



Australian Industry Group

Submission

**L. H. Martin Options Paper:
The Quality of Teaching in VET**

October 2010

Introduction

The Australian Industry Group is pleased to have this opportunity to provide a submission to the L. H. Martin Institute project on The Quality of Teaching in VET. We commend the L.H. Martin Institute and the Australian College of Educators on undertaking this important work and tackling what is a very important issue for the VET sector in particular, but the Australian economy more generally.

About the Australian Industry Group

The Australian Industry Group (Ai Group) is a leading industry association in Australia. Ai Group member businesses employ around 750,000 staff in an expanding range of industry sectors including: manufacturing; engineering; construction; automotive; food; transport; information technology; telecommunications; call centres; labour hire; printing; defence; mining equipment and supplies; airlines; and other related service industries.

In preparing this submission Ai Group has drawn on the expertise of its Education and Training Policy team and also its member advisors located in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia who are dealing directly with member companies on a day-to-day basis on skilling issues. This submission makes reference to a number of recent Ai Group research reports all of which can be accessed through the website www.aigroup.com.au

In developing this response Ai Group has chosen to focus upon the issues identified in the Options Paper as they concern industry. However, we have elected not to address each specific option as provided in the Options Paper. Instead, our response is ordered around the major thematic issues as identified by industry through our research.

As will be clear from our response, Ai Group is firmly of the view that the success of the VET workforce is tied closely with its capacity to engage with and meet the needs of industry and primarily industry is interested in skilling in the context of how it can improve productivity and competitiveness. For industry skilling is not an end in itself. New entrants and existing workers undertake vocational education and training to improve their work prospects and outcomes and these expectations will not be met without a deep engagement with industry.

Relationship between the VET Sector and the economy

The Options Paper is right to identify that the VET sector is one of great diversity. Its workforce operates across a wide range of courses and qualifications, within a variety of ownership structures, under a complex mix of funding sources and delivers services to individual students across the population and organisations across the economy.

It is this diversity and complexity that makes it necessary to ensure that this study embraces quality in relation ship to teachers and trainers, institutional settings and enterprises. Whilst the terminology statement at the beginning of the Options Paper provides a scope statement, by then utilising the term teaching/teacher as all encompassing continues to reinforce an out-of-date and narrow paradigm.

The VET sector is inextricably linked to the organisations which make up the economy and just as the Australian economy has undergone enormous change in recent years, so too has the VET sector. It is our expectation that change will continue to be a feature of the economy and the VET sector.

Ai Group research consistently shows that enterprises are turning to their existing workforce as the source of new skills and that increasingly the skills they need are at higher levels.¹

Simultaneously, approximately 47% of the Australia working age population does not have sufficient language, literacy and numeracy skills to function fully and effectively in the modern economy.² These developments pose challenges for the VET workforce which needs to respond by working more flexibly and with a greater concurrent range of people. The reduced availability of low skilled work will mean people who had not previously undertaken training will now need to and many of them will require additional support, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy.

Ai Group is concerned that the Options Paper does not sufficiently consider the VET teacher/trainer who is providing assistance and facilitation around workforce development. This type of training and development, typically on-the-job, should be seen as increasing in prevalence and preference by enterprises and can lead to national qualifications.

In the Ai Group survey mentioned above, more than half of the respondents used formal training to introduce new skills; 61% utilised externally delivered training and 55% had the training delivered in-house.

The link between the VET sector and industry is a close one but Ai Group is concerned at the proposal in the Options Paper of the establishment of master practitioner roles, possibly as joint posts. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the economic and business environment. There are instances where this has been the traditional structure and there will be individual cases where this can work and very many instances where it works in part already but the introduction of a 'career stream in industries' it is not, in our view, a practical proposal.

National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development

It is also worth noting that the objectives and outcomes of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development translate into a very significant set of expectations for the VET workforce. This workforce must be innovative, flexible, fully aware of the latest policy and practice developments, and in a position to deliver quality vocational training which meets industry needs. For many this will present a significant challenge.

The sector's capacity to meet this challenge should be measured and a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures should be developed, in consultation with industry. The issue of teacher and trainer quality is a key one for industry. This is a critical element that must be incorporated into a range of measures. Elements of the industry developed and tested Institute for Trade Skills Excellence Star Rating Scheme provides a good starting point for the development of appropriate metrics.

¹ *Skilling the Existing Workforce Report*, Australian Industry Group, December 2008

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4228.0 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, Summary Results, Australia, 2006

The importance of the VET workforce

The VET workforce has a pivotal role in ensuring that the nexus between the VET sector and the economy achieves its dynamic potential. In understanding the importance of the role of the VET workforce, it is necessary to understand the context of engagement in which the learning transaction takes place both in terms of the diversity of learners and the diversity of settings. The challenge of the VET workforce is to work with and embrace this diversity, thereby promoting and facilitating the learning exchange.

