

## **Raising the Bar on VET Teacher Education Qualifications**

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The workshop held at the AVETRA Conference in 2010 was entitled 'Raising the Bar on VET Teacher Education Qualifications', and one of the stated aims of the workshop was to extend the parameters of the AVETRA workshop in 2009, where there was a discussion around teacher education qualifications in the VET sector and current research and issues. A statement was developed from the 2009 workshop describing the need to ensure that there is recognition of professional teaching qualifications for VET teachers. In 2010, we wanted to consider the research that had or was currently taking place, and the support by various governments for higher level qualifications for VET teachers. At the same time, the review of the CIV TAA and the development of the Training and Education Training Package, will have significant impact on VET teacher qualifications. The workshop heard from various people on the current research, discussed what it is that makes up a good VET teacher qualification, considered how TAFE and universities can work together in this area and future directions for research.

In 2009 the workshop developed a set of principles, which stated:

- There must be 'parity of esteem' with others working in the various education sectors
- Teachers need to be acknowledged through a national mechanism of professional recognition
- The elements of any teacher qualification must include a focus on the capacity to research our own practice
- Assessment is a critical issue for VET practitioners and it must be centrally located in VET teacher preparation
- In the current policy environment, where the links between VET and Higher Education are being reconceptualised, VET practitioners need to be autonomous, independent, creative and consistent

and agreed that the following elements should apply:

- VET teacher qualifications should be thorough, holistic and cross disciplinary
- The qualifications must focus on the diversity of the student cohorts that are present in any teaching and training context
- There is a need to include a study of ethics in any teacher preparation program
- They must establish rapport with learners, focus on the teaching and learning process, and anticipate emerging needs in the sector and interpret these with a focus on student learning
- VET teacher qualifications need to acknowledge the duality and sometimes tension between industry needs and pedagogical imperatives
- There is a need to ensure the industry currency of VET teachers and to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate this.

In the year since the 2009 Conference, there has been considerable interest in providing VET teachers with access to higher level qualifications, an acknowledgement that one size does not fit all and agreement that VET teachers need more than just the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. As a consequence there are a number of pieces of work taking place that focus on different aspects of this issue, and this was an aim of the workshop to consider this research, to understand its basis and to comment on any issues arising.

Amongst the issues considered by the workshop were:

- the requirements for initial qualifications and for continuing professional development – acknowledging that these may be different. This discussion

included how long should qualifications be and at what level, should study be on or off the job,

- what impact the use of different terminology used in the literature has on the debate – in other words, the Certificate IV TAA is for trainers and assessors, and the proposed new qualification ‘an entry level qualification for trainers and assessors’. If we then talk about teachers, or VET practitioners, or VET professionals, or advanced VET practitioners, does this change the focus of the necessary qualifications. Often these words are used interchangeably, and yet at others defined as having quite different roles. If the latter is the case, how does one move from being a trainer to a VET professional, who decides and what qualifications and experience are needed?
- funding and incentives for teachers/practitioners to support them in increasing their qualifications and skills
- the restrictions and effects of the AQTF on qualifications for VET teachers, including on government support for higher qualifications
- the issue of career pathways for VET teachers was raised, as was the need to give teachers a space to debate and build resilience within their profession
- whether the same requirements should be expected of public and private providers, and whether the expectations created by government support for a competitive training market have given TAFE Institutes and State and Territory governments an ‘out’ in their obligations to their TAFE teachers
- whether there is a need for a national qualification/standard/accreditation/regulation, and how this should be configured
- the issue of the review of the CIV TAA and the upcoming review of the Diploma TAA were discussed, including the need to include all stakeholders in reviews including the university sector. The intention of the new Training Package in Training and Education was raised, including the coherence of the qualifications contained in it
- the type of initial qualification, and when there is a need to specialise in terms of qualifications as happens in schools. This included discussion around the pedagogies of different industries and how they are reflected in qualifications
- how we persuade employers and other stakeholders to recognise the need for higher level qualifications.

These were some of the initial issues that the workshop participants set out to discuss. In doing so they initially considered the standards that currently apply to VET trainers and assessors as determined by the AQTF. These are that:

“Training and assessment are conducted by trainers and assessors who:

- a) have the necessary training and assessment competencies as determined by the National Quality Council or its successors
- b) have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being developed or assessed
- c) continue developing their vocational and training and assessment competencies to support continuous improvements in delivery of the RTO’s services”

The present standard is the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or being able to demonstrate equivalent competencies.

