

JOHN MITCHELL & ASSOCIATES

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RESEARCH

PLANNING

EVALUATION

**Submission to the Productivity Commission in  
response to the November 2010 draft research report  
on the Vocational Education and Training Workforce**

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**6 March 2011**

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## Covering letter

6 March 2011

Productivity Commissioner  
Education and Training Workforce Study  
Productivity Commission  
LB2 Collins Street East  
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Commissioner,

### **Response to Nov 2010 Draft Research Report on Vocational Education and Training Workforce**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Research Report.

I write in my capacity as Managing Director of two research companies that focus closely on workforce development in vocational education and training (VET):

- John Mitchell & Associates (JMA), a company established in October 1992 and specialising in research, planning, evaluation, strategy and innovation in relation to strategic leadership and workforce development in VET. Please see <http://www.jma.com.au>
- JMA Analytics Pty Ltd, a company established in April 2010, focusing specifically on quantitative measurement in workforce development. My partner in this company is psychometrician John Ward. Please see <http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx>

I look forward to reading your final report.

Yours sincerely,

***Dr John Mitchell***

Managing Director  
John Mitchell & Associates; JMA Analytics

## Section 1: General comments

The Commission is to be congratulated for the amount of work it completed from early 2010 and draft report contains some valuable aspects, for instance:

- the statistics about the number of employees in the TAFE sector nationally, a basic statistic which has eluded previous research projects
- the proposal that providers be remunerated for undertaking community service obligation activities (please see Attachment 1).

However, all the strengths and the weaknesses of the report are too many to cite, so this section focuses on some issues raised by chapters 7 and 8 of the Commission's report.

### Alternative ways to increase efficiency

In chapter 7, *Ensuring workforce capacity and efficiency*, the draft report provides the following definition of efficiency:

The main focus of this study is on the relationship between outputs from the sector and the workforce inputs used in their production (that is, productive efficiency). Unless otherwise stated, this is the context in which the term 'efficiency' is used in the remainder of this chapter. (p.7.2)

Chapter 7 then sets out three recommendations – two about data collection and one about industrial arrangements.

While all good citizens would support the goals of increased national efficiency in VET, my own research suggests that if the government wants to increase the efficiency of the VET workforce, then industrial relations changes, such as giving autonomy to TAFE Institutes, and enabling them to offer flexible pay rates, are limited and incomplete solutions.

Alternative ways to increase the outputs of VET teaching practitioners and other VET people, from my research, are likely to be by attending to the professional, psychological, social and cultural domains of VET work and practice. One of these ways is to convey to VET practitioners that we respect their capabilities, we encourage novices to continually develop themselves, we applaud those who have achieved advanced practice, we respect the desire of VET practitioners to improve their skills, and we will provide them with opportunities to stretch and improve themselves, provided of course they also contribute some time and energy.

Basically, this trusting, respectful, professional approach is tried and proven in VET as it was employed by the much-evaluated national professional development program Reframing the Future for eleven years from 1998-2008.

I would like to provide some examples of VET practitioners becoming more efficient and flexible without industrial relations or organisational structural changes. In my report with Suzy McKenna for

Reframing the Future, *Productivity and Participation Enhanced by VET* (DEEWR 2008), one chapter was entitled 'Improved productivity of the VET workforce' (chapter 6). The key points from the chapter were summarized in the Executive Summary as follows:

The Second Reading Speech of the Skills Australia Bill 2008 stressed that providers "must deliver customised, relevant training that is integrated with, and supported by, workplace learning opportunities, at a time and place that suit business needs". In response to this expectation, the VET workforce needs to improve its productivity by becoming more flexible, innovative and responsive. Examples (in this chapter) of VET providers (from the 2007 Reframing the Future program) developing these capabilities are as follows:

- A community of practice in Tasmania explored a goal from the COAG National Reform Agenda of "a more flexible and responsive training system" by investigating topical issues in workplace learning and assessment, focusing on four specific enterprises.
- An action learning project convened by a training provider in the retail industry and based in Brisbane led to an increase in staff awareness and understanding of employability skills in training programs.
- A national training change agent in Melbourne collaborated with his colleagues to improve recognition services and flexible delivery approaches within his Faculty of Building and Construction.
- Action learning methodology was used in another Melbourne project to enhance participants' expertise in the delivery of digital media and design competencies – a fast-changing field, affected by continual improvements in technology.
- A strategic and change management project in Perth investigated the changes the training provider organisation would need to make in order to operate successfully as a service driven organisation, shifting away from a reliance on traditional institution-based delivery.
- Another strategic and change management project, this time in regional Queensland, enabled institution-based staff to develop a clearer appreciation of the valuable role that remote trainers perform in helping the organisation achieve its goals.

The above snippets make the point that, given the vast array of contexts within which VET practitioners operate and given the range of skills they need in their work, to increase the efficiency of the VET workforce might best be achieved by primarily viewing the participants as professionals who have a commitment to shared standards and who know they need to continually improve.

Notably, when John Ward and I conducted our national survey of VET practitioners in late 2009, to which 2230 practitioners responded, they said that they have 80% of the skills they need to do their job and they ranked very clearly the professional development they knew they needed. Generally speaking, professional VET people, like most professionals in most industries, are self-driven individuals who want to improve their skills.

As a general comment, the Commission's report could be strengthened, and made more positive, by reference to more qualitative evidence about the professional identity, motivation, aspirations and capabilities of VET practitioners, such as that provided above. While there is a raft of such qualitative evidence available to the Commission, three sets of case studies I have authored in the last six months may be of interest.

- *Innovative regional skilling. How TAFE SA Regional combines technology and innovation to improve student access, participation rates and course completions*
- *Improving Workforce Capabilities. How TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute effectively assists organisations develop their workforces*

- *Creating and Adding Value. How responsiveness by TAFE NSW benefits its customers (forthcoming).*

Each of the case study publications is around 30,000 words and each publication identifies the exemplary skills of the VET professionals involved in the initiatives, emphasizing the new skills being used for the more demanding environment in which TAFE and VET operates.

