

## The Quality of Teaching in VET: Options Paper

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### Context

1. Much of this introductory comment seems to assume that the current set of entry qualifications and PD requirements have been adequate until recently but there are good reasons for reviewing them given current developments in this area. I disagree with this very strongly – the current requirements are the result of a serious effort in the 1990s to deprofessionalise teaching in general and TAFE teaching specifically, based on a Milton Friedman program of seeing professional entry qualifications as a conspiracy against the public to push up teachers' incomes and enable them to enjoy sinecure working conditions which are not in the real interest of employers or students. It has been a very ideologically-based move, not based on any real understanding of, or sympathy for, the needs of an educational stratum supposedly involved in skilling part of our workforce.
2. In the 1990s, the Victorian government supported the creation of the *Australian Hospitality Review Panel* which created a set of accreditation standards for TAFE teachers, approved by the industry bodies which were given authority to set such standards for TAFE. The basis for their standards was that academic qualifications in one's discipline were given zero value, teacher training college courses preparing people for teaching were also given zero value, and the only preparation recognised was “ a minimum of two weeks' experience in a hospitality-related business”, so direct industry-based experience (albeit very minimal) was given a very high value. This was somewhat watered down by a parenthesis explaining that even work as a cleaner in a travel agency might count as “industry experience” and qualify a person to teach in a TAFE institute. This was a very serious effort to deprofessionalise teaching by stating clearly that professional standards for governing entry and for ongoing PD were of no importance whatever. The underlying assumption was that anybody with a scrap of knowledge could teach that bit of knowledge, that teaching is not a skill in its own right.
3. In the late 1990s and early 2000s there has been a move to re-establish some form of entry qualification so the Certificate 4 in Workplace Assessment was set up and all VET teachers were told it was mandatory to complete this, no matter what previous experience or qualifications had been accumulated. There was an instant decision to make this an exercise in window-dressing, and one-day or three-day courses with zero or minimal assessment were set up to enable multitudes of Certificates to be issued with no real development of anybody's skills. This still continues – my son is in a partnership in a yoga-and-pilates business which delivers training and has been required to complete the Cert 4 which he assures me is so low-level as to be an insult to his intelligence, which is what I experienced when required to go through it about 7 years ago. So nothing much seems to have changed, and a lot of money is being earned by deliverers of these worth-less courses as they are required for accreditation. Just an exercise in window-dressing: teachers should have a piece of paper and this enables a piece of paper to be issued to satisfy RTO registration requirements. Some RTOS, especially TAFEs, are now delivering this extremely basic course in a respectable format, as I am told is now happening at my institute, but I gather a lot of it is still pretty shoddy, and the course itself is so low-level it should be seen only as an introductory stopgap, to be followed by something that will turn beginners into real professionals.
4. ***The structure of the VET teaching workforce***: what you wrote about the importance of VET teachers being expert teachers and not just industry experts is important. First, the industry expertise must be taken far more seriously than the AHRP ever did, so if people are teaching they should have real expertise, not just the minimum two weeks as a cleaner in a travel agency; or a shonky Cert 4, and teaching is a real skill in its own right and should also be taken seriously with proper preparation of all grades of trainers and teachers for working with students and supporting their learning.
5. About workplace trainers who do it as an add-on as part of a wider job, but are not professional teachers and for whom it is a small part of what they do. One of the big issues in TAFE (and no doubt in private

