Response to ‘Quality of teaching in VET: Options paper’

Introduction

The TAFE Development Centre (TDC) was established by the Victorian Government in 2005 to provide a strategic approach to continuing professional development (CPD) across the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Victoria. As the leading provider of CPD for the sector, the TDC aims to support high quality teaching practices and further professionalisation of the VET teaching workforce. The Centre provides CPD programs for teachers and specialists across the sector and plays an important role in the dissemination of state and federal educational policy impacting on the sector’s workforce development needs. Through a range of CPD programs, the TDC provides invaluable opportunities for the VET workforce to network, share expertise and engage in critical debate about current and emerging issues impacting on the sector.

The TDC has been closely monitoring state and federal VET policy reforms currently impacting on the skill profile and professional development requirements of VET practitioners. In particular, the merging of the VET and Higher Education (HE) sectors, calls for greater participation and attainment in the workforce and the push for a demand driven and more flexible, competitive and responsive tertiary education sector.

In this environment, teachers face the challenges of engaging increasing diverse learner cohorts, teaching across blurring educational boundaries and maintaining currency and high levels of industry and pedagogical skills. Ongoing strategies for the development of VET practitioners are required at a strategic, organisational and individual level to keep pace with these changes and to assist teachers to adapt and meet the needs of industry, learners and government.

The TDC is currently developing strategic CPD frameworks in response to the changing VET landscape to inform the provision of professional learning programs for VET teachers and promote consistently high standards in teaching practices. The Centre has proposed to Skills Victoria that a VET Practitioner Development Strategy be developed to inform CPD strategies at the state, institution and individual levels into the future. Against this backdrop, the Centre welcomes the opportunity to comment on the ‘The quality of teaching in VET: Options paper’ (2010), developed by Leesa Wheelahan and Gavin Moodie and further contribute to the development of the sectors future capability.
1. Structure of the VET Workforce

Preferred Option: 3

From the experience of delivering and evaluating CPD programs for VET teachers over many years, the TDC has found that programs need to be targeted to accommodate the learning needs of VET teachers with varying levels of experience and responsibility. In response to these findings, the TDC recently made recommendations to Skills Victoria in a proposal to develop a VET Practitioner Development Strategy for the recognition of three (or potentially more) levels of VET teachers (practitioners) in a workforce structure as outlined in Figure 1.

![Diagram: Levels of experience and expertise of VET Practitioners]

Figure 1: Levels of experience and expertise of VET Practitioners

The distinction between the levels is the degree of teaching experience and the responsibility a teacher has for the design and/or delivery of learning and assessment strategies, resources and tools and for ensuring the quality of teaching programs. The TDC has proposed that each level of VET practitioner is supported by appropriate levels of professional development and preparation as proposed in the Options paper.

The TDC recognises the increasingly diverse range of skills required by VET practitioners and concurs with the Options paper's premise that it is ... “difficult to define a single type of VET teacher given the diversity of purposes, contexts, outcomes, occupational fields and students” (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2010: 20). Drawing on professional experience, the TDC observes that an effective structure for the VET teaching workforce would consider a number of skill pathways for practitioners that will accommodate the increasing diversity of VET roles as described above.
Further to this observation, the TDC suggests a VET teaching workforce structure that ensures all VET practitioners who are responsible for making judgements about competency against national competency standards are required to achieve an entry level teaching qualification. Therefore, a structure and preparation framework for VET practitioners might entail requirements for:

- All prospective teachers to undertake an induction program before commencing teaching
- New teachers (those who intend to pursue a career as a VET Practitioner) and workplace trainers and assessors to undertake an entry level qualification during commencement of teaching
- Accomplished teachers who do not have full responsibility for curriculum development, innovation and curriculum delivery to undertake a further qualification to augment their entry level qualification (depending on the skill set required)
- Educational leaders or teachers who have full responsibility for curriculum development, innovation and curriculum delivery and assessment strategies would be required to undertake a further and appropriate higher level qualification (depending on the skill set required).

2. Recruiting and retaining teachers

2.1 Master Practitioner Roles

The currency of VET practitioners' industry skills and knowledge has been a strong focus and priority for VET providers and for TDC CPD programs. Initiatives that promote relationships and collaboration between VET and industry and the development and exchange of knowledge, skills and innovation are welcomed by the TDC. The creation of master practitioner roles in industry to supervise training within enterprises could support this objective and also enhance industries contribution to the development of curriculum, learning and assessment strategies and validation activities with partner RTOs.

2.2 Developing new cross-sectoral teaching roles

TDC does not wish to comment on this section.

2.3 Creating a staff collection

TDC does not wish to comment on this section.
3. **VET Teacher Preparation and Development**

The TDC advocates a strategic approach to VET teacher development within national, state and institutional policies and strategies to support further professionalisation of the sector.

3.1 **Options for VET entry level teaching qualifications**

In line with the proposed levels for VET practitioners, the TDC’s professional opinion is that qualification structures should aim to support VET practitioners to pursue a career in the sector from entry level to educational leader and beyond. If VET teaching qualifications are nested, they are better placed to encourage new entrants into VET teaching and support them to develop their professional practice in the workplace as they learn. A qualification structure that provides a clear and seamless pathway, that commences with an induction program, builds to basic entry level and higher level credentials study and provides opportunities to work across sectors and specialisations is, in the TDC’s view an effective approach.