Going against the tide of devaluing TAFE as the public provider, surprisingly a state government has recently expressed its respect for TAFE, indicating it understands that simply making TAFE Institutes autonomous is not enough to motivate VET practitioners to increase their productive efficiency. Please see Attachments 2 and 3.

### **Concerns with Chapter 8**

My major concern with the draft report relates to Chapter 8 *Ensuring workforce capability*, as it is, from a research perspective, incomplete and might have a negative effect on the growth of VET practice and the future health of the VET profession. In particular, I believe that the Commission needs to describe in this chapter the current capabilities of the VET workforce, including a respectful description of the leading edge of practice, before it makes recommendations for improvements to the workforce's capability or recommendations about registration of the teaching section of the VET workforce.

A fast track way for the Commission to witness the leading edge of VET practice is to review the three sets of case studies noted above. In making that suggestion, I hasten to add that the best practice of private providers is as remarkable as that in TAFE.

### **Foundation and advanced practice**

It is unfortunate that the vast majority of the discussion in Chapter 8 focuses on whether the Certificate IV Training and Assessment is an adequate qualification. Our qualitative and quantitative research finds that the Certificate IV may be an adequate qualification for the novice, on day one of their VET career, but extensive and ongoing professional development is required for the novice to progress to what we describe as an Established Foundation Practitioner (please see Attachment 5). To progress further, to the categories of specialist and advanced, requires even more professional development over a period of many years. Many of the people I have researched in the last 5-6 years have told me it took them 10-15 years to reach what we would describe as the categories of specialist or advanced. Please see section 2 below. To become an advanced VET practitioner is a huge achievement, within which a Certificate IV is a small step in a very long and rich professional journey.

In Chapter 8, the focus on the Certificate IV and the novice needs to be balanced by a focus on the leading edge of practice; that is on the potential high end of practice. There is a large body of work from 2003 onwards describing the VET practitioner. For instance, the Foreword to my 2009 book *The Advanced VET Practitioner* describes the new and advanced VET practitioner and links it to the previous literature on the "new" VET practitioner. Additionally, my work with John Ward on VETCAT™ provides a psychometrically validated model of foundation and advanced VET practice, plus a taxonomy of novice, established, specialist and advanced VET practitioners. Please see the

Appendices to section 2. The inclusion in the Commission's report of such concepts as foundation and advanced practice and levels of practitioners would properly reflect the breadth and depth of VET "teaching" practice.

### **High level capabilities of VET leaders and managers**

I note that most of the discussion in Chapter 8 is about the teaching workforce. There are many publications on VET leaders and managers which illustrate the skills required by this cohort in an increasingly challenging environment. Some recent publications include:

- Callan, V., Mitchell, J., Clayton, B. & Smith, L. 2007, *Investigating approaches for sustaining and building educational leadership*, NCVET, Adelaide.
- Callan, V., Mitchell, J., Clayton, B. & Smith, L. 2007, *Approaches for sustaining and building management and leadership capability in VET providers*, NCVET, Adelaide.
- Coates, H., Meek, L., Brown, J., Friedman, T., Noonan, P. & Mitchell, J. 2010, *VET Leadership for the Future*. L.H. Martin Institute, Melbourne University and ACER, Melbourne.
- Mitchell, J.G. 2007, *Women's Leadership in VET*, John Mitchell & Associates, Sydney.
- Mitchell, J.G. 2008a, 'Position paper on key issues facing VET managers and leaders. A paper for the L H Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management'. Unpublished paper.
- Mitchell, J.G. 2008b, *Authentic, sustainable leadership in VET*, John Mitchell & Associates, Sydney.
- Mitchell, J.G. 2009, 'The nature, work focus and indicators of effective VET leadership', a paper for LH Martin Institute, Melbourne University.

### **Registration**

The topic of registration is discussed very briefly in the draft report. The report that John Ward and I prepared on this topic for the National Quality Council (NQC) in late 2009, *Carrots, Sticks, A Mix or Other Options*, was based on qualitative evidence of 60 interviews plus discussions with the reference group and an international literature review, and raised a wide range of options, dilemmas, quandaries and recommendations. The issues are complex. The NQC report is 36,800 words compared with three pages in the Commission's draft. The many issues deserve further consideration by the Commission.

### **National professional development**

The draft report also gives little space to the topic of national VET workforce development and national VET professional development. For instance, it devotes three sentences on page 8.31 to the Reframing the Future project that was conducted for eleven years from 1998-2008 for around \$4.4m per annum. Even though the question of whether government should support initiatives such as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in the higher education arena or Reframing the Future in the VET sector is now a contentious one, given the recent axing of the ALTC, the issues still deserve extensive public discussion.

Please see Attachment 3 for my attempt to use humour in order to keep minds open on this topic.

## **Section 2. Links between the level of VET practice and practitioners' educational qualifications**

The Commission expressed interest in teacher qualifications and their impact on student outcomes. While this section does not comment on student outcomes, it does comment on teachers' perception of their level of practice.

This section was prepared by John Mitchell and John Ward from JMA Analytics.

The following discussion provides a brief summary of data analysis conducted by JMA Analytics on the links between VET practice (e.g. foundation level practice; advanced level practice) and practitioners' educational qualifications, based on VETCAT™ data. This data was originally workshopped with clients of VETCAT from twelve registered training organisations in Sydney on 3 December 2010.

In brief, the section shows that

- gaining higher level qualifications will have a positive impact upon a VET practitioner's foundation skills and practice
- gaining a masters degree in education will distinctly improve the level of advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills.