It was acknowledged that the proposed new Certificate IV sought to put in place a qualification that better represented an entry level qualification for trainers and assessors, with space then given to a Diploma or higher qualification to be required for VET teachers/practitioners/professionals.

The IBSA discussion paper for the development of a new Diploma seeks to examine further requirements and asks the question: “What should be the purpose of any qualification which seeks to meet the skill development and recognition requirements of a VET professional?” It goes on to say: “To answer that question it would be desirable to conduct a broad functional

analysis of the individuals in those roles attempting to identify the required competencies and then linking those to an appropriate qualification level in the AQF.” Responses to the discussion paper close on 31 May. The proposal for the new Diploma is for four core units plus one skills set of 3 units. The skills sets include advanced assessment, advanced facilitation, learning design and educational leadership.

One of the problems with this proposal is the gap between an entry level qualification for trainers and assessors, and the skills required of a VET professional. The new Diploma, as set down, does not address the issues of what is a VET professional and what is an advanced VET practitioner. Both are referred to in the paper, without differentiating one from the other, yet there is a great leap from a trainer qualification described through the CIV TAA and VET professional qualification referred to in the Diploma, without any clear idea of how one gets there and what is expected of the different roles.

Skills Australia in its communiqué on 20 November 2009, stated: “Quality VET teaching is essential to a high performing system and to the professionalism of the broader workforce. National leadership is needed and the Forum is calling on COAG to add VET system quality to its list of aspirational education and skills targets. The Forum is calling on industry, educational institutions and government to support the development and implementation of a national workforce development strategy for the VET workforce. Elements of the strategy would include:

- higher quality data and information about the VET workforce
- a suite of qualifications that reflect the diversity of the sector to ensure that qualifications of the VET workforce are fit for purpose, and regular audits to ensure that training providers offering these qualifications are competent to do so
- accreditation of teachers and assessors including a requirement for continuing professional development
- appropriate financial investment in teacher development.”

In their further paper released in March 2010, ‘Australian Workforce Futures’, Skills Australia recommended that the tertiary education and training capacity be enhanced to meet future skills needs, and that a workforce development strategy be developed and implemented for the tertiary education workforce. An investment of \$40m per annum is recommended over the next six years to develop and implement such a strategy.

Part of this strategy would be to explore and provide support for ways to expand the engagement of industry with the education and training workforce, which might include industry and provider staff exchange, joint industry/provider staff appointments and industry sabbaticals, and return to industry placements for teaching staff.

The paper also recognised the need to research, develop and diffuse distinctive VET and higher education pedagogies. It also identifies the need for creative pedagogy, including skills to deal with challenging learners and the ability to devise innovative teaching and learning strategies.

It says: VET practitioners ...”need to continually develop their skills in teaching, learning and assessment, in an environment that is characterised by increasing diversity. They need to address individual learning styles and preferences, including those of online learners, and to provide support to disadvantaged learners and at risk groups.”

The Skills Australia papers appear to identify:

- a far more complex set of skills, knowledge and capabilities required of a VET practitioner, than would be provided by a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and
- the need for continuing education and skills development, to address the changing VET environment and the increasing diversity of this environment

Ros Brennan Kemmis spoke to the workshop of the research she had undertaken with Erica Smith for NCVET in the Services Industry. As part of that research they looked at the current

state of VET teacher education qualifications overseas, particularly in the UK and Europe, where they were higher than in Australia. Their research noted that:

- Most EU countries require VET teachers to have a higher education degree and teacher training
- In the Netherlands there are various forms of training but all include at least one year of university teacher preparation
- In Norway, at least one year for skilled workers and three years with trade content and teacher preparation
- In Sweden three to five years of training is required. New schemes are being introduced to cope with shortages.

They also reported on changes to VET teacher qualifications in the UK over the last few years. The latest teacher qualification reforms, they said, are predicated on the concept of the award of a 'licence to practise' from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Teachers who meet the designated standards will be provided with the credential 'Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills' (QTLS). Initially teachers will be given a passport to teaching modules of about 30 hours of tuition. They reported that those whose teaching role is limited to the delivery and assessment of their specialist area may need no more. The credential will be awarded at level 3 in the qualifications framework. All other teachers should articulate into full teacher training and teachers will have up to five years to complete this work. Both programs contain 'taught and practical' elements. Teachers who complete this program will have a full licence to practice. Both programs contain teaching about assessment, accreditation of prior learning, skills for life support, mentoring, blended learning, observation, professional development, and registration requirements. The Institute of Learning is responsible for registering trainee teachers and trainers at the start of training.

