



**TDC Response to**

**The Productivity  
Commission's Draft Research  
Report on  
the Vocational Education  
and Training Workforce**

**28 February 2011**

## Executive summary

The TAFE Development Centre (TDC) supports the broad directions outlined in the Productivity Commission's draft report on the Vocational Education and Training Workforce, particularly the recommendation for developing the capability of VET educators through strategic, systemic and targeted continuing professional development (CPD) programs. The TDC has developed and delivered a wide range of CPD services for the Victorian VET sector since 2005 to meet the workforce development needs of the sector and the practice priorities of VET professionals.

The TDC adopts a strategic and sector wide approach to the provision of CPD to meet government policy requirements and workforce development needs as outlined in the TDC Professional Learning Framework. The Framework outlines the broad range of capabilities required by VET professionals and, after rigorous analysis of government policy and business environment changes, informs the focus of PD programs provided by the TDC annually. The aim is to support the ongoing PD needs and raise the professional standing of the sector through a model based on the progressive acquisition of skills and knowledge by VET workers throughout their career.

As a dedicated CPD body for Victoria, the role and structure of the TDC is unique in Australia. We provide high quality professional learning programs for VET educators, specialists or non-teaching staff, and leaders and managers and have strategic links with other organisations in the wider tertiary education sector that ensures our programs are highly relevant, cost effective and timely. The TDC provides a unique and informed perspective on the capability and professional learning needs of VET professionals and educators in Victoria, particularly in times of rapid policy change at state and federal levels.

While the TDC has been predominantly Victorian focused, it supports a national network of workforce development managers and is well placed to lead the development of a national VET body charged with developing a PD framework for the sector.

In the following document, the TDC provides comments and perspectives on the draft recommendations 8.5 and 8.6 in Section 8.2: Workforce capability gaps in the Productivity Commission's draft report.

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## Introduction

The TAFE Development Centre (TDC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's Draft Research Report on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) workforce. Established in 2005, the TDC plays an integral role in the development of the Victorian VET sector's workforce and has extensive knowledge and experience in the design and delivery of professional learning programs that target key issues facing the VET sector, Registered Training Providers (RTOs) and individual VET professionals.

The TDC is a public company based in Melbourne limited by guarantee with the Minister for Education, Skills and Workforce Participation as the sole member. It is governed by a Board of Directors appointed for their knowledge of the Australian VET system, expertise in education, training and development and skills in organisational governance. The TDC's mission is to promote the development and raise the professional standing of people working in the Victorian VET sector including TAFE, Private RTO's, the Adult and Community Sector (ACE) and Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS).

The TDC receives funding to design and implement a wide range of PD programs from the Victorian Government through Skills Victoria with currently approximately 80% of support being provided to the TAFE sector to support workforce planning requirements. To augment PD opportunities available to VET professionals, the TDC also provides PD programs on a commercial basis to the wider VET sector including ACE and private providers in Victoria and nationally.

This document provides a summary of responses from the TDC to the key points and recommendations raised by the Productivity Commission in Chapter 8: raising the workforce's capability and other matters pertinent to the TDC's speciality and expertise. The exclusion of comments in response to other key points and recommendations does not infer disagreement but rather that TDC does not wish to comment. This document also provides information and perspectives from the TDC on the skills and knowledge required by VET professionals and strategic approaches to building capability for the VET sector in general.

