

Comment on The quality of teaching in VET: options paper

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My background. I feel I need to provide some information on my background in the VET sector as I am exactly one of the people you are talking about throughout this paper. I entered the community services sector after ten years out of the workforce to have and raise children. When I re-entered the workforce I had already completed one qualification at TAFE and commenced another. During my work in the community sector I found what I enjoyed the most was the training, for me initially with volunteers. I subsequently attained the BSZ40198 qualification.

Within four years of attaining this I was working full time for an RTO delivering Certificate IV in Disability Work and Certificate III in Aged Care. Since 1994 when I commenced study at TAFE I have achieved twelve qualifications all within the VET sector, including the movement to the TAA40104 and TAA50104 Diploma of Training and Assessment (having held both of the previous qualifications).

However, during this time I have also achieved a Bachelor of Health, Ageing and Community Services (2008), studied distance and online from University of New England and most recently a Masters in Education, with a major in Vocational Education and Training, which was achieved with distinction via distance/online with the University of Wollongong.

I am the person covered in this discussion and feel very passionate about the neglect of the qualities of people teaching and educating in the VET sector. In my current role, I oversee the operations of a training centre, which is partnered with two RTO's, which enables us to deliver competency based training. We are also preparing an application to become achieve RTO status as the partnerships have not been without difficulties. I currently also recruit and interview and oversee contract trainers and have had to release a couple of trainers from their contracts and one I have had to spend time with to develop and show other ways of training and yet all have the TAA. I am concerned that while knowledge, in my industry, of the community sector is essential, so are good teaching and assessment skills. I could be an absolutely fantastic case manager; that does not mean I will make a good educator for those wishing to be case managers.

This is the premise behind the comments I have made against the questions and the options presented.

Question One: do you believe that current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are satisfactory?

In a nutshell, based on the comments I have made against the various options presented throughout the paper, definitely not. All organisations can have great teachers as well as bad. Often you don't know you have a bad teacher until you have a good one.

There is no quality amongst the Cert IV; it still can depend on who gets it and from where. People do not have to maintain CPD points. There is no professional association. Surveying only students who have achieved a qualification is not satisfactory evidence alone of quality.

I would welcome a system where an RTO can have undergone some form of assessment on its trainers or say it belongs to a professional association and the criteria for joining it show you do professional development etc. I know this also has marketing capability which I see as a good thing and could help to remove RTO's who give qualifications out when there is not an appropriate teaching or assessment undertaken.

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

I think the options here related to a professional association and CPD are great. I have expressed concerns throughout my comments on the options though of what a teaching qualification should look like as the Cert IV has been the base and if people come from industry we can't make them go to university to achieve teaching qualifications.

Question Three: do you find helpful the paper's presentations of options in stages: stage 1- the augmented status quo, stage 2- intermediate enhancement, and stage 3- ambition?

Yes I liked how they were presented and it enabled me to make comment which I have completed on subsequent pages.

Question Four: do you find helpful the paper's analysis of VET teaching into elements-

- The structure of the VET teaching workforce**
- Developing master practitioners**
- Cross sectoral teachers**
- Staff data collection**
- Entry level teacher qualifications**
- Mentoring and supporting new teachers**
- Continuing teacher education qualifications**
- Continuing professional development**

Maintaining teachers' industry currency
Research on VET pedagogy and models of teaching
Accrediting qualifications
Registering VET teachers
Evaluating the quality of VET teaching

Yes it was helpful although there were definitely elements which could be combined.

Question Five: have we missed any element or might some elements be combined?

The areas related to the registration of people, similar to teachers, the professional association and CPD were mentioned a few times in my comments. These I see as key elements which came from areas related to the entry level, followed by industry currency, teaching currency, professional development and master practitioners.

Question Six: is there any option that we have missed that you believe should be considered?

I think it was fairly extensive and nothing else came to mind as I wrote my responses.

The structure of the VET teaching workforce

There is a comment made (pg9) regarding different categories of teachers to be defined by the level of responsibility that they have and linking this to the appropriate preparation for that level of responsibility. When I commenced in the VET sector as an educator I didn't think I would be running an organisation parallel to the registered training organisation in a partnership. Some of us have quite high level responsibilities. For example I prepare materials, design the assessment tools, provide individual support for students, design individual assessment tools, train and assess, currently five competency based qualifications as well as oversee trainees undertaking traineeships and the trainers of other qualifications we are delivering. However, many others do have their roles split. I also use industry experts whether they have teaching qualifications, including the Cert IV, or not. I do this for example in the mental health course where I utilise the skills of workers to facilitate sessions and use already prepared materials but with their added experiences.