- RTOs as well) is that a growing percentage of course delivery is put into the hands of people for whom it is a bit of work on the side, so they do not believe they should be expected to become professional teachers. If they are teaching, then why should they *not* be expected to show they have teaching skills and some preparation to perform their part-time function well? Would this be acceptable for someone who performed medical functions a couple of hours a week? Or engineering functions? It becomes a defence of a casualised workforce of largely unqualified non-professionals, and I do not believe that is a healthy way to go. As soon as the option is there for employers to avoid requiring teacher training if people are only teaching a few hours a week, there will be a shift to employing more casuals and reduced incentive to employ professional teachers to do that work. The incentives become anti-educational in their effect.
6. The other issue is that, once people are into the system, they get used to fill in gaps beyond their ability or qualifications, so having multiple levels of preparation barriers is setting up a situation in which fudging becomes widespread just to fill classes when people are off sick or on other leave.
  7. One of the problems with the Cert 4 and similar very low-level entry requirements being an acceptable minimum is that the generation of teachers approaching retirement were all required to have qualifications well above the levels at which they were delivering – degrees and diplomas at least, plus a Dip. Ed. and two years of industry experience, dating from a time when nearly all teachers were full-time professionals anticipating a long teaching career. They are about to be replaced by a younger generation many of whom have much lower-level, or even zero, qualifications, which is likely to dilute the general level of qualifications of the VET workforce quite significantly. As an example of the problem with pitching it all at workplace assessors, everyone has to learn about the standards for assessment material, which should demonstrate validity etc., but in my experience these become just mantras to memorise with no serious effort to have people discriminate situations in which assessments are not valid, and what makes them invalid – they are just words to memorise and not indicators of real professional skill.
  8. As an indicator of the problem with “visiting industry experts” I used to make use of such people in delivering a unit on Business Planning, for my first couple of semesters with this unit and I found them, almost without exception to be unskilled at delivering to a class of beginners, unskilled at grading their delivery starting with introductory concepts and advancing to more sophisticated ones, unskilled at explaining their discipline in language accessible to the students, often with poor voice delivery etc. – they were all skilled in their fields, but seriously lacking in what was needed to be effective deliverers of their little bit of teaching for a few hours, which considerably reduced the value of using such people and eventually I stopped doing it. Some basic training in how to deliver even a short unit to a single class is really essential if these people are to be valuable.
  9. Another issue is the proposed (Option 3) progressive upgrading of qualifications as teachers’ duties become more sophisticated. Regrettably, given the current organisational culture, “short-cuts” and fast-tracking are likely to be developed which would seriously erode the effectiveness of any upgrade, so allowing people in, with confidence that when they need more advanced skills they will undertake demanding real courses that will really deliver these more advanced skills is being, I believe, unduly optimistic. I suspect, as has happened with the Cert 4 courses becoming mandatory, that they will be travestied into empty shells so a box can be ticked: “done that”.
  10. Recruiting and retaining teachers: this paragraph is spot-on – these are very real issues facing VET as my generation of teachers retires (I am 65 tomorrow and am retiring in December) – a completely inappropriate administrative mindset must change quite radically to face up to the future needs of an expanding TAFE able to replace a large part of its retiring workforce and tackle the growing proportion of students undertaking degrees, advanced diplomas and other higher-grade qualifications.
  11. ***Developing new “master practitioner” roles:*** In 1989 Victoria’s TAFE institutes developed a new category of teacher called Advanced Skills Teacher, which was seen as a promotion position to be applied for to a selection committee, and TAFEs were commanded to create such positions on a ratio of 2 for each 9 EFT teachers. This was a small attempt to remedy the very short salary scale of six steps with most teachers reaching the top of the scale in their early 30s (I reached it in 1980, 30 years ago, at age 35) and having no

further career steps *as teachers* after that. The commitment to supporting this new category was very short-lived and as these people left they were not replaced – we now are down to the last 2 or 3, and the position was absorbed into the SE1 level, and thereby abolished, last year. No extra duties were imposed on the first generation of ASTs so an opportunity was wasted to make use of their advanced skills, and in the second generation a couple of years later they were just given normal administration duties as part of their load. This showed a complete failure to understand that the advanced skills of experienced teachers could be of value in developing the next generation of recruits. This understanding is still largely absent as there are no real provisions for mentoring, or for recognising that experienced teachers have valuable skills that should be passed on via mentoring or advanced skills training. Your proposal would remedy this, but would need, as usual, a significant culture change in the form of developing management commitment to making productive use of these positions rather than just loading them with routine administrative tasks. The other issue with the AST grade was that it added about \$2,000 a year to total salary, around 3%, and turned a 6-step salary scale into about a 6.25 step scale – it was not an indicator of a real commitment to extending the career path for classroom teachers.

