

Combined Queensland VET Development Centre response to *The quality of teaching in VET: options paper*

1 October 2010

General comments

- The Queensland VET Development Centre (QVDC) would like to thank the LH Martin Institute for the opportunity to provide a response to the Wheelahan/Moodie discussion paper *'The quality of teaching in VET: options paper'*.
- A major QVDC purpose and commitment is to build VET capability across the Queensland VET sector in teaching, learning and assessment.
- The paper represents a timely discussion of strategic professional development (PD) requirements in the VET sector. It adds to current discussion stimulated by recently released papers such as the Productivity Commission *Issues Paper* and the Skills Australia's *Australian Workforce Futures* paper.
- The paper skirts but does not tackle head on, the complexity and diversity of the VET sector and its myriad of business models including enterprise partnerships. While this is recognised in preamble sections, it fails to translate sufficiently into the options.
- The diversity alluded to above is not represented well by Figure 1 'Diversity of qualifications taught in each sector, teaching contexts and teacher qualifications' as it oversimplifies the reality.
- There is no acknowledgment in the paper of the variations in State and Territory requirements around minimum qualification standards for VET professionals nor the variations in State and Territory approaches to the delivery of national qualifications in that jurisdiction which QVDC believes is imperative to the discussion.
- The flavour is very much a schools' perspective - one which fails to recognise that VET teaching is often very much a "second" rather than "first" career for practitioners.
- There is no recognition in the paper that workplaces are in increasingly places of formal and informal VET learning.
- QVDC acknowledges that an increase in workforce participation, skills and social inclusion are important factors impacting on the VET sector. However, the claim that the VET workforce size will need to be increased commensurately to respond to these challenges may need to be more fully substantiated. The paper also makes a claim for a need to have the VET

workforce 'professionalised'. QVDC would welcome more substantiation for this claim.

- There is recognition in the paper that there are increasing opportunities for partnering between VET, HE and industry. This results in a different skills set being required of many of our professionals. New opportunities for PD must include support for these skills by the education and training employing organisations.
- The paper uses the terms "options" and "stages" interchangeably in reference to the three part framework of
 - the augmented status quo
 - intermediate enhancement and
 - ambition

These terms have different connotations. The terminology needs to be resolved as these options are not necessarily a continuum as the use of the term "stages" would suggest.

- The writers might consider terminology more consistent with the national NCVET classification when considering VET teaching. The use of the term teacher as a generic term for all roles listed on page 4 is problematic particularly because of the different responsibilities and award entitlements linked to these roles. Consideration might be given to the use of the term 'VET practitioner' in preference to 'teacher'.

The structure of the VET teaching workforce

QVDC agrees that existing and new trainers should be supported in their professional development requirements and that there should be opportunities available for progressive skilling and knowledge updates.

The paper highlights the variations in the roles of all other VET teaching staff although it is not clear what work has been done (if any) to research the distinctions and variations in responsibility and accountability.

The paper proposes that the VET sector develop specific new qualifications for teachers. QVDC notes that a range of different qualifications already exist to meet specific needs in the VET sector but these are not outlined in the paper as examples or gaps in the qualification range.

The proposal that different categories of teacher be defined by responsibility may have industrial implications, particularly in the public sector. It should be acknowledged that the categorisation of the VET practitioner in this paper i.e. teacher, workplace trainer and assessor, workplace consultants etc, are linked to jurisdictional awards which may specify responsibilities and qualifications. The proposals do not attempt to place suggested options within any kind of IR framework. Without this context, the proposals lack rigour e.g. the new category of cross-sectoral teachers.

Developing new ‘master practitioner’ roles

There is little consistency in the application of the notion of “funding streams”, e.g. for the notion of master practitioners. The pre-eminence of the role of skills councils in the master practitioner role is questionable.

QVDC believes that the proposed master practitioner terminology requires further clarification and a rationale. The suggestion in option three to develop a new teaching stream within each industry is not consistent with the current national policy to reduce duplication of similar units and qualifications across different industrial sectors. It may be worthwhile for the authors to investigate the Lead Vocational Teacher role, TAFE Queensland.

Developing new cross-sectoral teaching roles

In Queensland, many VET Practitioners already work across sectors. This occurs both in the regions and metropolitan areas and can be arranged either by the individual or the RTO. This is a recruitment and selection issue managed by the employer.

Creating a staff data collection

QVDC agrees that a national staff data collection is important for the purposes of assisting with workforce planning and supports the work of NCVET in this area. However, the business need for the staff data collection has only been interpreted and noted from a statistical perspective. There seems little benefit in this for RTOs, who would have to contribute data to the website and also comply with workforce programs.