Individual members of the VET workforce must have a broad range of skills and abilities to enable a quality outcome. These skills and abilities are constructed around the following principles:

- Industry engagement is vital and the capacity to work with enterprises to understand their business needs and design skilling solutions is critical
- Industry skill currency is paramount
- A dynamic pedagogy that supports applied learning across many contexts needs to be further developed and valued
- Responsiveness and flexibility must become essential elements of quality VET teaching
- The diversity of participants will deepen as the demographic and economic pressures build and the VET professional must be able to respond to their needs
- The VET sector and VET professionals must be able to delivery higher level skilling and qualification solutions, to more people across more areas than previously
- The role of the VET practitioner needs to be seen by industry and the wider community as an important contributor to our economy.

It is important to recognise that the VET workforce comprises many occupations. While the teaching component is the focus of this options paper and the broader research project of the LH Martin Institute, it is clear to industry that the quality of teaching outcomes is often adversely affected by the quality of management, leadership and administration within Registered Training Organisations. It is just as important to develop the management, leadership and coordination capability of the VET workforce as it is to develop the teaching and training skills.

Ai Group supports the call in the Options Paper for improved statistical data on the VET workforce. The lack of good data is a stumbling block to the development of good policy in this area and steps to address this shortfall should be taken in the near term. A useful extension would be the inclusion to the fullest extent possible of those people who are employed by enterprises to deliver training as all or the majority of their responsibilities.

VET Teacher and Trainer Qualifications

There has been much debate around the level and quality of qualifications mandated for the VET teaching and training workforce. Regrettably, much of the debate has been focussed upon the inadequacy of some qualification outcomes, most noticeably Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. It is not productive to continue that conversation here, except to acknowledge that poor delivery practices and less than rigorous assessment outcomes have seriously discredited this benchmark for VET teachers and trainers.

However, the way forward from here is less clear. The new and improved Certificate IV in Training and Assessment may prove to be an adequate commencing qualification for VET teachers and trainers. However, it would be problematic to assume that a minimum standard is the only identified level of proficiency. Therefore a framework approach has merit, enabling ongoing skill and qualification progression for VET teachers as well as various specialisations. However, this framework must be designed and constructed in such a way that the right incentives are in place without the creation of additional and possibly unintended disincentives. For example, the framework needs to be able to encourage the transition and skill development of industry personnel into a VET Teacher and Trainer framework. This in no way suggests lowering a standard; rather it identifies the importance of multiple and broad access points, with clear pathways to higher level qualifications across various applications.

Ai Group does not accept the view that this framework should be developed by the university sector and accordingly implemented by the same institutions. Many of the qualifications within a VET teacher and trainer framework lie within the remit of the VET sector. Hence, it presents an opportunity for the VET and higher education sectors (tertiary) in conjunction with industry, to jointly develop and progress an important piece of work. Much reticence to such an approach has traditionally come from higher education institutions, citing many reasons, but most notably their perceived inappropriateness of a training package construct to deliver the desired qualifications. However, in light of the recent policy review undertaken by the National Quality Council, most notably the *VET Products for the 21 Century*, many of these reservations can be overcome. For example, the definition of the unit of competency has been broadened as follows:

Competency is the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments. (Recommendation 1)

In addition to this, recommendation 9 specifically calls for the 'VET qualifications to provide for identified knowledge and preparatory units of competence as appropriate' and recommendation 14 asks that 'training package developers include articulation arrangements in the design and development of Diploma and Advanced Diplomas as appropriate'. To support these and other reforms to the training package construct, quality assured companion volumes must be developed to support competencies and qualifications. These companion volumes will, in the first instance, specifically deal with: knowledge and guidance; learning strategies; and assessment strategies. It is envisaged they would be developed in partnership between the industry skills councils and the providers and provide a strong pedagogical framework for implementation. The combination of these policy reforms create the right policy settings for joint work between the education and training sectors, industry skills councils and providers/practitioners to develop a fresh new approach.

Registration and Accreditation

Ai Group has some concerns and reservations about the introduction (or reintroduction) of registration and/or accreditation for VET teachers and trainers. Various models of registration and accreditation have been utilised in other industry sectors and have considerable merit. Yet instances exist where this regulatory machinery is little more than gatekeeping.

The express concern of Ai Group is how a model could best be established that embraces the broadest possible definition of a VET teacher. The model would need to have relevance and value to work-based trainers not just those, usually with higher level qualifications, employed in fully institutional settings. Unless the model is broadly based and inclusive it would run the risk of establishing a binary approach; one for teachers and one for trainers. Furthermore, minimum standards/qualifications would need to be agreed to by all stakeholders.

On a less cautionary note, such a process may enable formalisation of professional development networks for teachers and trainers. Such networks used to be both prevalent and funded over 15 years ago. The demise of these networks has impeded a much needed rich and diverse conversation within professional groupings. Such networks can also be utilised as a key forum for on-going professional development.

Industry currency

Industry currency is a term often bandied about, but little action is taken to ensure it happens. Not only do VET teachers and trainers need to maintain their technical skills in terms of being conversant with the latest technologies in their field, but they also need to maintain their understanding of management systems and the ways of doing work in their industry. Most commercial enterprises operate on a much leaner basis than they did twenty, ten or even five years ago, and the VET professional needs to have an appreciation of this.

The capacity of enterprises to engage in training or workforce development exercises is affected by how they organise their workforce. VET professionals need to be able to devise innovative ways of delivering training that complement the systems of work in an enterprise and minimise worker downtime. Professional development of VET teachers could include looking at better ways of building learning into work being done by the learner.