This short discussion is not meant to diminish the value of practitioners learning in other ways, for example informally on the job.

### **Description of VETCAT™**

VETCAT™ is the VET capability analysis tool for those practitioners for whom training and assessing is part or all of their job; that is, for full-time, part-time, permanent, contract and sessional staff.

VETCAT™ is an appropriately tested and validated survey tool based on the findings from a national survey of 2230 VET practitioners conducted in late 2009. For further background to the national survey and a full description please see the report, 'The JMA Model of VET Capability Development' at [www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx](http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx)

VETCAT™ contains over 120 questions and is designed specifically to capture the skill levels of VET trainers and assessors, both as individuals and as members of faculties or campuses. VETCAT™ meets stringent commercial requirements for validity and reliability.

VETCAT™ is based on self-assessment, the validity of which has been shown to be high, and often better than many other forms of assessment, for example peer assessment of a colleague's professional skills (Puanonen & O'Neill 2010). A separate paper on this topic by JMA Analytics, 'The Validity of Self-Assessment', is available upon request.

The national research which informed VETCAT™ identified two levels of practice in VET, the foundation and advanced levels, as in Attachment 4. The analysis of the 2009 data also provided a



taxonomy of Foundation Practitioners (2 levels), Specialist Practitioners (2 types) and Advanced Practitioners. This taxonomy is summarised in Attachment 5.

In the eight months since its launch in June 2010, VETCAT™ was used by 11 TAFE Institutes in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. To date, over 4,600 VET practitioners have completed the initial national survey or the VETCAT™ survey.

After completing VETCAT™ the individual receives a twelve page report on their capability levels and professional development needs, benchmarked with national averages, and the Institute/organisation receives a 36 page report and each faculty a 30 page report.

### **Key findings from VETCAT™ data linking skills and qualifications**

Nearly thirty representatives from twelve organisational clients of JMA Analytics attended a national forum on VET capability analysis in Sydney on 2/3 December 2010, focusing on the topics of what to do with once you receive the VETCAT™/CURCAT™ data and what else can be extracted from the data. At the forum, one of the topics discussed was voluntary benchmarking between organisations using the results from these capability analysis tools.

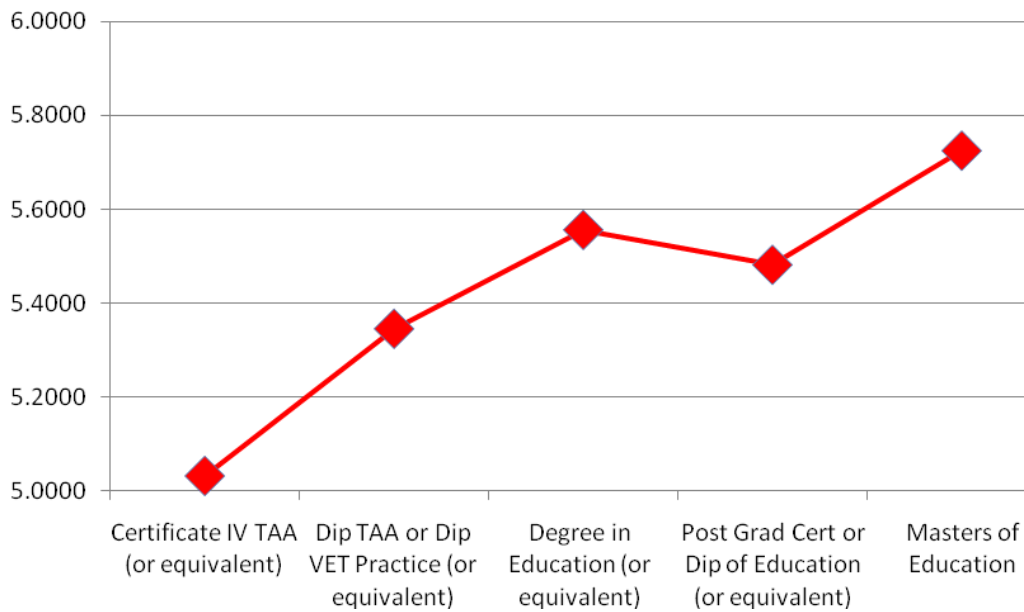
To stimulate discussion among forum participants, psychometrician John Ward presented findings from his analysis of whether VETCAT™ respondents' qualifications levels had any impact on their level of VET practice. He drew on data from the first nine TAFE Institutes that had completed VETCAT™, a sample of just under 2,400. To explore the impact of qualifications upon self-rated levels of foundation skills, he undertook a two-way between groups analysis of variance.

In the level of foundation VET skills across qualifications, there was a statistically significant difference (at  $p < 0.05$ ). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicate that as the qualification level increases, so too does the average self-rating of foundation skills.

Figure 1 following shows that:

- as the VET practitioner gains higher levels of qualifications, the practitioner's foundation skills also improve
- that is, the higher the qualification, the higher the level of foundation skills
- there are significant differences in the foundation skills of VET practitioners, as they progress up the qualification ladder
- note that there is no significant difference between the self-rated skills of those with a degree and those with a postgraduate certificate or diploma.