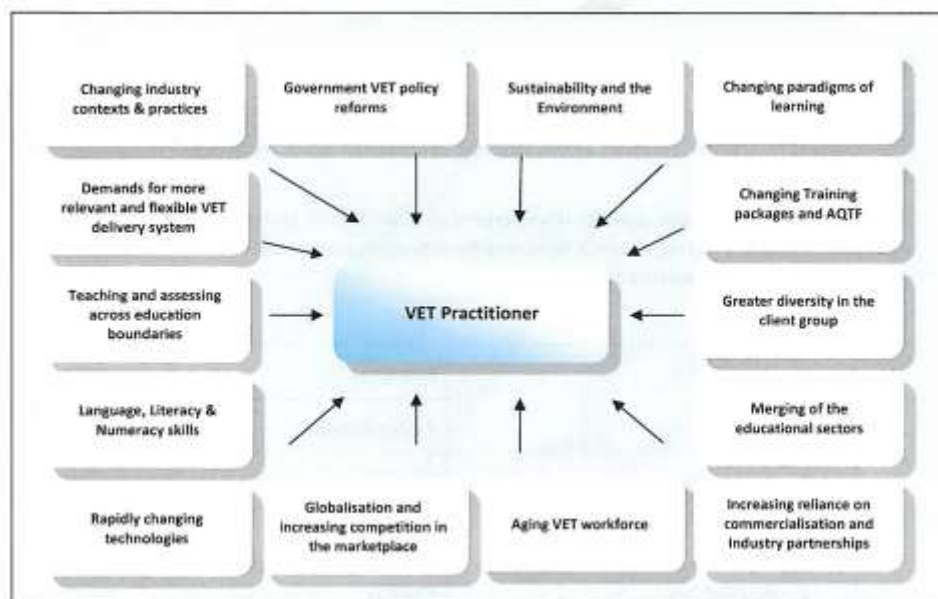
## 1 TDC Perspective

As the major asset in the Victorian VET sector, the expertise of the VET workforce is critical to ensuring Victorian industries have highly skilled workers to ensure ongoing economic growth and prosperity. However, a number of complex environmental drivers are impacting on the current skills and knowledge profile required of VET professionals (including educators and specialist staff). Recent changes in government policy at state and federal levels driving rapid reforms in the VET and Higher Education (HE) sectors are merging educational boundaries, demanding greater social inclusion in tertiary education, improving pathways for learners across the sectors and encouraging greater collaboration between VET and HE providers.

There is also growing interest in the quality and governance of the VET system and teaching delivery, moves to more competitive funding models and calls for more relevant and service-focused VET provision.

The result is a more flexible, competitive and demand driven VET sector with greater competition among providers, an increasingly diverse client base, blurred boundaries between schools, VET and HE and increased pressures on the workforce as outlined in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: TDC view of policy and environmental pressures impacting on the VET workforce*



These pressures are impacting on the way VET professionals work, particularly VET educators. VET educators now require a diverse skill profile that differs significantly from that required in the delivery of traditional, supply-driven educational models. In demand is the ability to be innovative, adaptive and collaborative, to be both an industry specialist and a highly skilled educator with capability to practice across educational sectors.

VET educators need a diverse range of pedagogical practices partnered with networking, relationship building, research and commercially savvy innovation skills. The ability to adapt, to learn, to reflect and be creative is critical for educators to keep pace with a world where skills and knowledge are rapidly becoming redundant. Entry level qualifications are not enough to ensure educators have these skills and capabilities (IBSA, 2010:9); continuing professional development (CPD) is essential to supporting VET educators maintain high quality pedagogic and industry practices. As a result

*Existing teachers and trainers will need to be supported to increase the scope and range of their industry and pedagogic knowledge and skills to accommodate the increasing demands that are being made of VET and the new roles they will be required to fulfil. New teachers and trainers must be recruited to replace an aging*

*workforce and be supported to develop expert knowledge and skills in teaching and learning to foster dual identities as industry experts and expert teachers and trainers (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011: 13).*

Ongoing strategies for the development of the VET workforce are required at a strategic, organisational and individual level to equip the sector with the skills and knowledge to keep pace with changes and meet the new and merging needs of industry, learners and government. As dual professionals, VET educators face significant challenges to build and maintain their capability to:

- Keep pace with rapid changes to both VET and industry contexts including products/services, processes, technologies, business systems and regulations
- Operate in an increasingly commercial, competitive, demand driven and global training market
- Respond to demands for more flexible pedagogical strategies and practices
- Work with changing AQTF and Training Packages requirements and other compliance demands such as related legislative and organisational requirements
- Understand and manage an increasingly diverse client base including learners with low levels of LL&N skills, from low socio-economic backgrounds and from a wide array of cultural heritages
- Adapt to a role as facilitator of the learning process as learning paradigms change
- Work in partnerships with industry, community and other educational providers
- Understand and use current and emerging technologies in teaching practises
- Be entrepreneurial and look for new business opportunities
- Develop new and customised products and services
- Manage personal career and development needs.