My concern with gaining qualifications additional to Cert IV is how this can be done when the person could essentially be running a business, especially in terms of actual teaching qualifications as these require practical teaching for 50 days; difficult for anyone in full time employment.

Recruiting and retaining teachers

Developing new 'master practitioner' roles

I would be concerned how a funding stream was allocated to RTO's based on specialisation. How would this assessment occur of their teaching practices to determine whether they are able to create master practitioners? In my case it is not the partnership with the two RTO's which has developed me; it has been my own study towards a Master of Education where I specialised in study related to the VET sector.

Partnerships between industry and RTO's also need to be investigated appropriately as an industry which utilises traineeships which requires its staff to be found competent in order to have funds released, from the State Training centre, is not a measure of quality and there would need to be other checks around the quality of the teaching and assessment methods delivered by the RTO.

Further to this I would be concerned about tendering for RTO's, partnerships and enterprises as suggested in the options. The reason for this is in 2009 when PPP (productivity places programs) were being tendered for a large proportion of the money went to TAFE, possibly based on its capacity to deliver the courses. I don't know if the money went to those capable of managing the level of outcomes required and achievement of competency and qualification is not and should not be the sole measure of quality. Funding for many of these programs is based on students achieving competence or the RTO will not receive full funding.

I also know in TAFE there is a huge variety of skills and experiences. VET requirements within the AQTF talk about industry currency as well as teaching currency. Many full time TAFE teachers may have lost the currency when comparing the depth to those who are from the industry and I am concerned of TAFE being considered a benchmark, based on my own and others experiences. Bad practitioners exist everywhere because there are no methods of ongoing development and assessment.

Perhaps skills councils can oversee master practitioner roles as they may be able to determine the vocational skills; however this once again leaves openness around the skills required by the teaching side as I am unsure of the expertise of skills councils with regard to this as it is a different field.

Developing new cross-sectoral teaching roles

All of these options have a solid foundation. They recognise the need to have vocational experience. However as many in the field don't currently have a recognised teaching qualification how will they be accepted in the higher education field as a teacher?

I know I could take the skills I have gained through experience as an adult educator along with my life experience and then vocational experiences into both the school and higher education sectors. However, I can't afford to leave work to

complete study full time and/or write a PhD to be accepted in the higher education field.

Creating a staff collection

While staff collection of qualifications is relevant I see it as only one part of what is happening in the VET sector regarding qualifications. Part time, sessional or casual staff could have their details against a number of RTO's and this could be misleading. Once again it won't rate people. It is only a statistical count of what the staff in an RTO could look like.

I also ask if TAFE would be include in this along with all of the casual and part time staff they use, some of whom do not have the Cert IV...does this mean they wouldn't be recorded?

VET teacher preparation and development

Entry level teacher qualifications

It needs to be recognised that even though a person has industry experience they may not make an effective teacher. The skills required for teaching are different. The vocational knowledge is extremely important. How can I convey knowledge, in my case related to the community sector, disability and mental health, without experience for workers? I employed a young person with a Cert IV Mental Health (non clinical) to teach other workers a Cert IV Mental Health. While she had enough vocational experience for the new workers she didn't have enough for the older workers in the room. She was unable, due to her age, develop them further and they felt they were wasting time. I believe if she had more industry exposure she could have done this. I don't think it just could be more work in the sector either, but perhaps more wide reading or conversations with those in the sector in order to develop a bigger portfolio of stories to share with the students.

The skills gained working in the sector are an essential element however I believe they must be weighted at least equally with teaching skills.

People in the VET sector have to have the industry experience. We cannot be expected to give up full time employment to gain a teaching qualification. The teachers I have used are Cert IV qualified. A person who has been, for example, a high school teacher, who has the teaching qualifications, would not have the industry experience to know how to teach for example, a Certificate IV in Disability Work. Where will they have got this from? They will have needed to study this as well and undergone a practical component. However, even if this took one year of study to complete at TAFE as full time the exposure would not be enough for me to employ them as I would be concerned over the lack of disability knowledge.

I refer to my statement above that vocational skills are equal to teaching skills.

I like the idea of induction programs. However, who will pay for this program. Is it the person, the RTO, TAFE, what if they are employed in a number of places as a contract or sessional trainer? What if the course they were teaching was for 10 weeks only and twice a week for a total of 12 hours, the cost could be too much for a small RTO.

I am also concerned at option 2 where it is talked about qualified teachers without experience in VET gets introduced through induction to the curriculum etc. Is this saying a young person who is studying a Bachelor Teaching degree could then move into the VET sector? This person would have no or limited vocational experience and I would doubt their credibility in a classroom of workers who have been in the sector for many years, CALD learners, along with a lack of ability to draw on skills and knowledge of adult learners and more.