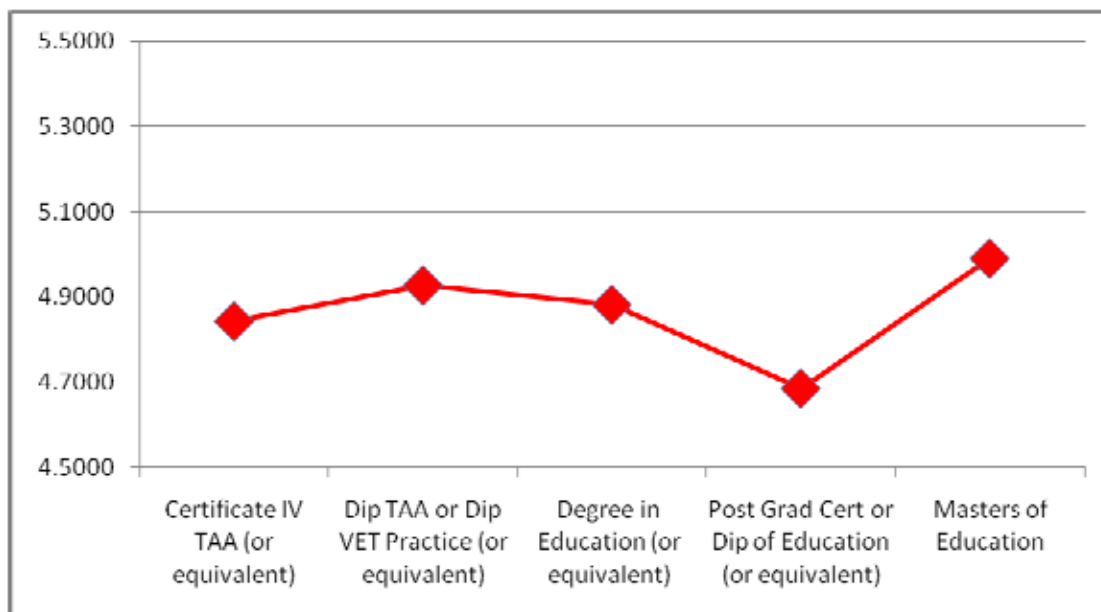
**Figure 1. Positive impact of educational qualifications upon VET foundation level skills**



To explore the impact of qualifications upon self-rated levels of commercial skills, John Ward also undertook a two-way between groups analysis of variance.

There were no statistically different effects between groups of VET practitioners at different qualification levels (at  $p < 0.05$ ). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test confirmed this result. That is, having a higher level qualification did not impact on or improve commercial skills.

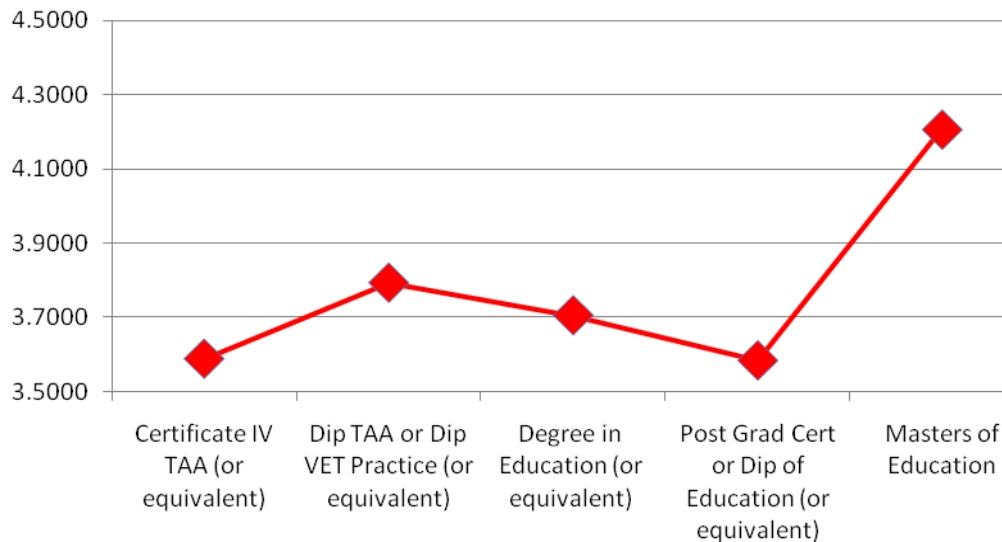
**Figure 2. Impact of educational qualifications upon VET commercial skills**



Finally, to explore the impact of qualifications upon the self-rated level of advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills, he undertook a two-way between groups analysis of variance.

There was a statistically significant difference (at  $p < 0.05$ ) in the level of advanced learning and facilitation skills at the masters level. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicate that a masters in education has a significant impact upon advanced learning and assessment skills.

**Figure 3. Impact of educational qualifications upon VET advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills**



### Summary findings

In summary, the analysis reveals that:

1. Gaining higher level qualifications will have a positive impact upon a VET practitioner's foundation skills and practice (see Figure 1).
2. There is no evidence that increasing educational qualifications will impact upon the level of VET commercial skills (see Figure 2), although commercial skills build upon foundation level skills, which do benefit from higher level qualifications, as discussed below.
3. Gaining a masters in education will distinctly improve the level of advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills (see Figure 3).

### Discussion

Finding No.1 regarding foundation practice skills is important, as VETCAT™ analyses continually show that practitioners who are proficient at this level (Foundation: Established Practitioners) are the most numerous group within an RTO and are the fulcrum around which VET delivery pivots. This cohort benefits from higher level qualifications, as they progress up the Australian Qualifications Framework from Certificate IV to masters level courses in education.

Finding No.2 regarding VET commercial skills indicates that, once a VET practitioner acquires the level of proficiency of a Foundation Established practitioner, to take the next step to become a VET Commercial Specialist requires skills in addition to academic knowledge and skills. However, to become a VET Commercial Specialist requires the practitioner to have mastered the foundation

practice skills. So even with VET Commercial Specialists, academic qualifications were essential and positive influences earlier in their professional development.

Finding No.3, regarding skills in advanced learning facilitation and assessment, is particularly important, given that the research conducted by JMA Analytics has revealed a critical shortage of practitioners at the level of VET Learning and Assessment Specialists. Please see Attachment 6. This cohort benefits distinctly from masters in education programs. To help address the critical shortage of these specialists, an urgent increase is needed in VET practitioners undertaking higher level qualifications.