The changing profile of VET educators is also highlighted in the Joint TAFE Associations (TDA) submission (2010:5) as a challenge for the TAFE workforce in the need for

*. . . more flexible and adaptive teachers with a broad range of inclusive teaching skills in addition to specific content knowledge and industry experience. It may also result in a change in the working profile of TAFE with the increase of different staff employed to cater for more diverse learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

This is echoed by Skills Australia (2010) who notes

*. . . that the Australian tertiary education sector itself needs a new and different repertoire of responses to help change in workforce development at the enterprise level. Education and training providers need to continue to redesign their business models away from the traditional institutional provision of standardised courses, 'teacher-centred' and classroom-based face-to-face delivery of education and training. Industry expects the VET sector to expand work-based learning to increase the relevance of the learning.*

## 2 TDC Response

### 2.1 Productivity Commission Draft Report Summary

The TDC highlights the following key point made in the summary of the Productivity Commission's Draft Report Summary, ***'VET trainers and assessors are required to be 'dual professionals' with both industry currency and educational capabilities'***.

This key point highlights the unique and distinguishing feature and arguably greatest strength and challenge for VET educators; their dual professionalism. Observations made by the TDC indicate that VET educators find it very difficult to maintain concurrent currency of knowledge and skills across two professions. Support is required in the form of funded professional learning programs of an appropriate scale and focus that provide regular and ongoing opportunities for educators to enhance both professional and educational practices.

The second defining characteristic of the VET sector is its competency based training (CBT) and assessment (CBA) model. CBT, based on the achievement of specific outcomes determined by industry, is a very different curriculum model to those in secondary schools and higher education. Teaching across educational sectors and curriculum models is another significant challenge for VET educators and requires, as outlined above, support in the form of well planned and resourced professional learning programs that focus on pedagogic practice and collaborative peer networks.

The next key point extends the argument for greater pedagogic focus and skills for VET educators, ***'The VET sector requires: more trainers and assessors with skills in demand; greater attention to meeting the contemporary skill needs of industry; and a wider base of the VET workforce that has at least basic educational capabilities'***; a focus that some would argue has been lost over the past decade. While the TDC does not comment on that view, it does note a significant increase in demand for PD programs that develop pedagogic knowledge, skills and understanding.

Finally, in this section a comment on the key summary point, ***'More professional development to specifically meet some capability requirements of the workforce'***. The TDC has attained a considerable reach across the VET sector in Victoria with its programs and services. The TDC's strategy for VET educators' development is to build VET pedagogic practice, deepen vocational knowledge and expertise and provide professional learning pathways to support educators as they progress through their careers. The underpinning philosophy supports collaborative and active learning, promotes reflective practice and encourages sharing of knowledge and expertise across the sector through professional learning communities.

The TDC actively identifies and targets strategic VET workforce needs through consultation with government, providers and individual VET professionals, through rigorous evaluation of programs and services and through extensive networks and relationships with key bodies in the wider VET and tertiary education sector.

## 2.2 Chapter 8: Improving the workforce's capability

### Workforce capability gaps

The TDC agrees with the Productivity Commission findings that there is evidence of significant capability gaps in:

- Delivery to learners who experience disadvantage;
- The delivery of higher education qualifications in VET;
- Engaging an increasingly diverse range of learners;
- The use of ICT skills in business and in delivery;
- Entrepreneurial skills and the capability to work in a more commercially-orientated environment;
- Capability in recognition of prior learning (RPL) and current competence (RCC); and
- Fundamental management and leadership skills for middle managers and coordinators.

The TDC also finds ongoing and significant gaps in knowledge and understanding of CBT and CBA, how to interpret and unpack Training Packages (particularly in new and VETiS educators) and understanding how to comply with AQTF standards and VRQA guidelines.

### **Response to Draft Recommendation 8.5**

***In order to improve delivery to Indigenous VET students, VET providers should attempt to secure the services of more Indigenous VET workers. Possible strategies include ensuring the presence of indigenous staff members on recruitment panels and charging an Indigenous HR manager with attracting, coordinating and retaining Indigenous employees across their organisation.***

***Recognising that it is difficult for VET to attract skilled Indigenous VET workers who are also being sought by industry, the VET sector should also put in place strategies to support Indigenous students to complete their studies within the VET sector.***

### **Capability in delivery to learners who experience disadvantage**

The TDC has noted an increase in demand for professional learning programs that develop capability to engage learners who experience disadvantage. The TDC anticipates that this demand will increase as rates of participation in VET for members of equity groups increase to meet COAG's social inclusion targets, particularly demand for programs that address learners with low language, literacy and numeracy skills. This area of PD has been targeted in the current TDC professional learning program for semester 1, 2011.

