Council successfully brokers the provision of professional development and qualifications / skill sets in our industries with public training funds provided by the Queensland Department of Education and Training. We value the capacity to work with the VET suppliers in our markets to obtain the best value for employers in our industries. Invariably the best outcome is with those public providers that have the ability to go to market competitively with capability to address issues around customization, flexible delivery, action learning, learner centred delivery and other industry exchange programs where trainers are embedded in contexts of employment. The success of the industry brokerage model in our industries in Queensland proves an effective model to support managerial independence in VET.

Chapter 8 Ensuring workforce capability

The Workforce Council supports the finding that the Certificate IV in Training and Education is a high risk qualification and that auditing providers with this qualification should be frequent and intensive. We also support the notion that other qualifications are required of the VET workforce and draw the Productivity Commission’s attention to other more detailed submissions in this regard. We would also support the dual professional cohort as vitally important in our sectors undergoing vast change and placing industry currency as fundamental to addressing skill shortages on a large scale. Public policy in our sectors is constantly changing and wide ranging and the VET system has to include this in its strategies for meeting the workforce challenges. The Certificate IV in TAE is important but not the only product in VET that needs to be under the scrutiny of continuous improvement strategies within the RTO. We commend DET Queensland for its foray into this area – with *Keeping it real: Industry Currency for Trainers in Queensland*, an attempt to research this area and provide recommendations.

Workplace and enterprise trainers and mentors may not require the TAE qualification but a skill set. The TAE, on the other hand, is not sufficient for all roles. For example, language and literacy support, RPL, Teaching English as a Second Language etc. The Workforce Council recommends that the focus be similar to that of the industry competency. That is, VET practitioners need to have TAE and the competencies related to the role they are playing (i.e. including competency in literacy support, or RPL / RCC assessment).

The Workforce Council does not support a two year lead into gaining the foundational qualification for teaching staff employed by RTOs as such. It is important that 'aspirational' VET teachers acquire this qualification before they begin duties as a VET trainer and assessor.

In addition to this, the Workforce Council would support increasing the size of the regulatory workforce and the qualifications available to such employees. Increased use of Technical Advisors, and skills development for industry experts, in regulation audits would also support improved VET outcomes. It is of considerable concern that RTOs would present material for audit that indicated the basic human resource requirement for delivering the training packages was not met.

Already RTOs that have User Choice Pre-qualified Supplier status in Queensland are required to publish their recent audit findings on their website. This is a sensible and achievable mechanism to provide greater transparency and support employers and learners in choosing quality providers. Meanwhile RTO based internal auditors need to be accountable for non-compliance to improve their performance and that of their employer. The Workforce Council thus recommends that all RTOs be required to publish their latest audit report on their website to support consumer choice. Ensuring public providers are also subject to external (rather than internal) audit would also serve to improve transparency and create a level playing field.

The Workforce Council firmly believes that increased levels of staffing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander people are required not only to build the capacity of VET providers and the system as a whole to develop culturally appropriate processes and products but also to build capacity of communities. We believe that the Queensland government is on the right track and has a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) across government. We believe that DEEWR also has a RAP. These forms of accountability can impact on VET providers who contract with government to meet the RAP time frames and strategies.

Information requests

Are VET providers (public or private) compensated for pursuing non-commercial objectives requested by governments? If so, does the level of compensation accurately reflect additional costs? What form does this compensation take? Is it transparently identified in government budget documentation and as income by providers?

While the Workforce Council cannot comment on the levels of compensation provided to RTOs for their community obligation, we do call for transparency in calculating the non-commercial aspects of the public provision of VET.

The Commission seeks further input on whether VET-in-Schools teachers should be required to have the Certificate IV in Training and Education.

Teacher qualification is adequate if teachers are provided with on-going and audited professional development that maintains industry currency and supports continuous quality improvement in teaching. In Queensland teachers are registered and must comply with ongoing professional development. If they do not necessarily understand competency based assessment, then schools must make the necessary professional development available. Similarly this professional development is required for currency in the vocational occupations that teachers are delivering as VET in schools.

More importantly, VETiS teachers often do not have the industry competency in the area being delivered, and this is a significant problem for the quality of vocational training in schools. Where industry vocational competency is not available in the school teaching staff, opportunities for co-teaching and mentoring of teachers by industry experts need to be explored. Stronger partnerships between school teachers and RTOs and/or industry with the required industry competency is essential to ensure appropriate outcomes for students.

The Commission seeks further information on any quantitative studies, with a focus on Australia, that seek to identify the relationship between the characteristics of trainers and assessors with the quality of student outcomes.

Below are some articles that are relevant to this topic. However the Workforce Council suggests that the lack quantitative research into the quality of VET teachers internationally suggests that it may not be the most appropriate means for investigating this issue. These studies are limited even though they have attempted to use a quantitative approach. One assumes that the quality of teachers is fundamental, but not the only variable at play in post-compulsory education and the quality of student experiences in VET.

Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence By Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford University

<http://www.politicalscience.uncc.edu/godwink/PPOL8687/WK11March%2029%20Teachers/Darling-Hammond%20Review%20essay%20on%20teacher%20quality%20and%20outcomes.pdf>

Most recent research review suggests that area under researched in terms of school education – nothing on VET at all.

Implied in Senate Report 2002 on education of boys

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/report/fullrpt.pdf>

Investing in Teacher Quality: A Model for Strengthening the Teaching Profession in Australia

http://www.eera-ecer.eu/ecer-programmes/print/conference/ecer-2009/contribution/225-1/?no_cache=1&cHash=c4b8915deb

EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

The ECER programme is regularly updated.

Last Update after taking out cancelled papers: 03.09.2010.

Author(s): Stephen Dinham (submitting), Elizabeth Kleinhenz (presenting), Lawrence Ingvarson (presenting) Conference: ECER 2009 Network: 1. Continuing Professional Development for Teachers and Leaders in School Systems

Format: Paper

BEYOND THE PRACTICUM: INTEGRATING CONTENT, PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

http://ocs.sfu.ca/aare/index.php/AARE_2008/AARE/paper/viewFile/516/237

Peer Refereed Conference Paper delivered to the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) National Conference, 30 November – 4 December 2008, Brisbane

Effective teaching practices for students with and without learning difficulties: Constructivism as a legitimate theory of learning AND of teaching?

http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=learning_processes

Ken Rowe, Australian Council for Educational Research. Background paper to keynote address presented at the NSW DET Office of Schools Portfolio Forum, Wilkins Gallery, Sydney, 14 July 2006

Feasibility Study: Establishing a national centre for pedagogy

<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/ta/webdav/shared/Feasibility%20study%20-%20Establishing%20a%20national%20centre%20for%20pedagogy.pdf>

Report for Teaching Australia prepared by John Loughran, Amanda Berry, Allie Clemans, Greg Lancaster and Michael Long

Good teachers on dangerous ground: towards a new view of teacher quality and professionalism*

http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ep/v36nspe/en_v36nspea13.pdf

Raewyn Connell University of Sydney

'Supporting VET providers in building capability for the future' (2007)

<http://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Conference%20paper%202.pdf>

Towards a synthesis of key findings from the National VET Research Consortium,

Roger Harris, Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work (Hawke Research Institute) University of South Australia, Berwyn Clayton, Centre for Undertaking Research in Vocational Education, Canberra Institute of Technology

The Teaching Quality Indicators Project: Final Report (2008)

www.deakin.edu.au/herg/assets/resources/TQI-final-rprt.pdf

Marcia Delvin, Jennifer Brockett, Lise Baker, Deakin University