

HOW DO WE KNOW OUR CHINESE TEACHING PARTNERS ARE DOING A GOOD JOB? A PROJECT TO DETERMINE GOOD PRACTICE IN SUPERVISION OF OFFSHORE TAFE TEACHERS AND IN MODERATION OF COURSES

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One of the ways in which VET providers are strategically positioning themselves for sustainability in future is to engage in international education. Recent estimates suggest Australian TAFE has more offshore students than it does onshore international students (NCVER estimates there are around 44,000 students offshore enrolled in Australian TAFE courses and AEI figures indicate around 33,000 international students are studying at TAFE in Australia).

However operating offshore is complex and ensuring partner teaching staff members have qualifications in their field as well as a teaching qualification is problematic to both assess and supervise. Victorian TAFE International (VTI) is an incorporated association of TAFEs in Victoria that work internationally and it has produced a Discussion Paper called '*Supervision and Moderation for Offshore Delivery: VTI Guide to Good Practice in Transnational Education*'.

The aim of the 12-month project was to provide VTI member institutes with a set of options to draw upon in order to meet the AQTF requirements in relation to 'qualified teachers' as they apply to overseas delivery.

The Discussion Paper highlights the practical difficulties of working with teachers who may be qualified in a different system and yet still require the Certificate IV in Training & Assessment. It raises questions regarding the lack of flexibility of current AQTF requirements in relation to operating offshore. It asks: what makes a good TAFE teacher overseas? How do we evaluate current competency of teaching staff that are based in China? How do we supervise local teaching staff? How do we ensure that the outcomes of our courses are equivalent in China to what a student would receive here in Australia?

It is financially and practically challenging to provide the Certificate IV in TAE offshore. This paper will summarise the Discussion Paper and its key findings. In addition, it will speak to the process of developing the Discussion Paper collaboratively amongst 16 independent TAFE institutes and dual sector universities in Victoria.

Introduction

Victorian TAFE International (VTI) has been in existence for 12 years as a network of managers of international programs across TAFE Institutes and dual sector universities in Victoria. With only two exceptions, all Victorian TAFEs engaging in international education are members of VTI. It is a subscription-based organisation and operates a small secretariat to oversee its various professional development activities.

VTI members work together to provide professional development activities for international staff members and to share best practice in international activities and programs. More recently we have embarked on an agenda of sharing our intellectual property across organisational boundaries. This has been a slow and sometimes painful journey, but a most rewarding one and today I am going to talk about the latest such collaborative project. But first you may be surprised to hear just how big international education really is. Across all sectors it is Australia's third largest export industry. It is Victoria's largest export industry. It is larger than tourism, earning around \$5.4 billion in 2008/2009¹

International VET is big business in Australia. By the end of 2009 there were more than half a million international students studying in Australia. Just over one third of these - 232,475 (AEI 2010) were enrolled in a VET course in Australia. Most of those students study at a private RTO with a small percentage (14%) of international students studying at TAFE in Australia.

But this is just one side of the story, because TAFE is also active in providing courses in other countries. Australian TAFE Institutes have around 44,000 students studying their courses in other countries (NCVER 2009). Almost all of these students in other countries are studying an Australian award qualification. So let's think about that...how does that work? The vast majority of these students are Chinese, studying in a Chinese classroom, being taught by a Chinese teacher and perhaps an Australian teacher (or the Chinese teacher is supervised by an Australian teacher).

Thinking about this situation you can imagine all manner of complexities and issues arising. Do they teach in English, are resources available in English, are workplace standards the same as here? Are student expectations the same as in Australia? Are class sizes the same? What are the risks of training in this remote way? What are the consequences of different cultural attitudes to cheating? Why are students in other countries undertaking an Australian qualification? Do they understand our CBT system? Do the teachers understand it? How can we demonstrate that we are still providing a high quality offering in other countries? Despite the many questions raised by this activity, perhaps the future of VET lies in this very connection with the global training environment? Perhaps skilling for the future means being able to meet the needs of trainees in a broad diversity of settings, not just in Australia, but in other countries too. Are we ready for this future?

TAFE Institutes in Victoria are at the cutting edge of this new enterprise of global VET. They are ahead of the regulators in that they are already providing training with partners in many countries and they are dealing with the complexity this brings with limited

¹ http://export.business.vic.gov.au/export_home/export-sector-capability/education/about-the-victorian-education-industry

guidance. They are also working within a system designed for an Australian environment. They have to face audit of the work they do according to the criteria of an Australian VET qualification.

So having set the scene I now want to tell you about the work that VTI collaborated on.