Successful initiatives such as the 'Reaching Learners outside the System' program have been delivered widely to the TAFE and ACE sectors by the Victorian Government through the TDC to address this issue. This particular program provides VET educators with the skills to engage learners who have had had limited contact with the formal training system and provides them with a qualification, *Assessment of Informal Learning* (21658VIC). The TDC is also working with Skills Victoria to develop a program including 'Reaching Learners outside the System' to develop the



capability of VET educators to engage indigenous learners in learning programs and to encourage and support the sector to recruit more indigenous trainers in service delivery.

### **Response to DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.6**

***State and Territory governments should assess the adequacy of funding provisions for ongoing professional development of their VET workforce. Nongovernment RTOs should identify capability needs within their workforces and target funding accordingly. Professional development should be a joint responsibility of RTO employers/owners and employees. Industry and Business Skills Australia should consult with the sector and develop options for ongoing professional development that address competency gaps and/or contribute to further capability development.***

#### **Capability in delivering higher level qualifications**

The push to raise qualifications in the workforce and the move into delivery of HE qualifications in VET means that VET educators need to be suitably qualified and skilled to teach and deliver at these levels. A shift to higher qualifications may, as indicated in the Joint TAFE Associations response, bring a move to emphasise teaching skills over technical skills (sub, 48, pp 22 and 32).

With increased targets for enrolments at Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels, VET educators will need to hold qualifications at AQF levels 5 and 6 and, for degree programs to have Masters Qualifications and above. VET educators delivering HE programs also are required to be more 'scholarly' in their practice as well as maintaining the educational and industry currency pertinent to the vocational degree they are teaching.

The TDC has had unprecedented demand for professional learning programs that address this issue. In the first part of 2011, two programs, 'Critical conversations about VET Pedagogy' and "Developing a scholarly culture' were instantly over subscribed and will require further sessions throughout the year to meet demand. They have also attracted interest from other states indicating a broader and pressing need to support the development of this capability nationally.

#### **Capability in the use of ICT in delivery**

The TDC recognises the priority for VET educators to be proficient and confident in the use of ICT in VET delivery and supports IBSA's (2010) view that technological developments in industry will require a greater engagement with, understanding of and competence in the digital economy by the VET workforce. This capability is also critical to engaging with young learners who communicate using digital technologies and to provide access for learners in remote locations and for learners who cannot attend centralised delivery.

Having offered many e-learning PD programs over the past five years, the TDC considers the most effective professional learning model for supporting the use of ICT is one that provides VET educators with digital learning experience as they learn. Online professional learning communities, web based seminars portals, blogs and wikies are examples of strategies the TDC either employs now or intends to implement in the near future to encourage and engage VET educators.

### **Capability in working in a more commercially-orientated environment**

In light of increasing commercial and competitive pressures in the VET sector, many providers have indicated to the TDC that much stronger entrepreneurial, business and commercial skills are required in the workforce, particularly at middle management level where teaching departments now have to operate much more as a business. In the first part of 2011, the TDC is offering PD programs that develop entrepreneurial capability in VET educators with a strong emphasis on industry engagement and successful work based learning initiatives.

### **Capability in the recognition of prior learning and current competence**

Over the past twelve months, the TDC has had steady demand for professional learning programs that address assessment practice including RPL, RCC and the requirements to comply with the AQTF 2010 and VRQA. There is also demand for PD programs that develop capability to develop assessment tools and to implement learning and assessment strategies. The demand is strong from all sections of the sector including VETiS, TAFE, ACE and private providers and represents one of the most pressing PD issues currently being experienced by the TDC.

### **Management capability**

The TDC agrees with the Commission's draft report that there is a capability gap in the skills and knowledge of managers in VET. Recent feedback from the sector regarding workforce development needs indicates a growing need for management development, particularly at senior educator and middle management levels where most VET managers have progressed from teaching careers into management positions and have not always had adequate leadership and management training and support.

Professional learning programs that target change management, business development and entrepreneurial skills, financial skills and people management capability in educational environments are in demand. While larger RTOs support the development of managers with in house training programs, smaller organisations face significant challenges in developing current and future managers and leaders.