12. Creating a funding stream, *and having accountability reporting requirements* to ensure it is used as intended, and a *reasonable number* of master practitioners, of demonstrated ability, are appointed and actually contribute to the development of the next generation of teachers, would be an excellent move. The important thing is to ensure it is not just a token commitment as the AST grade was, or a way of rewarding people without ensuring performance.
13. *Creating a staff collection*: My institute used to, in the late 1980s, publish a list of staff qualifications, for staff consumption, and to show students how well qualified its staff were. This practice ceased in the early 1990s with the dismemberment of TAFE into competing institutes, the creation of the VET “market”, the deprofessionalisation of teaching by the Kennett government, and the active recruiting of minimally qualified teaching staff by TAFEs and private RTOs. There was much less to proudly display, so the display ceased. It is a very poor indicator of TAFE commitment to quality delivery that such information is no longer collected and not available in a public database. My institute’s staff is now an amazing mix of people with Masters degrees, bachelor degrees, diplomas and some with virtually nothing. It is the bottom end that is the problem, as the number is growing, partly as a response to increasing casualisation of teaching.
14. *VET teacher preparation and development*: Entry level teacher qualifications: I entirely agree that the sort of basic induction training delivered before a new teacher takes the first class is an irreducible minimum requirement. The problem is that so much of what goes on in VET is short-term crisis management, and putting teachers in front of classes is one application of this. Given the problem of not knowing how many classes there will be until enrolment is completed, and not knowing how many teachers are available as some people don’t return from vacations or other leave or provide reasonable notice of this, or get sick etc. filling some percentage of timetabled classes will always be crisis management, and ensuring everybody has done the induction course before the first class will be very difficult. What is needed is some improvement in planning processes.
15. *Certificate 4*: your use of the IBSA quote, of there being “nothing new” is a typical adaptation in VET: the appearance of change and improvement, accompanied by a reassurance to delivery staff that nothing is really changing. Again, the culture needs to change for this mindset to be abandoned. The issue you have described of *developing professional identities* is crucial, as this is not at present part of the mindset of the industry boards which dictate TAFE policies – teaching is not seen as a profession in its own right, but as something anybody can do, that needs no preparation of skill development and no ongoing maintenance in the form of PD to maintain and develop teaching skills. One basic demand should be made if this is to remain the entry qualification – that there be no opportunity to “fast-track” it into a three-day course with minimal demands on new teachers – just window-dressing to be allowed to take on a teaching job without any real prior learning - but that it be seen as a real opportunity to develop real teaching skills in beginners, enough to ensure they can function as effective teachers in their first semester or two.