Our Collaborative document: Supervision & Moderation for Offshore Delivery

Having worked collaboratively on producing a best practice guide to transnational education in general in 2009, the Offshore Special Interest Group of VTI agreed that in 2010 it would spend time working collaboratively to further investigate an aspect of providing VET overseas that particularly concerns members. That is, how to ensure high quality teaching of students, maintain the integrity of Australia's VET system, whilst at the same time providing training which meets local needs and is respectful of local teachers and local education environments. The collaborative project aimed to determine good practice in assessing the competency of partner teachers and develop a model of moderation to ensure that best practice occurs in the teaching and assessment of offshore programs. Along the way, members also agreed that there were many 'grey' areas where good practice is not clearly defined in the context of training offshore.

Initially, the project aimed to provide advice to IBSA (through the Victorian TAFE Association) on its deliberations in relation to the recent review of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. The IBSA (Innovation and Business Skills Australia) is the Industry Skills Council, which oversees and advises the NQC (National Quality Council) on any changes required for the vocational education and training teaching qualification, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. However, over months of collaboration, it was decided that the best route forward was to provide examples of best practice in teacher supervision and in moderation of teaching for VTI members only, in the first instance. The Association has discussed, debated and modified the document through 6 drafts over a period of 12 months of collaborative work. It should not be forgotten that 16 independent and competitive VET providers came together and shared their knowledge and their procedures with each other to provide a document of use to all members. This is of itself a unique achievement.

The aim of the project remains the same - to provide members with a strategy or a set of options or activities to draw upon in order to help meet the AQTF requirements in relation to 'qualified teachers' and the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment/Education (TAE) as they apply to overseas delivery.

When teaching AQTF qualifications in another country all the same standards apply to the work as occurs in Australia. The AQTF requires registered providers of accredited vocational education and training programs to ensure that their staff members – those delivering and assessing programs – meet specified standards. Standards in programs offered under the banner of the AQTF offshore must be equivalent to the standards expected of programs offered in Australia. Trainers and assessors' competence and currency must be established, verified and monitored. If a trainer does not have these competencies, he or she must be directly supervised by someone who does.

The key means of ensuring quality of teaching in VET is the requirement that all trainers and assessors undertake Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. In 2010 this qualification was reviewed and the National Quality Council (NQC) endorsed a modified package in May 2010. The modified package still does not take full account of the

situation when training and assessing overseas. It is not possible, for example, to deliver this qualification overseas and omit elements of it that are purely relevant to the Australian vocational education and training context.

In Victoria, the State Regulator for schools and VET is the Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and it has recently upgraded its Guidelines for Registration of VET providers. The new Guidelines include two that relate to teaching and assessment.

The provider must demonstrate that it is able to monitor course quality, externally moderate student performance and drive continuous improvement in course delivery.

The provider must demonstrate that it has measures in place to prevent and detect cheating and plagiarism amongst its students and to deal appropriately with any instances of these practices.

So it is clear that VTI member TAFEs work in a strict regulatory environment. Managing quality in transnational environments, which are culturally very different to Australia, and where English is the second language, is challenging. The document that we produced together provides a flow chart showing the steps in a moderation procedure for courses offered overseas; it has examples of checklists, templates and policies regarding teacher supervision and also moderation of course offerings. These documents have been generously shared between member TAFEs to ensure good practice. However for the purpose of this presentation, of greater interest may be an outline of the debates and discussions that occurred between member providers as we embarked on this collaborative work. In addition to providing the checklists and proformas, the resulting document aims to discuss some of the more complex means of achieving quality specifically around teaching, including moderation and supervision of teaching when delivering programs offshore. Along the way, we struggled with several key issues that make the teaching aspect of offshore activity complex. These issues are described below.

Creating Partnerships Where Each Party Is Valued

VTI members take the view that when working with partner providers in other countries, they are aiming to forge relationships that will last. Working with a partner necessarily means dealing in a fair and open manner, treating the partner as an equal in the endeavour and valuing the skills and experience of the partner. The emphasis in the AQTF on the strength and superiority of the Australian system of competency-based training can make overseas partner relationships complex. For example it is hard to explain why a Chinese teacher who is highly skilled, has recognised teaching credentials as well as currency in his/her field must undertake an additional Australian teaching qualification in order to teach local students in an Australian qualification.

VTI is working with other bodies at the moment to undertake a mapping project whereby provincial teaching qualifications in China can be benchmarked against the competencies required in the Certificate IV in TAE, so that locally qualified teachers may more quickly and easily gain RPL (recognition of prior learning) before undertaking the TAE. VTI members believe that this issue is an unforeseen consequence as VET expands and undertakes activities in other countries. The Australian system is meant for Australian standards and conditions.