None of these findings are meant to diminish the value of the other ways a VET practitioner can improve her or his skills, such as through learning on the job, or from non-accredited programs and/or through mentoring and coaching or other activities. The specific analyses reported above solely examined whether there was a link between the level of skills of a VET practitioner and levels of educational qualifications.

**Reference:**

Puanonen, S.V. & O'Neill, T.A. 2010, 'Self-reports, peer ratings and construct validity', *European Journal of Personality*, Vol.24, pp.189-206.

## Attachment 1. TAFE earns compensation

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 17 January 2011

The recent draft report by the Productivity Commission on the VET workforce sets out multiple recommendations, some of which may surprise observers. One such recommendation is that VET providers, and TAFE institutes in particular, be given explicit payments for undertaking community service obligations.

This recommendation is a surprise as there was no mention of such a strategy in most States over the last few years, as they embarked on a market-based approach to VET funding, telling TAFE institutes to ready themselves for full competition. The Productivity Commission has at last brought some commonsense to this topic by pointing out that state governments won't want to lose all control of TAFE institutes and as governments they will always have non-commercial objectives they will want institutes to pursue.

To add weight to the Commission's recommendation, consider the compelling community service activities undertaken by the current national winner of the award for the large RTO of the year, TAFE NSW's Western Sydney Institute.

While this Institute conducts highly effective commercial programs for local enterprises, it is also provides programs that suit the diverse demographic of western Sydney.

One such program is called the Eagles RAPS program conducted at Doonside, a youth centre committed to the prevention of youth suicide, and focusing 15-18 year old youths-at-risk who have disengaged from education. Here the Institute delivers a range of courses from Certificate I to Diploma level. Since 2007 over 530 students have enrolled in the program "with a staggering 77% completion rate", says Institute Director Susan Hartigan.

Another favourite program of Hartigan's is conducted at Mt Druitt, involving the institute's unique Jobs Pond and Clothing Pond.

"We take on long-term unemployed people who are disadvantaged and we enrol them in language, literacy and numeracy support, but it's all focused on getting a job. We run them through how to do a resume, how to write proper letters, how to perform in an interview. And before they attend their interview they go up to our health and beauty section where our staff cut their hair and teach them about skincare.

"We're linked into all the job agencies around Mt Druitt and Centrelink, so when an appropriate job comes up they can come straight to Job Pond. They're coached for that job interview and then go to our Clothing Pond where they borrow clothes like a suit or dress for their interview and enough clothes to get them through for the first week."

The people are loaned the clothes, but "if they're really needy they get to keep them".

Hartigan is proud that “everyone in the institute is behind this and everyone contributes to it. All the teachers and executive want it to work, in terms of looking for jobs for these young people, looking for opportunities, giving them clothes.

“And there’s almost no allocated student hours for the Clothing Pond, so we put some of our commercial income into it. We cross-subsidise it.”

Besides using the profits from its commercial activities, the institute also funds its community service activities by forming partnerships with other parties, says Hartigan.

“We partner with a range of not-for-profit, non-government and religious organisations who all have access to funding, or are very good lobbyists. We’ve hooked up with influencers so that between the two of us we can get sufficient funding.”

An example is called the Karen Refugees’ Farming Program, an initiative of the New South Wales Farmers’ Association, the Nepean Migrant Access Settlement, Sydney West Area Health, Hawkesbury Harvest and the Institute. This program provides opportunities for Burmese refugees to build careers in sustainable farming and small business and at the same time improve their language skills.

Through a link with Racing New South Wales the Institute is involved in the Darby McCarthy Indigenous Employment Strategy. “This program brings in a whole range of indigenous kids from rural New South Wales and provides them with an opportunity to train and find careers in thoroughbred racing and at the same time help industry to gain skilled workers.”

The institute’s distance education arm OTEN also supports forty Sudanese women who live in the inner west. “Most of them were refugees and illiterate in their own language. We’ve been working with them through the St Bakhita Sudanese Centre which provides childcare. Surprisingly, the distance education programs suit the women, who can come in and study when it suits them.”

Not surprisingly, Hartigan applauds the Productivity Commission for recommending that TAFE institutes receive payments to undertake such life-saving and job-related initiatives.

“If we know that we’ve got a core amount of funding coming in, then we can plan these programs. But if we’re always chasing funds, we can’t do any proper planning.”

## Attachment 2. Unexpected love for TAFE

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 14 February 2011

The elephant in the room in VET is TAFE. It delivers most of the training and enrolls the vast majority of students in VET, but its owners, the state and territory governments, have spent the last few years wondering whether they wanted to divorce it. And now out of left field, the SA Rann labour government has stood up and said unequivocally that it values TAFE and wants to ensure its future.

The SA government's actions are completely out of step nationally. When the current Barnett Liberal Government in Western Australia came into office it told TAFE institutes to drop the term TAFE from its title, saying that the brand had lost its value. The previous Bartlett Labour government in Tasmania axed its award-winning TAFE institute in order to create two new organisations, the Polytechnic and the Skills Institute. Now the new Labour-Greens coalition government has buried the Polytechnic inside a new structure.

The oddest behaviour of all was displayed by the previous Brumby labour government in Victoria, which started divorce proceedings against TAFE several years ago, hurtling TAFE into an untested market based funding regime. As a result, rumours abound that some regional TAFE Institutes will soon hit the wall financially. Then just before their failed bid for re-election last year, the Brumby government flipped and desperately tried and failed to change the law, to enable it to assume control of the boards of TAFE institutes around Victoria.

What on earth came over the SA government in issuing a statement about its respect for TAFE in the recent report *Skills for All*, including a position paper on TAFE governance? In an interview, Raymond Garrand, the CEO of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST), explained the logical drivers.

"TAFE is fundamental to the implementation of skills reform. Something like 70% of our training in South Australia is delivered through TAFE. Clearly the changes that are proposed are about trying to position TAFE to be able to continue to compete effectively in a demand-driven market where the funding model shifts from one of funding supply to responding to student and industry demand."

