

## RESPONSE TO OPTIONS PAPER “THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN VET”

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Dear Lisa

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important options paper, and, congratulations on developing such a comprehensive document for comment. In this response I will endeavour to make comment using the questions for consultation that are raised in the paper and then present a summary of main points.

### **Question 1: Do you believe that current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are satisfactory?**

I am in agreement with the view that the current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are inadequate.

To a great extent, this inadequacy is related to the use of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (CIVTAA) as the default minimum qualification of VET teachers and trainers across all states and territories. This situation is further complicated by the inconsistencies in the standard of delivery and assessment of the CIVTAA. More importantly, the assumption that the completion of a single qualification at a Certificate IV level can provide participants with the skills and knowledge to operate effectively in such a diverse sector as VET is unsustainable.

The Option Paper states that ‘it is no longer possible to define a single type of VET teacher given the diversity of purposes, contexts, outcomes, occupational fields, and students. This requires teachers to draw on diverging knowledge bases and skills’ (p.22). Here, it is clear that the Options Paper recognises and articulates the diversity of the sector and the need for a range of alternative pathways in VET teacher qualifications.

In the case of workplace trainers the paper proposes that ‘VET develop specialised qualifications for teachers in these circumstances that reflect their level of responsibility’ (p.9). The need for such specialised preparation is also true for those working in other segments of the VET sector. For example, whether it relates to the relevant institution (e.g. industry, school, public or private provider, university), the level and nature of disadvantages that students in a variety of VET segments are likely to experience (e.g. literacy and numeracy, indigenous peoples, correctional services) or the level and nature of program being completed (e.g. Certificate II to post graduate studies, service/manufacturing sectors etc). In order to meet the diverse needs of the VET sector, teacher education should provide flexibility and diversity, both vertically and horizontally, of officially recognised teacher education programs.

However, the acknowledgement of a diverse range of VET teacher identities fails to be recognised in the use of the term ‘teacher’ which the Options Paper uses to represent what the paper acknowledges is a diverse range of contexts, learners and learner expectations, and, the nature of the outcomes in terms of the extent, nature and level of the VET learning. If the diversity of the VET sector is acknowledged then VET teacher education options should consistently avoid the homogenisation of the sector in favour of options that recognise and value the contributions that VET teachers in very different environments. The generalised and non-specific manner in which the Options Paper uses the term teacher is a fatal flaw in the construction of the document. This view underpins my responses to Questions 2 and 3.

**Question 2: To what extent do the options outlined here allow teachers, RTOs, and/or VET more broadly to build on existing processes to improve and ensure the quality of VET teaching?**

**And**

**Question 3: Do you find helpful the paper’s presentation of options in stages: stage 1 – the augmented status quo, stage 2 – intermediate enhancement, and stage 3 – ambition?**

With consideration of the preceding response to Question 1, my fundamental concern is that when the homogenisation of the diversity of VET teachers is combined with the options model proposed, there is a risk of further entrenching the existing model of entry level VET teacher training that fails to recognise the diversity of contexts in which VET teaching occurs. Such an outcome is contrary to the desirability of developing a career stream for VET teachers (see p.11) that provides the potential for teachers to move across the VET system with ease.

It is important that the assumptions underpinning the options provided should be made more explicit. In summary the options model fails to acknowledge or adequately represent the diversity of VET teaching. The three stage options model runs the risk of promoting a linear and hierarchical model of VET teaching quality and appears to suggest that each option is mutually exclusive. Interpretations that I do not believe are intended by the authors.

**Question 4: Do you find helpful the paper’s analysis of VET teaching into elements?**

**And**

**Question 5: Have we missed any elements or might some elements be combined?**

**And**

**Question 6: Is there any option that we have missed that you believe should be considered?**

With the qualifications reflected in my previous comments, I believe that the analysis of VET teaching into elements is a suitable and appropriate way to structure the options paper. The elements identified cover important facets from selection and recruitment of VET teachers, initial preparation, continuing professional development, maintenance of industry currency and support systems required for effective implementation. The options paper also considers the development of VET pedagogy and models of teaching. These are the central focus of my response to the Options Paper.

The recent publication *The future of VET: A medley of views* (Beddie and Curtin, 2010) provides a useful framework for responding to these elements. In that document, Ryan (2010) asks the fundamental question: What is VET and what is it for? His response identifies ‘the diverse needs of the VET student body’ (p.10) with particular reference to low participation groups, and, the differing ideological positions of industry and educational representatives. Here, I believe, he is fundamentally referring to the diverse roles of VET in specific training for specific job roles at a specific time and place as compared with the role of VET is more general preparation as career and

personal development. He argues that such differentiation 'should be the foundation of debate about issues such as competence and training packages, funding models and governance' (p.10). Such debates go to the heart of concern for the institutional nature of VET and the relationship of VET with other institutions. He suggests that 'Such a foundation paves the way for considering what Shreeve describes as possible bifurcation within the sector, with differential funding streams' (p.10). These views are consistent with my response to the Options Paper which advocates acknowledging the value of diversity within the VET sector, and as an implication, ensuring that the options for initial and continuing education of VET teachers should reflect this diversity with a range of pathways to allow the development of a VET teacher career path and the potential to move across or straddle sectors.