Peer Review

A related matter comes to the fore when in country teaching staff must be supervised when they are not TAE trained. VTI members wish to acknowledge the culture and training system that these trainers have come through, whilst at the same time applying the rigorous standards as expected of an Australian qualification. There is a level of complexity in providing support, guidance and in monitoring the teaching technique of local teaching staff and in finding Australian qualified teaching staff to undertake this work with sensitivity and cultural understanding. VTI members prefer to emphasise peer review of all of their offshore teaching staff and a collegiate approach to the work, rather than consider the Australian way the 'best way' and that Australian staff 'know better'. There is much we can learn from our partners about how to provide a positive learning environment for local students and how best to incorporate local practices and priorities. There are examples in the Appendices of our document of how VTI members try to achieve this. In particular we recommend the adoption of a 'peer review' process which one member TAFE uses. It offers its in-country trainers the opportunity to provide feedback on the Australian trainers or supervisors. This is done for the purpose of bringing both sets of teachers closer together and demonstrating that each has something to learn from the other. The form helps to bridge any cultural gaps. In this case, in country teaching partners give feedback to course leaders about the support, follow up, supervision, moderation and advice given to them by Australian staff.

Internationalisation and Maintaining Australian Standards

VTI members working overseas are at the cutting edge of vocational education. They are providing an Australian qualification in a local society and economy where much of the taken for granted aspects of the qualification simply do not apply. The work is complicated also by the need for the partner to meet local accreditation requirements. There are currently no guidelines in place to assist providers working offshore as to how to deal with these conflicting demands. A good example of the complexity of the issue is that providers have been required under the AQTF for one course to teach to the Victorian Timber Framing Code in China. VTI members work collaboratively to determine good practice in these 'grey' areas, but maintaining a balance between ensuring a positive learning experience for local students and maintaining the integrity of Australian qualifications is not easy to achieve. VTI members believe it may be timely to undertake high-level discussions about the lack of flexibility in Australian based qualifications for overseas application.

Competency or Grades

Getting the balance right between maintaining the integrity of Australian qualifications and also meeting local needs is well illustrated in the conflicting demands of overseas students – who often expect graded assessment – and the general requirement of CBT (Competency Based Training) to provide a student with a result of 'competent' or 'not yet competent'. It is common practice in some discipline areas (notably commerce) for TAFE institutions in Australia to provide both statements of competency AND graded assessment to facilitate later articulation by graduates into higher education. Students within VTI member institutes are only eligible to receive a graded result of pass or higher for a unit of study if they have first been assessed as competent in accordance with requirements for demonstration of competence as expressed by the relevant endorsed industry/enterprise competency standards (and assessment guidelines) of a Training Package or by the learning outcomes (and assessment criteria) of the accredited course.

Within the CBT framework, there is less emphasis on assessment, moderation and validation of results, as there may be for higher education courses here or internationally. But increasingly this graded credentialing is expected overseas and requires a detailed process to ensure fairness, validity of assessment and reliability of results. The challenge for VTI member TAFE's into the future is to build robust academic moderation processes. Our collaborative document provides a flow chart of a good practice moderation procedure to guide members.

VTI member institutes control and manage the issuing of certificates upon course completion. Certificates and statements of attainment provide students with a record of their achievements in terms of learning outcomes or competencies. Providers minimise risk of fraudulent documentation by using photographs of students on enrolment, student identification numbers and records and the issuing of certificates occurs within the Australian provider. Members also have policies regarding plagiarism to minimise problems.

Plagiarism

VTI members have processes in place to monitor, detect and deal with plagiarism and we agree with the recent VRQA guidelines requiring evidence of policy and procedures on plagiarism. We define plagiarism as:

Plagiarism – means to take and use another person's ideas and/or manner of expressing them and to pass them off as your own by failing to give appropriate acknowledgement.

Cheating – means seeking to obtain an unfair advantage in an examination or in other written or practical work required to be submitted or completed by a student for assessment.

Collusion – is the presentation of work which is the result in whole or in part of unauthorized collaboration with another person or persons².

However we also acknowledge that the typical Australian academic understanding of plagiarism may not be the same in other countries and that these circumstances require us to be very clear in our dealings with local students and in country teaching staff about our policies and procedures. It adds a level of complexity to the work. For example, the expectation in China is that the successful student will be able to memorise and then repeat the wisdom of the teacher or as found in textbooks in an exam. Of course this would be considered plagiarism here in Australia. Chinese students may find themselves in the unusual situation of passing the course according to local requirements, but not for the Australian TAFE Institute.

Delivery of TAE in LOTE

While many VET qualifications can be undertaken in languages other than English, this is generally not the case for the TAE. The qualification is meant to operate in an Australian context and the entry requirements state that the candidate must have a level of competence in English language and literacy before commencement. In addition, competence in the qualification is measured in effective language, communications and interpersonal skills and the ability to write a range of documentation – all expected in English. For example, Training and Assessment candidates are expected to read and

² Source: <http://www.policy.monash.edu/policy-bank/academic/education/conduct/plagiarism-procedures.html>

interpret Training Packages, develop and document learning programs and assessment tools, present information, facilitate in a number of contexts using a range of skills, and prepare various records and documents (IBSA 2010)³.