Garrand and his colleagues listened to the feedback from industry and the community and realised that TAFE needed protection and support, not divorce and dismemberment. TAFE needed a new, secure platform to enable it to stay intact, regroup and function effectively in a more competitive landscape.

"One of the strong things that came out of the extensive consultation with did was the need to give TAFE greater autonomy, so the changes are designed to provide TAFE with that greater autonomy, enable them to be more flexible, more innovative, more entrepreneurial in many respects and to be even better positioned to operate in what is a very changing landscape, not just here in South Australia but nationally."

The key structural change in SA is the creation of a statutory authority for TAFE in which the three existing TAFE Institutes are subsidiaries, not separate entities. There was no point making each Institute a statutory authority, said Garrand, with them competing in each other's markets.

"It really comes down to the size of the market in South Australia. And in that regard it was about trying to preserve the benefits of what already exists. We didn't want a situation where the TAFE institutes are fiercely competing against each other in a fairly small market. At the end of the day we didn't think that was in the best interest of students or the best interests of the economy or of industry generally."

At odds with the derogatory attitudes towards TAFE of his counterparts in many other states, Garrand respects the contribution TAFE makes to his state and says he doesn't want "to lose the many benefits that TAFE SA currently has". Those benefits include "meeting the needs of disadvantaged students and also the very high quality [of training] and maintaining those quality standards. It's those things that we don't want to lose."

"Really we're looking for a strength in TAFE SA," said Garrand. "And the model that's proposed hopefully will strengthen the capacity at TAFE."

Almost taunting his interstate peers, Garrand repeats the words that have almost disappeared from government rhetoric: "We're working to strengthen TAFE's capacity".

Suddenly a new market vista opens up for TAFE SA. For those in SA previously worried about the invasion of ex-TAFE-branded institutes such as Box Hill from Victoria or Polytechnic West from Western Australia, Victorians and Western Australians may need to watch over their shoulder for a new phenomenon.

Imagine this: a coordinated TAFE SA push into neighbouring states, trumpeting the refreshed TAFE brand, picking off brash, stand-alone public providers who have yet to prove to the market that they can go it alone and stay the distance, without a loving government backer.



### **Attachment 3. Pumping up professionals**

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, Tuesday 8 March 2011

I have just watched our prime minister on the evening news rousing the faithful crowd at an AFL Western Bulldogs event, proudly holding aloft a jersey with her name on it and stirring the fans by saying this is the year her favourite professional footballers will deliver the bacon by winning the premiership. It is all in good fun and a credit to the PM that she can switch off politics and enjoy some idle sport.

But in the serious business of the VET sector that enrolls at least 1.6m adult Australians every year, VET needs public leaders to imitate the prime minister and to stand up for VET professionals, to be proud of them, to show them respect and to stick with them for the long haul.

For as the prime minister and all sport fan know well, no team of players, no single organisation, no group of educators can sustain peak performance week in, week out. And it is important that VET professionals seek to do their best by the students, each day, every year, rather than seek to win random premierships.

This call for VET leaders to show more respect for the managers, teachers and support staff who underpin the sector is brought about by two recent events: first, the attempt by the government to ditch the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), an execution with an earlier parallel in VET; and second, a draft recommendation from the Productivity Commission that government not get involved in the national planning of VET workforce development.

The government's attempt to abandon the ALTC is surprising, given the obvious value of the Council to fostering quality teaching and learning in the higher education sector. It was no surprise to see the consequent outpouring of support for the ALTC from university leaders around Australia.

I have an unusual insight into the ALTC's value, as the external evaluator of just one of the many projects it commissioned. The project was entitled PATHE, an acronym for preparing academics for teaching in higher education, and the project involved the development of best practice models and resources to help new academics to develop their teaching skills.

When evaluating the three-year PATHE project which concluded in late 2009, I was struck by the fact that it attracted active support from more than thirty universities and this support was sustained for the full three years of the project. Admirably, university leaders were able to put aside commercial competition and respect the fact that foundation teaching skills are similar across all universities.

Just as the basic skills of Australian rules football are the same no matter where it is played, university teaching has an underpinning core of skills that are relevant no matter where the university is located. And foundational VET teaching skills are the same in Townsville, Whyalla and Hobart.

The outcomes of the ALTC PATHE project were high because of effective cross-university collaboration based on goodwill, trust and support, so it is disappointing to see initiatives such as PATHE no longer treasured by the government.

Turning to VET, sadly there is no equivalent of the ALTC. The closest equivalent was the national VET workforce development and change management project Reframing the Future which was axed by commonwealth and state government representatives at a meeting in the Hilton Hotel at Tullamarine Airport in November 2008.

These decision makers ended an eleven year program which served over 66,000 practitioners and each year attracted over 500 applications for project teams of VET professionals and industry partners to address high priority needs of the sector, such as quality teaching and learning in industry.

The axing seriously impaired the sharing and generosity among VET professionals that transcended state borders and competitiveness between training providers. It also ended numerous opportunities for providers to partner industry, as over 60% of project applications each year involved the formation of partnerships and networks.

A new grey cloud hangs over VET professionals, with the Productivity Commission's draft report on the VET workforce expressing its "reservations about the value of a national plan" for VET workforce development, and suggesting that responsibility for most professional development should be located primarily at the training provider level.

The irony about this recommendation is that the Productivity Commission, like the government, would like to see an increase in VET workforce efficiency, more effective teaching and better student outcomes nationally. How better to achieve these goals than by fostering high standards in those aspects of VET practice that are common across the national system?

Unexpectedly, maverick MHR Andrew Wilkie partially rescued the ALTC from extinction. Is it too much to expect the Productivity Commission, whose VET researchers are based in AFL-crazy Melbourne, to have a change of heart and develop the same passion for supporting VET professionals over the long haul that the PM feels for her beloved Bulldog players?