Teaching in VET is more than being a qualified teacher. Option 3 is of concern in that to VET work industry currency is paramount and is contained within the AQTF standards.

The options for mentoring and institutional strategies to support new teachers

The areas mentioned regarding mentoring and an institutions strategy to support new teachers are difficult. RTO's use part time, casual and sessional staff particularly in small RTO's and some of the trainers would be employed in more than one organisation. For example, an RTO can use a person to oversee traineeships by employing them on a contract. What time would this person have to attend programs and they may not even be interested? What about those with more than one job? I know my RTO plan while it includes several professional development days where they will be paid could not sustain on going mentoring strategies if I have to pay someone to attend more sessions.

The complementary mentoring program suggested at Option three has the soundness and capacity to assist with professional development and self learning.

Options for continuing VET teacher education qualifications

I like option three where a person undergoing study could qualify for them for VETiS as they could be registered as a school teacher.

I further like the idea of some recognition for those who do have more than a Cert IV. For example, I have a Master of Education (VET), my manager has a Bachelor of Adult Education (Hons) and I have a trainer with a Grad Cert in Adult Education and another studying for a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education. I know my students have benefited from the extra study I have undertaken as some of the study outcomes I achieved have been incorporated into my classes.

This has particularly applied to the students undertaking study of the Cert IV TAA.

Also as mentioned in option three the AQTF means our staff must have qualifications and/or relevant experience in the vocational field. It is quite a challenge for some people to have the vocational and also the teaching experience required.

Continuing professional development

TAFE employs casual teachers who have jobs in the sector. How would these people attain a teaching qualification especially as although I have heard it is mandatory for TAFE teachers to have the Cert IV some do not. I know this because I have had them in my room undertaking the Cert IV.

Option three with CPD activities at national levels, possibly from the skills councils and a relevant association has a solid foundation. This could be a new association or attach/incorporate the activities of those such as ACE or ALA.

This could be a professional program across 12 months with options around a number of points which are required to maintain the standards. Perhaps it could be linked to a database of RTO's and trainers which other RTO's could access so we can employ people who have maintained their qualification via CPD activities.

Maintaining and extending industry currency

When I read through the paper I think it has an emphasis on full time teaching and not those who are contract, sessional or casual. Teachers I use are often employed in other roles within the industry. Due to the lack of consistent work many cannot abandon one field for another.

Option three is a viable alternative as it could enable people to volunteer or be seconded or return to an industry position to ensure currency. This can also be about conversations with industry people, visits and observations of current practice, meetings and forums etc with industry people.

Developing VET pedagogy and models of teaching

Options on developing VET pedagogy and models of teaching

I am not sure this is needed. If people undertake other areas of study then they will know about VET pedagogy; it isn't different from other adult practices. During my degree I studied adult learning methods, styles etc. I also studied a unit on Vygotsky studies which relates to children however as part of the unit I had to link it to my area of specialisation which was the VET sector and so learning about children has helped me to understand adult learners in general, not just those in VET.

Accrediting teacher education qualifications

I like options two and three which talk about recognising qualifications and then this information **MUST** be shared with others looking to enter the VET sector. Often the progression in VET is industry experience, perhaps you enjoy the teaching part of your job or want to move on from the face to face of daily support, and that you have the knowledge, skills and attitude and want to impart and share this with others. Then the person comes into teaching. Perhaps they have worked with people who have a qualification in disability work and then think I could teach that or I could do a better job teaching that as they can identify the gaps the person working with them has.

There would need to be a type of 'catch up' framework though for those in the industry who have been teaching for some time and may only have a Cert IV but have been doing as much as they can for professional development.

Registering VET teachers

Definite need for VET teachers association and this can then be linked to CPD and more. I know if I was employing someone who claims to be a VET teacher the opportunity to identify membership and professional development opportunities as a mark of development and improvement would be great and most welcomed.

Evaluating the quality of teaching in VET

The information contained, as presented in Option one has no value. The outcomes for a student are affected by the teacher in front of them with often no one to compare it to and they have finished their qualification and have achieved it; are they really going to say the teacher was bad? The assessments poor? They could be concerned their qualification could be removed from them.

The quality of teaching cannot solely come from outcomes and comments by students. I wouldn't object to a type of peer assessment as long as this system in itself is credible and involves appropriate selection and integrity. I evaluate students for the Cert IV and as a partner to an RTO they have audited my teaching twice, collected a sample of assessments twice. In an other project I was involved in, a representative of the RTO observed all the trainers for three days, took samples of work, spoke to and surveyed students. I will however point out this project was funded out of Health and Ageing to several million dollars and so the RTO was able to employ a person and this was their job.

It could be hard for small RTO's to do peer teaching cost wise, having an association could address this issue.