
FLAG

FLEXIBLE LEARNING ADVISORY GROUP

Ms Carole Gardner
Productivity Commission
LB 2 Collins St East
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Ms Gardner

FLAG response to the Productivity Commission draft research report, *Vocational Education and Training Workforce*

The Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) is an advisory group of the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC), and provides advice on national issues relating to the directions and priorities for flexible learning in the VET sector, with particular reference to e-learning technologies. It comprises a senior nominee of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), each state and territory VET CEO and one representative of the national Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector with Education Services Australia as a standing observer. FLAG is chaired by Mr Raymond Garrand, Chief Executive of the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) and South Australian NSOC representative.

FLAG welcomes the Commission's invitation to respond to its draft research report, *Vocational Education and Training Workforce*. We believe that this is a timely opportunity to consider the capacity of the VET workforce to meet changing labour market demands and contribute fully to Australia's economic prosperity.

By way of introduction, in addition to providing advice to NSOC, FLAG manages the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, the e-learning strategy for the VET sector. The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) was developed as a model of national collaboration to advance the uptake of e-learning in the VET sector. At its core is a formal commitment by state and territory training authorities to a shared national vision, one in which the VET system is equipped to respond to the challenges of a modern economy. This commitment is enacted through a robust national network, charged with the responsibility of identifying opportunities for national collaboration and finding creative ways of responding to them.

Through the Framework, FLAG works to support and complement the Australian Government's productivity agenda, which is partly enabled by the digital revolution, most visibly in the major infrastructure investment of the National Broadband Network, the Vocational Education Broadband Network and other key policy initiatives such as the Digital Education Revolution and the Digital Regions Initiative.

This submission focuses on the ways in which increased uptake of flexible learning technologies, in particular e-learning, are expected to impact on the role of the VET workforce. As such, it responds to the draft findings for 6.1 and 7.1, and to the draft recommendations for 7.1, 8.1 and 8.4.

Should you require clarification on any of the points raised in this response, I ask that you contact Chris Stewart, Director of the FLAG Secretariat on chris.stewart@tvetaustralia.com.au or by telephone at (03) 9832 8103.

Yours sincerely



Raymond Garrand
Chair
Flexible Learning Advisory Group

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This section responds to the following:

Draft finding 6.1

Over the medium term, in the context of a tightening labour market, the VET workforce will be expected to deliver a greater volume of training, increase the quality and breadth of its training, cater for a more diverse student population, and operate under a more contingent and contestable funding system.

Draft Recommendation 8.1

The Certificate IV in Training and Education (TAE40110) should maintain its status as a high risk qualification. Auditing by state and territory regulators of RTOs with this qualification on their scope needs to be more frequent and more intensive.

Draft Recommendation 8.4

Within two years of commencing employment, VET practitioners should have completed the Certificate IV from TAE10. Industry experts, working under supervision, should be encouraged but not required to obtain a Certificate IV in TAE. Within two years of commencing delivery of training or assessment, enterprise trainers and assessors working under the supervision of someone with the Certificate IV, should have completed the Skill Set relevant to their role.

FLAG agrees with initial finding 6.1. The 2010 E-learning Benchmarking Survey¹ found that the demand continues to grow from learners, registered training organisations and, perhaps most importantly, from business and industry for flexible delivery options. Employers and individuals expect greater choice and control over the time, place and content of their training, and they increasingly expect technology to form a part of that delivery. At the same time, governments and businesses expect more training to be delivered while managing cost pressures, rapid changes in the workplace, changing demographics in the labour market and the impacts of critical skills shortages across the economy. The survey also found that employers are more knowledgeable about e-learning, increasingly using e-learning as part of their own training provision, and expect RTOs to be responsive and flexible².

The rollout of the National Broadband Network is expected to considerably increase the demand for flexible training options, with users gaining access to high speed internet connections up to 100 times faster than they currently experience.

As the demand for flexible training continues to grow, so too does the need for practitioners to possess high-level skills that will optimise learner experiences and deliver quality outcomes. There is an expectation that practitioners will not only know how to use the technologies but how to integrate them into teaching practice in an innovative way.

The Commission has asserted that *“there is evidence of a significant capability gap in ICT skills among the VET workforce.”* FLAG supports this finding; noting that in many cases VET teachers and training are on the back-foot when it comes to the application of technology, responding to changes in learner behaviour rather than driving it. There is a strong argument for investment in mentoring and ongoing professional development for VET practitioners to equip them with the skills they need to keep pace with emerging technologies and business practice.

FLAG notes the Commission’s recommendations regarding attainment of the Certificate IV in Training and Education (Recommendations 8.4 and 8.5). The Commission would be aware that Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) has recently consulted on the content of the proposed Diploma of Training and Education (TAE). FLAG considers that the units of competency relevant to e-learning and the use of information and communication technologies are critical for VET teachers

¹ Australian Flexible Learning Framework, *E-learning Benchmarking Survey – Final Report* (2010)

The E-learning Benchmarking Survey addresses the uptake, use and impact of e-learning. In 2010 responses were received from 784 RTOs, 2,411 VET teachers/trainers and 800 employers. The results of the E-learning Benchmarking surveys are based on samples of VET teachers and trainers. Any variability of up to +/- 3% between aggregate results over time would not be considered statistically significant.

² Ibid.

and trainers. Accordingly, FLAG has recommended to IBSA that the competencies (TAEDEL501A Facilitate e-learning; and TAEDES504A Design and develop e-learning resources) should be considered core for the qualification, and not elective as is currently the case.

The demand for increased volume of training delivery also highlights the need to consider the sector's capacity to effectively monitor the quality of both training delivery and assessment practice. One of the emerging practices is the use of e-assessment.

To this end, in 2010 the Australian Flexible Learning Framework commissioned a research study, *E-assessment and the AQTF: Bridging the divide between practitioners and auditors* to examine what practitioners and auditors judged to be the key issues in e-assessment with reference to the AQTF. The research revealed practitioners use e-assessment for formative assessment. However, many practitioners also expressed a desire to become more proficient using these various forms of e-assessment for summative, rather than purely formative, purposes. Furthermore, the research indicated that although the majority of auditors are auditing e-assessment (primarily in the form of online quizzes) feedback was that they wished to be more proficient in auditing other forms of e-assessment.

In 2011 FLAG and the National Quality Council will undertake a joint project around the use of e-assessment in the Australian Quality Training Framework, including the proposed development of a set of best practice guidelines and case studies. A copy of the full report is available on the flexible learning website: http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/files/Eassessment_AQTF_final.pdf

Response to draft finding and recommendation 7.1

FLAG acknowledges the Commission's concerns around the lack of quality data for the VET workforce. Lack of national consistency for VET data collection remains a threshold issue for policy-makers.

FLAG supports the Commission's recommendation to task the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) with developing a comprehensive instrument for identifying the VET workforce. FLAG notes that as an outcome of its review of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical (AVETMIS) Standard, NCVER recommended that –

... further work be undertaken to define a Standard for VET Workforce information (separate from the Standard for VET Providers) and that an appropriate method for collection be considered subsequent to this initial work³.

FLAG supports this recommendation, noting that in developing the Standard, NCVER should consider how the administrative burden for providers can be minimised.

³ NCVER, *Review of AVETMIS Standard for VET Providers: outcomes from the discussion paper* (2010) p15