If the PM can dream of a Bulldogs premiership, is it too much to dream of a full restoration of the ALTC and Reframing the Future?

## Attachment 4: The VETCAT™ model of VET practice

Quantitative and qualitative research undertaken by JMA Analytics indicated that VET practitioners Australia wide conceptualise and categorise all their professional training and assessment skills into nine distinct skills sets.

These nine skill sets are:

1. **Generic skills:** This skill set is self-explanatory, and includes negotiations skills, communication skills, decision making, critical thinking, and ethical standards.
2. **Learning theories:** This is a theoretical, rather than practical skill set, comprising of knowledge that underpins learning. This includes knowledge of VET pedagogy and andragogy, theory of cognitive learning, theory of behavioural learning, theory of experiential learning, theory of learning styles, and theory of learning preferences.
3. **Foundation learning facilitation:** This skills set includes such skills as facilitating individual learning, facilitating group learning, facilitating workplace learning, and facilitating learning amongst equity groups.
4. **Foundation assessment skills:** This skill set includes summative, formative, diagnostic, and PRL assessments, as well as the ability to perform such assessments within the context of the classroom and the workplace.
5. **Advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills:** This skill set include those learning facilitation and assessment skills that enable a trainer/assessor to work beyond the context of the classroom or the workplace. It includes such as skill as facilitating e-learning, distance learning, off-shore learning and online assessment. This skill set also includes the ability to facilitate flexible learning.
6. **Learning styles:** This skill set include the ability to take into account visual learners, auditory learners, and kinaesthetic learners when teaching/training.
7. **Course organisation and student management:** This skill set is about the organisation and management of students. It includes such skills are the ability to apply continuous improvement to the management and delivery of VET courses, to engage stakeholders in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of courses, to ensure that all students receive necessary training assessment and support services, and the ability to ensure that all training and assessment materials meet the requirements of the relevant training package or accredited course.
8. **Commercial skills:** This skill set is about the conduct of commercial educational activity. It not only includes teaching and training within a workplace environment, it also includes managing commercial relationships, offering consultancy services, personalising training for commercial customers, and adapting training packages for commercial purposes.
9. **Educational Research:** This dimension is about the collection and analysis of data to inform educational quality. It also includes research skills for the purpose of expanding our understanding of VET educational issues.

Like putting together pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, researchers at JMA Analytics were able to use advanced quantitative techniques to piece together the above nine skills sets in a way that explains

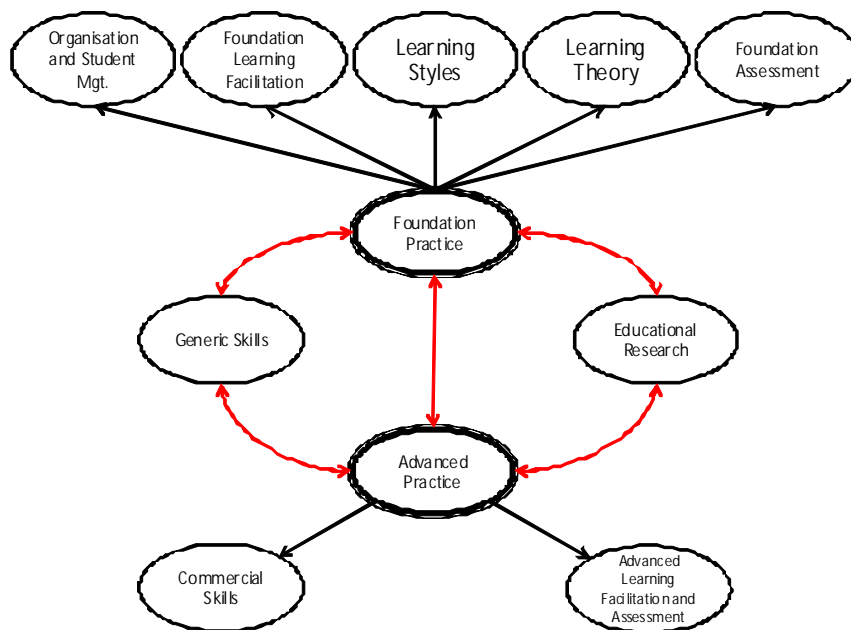
the structure of VET professional practice. That is, to piece together the way in which these nine skill sets come together to enable VET trainers and assessors to undertake the full spectrum of their professional duties.

A simplified version of the structural model of VET professional practice is diagrammatically displayed in Figure 1 below. It shows that five of the nine skills sets come together to form foundational practice. Foundation practice consists of those skill sets that are fundamental to the successful daily practice of a VET practitioner, and include: organisation and student management, foundation learning facilitation, learning styles, learning theory and foundation assessment.

Two of the nine skill sets come together to form advanced practice. Advanced practice consists of those skills sets that allow VET practitioners move beyond foundation practice by becoming specialists in certain areas of VET professional practice. Advanced practice skills sets include commercial skills and advanced learning and assessment skills.

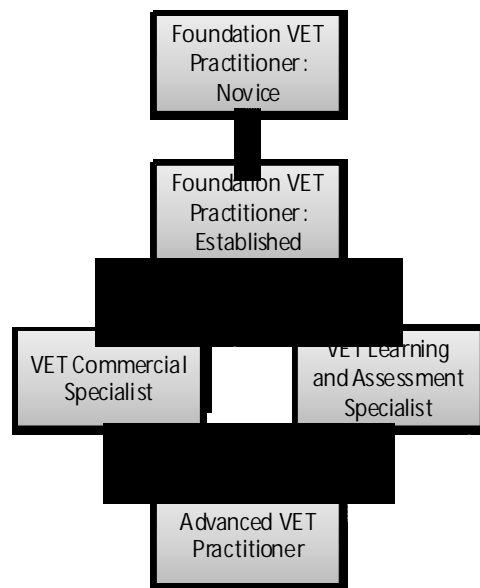
The skills sets of generic skills and educational research skills do not belong in either foundation practice or advanced practice. Rather, these two skills sets sit out on their own, supporting both foundation and advanced practice, while not actually being part of their structure.