Further, it is recognised that the diversity of the VET sector it is also recognised that the VET sector has been the subject of almost constant institutional change since the 1980s. Given the outcomes of the Bradley Review, such change is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. This given, it is imperative that VET teachers exhibit the skills and knowledge bases that allow them to adapt to the changing environment. If the standard of VET teacher education is elevated then these teachers are more likely to exhibit such adaptability and to be able to contribute to institutional development in a constructive manner.

The Options Paper proposes that 'All teachers need general pedagogic knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of their specialist area, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, and educational contexts, and the broader social purposes of learning' (p.22).

Depending on the specific needs of the segment of the VET sector being serviced, the teacher education program should provide opportunities to develop the teacher's identity, make implicit industry knowledge and skills explicit and to develop a full suite of teacher knowledge bases including pedagogic content knowledge. These developments require time, support, exposure to a range of experiences and opportunities for critique and reflection of personal practice as well as vocational education policy. Elsewhere, I have concluded that the CIVTAA (and the Diploma of Training and Assessment) is not consistent with these three design elements. This conclusion is not changed by the accreditation of the 2010 version of the CIVTAA. The specific nature of VET teachers' knowledge bases and the pedagogies of the VET sector require further investigation and clarification.

Other important elements considered are issues that relate to accreditation, registration and development of teaching standards are also considered and these might be consolidated. In relation to teaching standards the VET sector should be cognisant of the challenges and debates that have characterised the development of standards for school teachers. It is imperative that the VET sector avoid standards as lists of skills and knowledge that form a checklist and give consideration to the broader social purposes of VET, particularly in some segments such as foundational and higher level programs. This view raises questions about the potential of a competency-based framework of standards as these are reflected in the current Training Package model.

Collection of data associated with the level of VET teacher education and nature of employment are also covered. Here the Options Paper appears contradictory and/or confusing. On p.8, the Options Paper asserts that whilst the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is the mandated qualification, in practice VET teacher's qualifications range from certificate level to PhD, and increasing numbers have teaching or educational qualifications from bachelor to masters degree. On p.9 it is also stated that 'In practice, many teachers have no teaching qualifications'. Both comments are made in the context of the observation that 'there is no central repository about staff qualifications or employment' (p.11). The paper would be improved with clarification of this issue.

The possibility of Master Practitioners is also raised by the Options Paper but seems to be an idea that is not well developed at this stage. The possibility of mentoring to support teacher education is proposed but not well defined and requires clarification. The concern for cross-sectoral posts is a current concern and will increase in importance with implementation of recommendations from the Bradley Review.

### **Summary of Main Points**

1. The generalised and non-specific manner in which the Options Paper uses the term ‘teacher’ fails to represent the diversity of the VET sector and VET teacher community in favour of homogenisation, it is a fatal flaw in the construction of the document. With this important limitation noted, I have used the Options Paper idea of teacher in my response.
2. The current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are inadequate. To a great extent, this inadequacy is related to the assumption that the completion of a single qualification at a Certificate IV level can provide participants with the skills and knowledge to operate effectively in such a diverse sector as VET.
3. Debates about the preparation of VET teachers and VET pedagogy should be undertaken in the broader context of debates about the purpose(s) and (uncertain) future of the institutional nature of VET and the relationship of VET with other institutions.
4. In order to meet the diverse needs of the VET sector, teacher education should provide flexibility and diversity, both vertically and horizontally, of officially recognised teacher education programs.
5. The homogenisation of the diversity of VET teacher, in combined with the three stage options runs the risk of promoting a linear and hierarchical model of VET teaching quality and appears to suggest that each option is mutually exclusive.
6. Whilst there is some scope for consolidation (e.g. accreditation, registration, teaching standards) and clarification (e.g. current state of teacher education, master practitioners, mentoring) the analysis of VET teaching according to the elements used is a suitable and appropriate way to structure the options paper.
7. Teacher education and continuing professional development programs should provide opportunities to develop the teacher’s identity, make implicit industry knowledge and skills explicit and to develop a full suite of teacher knowledge bases including pedagogic content knowledge. These developments require time, support, exposure to a range of experiences and opportunities for critique and reflection of personal practice. The CIVTAA (and the Diploma of Training and Assessment) is not consistent with these design elements.
8. It is imperative that the VET sector avoid standards as lists of skills and knowledge and give consideration to the broader social purposes of VET. The potential of a competency-based framework of standards reflected in the current Training Package model is questioned.
9. The specific nature of VET teachers’ knowledge bases and the pedagogies of the VET sector require further investigation and clarification.