16. **Competency:** your discussion of this competency brings up a real issue of what “competent” means. When competency-based-teaching was first introduced to VET in the late 1980s, it was defined as meaning performing to a standard expected in industry, which for something like accounting (which I teach) means being near-perfect, as there is little tolerance for error-riddled accounting records. Unfortunately in TAFE (and probably in private RTOs) “competent” was quickly watered down to a very low level of performance, far below what any employer would accept, to not frighten away the semi-literate students who were enrolling in VET courses, and to not threaten the flow of enrolment fees. If there could be a serious return to the original quite respectable definition of competency then this form of delivery would be less of a problem.
17. **Cert 4 again:** the main problem with the Cert 4 is its passivity in that it involves little assignments submitted as paperwork, no supervised teaching, no expectation of any theoretical understanding of teaching and learning, and no self-reflection on one’s development towards professional status. There is no other discipline aspiring to professional status that would accept such a low-level introductory course as adequate to prepare people for professional life. It is part of the 1990s shift to deprofessionalising teaching and as such, should be abandoned totally, with a return to a Dip Ed culture, preferably with more integrity than the one I went through in the early 1970s, more like the Certificate of Adult Teaching and Learning offered at Melbourne University that really prepares people for teaching adults.
18. **Mentoring and institutional strategies to support new teachers:** building in a real level of mentoring, with practicums organised within supportive teacher teams, is again a great proposal, and involves a major mindset shift from current practice, in which too often new teachers are over-loaded with too wide a range of subjects to teach at short notice, as part of the crisis-management style of operation. Practicums of supervised teaching should be mandatory for ensuring that new teachers are not dispirited and discouraged in their first year, and do not end up leaving for better things elsewhere. I was required to do this as part of my first two years of teaching in a secondary school and found the interaction with experienced teachers was invaluable. We were also required to visit other teachers’ classrooms and do our own “crit lessons” on their delivery, which I continued long after I graduated from Hawthorn Teachers’ College and found a very valuable activity. I think this should be part of the first couple of years’ requirements of all new teachers in TAFE – not only does it expose a new teacher to the techniques and qualities of experienced people, it also becomes a survey of the presence or absence of excellence, as inevitably some experienced teachers are not very good and some are really awful.
19. **Continuing VET teacher education qualifications:** I agree that the needs of teachers vary a great deal, and teaching adolescents is quite different from teaching mature age adults, while teaching secondary units differs in some ways from teaching in Higher Ed. but they also have a great deal in common, in that the distinction between deep and surface learning applies at all levels, the skills of engaging a class in the issue to be learned have strong similarities at all levels, though the level of scholarship expected in work submitted by students may vary widely. I found when I first was employed to teach accounting, that the skills I had in accounting theory and the skills I needed for teaching in practical classes didn’t overlap a lot, so your proposal that there should be a strong emphasis on developing teachers’ discipline skills is a very good one. Also, many VET teachers will end up teaching in several sectors, as I have, in higher ed and in VET, in recent years, so a qualification that prepares a teacher for only one sector will not be adequate as more RTOs become cross-sectoral, especially TAFEs. I agree that engaging with the scholarship of VET teaching is vital to all teachers, and there has been no place for it all in recent years, which has resulted in very impoverished introductory teacher preparation.
20. **Options:** I do not like option 1 as it is a kind of “self-regulation” which in my experience is a window-dressing exercise for no regulation at all. Option 2 looks much more acceptable. I suspect that most teacher training courses to prepare teachers for secondary or higher ed. teaching would be adequate for VET as well. Option 3 is the best of all, though no doubt the most intrusive in imposing regulation.
21. **Continuing professional development:** I agree with your proposed range of issues to be dealt with in CPD. At present none of these are dealt with at all, at least where I work. All that is offered is basic computer

software training, and occasional sessions about Gen Y, or the special needs of foreign students, or suchlike generic issues, none of which have any relationship to development of teaching skills, as there seems to be no understanding of what is meant by the professional development of teachers. It is seen as integration into organisational culture – whistleblower compliance sessions, how to use the student records software etc., not as development of teaching ability. About 20 years ago I went to one excellent session about the new Statement of Cash Flows, which was then replacing the old Funds Statement in accounting reporting, and this was most valuable as an update on industry knowledge, but not on teaching skill development. A few years later I went to one when the GST was first enacted and it became a widespread practice for small businesses to convert to a computerised accounting system, and MYOB became a best-selling package. There has been virtually nothing of any value offered since then. There were some sessions on assessment in my Dip. Ed in the early 1970s, introducing us to the issues in validating assessment, but there has been nothing offered since then, and the widespread use of low-level memory-recall multiple-choice and True-False testing around TAFE shows there is little interest in the superficiality of these methods of assessment, as the opportunity to score a test quickly seems to be the only consideration. As you discuss, in other professions most of this is developed by professional associations, keen to maintain the quality of their members' performance, but teachers in general don't have professional associations, which means this is a neglected area of teacher development. One of the big advantages of the Victorian Institute of Teaching is that membership is mandatory and the annual fee from 50,000 teachers enables funding of good quality professional development. In the absence of an organisational structure committed to this function, and adequate funding for it, nothing of value will ever be done. All it would take would be a VET body comparable to the VIT with mandatory membership costing perhaps \$400 or \$500 a year and this would raise several tens of millions of dollars a year for funding a good quality CPD program and enable creation of really worthwhile courses, conferences, etc. One important issue is how to fit such things into the working year, as teaching is unlike most other professions in having a rigid semester timetable with specific teachers allocated to specific classes 36 weeks or so each year, and almost no time free of the duties that go with delivering classes, as well as strong resistance to erosion of vacation rights. Some inroads must be made into this if a real CPD program is to be developed.