**Figure 1: Full structural model of VET professional practice**



VETCAT™ uses these nine skills sets as the basic measurements of VET professional practice. For a more detailed explanation of these skills sets, and the research methodology that underpinned their discovery, see the report entitled *The JMA Model for VET Capability Development* at: [www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx](http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx).

## Attachment 5: The VETCAT™ taxonomy of VET practitioners



1. **The Foundation VET Practitioner - Novice:** The novice differs from Established Foundation VET Practitioner in the sense that the novice is not yet proficient in the foundation skills. People at this stage of practice normally possess, or are working towards, the entry level qualification – the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAA). Members of this group are gaining the experience and undergoing the training that will help lift their practice to that of a foundation practitioner. They are the future of the VET workforce. Every medium-large training provider always needs a healthy number of novice practitioners, to replenish the workforce.
2. **The Foundation VET Practitioner - Established:** These practitioners have acquired the foundation skills required of the VET profession. In this sense, they are skilled VET practitioners who can work with autonomy as a VET trainer and assessor. They understand all the tasks required of a VET practitioner, and have the necessary theoretical and practical skills to undertake these tasks – whether in the classroom or in the workplace. The majority of these practitioners have worked within VET for many years, and are therefore able to mentor and guide novice practitioners. Like general practitioners (GPs) in the health system, Foundation VET Practitioners are the backbone of VET.
3. **The Commercial Specialist:** These practitioners are able to take responsibility for the commercial development of VET services. They have skills in marketing and sales and are capable of personalising training for commercial customers. They are able to offer consultancy services, can manage commercial relationships and can adapt training packages for commercial purposes. Their responsibilities might include the sale, management and evaluation of commercial education programs. Because these practitioners might supervise VET trainers and assessors, they also need to have effective management and leadership skills.

4. **The Learning and Assessment Specialist:** These practitioners have specialist skills in the facilitation, organisation and management of learning and assessment that goes beyond the context of either the classroom or the workplace. This includes e-learning and online assessment, as well as distance and off-shore learning. In order to facilitate such learning and assessment, Learning and Assessment Specialists need to have a good grasp of the technology that supports such training and assessment. The diverse needs of their educational clients require these specialists to have a good knowledge of the flexible design of learning and assessment. Because these practitioners might supervise VET trainers and assessors, they also need to have effective management and leadership skills.
  
5. **The Advanced VET Practitioner:** Advanced VET Practitioners are competent in the tasks required of a Commercial Specialist as well as the tasks required of a Learning and Assessment Specialist. They have a good understanding of the application of new technology to the advanced facilitation of training and assessment –within the classroom, within the workplace, across Australia, or off-shore. Being at the leading edge of VET practice, these practitioners continually refine their training and assessment skills. Because technology keeps changing and because they are focused on the leading edge of VET practice, they are focused on how to improve those skills that have a technology component. Advanced VET Practitioners have strong project management skills and are able to utilise these skills for commercial as well as non-commercial purposes. Advanced VET practitioners are leaders in VET practice.

## Attachment 6. Shortage of learning specialists

*Excerpt from John Mitchell's Inside VET column for Campus Review, 5 April 2010*

There are nearly ten times more commercial specialists in the VET sector than specialists in learning and assessment. More pointedly, the number of learning specialists is very low, at 2.4% of the sector, potentially placing at risk the future quality of learning and assessment across the sector. How did this shortage come about and what can be done about it?

Commercial specialists are skilled in writing tender proposals, pitching training products to business clients, customising the product to suit a particular enterprise, maintaining good client relationships over a period of time and ensuring there is a healthy profit margin at the end of the service delivery. While VET needs commercial specialists to ensure the sector remains customer focused, we may have too many of them now.

Learning and assessment specialists are skilled in the variety of delivery methods, ranging from delivering in the classroom to the workplace and even online. They know much about learning theories and learning styles and are also highly skilled in the different forms of assessment, from summative to formative and diagnostic and in providing recognition of prior learning.

Like medical specialists, they have progressed past the foundation level of general practice and are able to operate at the sharp end of practice. VET needs learning specialists to ensure its core product, education, remains healthy. And VET needs a good number of them, say 10% not 2% of the VET workforce.

The finding that there are many more commercial specialists than learning specialists was one of the surprising results from the extensive national survey of VET practitioners conducted by quantitative researcher John Ward and me late last year. Over 2,200 practitioners undertook the survey which contained 140 questions. The results are statistically valid, to a level of 95% or slightly higher, says statistician Ward.

The survey results show that 23.2% of VET practitioners are commercial specialists but only 2.4% are learning and assessment specialists. While the number of commercial specialists reveals an important strength in VET, the low number of learning specialists potentially puts the sector at risk of being weak in its core area.

How did the VET sector end up with this lopsided profile? Margaret Dix, Manager, Staff Learning and Development at TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute is immersed in developing specialist capability and has her theories about why the VET sector has sprouted so many commercial specialists.

“It is a business survival thing. It is also a response to government policy. It was a strength we didn't have before and, now that we have it, people recognise it in action, whereas we have always had teachers and assessors. To be a learning specialist is not trendy.”

Dix believes that VET recognises commercial expertise much more easily than teaching and learning expertise, “because everyone is supposed to be an expert in teaching and learning. That’s why we call them teachers. And it is assumed they have a level of expertise, but they may or may not, because we never test it. We qualify them but we don’t test their ongoing degree of capability.”