VET teacher preparation and development

QVDC agrees that continuing professional development is important to the integrity of the sector and must support the initial qualifications held by VET practitioners. However, it is suggested that the PD needs of VET teachers don't always come from obtaining a higher education qualification.

In Queensland, the [VET Learning Pathways](#) project outlines teaching capabilities and related professional development options across the categories of new, practised, advanced and accomplished VET practitioners. The Pathways project has defined capabilities within these categories and provided PD options ranging from non-accredited training through to high level higher education qualifications according to the individual needs and aspirations of the practitioner.

VET Futures is an initiative of the Queensland Department of Education and Training focused on building capability around teaching, learning and assessment practices in the Queensland VET sector. The VET Futures program for 2008-2010 aligned with

the pillars underpinning the Queensland VET Professional Development Strategy 2007-2010, with an emphasis on building and strengthening VET business by strategically investing in staff. These four pillars are teaching learning and assessment, industry currency, leadership and client business development and quality improvement. Everything proposed in the VET Futures initiative supported choice in diverse pathways, which QVDC believes appears to be contrary to what is being proposed in the LH Martin options paper.

Entry level teacher qualifications

QVDC supports the Certificate IV in TAA/TAE as the entry requirement for training and agrees that VET practitioners need extra skill sets along with their entry qualification requirements. Any move to improve VET practitioner skills should work with current qualifications, structures and skill sets to meet the needs of the RTO.

Mentoring and institutional strategies to support new teachers

QVDC agrees that mentoring strategies to support new teachers are vital. Formal mentoring for teachers includes the VET Futures initiative and TROPIC (Teachers Reflecting on Practices in Context) program. More information can be provided on these programs on request.

Continuing professional development

The national CPD plan suggestion has merit but must be two-pronged in nature – development of the industry specialisation *and* generic teaching/education expertise.

The notion of skills councils organising master practitioner classes is based on the assumption that these organisations have the pedagogical expertise to do so. This assumption needs to be tested.

Maintaining and extending industry currency

Research activity on VET approaches to industry currency has been conducted and may be useful input to a discussion about industry currency of Queensland trainers.

From this [research](#) we know that Queensland trainers undertake a broad range of activities to maintain and improve their vocational skills and knowledge for industry currency. The research found that applying an outcomes focus during planning provides greater clarity and purpose to industry currency activities. This outcomes focus should be concentrated on continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices and resources.

Developing VET pedagogy and models of teaching

QVDC believes there is more comprehensive research and critique on theories of teaching and learning and VET pedagogy available than is acknowledged by this paper.

The paper represents an opportunity to provide the necessary leadership and advice around how best to support development in skills and knowledge of VET practitioners. QVDC believes priorities on these issues are required, with fluid structures reflecting acknowledgement of diversity of the VET workforce.

The concept of promoting a higher level of research around VET pedagogy is supported.

Accrediting teacher education qualifications

Whilst improvements to pedagogy may support improved learning outcomes, the impact on status of the VET workforce and on capacity through restricted supply may outweigh these. QVDC believes that this issue needs further research, extensive consultation and development of options before any move to raise the standard occurs. Increasing qualification standards may make entry more difficult which could impact on the supply of new workers and create financial constraints on the employer to support the up-skilling of existing staff. QVDC believes that the impact of this approach will require careful consideration. Care must be taken not to raise barriers to entry to the profession, nor to discourage on-the-job training initiatives in industry.

The idea of professional organisations regulating professions strongly is not always the reality. While some professional associations are highly representative and aligned to their employing industries, professional bodies do not always align with the workplace needs of their professions and as such should not be placed in a position of authority where they can unduly “influence employers to employ (only) those with qualifications accredited by that body”.

Registering VET teachers

The notion of registration of VET teachers seems one borrowed from the schools sector where the workforce is far more homogenous. Its value in the VET sector is highly questionable given the diversity of employee types and conditions and the high proportion of sessional staff. The VET sector would be highly disadvantaged if a registration process restricts the involvement of industry people temporarily into the profession.

In Queensland, ACPET commissioned a scoping project on acknowledging and empowering VET professionals for a model based on professional development, standards of professional practice and policy engagement. The research recommended the setting up of an organisation for professionals in VET, however

this would not include a registration process. A copy of this report can be forwarded on request.

Evaluating the quality of VET teaching

When evaluating quality, QVDC believes consideration should also be given to non-completions and destination outcomes. Evaluating quality is complex and difficult. RTOs have done some work in this area but new approaches and vision is required.

For further info please contact:

Janine Schubert
Director, Queensland VET Development Centre
Queensland Department of Education and Training
Ph: 07 3259 4119
janine.schubert@deta.qld.gov.au