The TDC also strongly supports recommendations for sector wide and institutionalised mentoring and induction programs to support new managers and new and developing teachers (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011: 39). Sector wide, funded mentoring programs delivered by the TDC have been very successful in Victoria in conjunction with a range of development programs for VET educators such as Fellowships, Scholarships, VET educator networks and knowledge sharing events. The *Industry Experts as Teachers* program which provides scholarships to new industry entrants to the VET teaching workforce to pay for initial training and mentoring has been particularly successful. The TDC also has a well developed sector wide coaching and mentoring program that provided complementary support for VET professionals to help them develop networks in their field of expertise, to develop capability and to keep abreast of changes in the policy environment.

## **Vocational competency**

The aging of the VET workforce and anecdotal evidence of a trend for some teachers to move into teaching as a 'semi retirement' from industry, has resulted in numbers of VET educators who may not be up to date with industry trends, particularly developments in technology. The TDC has delivered a range of sector wide programs such as the *TAFE Industry Skills Scheme (TISS)* to assist TAFE Institutes build and maintain the industry knowledge and skills of their staff. The TDC has supported 252 projects over the past six years with an investment of \$2.8 M through this initiative.

The TDC also provides funds to individual RTOs to enable them to design and implement specific programs in house that are customised to meet their needs. These programs, linked with the overall institute strategy provide opportunities for staff to engage directly with industry and make and develop important relationships with the industry sectors in their community.

The TDC strongly advocates for a greater range and number of these programs to support VET educators to gain and maintain vocational currency. Initiatives that support partnerships between RTOs, enterprises and industry bodies that provide opportunities for VET educators to upgrade their existing skills and knowledge or to acquire new or specialised skills in their industry area are highly recommended. These initiatives would focus on knowledge about national and international trends and developments in the industry concerned, specific industry and technological knowledge and skills and current and emerging business practices.

## **Ongoing Professional Development**

The TDC strongly advocates a strategic approach to professional development of the VET sector to ensure it can meet the capability requirements of the workforce into the future. This views supports international trends for further professionalising the VET teaching workforce (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011: 15) and calls from many across the Australian VET sector for a strategic workforce development approach including Industry and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) (2010), Mitchell & Ward (2010), Skills Australia (2010), Service Skills Australia (2010), Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2010) , Joint TAFE Association (2010) and Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) in the recently published, *Quality of teaching in VET: final report and recommendations'* report.

The TDC agrees with Wheelahan and Moodie (2011:34) that the existing national development group hosted by the TDC could be funded to develop a framework to support nationally consistent approaches to CPD for VET educators and that VET teacher and trainer preparation and development should be integrated within national, state and institutional policies and strategies and that CPD and teaching qualifications should be interdependent and a component of each other. By hosting the national professional development group, the TDC can play a leading role nationally, in collaboration with IBSA and other key bodies, to 'develop options for ongoing professional development that address competency gaps and/or contribute to further capability development' as recommended in the Draft Recommendation 8.6.

### 3 TDC Recommendations

A Professional Learning Framework such as that developed by the TDC (Figure 2) can guide and inform state and national PD programs to address the capability needs of the VET workforce. The framework defines 3 strategic goals for development of VET practitioners which are underpinned by 6 key strategies with broadly defined outcomes derived from the challenges and high level skill requirements outlined in section 1 above.

Figure 2: TDC Professional Learning Framework



This approach can be utilised to define capabilities and target competency gaps at a sector, RTO and individual level to improve the professional standing of VET educators and the quality of pedagogical practice and lead to better learning outcomes for the workforce in general.

The TDC also endorses Wheelahan and Moodie's (2011: 8) premise that CPD for VET educators should contribute to accredited studies within qualifications where possible. The TDC has already progressed in this direction with opportunities for accreditation for units from the Certificate IV TAE available for some professional learning programs.

In conclusion, the TDC recommends the development of:

- A sector wide professional learning strategy/ framework/plan that allows for the specific requirements of each component of the VET workforce and targets current and emerging workforce development issues;
- Professional capability statements for VET educators that defines levels of experience(e.g. new entrant, accomplished practitioner or educational leader), pedagogic practice and vocational expertise;
- Accreditation towards national competency standards for professional learning programs where appropriate;
- Programs linked to professional practice that can accrue 'credit' points that can be used against accredited training programs or to maintain professional currency;
- Sector wide funding support managed by bodies such as the TDC to ensure a coordinated approach to VET workforce development. It should be a shared responsibility of government, employers and employees to provide a range of integrated, well planned and resourced workforce and professional development activities and programs.

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