One of the aims of the changes in the UK, was to establish benchmarks and standards, and a network of Centres of Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) are planned to support the QTLS. A new scheme has also been introduced for enterprise trainers called the 'Bespoke Accreditation Scheme' where Standards Verification UK can accredit an enterprise's trainer-training provision so that they are deemed to have qualified trainers.

There are a number of similarities between the UK experience and changes currently being considered in Australia. These include hopefully the acknowledgement of the need for higher level professional qualifications for VET teachers, and the need for some model of ensuring accreditation and maintenance of standards and qualifications. The AQTF has certainly not done this, and many may argue that it has instead driven teacher qualifications down in the VET sector.

NCVER has also commissioned work in relation to VET teacher qualifications. Berwyn Clayton has undertaken a project investigating the extent to which practitioners believe that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment provides an effective foundation for the delivery and assessment in training in the VET environment. It outlines some of the key issues surrounding the CIV TAA, such as uneven quality, inconsistencies in delivery and the perceived inability to meet the skills and knowledge of trainers in workplaces or teachers in institutional settings. The research looks at a small number of graduates of the CIV TAA both on completion and sometime later, and has found that whilst graduates might enter the field feeling prepared and reasonably confident, they need ongoing learning and support from experienced teachers and trainers. Without this support, she is finding that graduates struggle. This means that it is particularly important that a range of professional development activities are on offer which support initial teacher preparation and training.

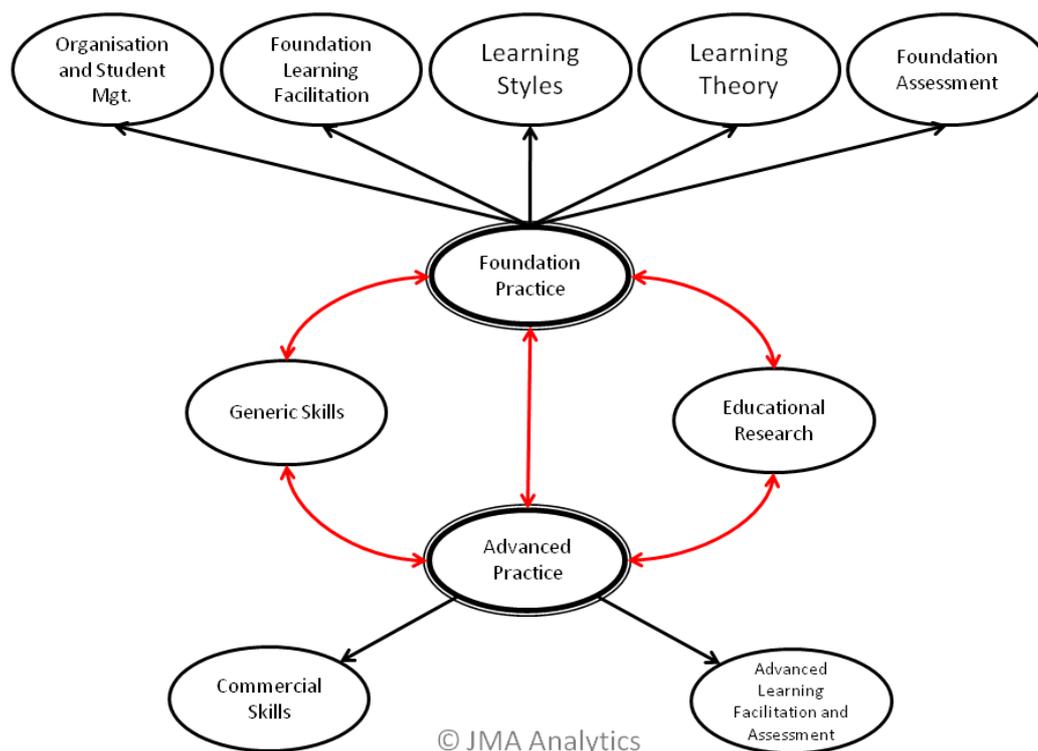
NCVER is also undertaking another project this year which considers the question "What is the range of approaches and qualifications used for providing initial VET teacher training within the sector?" It is looking at the range of formal teaching qualifications available, their key elements and attributes, and their use by learners and providers. This research should assist groups such as the Australian Education Union in making recommendations about appropriate qualifications for TAFE teachers.