Anecdotal information suggests that obtaining a higher education qualification as a condition for entry as proposed in Option 3 may deter industry specialists from committing to a VET teaching career both from a time commitment perspective (for some it would mean undertaking a second degree) and also from a capability and confidence perspective where some, such as those in the trades, may not feel confident to take up HE study at the beginning of their VET teaching career.

3.2 **Mentoring and institutional strategies to support new teachers**

The TDC has had much experience and success in the implementation of coaching and mentoring programs across the VET sector in Victoria, particularly in support of new teachers in TAFE or for teachers progressing into higher roles with greater responsibility. The Industry Experts as Teachers (IEATS) and Coaching and Mentoring projects are excellent examples of how structured, supported and centrally administered mentoring programs can assist new teachers enter a VET teaching career, VET institutions to develop their teaching workforce and the sector as a whole to develop teaching and learning capability.

3.3 **Continuing VET teacher education qualifications**

The TDC agrees that VET teaching qualifications and CPD need to reflect the changing and different contexts, students, purposes and specialisations found in the VET sector. It is also important that teachers have mobility and choice across educational boundaries, attractive career options and a qualification system that is cohesive and easy to navigate.

A model that integrates higher level qualifications, institutional support and targeted CPD to support teachers as they progress from industry specialists, to new VET practitioners to accomplished practitioners and to educational leaders, would be preferable. The qualification(s) could have different streams to accommodate varying teaching specialisations, the continuum of VET service (from VETIS to HE) and the diversity in purpose, contexts and learner cohorts mentioned above.
A nested qualification structure may include:

1. An Induction program before commencing teaching for industry specialists
2. Basic entry level credentialed study upon commencing for new VET practitioners
3. Higher level credentialed study for accomplished VET practitioners including training in vocational discipline and specialist teaching in their area of expertise
4. Higher education credentialed study for educational leaders who undertake specialist curriculum design and development, innovation, learning and assessment strategy design and leadership.

The basic entry level qualification could be a Certificate IV nested in a Diploma qualification and which, in turn leads to a higher award such as degree and masters level for an educational leader. The idea of parts or streams could accommodate career pathways for teachers wishing to move across teaching areas, contexts and purposes rather than up the qualification scale (or both). Obtaining a HE qualification for an accomplished teacher or mid level qualification level could be onerous given the commitment required by that teacher to maintain industry currency and skills.

3.4 Continuing professional development

The TDC is committed to providing a systemic approach to CPD for VET teachers to ensure the quality of teaching practice across the sector in Victoria and to meet the PD needs of RTOs and individual practitioners. A coordinated CPD strategy at state level is critical to ensuring VET practitioners across the VET sector provide consistent, high quality VET services while responding to changing policy and industry demands for more relevant and service-focused VET provision. Strategic CPD initiatives are also essential for driving change and innovation in VET, for sharing knowledge and best practice and building capability to meet changing skill and knowledge needs in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

In this context, VET practitioners require a diverse skill profile; one that differs significantly from that required delivering traditional, supply-driven educational models. The skill profile of a VET practitioner now features a diverse range of pedagogical practices partnered with current industry, networking, relationship building, research and learning and commercially savvy innovation skills. The ability to adapt, to learn, to reflect and be creative is critical for practitioners in order to keep pace with a world where skills and knowledge soon become redundant.

The proposal for a VET Practitioner Development Strategy, developed by TDC to guide Victorian government workforce development initiatives, aims to capture the skills profile, capabilities and priorities of VET practitioners both now and into the future. This capability profile will change as industry and workforce needs evolve and will be developed and then reviewed in collaboration with key VET stakeholders.
An example of a VET practitioner capability model is provided in Figure 2 which outlines three strategic goals: Attainment, Articulation and Architecture and focuses on six key capabilities: pedagogical practice and developing a culture of scholarship, professionalism and industry currency, engaging teachers in an active process of lifelong learning, the quality of teaching, industry partnerships and relationships and innovation.

Figure 2: Example of VET practitioner capabilities

3.5 Maintaining and extending industry currency

The TDC has long supported programs to enhance and maintain industry currency of VET teachers through programs such as the ‘Industry Skills Scheme’ and ‘Education for Sustainability’ as part of the annual CPD calendar. A key objective of the proposed VET Practitioner Development Strategy is to continue the tradition of supporting VET teachers to undertake industry projects and/or to undertake industry placements. A funding stream is currently provided to the TAFE sector to fund industry release for VET teachers. The TDC would welcome an expansion of this program to the wider sector and is well positioned to expand its role as the administrator of industry currency programs across Victoria.
4. **Developing VET pedagogy and models of teaching**

The TDC welcomes initiatives to enhance the capacity of VET pedagogy research. Ongoing fundamental research is essential to the development of VET teacher CPD and qualifications to ensure high quality, relevant and innovative VET practice that meets the changing needs of learners and industry. The TDC supports the establishment of a Centre on the scholarship of VET teaching and is well positioned to take a leading role in this endeavour in collaboration with peak research entities.

5. **Accrediting teacher education qualifications:**
   The TDC does not wish to comment.

6. **Registering VET teachers:**
   The TDC does not wish to comment.

7. **Evaluating the quality of teaching in VET:**
   The TDC does not wish to comment.