It is also not possible to deliver this qualification overseas and omit elements of it that are purely relevant to the Australian vocational education and training context. However, IBSA (the body responsible for the development of the VET teaching qualification) acknowledges that there may be occasions where the TAE could be delivered in LOTE. It advises providers to contact their State VET regulator, which may under certain conditions allow for delivery outside of Australia and delivery in a language other than English (LOTE), with a proviso that the qualification has been delivered in a LOTE.

Benchmarking and Articulating TAE Internationally

To meet Australian requirements, VTI member institutes ensure that staff with management responsibilities offshore have a clear understanding of the assessment process. Many ensure that the Course Leader in the partner institution has the Certificate IV in TAE, while others have an Australian trainer and assessor located on site for periods of time.

However, VTI members feel it may be timely to consider the TAE in a broader international context for vocational education and training. It may be useful (for example) to consider aligning and benchmarking the TAE with similar vocational qualifications overseas. The UK NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) has 5 levels of attainment and fits within the overall British National Qualifications Framework (see <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/home>). In addition, the Singapore system of vocational training (Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications System) has recently been benchmarked internationally to indicate its level of equivalency with other international qualifications. It has recognition with training institutes and articulation into higher education training courses.

While currently the Certificate IV in TAE is the minimum teaching qualification, it is of itself compulsory and does not articulate to other teaching qualifications. There is also a Diploma of TAE, but there is no graduate entry teaching qualification for VET in Australia. The TAE may benefit from development as a Graduate Certificate level qualification. A Certificate IV level course requirement to enter the professional arena of vocational teaching can be perceived as insufficient to support the professional status of a vocational educator. A graduate certificate level qualification also fits more 'neatly' into a master's structure, which is now common for tertiary level educators in Australia and many other countries. The recent report by Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan (Wheelahan & Moodie 2010) of the LH Martin Institute recommends similarly that the Certificate IV in TAE becomes 'nested' in higher qualifications and that the next time it is reviewed, that the Certificate IV TAE includes a greater emphasis on broader knowledge of pedagogy, classroom management, understanding learners, student diversity, and student engagement. VTI member institutes would like to see the qualifications and skills of teachers who have come through a different system more fully recognised within the Certificate IV.

³ Source:

<http://www.ibsa.org.au/Portals/ibsa.org.au/docs/hosted%20documents/project%20docs/TAE10%20FAQs%20190510.pdf>

VTI Response to Issues

VTI members have spent 12 months considering these issues (highlighted above) as they relate to the complexities of training for Australian qualifications, in particular with regard to ensuring quality of training and assessment offshore. The resulting document has a statement of VTI policy; it has a suggested moderation flow chart, definitions of assessment, of plagiarism, of supervision of trainers and course moderation. It also has several examples of how to achieve quality. These examples include

- A form to record in country teacher employment history
- Trainer skills matrix
- A supervision plan (mentoring program for in country trainers)
- Moderation Policy and Procedures
- A form to validate and record moderation meetings and decisions
- A Peer Review form (where trainers from Australia are reviewed by their counterparts)
- Plagiarism policies

The collaborative project is unique in that TAFE providers have come together outside of their organisational boundaries to share ideas, good practice and examples of how they each try to demonstrate their commitment to quality of training and assessment offshore. This sharing required members to be open about the way they each undertake quality provision offshore, whilst not knowing how their own approaches compared to others.

Although the expectations are that training under the AQTF will conform to a quality standard, there is little guidance available to providers to show how exactly quality may be achieved in foreign lands. The move of VET into offshore markets has occurred, perhaps faster than policy makers have expected. While VTI has no authority or desire to influence top-level policy makers, it does hope to assist members in ensuring quality and by speaking about our work to inform others of the collaborative work that is occurring to make TAFE sustainable in the future.

Conclusion

The collaborative efforts of VTI members to tackle, discuss and debate their own approaches to providing quality offshore training has led to the VTI raising for discussion a number of issues more broadly related to skilling the global workforce for the future.

Members have raised the issue of credentialing and the expectations world wide for grading, which is internationally understood and valued. They have considered the complexities of maintaining the high quality of an Australian qualification whilst also respecting the education systems of other countries and the possibility of learning something new about vocation training from their experience. Currently the Australian system suggests that there is not much to be learned to improve on our CBT approach. Finally the VTI collaboration has led to the raising of awareness of the need to consider the training qualification of VET trainers and assessors and if it is adequate as a professional qualification in the global economy.

NCVER (2009) *Delivery of VET Off Shore by Public Providers 2007: Report on a consultancy undertaken for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*. Australian Government.

Wheelahan, L & Moodie, G (2010) 'The quality of teaching in VET: Options paper', Quality of Teaching in VET project, Australian College of Educators.