As part of its work, the Australian Education Union has drawn up a set of principles that should apply to teacher education courses for TAFE teachers, and is working to define a suite of courses that are suitable for professional teachers.

There is a further project being conducted by Leesa Wheelahan at the L.H.Martin Institute at Melbourne University. This project is being funded by DEEWR and managed by the Australian College of Educators (ACE). It will make recommendations on the quality of VET teaching; VET teacher qualifications and continuing professional development; the impact teaching has on the quality of the VET student experience and student outcomes; and how this can be evaluated. An open web survey has been conducted, and representatives or various stakeholders interviewed about their perceptions of the quality of VET teaching and teacher training projects. Ten Registered Training Organisations will be invited to participate through interviews, and they will represent the diversity of VET providers and contexts in which teachers teach. The second phase of the research will include interviews with VET students, graduates and employers.

Also, of interest in this area, is the work that John Mitchell and Associates (JMA Analytics) has undertaken in identifying skills and capabilities of advanced VET practitioners. Their most recent work uses a statistical technique known as 'Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)' to piece together the structural components of VET professional practice. The results of the research show that there are two broad components to the structure of VET professional practice – foundation skills and advanced skills.

This is the structural model as identified by John Mitchell and John Ward in their research.



As part of his earlier research John Mitchell had identified the skills and capabilities of advanced practitioners. As part of the current work, JMA Analytics conducted a survey in late 2009 of 2230 practitioners in the VET sector. One of the findings of the survey was that there is currently no coherent, inclusive model of VET professional practice. The research goes on to say:

“While there is some understanding in the sector of the types of skills sets that comprise VET professional practice, as articulated in various accredited training programs, there is no clear

model of how these skills sets and qualifications come together to enable VET trainers and assessors to perform their full range of professional duties. This lack of an overarching model further means that there is no comprehensive understanding in the sector of how VET trainers and assessors transition from basic or foundation level to advanced practice.”

JMA Analytics identify five foundation skills sets: learning theories, learning styles, foundation learning facilitation, foundation assessment, and organisation and student management. According to the survey there appear to be two distinct pathways to follow for practitioners to improve their skills – commercial skills, and advanced facilitation and assessment. John Mitchell suggests that there has been too much of a focus on commercial skills, and that further consideration needs to be given to how we support advanced facilitation and assessment.

The research has also identified that the percentage of advanced practitioners are a very small part of the VET workforce, although these are, according to JMA Analytics, the leaders in VET practice.

As part of the preparation for the workshop, Annette Bonnici and I disseminated a questionnaire to NSW Teachers Federation TAFE TA members on teacher education qualifications. We had over 500 responses in a short period of time. Whilst there are some 6000 members of TAFE TA, we imagine less than half would have been given access to the questionnaire. The responses represented all industry areas across a wide number of TAFE NSW Institutes, so was we felt, a fairly representative sample.

Teachers and educational staff were asked questions about the current qualifications they held, both of an educational and vocational nature, and what teaching qualifications they believed were necessary for a TAFE teacher. They were also asked about the skills they believed were most important for a good teacher, and new skills and knowledge they thought they would have to acquire over the next few years. The focus was on qualifications and skills teachers had, ones they believed they would need to gain, and how these should be attained.

We found that 78% of respondents had been in TAFE for 10 years or more, 22% were part time casual, 52% had industry qualifications at less than degree level and 32% educational qualifications at degree or higher level. The vast majority indicated that they also had a CIV TAA or its predecessor. Some of the skills outlined as being of most importance for an effective teacher were empathy, communication, organisational skills, flexibility, being adaptive, professional currency and computer skills. Whilst many of these skills are not necessarily taught in any course, the overall response was that TAFE teachers needed a “Dip Ed type course which looks at education theory and not just at planning and assessment. These last two are only part of the group of skills you need to be an effective teacher.” Most respondents acknowledged that the CIV TAA was not enough, also reflected in the research undertaken for NCVET by Berwyn Clayton, but they also stated that good mentoring and support was needed in the workplace to maximise qualifications.