22. **Quality of assessment materials:** it does not surprise me to read that studies of assessment materials used are “not at an appropriate standard” as where I work ability to score a test quickly is the overriding consideration, and everything is done on the run, which is partly a product of the chronic underfunding of TAFE in Victoria (20% to 30% less per student than in any other state) which means that non-teaching time to develop good quality assessments is not available and everyone is pressed for time. The training packages are also, from the small range I have had to deliver in recent years, poorly designed for assessment, being full of unteachable items which compliance worries mean people feel obliged to refer to in some way in their assessments even if they are not really assessable or even if it involves nonsensical and trivialised testing. Because of time pressures it is also a widespread practice to re-use tests endlessly which is educationally seriously unsound. Some good CPD on these issues may start a process of improvement.
23. **Skills Councils:** I am not sure who you think might manage Skills Councils, but I hope it would be people with some understanding of what CPD is really about, rather than the Industry Councils which have governed the direction of VET for recent decades and who have been quite contented with a situation in which there is no real CPD at all. The partnership proposal with universities and the professions would be a good solution to this problem – I used to be a member of the ASCPA but resigned as they really offered nothing of relevance to the daily lives of TAFE accounting teachers. If their governing bodies were involved in some ongoing way with the requirement to develop pertinent CPD for related VET teacher groups, this could become a very productive partnership. The articulation into higher ed issue you briefly refer to is also important, as there is at present very little understanding of the issues facing VET students, coming from a low-level VET competency-based system into a different higher-ed culture and the issues of upgrading skills and performance expectations, exemptions for previous studies etc all of which needs much rethinking.

24. **Options:** I don't like option 1, of the status quo, as it has allowed a situation in which there is no effective CPD to persist for decades, as the "shared responsibility" is largely shirked by both sides. Option 3, with some national planning and development of an organisational structure to ensure some real CPD is organised, delivered, and attended by VET teachers to maintain currency, as happens with other professions, seems the minimum to make this a respectable part of VET teachers' working lives.
25. **Maintaining and extending industry currency:** from my perspective this is less relevant than for manual trades which are undergoing automation or other revolutions in practice. There needs to be some recognition that TAFE is increasingly shifting away from an apprentice focus towards business management courses, the advanced diploma and degree courses. For these, a "return to industry" is of little value. What would be of far greater value would be projects to study the accounting practices in small businesses, to test whether what is taught in TAFE is pitched at the right level. I also teach business law, which is a rapidly changing field in which keeping current is far harder. Legal studies teachers could benefit from courses on recent changes in law relevant to business, especially small business, in the areas of negligence, consumer protection, insurance, superannuation obligations of small employers, nuisance and other torts, etc. The legal professional bodies could usefully set up short courses on these issues in each state and territory. Not a return to industry, which would not be helpful at all, but something to provide insight into recent developments. Some of this could probably be conducted as peer seminars, with presentations from up-to-date teachers to those needing some support.
26. **Options:** as usual, I don't like option 1 as the "shared responsibility" is shirked by both sides. In my area, I don't believe industry placements would be all that useful, so I don't think option 2 is relevant either. Option 3, seen as opportunities to survey industry practice, and develop projects to integrate current practice into revised teaching programs, would be of much greater value.
27. **Pedagogy:** have run out of time to consider this at length – but there is nothing going on that I know of in this area, which has been totally neglected. To a large extent I do not believe it is significantly different from the pedagogy of higher ed at undergraduate level, so the same requirements should be imposed. Either options 2 or 3 look quite good
28. **Accrediting teacher education qualifications:** a system similar to that developed in recent years for secondary and primary teachers would be a very good move, as at present there is just anarchy, and the deprofessionalising of TAFE teaching in the 1990s still governs what happens in TAFE, as a deregulated market which experienced a "race to the bottom" for some years, and is only very slowly coming out of it.
29. **Registering VET teachers:** again, option 3 would be my preference, along the lines of the VIT, and for the same reasons.