Further comments from respondents on their experiences in initial teacher education and what sort of qualification or course they now felt was needed included the following:

- A teacher needs to go to Uni to get a general degree, then a specialist dip.ed. – throw out the Cert IV, it didn't teach me a thing
- A specialised teacher training course that is industry specific delivered by senior teachers who have been teaching the trade for a number of years
- In general studies a university degree and diploma in education is the only way. Mentoring from fellow teachers is also important
- Definitely university based. Needs to be something delivered over a longer period in order to develop in-depth understanding of teaching and learning strategies – as opposed to quick, short-term, slap-bang courses. Unfortunately some CIV TAA courses are of the latter type ... but the people with them are 'qualified teachers' in the eyes of TAFE. Any teaching qualification needs to demand high level, good quality literacy skills. I am sorry to say that I have come across too many teachers with CIV qualification who have poorly developed

writing skills and a limited number of teaching strategies to suit delivery to a broad range of student ability types

- Tertiary level qualifications that include the theories of learning, particularly adult learning and theory and practice relating to the development of curriculum and programs and valid assessment
- Not the mickey mouse TAAs on offer from the mickey mouse RTOs – what an absolute joke! There has to be an end to “pay your dollars and get your quals here!” Training to be fair dinkum, authentic, disciplined, requiring best effort and skill, assessable – the way this is to be obtained may vary, as long as there is an end to the current madness
- Much of the ‘traditional’ teaching qualifications offered by universities are not of a great deal of use for someone working in the VET sector. The entire way we undertake delivery and assessment is different from other educational sectors. The qualifications for TAFE teachers really need to reflect this. I think the best way for teachers to gain their initial teaching qualifications is by being supervised in their on-the-job activities, together with a program of release to undertake higher level qualifications
- Mentoring with an experienced teacher and doing a degree or diploma of teaching
- Whilst undertaking limited teaching duties, development of theoretical knowledge, both VET learning and industry related should run concurrently. Serious consideration should be given to develop courses that relate to the finer aspects of industry, especially trades
- Initial short block release then regular face-to-face block release. This enables participants to share experiences and ideas
- Teaching qualifications should be gained while employed in TAFE on a reduced program
- In practice and with a nearby senior experienced mentor – plus offsite theory and reflection of practices of self and others and research – plus time to observe and absorb other teachers in action

Overall the support was for a tertiary qualification, generally from a university. When this should be acquired varied, and the make-up of such a course included general education components and those specific to the teaching area. Respondents overwhelmingly said that support from TAFE was needed including release from teaching, and they wanted both on and off-the-job components - in other words to be able to study the theory but also practice at the same time, with the support of mentors and experts.

In terms of new skills needed, the focus was on eLearning, mixed mode delivery, development of curriculum resources and green skills. When asked how these new skills should be gained, there was a variety of responses. Importantly there was a recognition of the need for courses and further qualifications, but also return to industry, mentoring and on-the-job learning with release from teaching and time to undertake the additional study and skills acquisition properly.

Recently the Federal Government has announced a further study to be undertaken by the Productivity Commission for COAG and entitled ‘The Productivity Commission Education and Training Workforce Study’. It will look at workforce issues in the education sectors including providing advice on workforce planning, development, and structure of these sectors in the short, medium and long term. In relation to the VET sector, the Terms of Reference state: “The status of VET practitioners as ‘dual professionals’, deploying both industry and education skills delivered in schools, VET only, dual sector and industry settings, is unique among education sectors, and poses both challenges and opportunities for the VET sector in attracting and retaining staff. In addition, the increasingly commercial environment in which many providers operate creates a significant role for VET professionals who are engaged in organisational leadership and management, but not directly involved in training delivery. The impact of this trend on the required capabilities of VET professionals is of policy interest.”

Two of the factors to be considered are:

- the requirement for broader skills in VET professionals as a result of increasing system focus on client needs, including flexible delivery, greater focus on employability skills, catering for a more diverse student base, and partnering with enterprises and communities, and
- the adequacy of support for high-quality professional practice, including consideration of practitioner qualifications and standards for VET practitioners across sectors.

This research combined with all the others will lead to a very rich body of knowledge on VET teacher qualifications and support for professional practice.

We ran out of time for discussion at the workshop and many of the issues identified at the start still required far more consideration. Discussion questions that might like to be further considered include:

- If we agree that we need to raise the bar on VET teacher/practitioner qualifications, how might we do this?
- Does this research cover all the issues that need to be explored? Are there gaps?
- How should stakeholders seek to influence the review of the Diploma TAA and other VET teacher qualifications?
- Are generic educational qualifications good enough, or is there now a space for specific educational qualifications for different industry areas?
- How should continuing education/professional development take place, including when, where and who pays?

Given the work outlined here and currently taking place, it would be useful to revisit this area of research at the next AVETRA conference.

Linda Simon on behalf of Annette Bonnici and Ros Brennan Kemmis

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