

PATHS TO PROMOTION

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This survey was undertaken in February 2011 of Head Teachers and Special Program Co-ordinators in TAFE NSW, and those who either aspired to be Head Teachers or managers who had once been Head Teachers. The survey was sent out to some 1200 respondents across TAFE NSW, and when closed on 18 February, there were 420 responses, around a third of the number of Head Teachers in TAFE NSW. Given it was a busy time of year, we may have been able to gather more responses a little later in the term. 85% of respondents said that they were currently Head Teachers or Special Program Co-ordinators, and an additional 30 respondents said they were currently acting in Head Teacher positions.

The aim of the survey was to provide a basis for a paper entitled 'Paths to Promotion' which focused mainly on the current skills and capabilities of Head Teachers, their current and future challenges and the qualifications they would need. It is a follow-up to the work we undertook during 2010 on 'Raising the Bar on VET Teacher Education Qualifications', where over 500 TAFE teachers responded and overwhelmingly said that they needed tertiary level teaching qualifications to do their jobs effectively.

TAFE Head Teachers have been identified as holding possibly the most critical positions in TAFE NSW, in which they undertake both leadership and management roles. This frontline role has been described as "where the rubber hits the road as far as doing business is concerned" (Mulcahy 2003, p.57). In his 2009 research 'Head Teacher Voices', funded by the TAFE Teachers Association, Stephen Black detailed the concern of Head Teachers that they were not recognised and appreciated in their roles. As one of the respondents to his survey said, "I love my job but am frustrated constantly by unrealistic expectations". We wondered whether anything had changed in almost three years, but in the main we wanted to focus not on the jobs but whether Head Teachers believed they had the skills and capabilities to effectively undertake the jobs as they saw them, and what skills and qualifications they might need in the future.

It is about the future of the Head Teacher role, and as such the data collected may provide some useful advice to TAFE management and the State Government. It is not however about the current industrial agreement that operates in TAFE NSW and is under review. Consequently we hope to be able to ask similar questions of frontline managers in some relevant private RTOs in NSW, to consider any possible similarities or differences.

The survey is separated into four sections: General information, Qualifications, Skills and Capabilities, and Issues for Head Teachers. We wanted to know which aspects of the job they saw as being most important, what they saw were the challenges for the future, the qualifications they currently had, and what skills and capabilities they thought they might need to continue developing in their roles. The survey and this report are also very timely in also picking up on the work of John Mitchell and John Ward on Advanced VET Practitioners, and the Productivity Commission's report on the Vocational Education and Training Workforce.

General Information

Of the 420 responses, 41% were from males and 59% from females. 61.7% of responses were from Head Teachers between 50-59 years of age, reflecting the current age demographic of TAFE teachers. 7% were 60 or over, and 6% were 39 and under. As a consequence of their age, the issues of succession planning, casualisation and recruitment were important for many respondents.

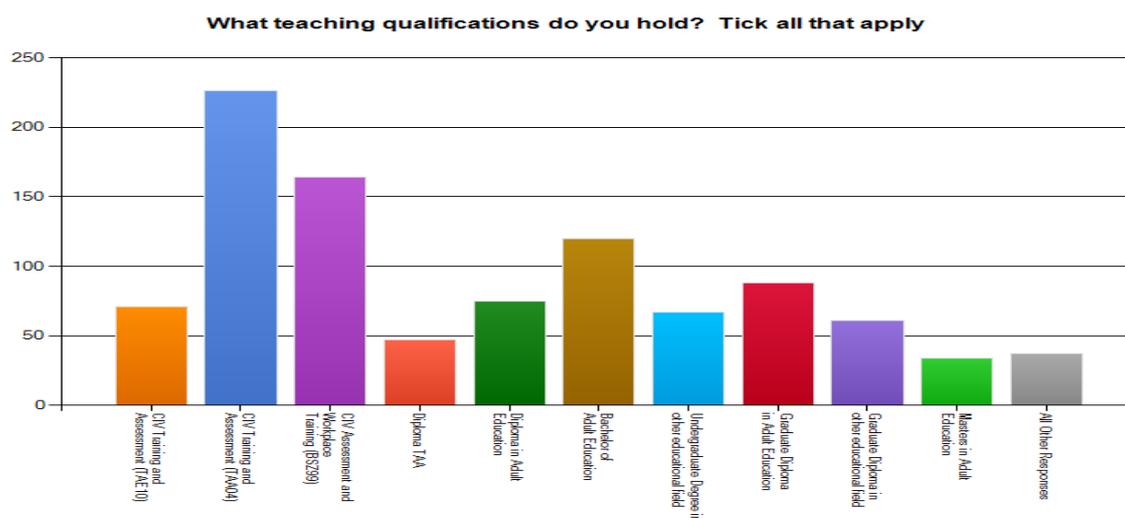
The respondents represented all Institutes roughly in proportion to the size of the Institute. 55% were the only Head Teachers in their sections. Of the teachers who answered the survey, 75% had acted as Head Teachers, and almost all Institute Managers who responded had been Head Teachers. Special Program Co-ordinators were included in the audience for the survey as their positions have generally been considered equivalent to Head Teachers.

About three quarters of the Head Teachers who responded supervised over 10 teachers in their sections, with 23% supervising over 20 teachers, giving some indication of the numbers of part time casual staff in their sections.

The respondents represented all vocational areas, roughly in proportion to the size of these vocational areas in TAFE. The areas of Access, Business, Construction, IT, Health and Welfare all had strong responses.

Qualifications

In answer to the question as to which year they completed their most recent educational qualifications, 64% said since 2005, and 85% had undertaken an educational qualification in the last decade. Most held the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment – 57%, and 18% had already gained the new Certificate IV from the Training and Education Training Package (TAE 10). Of those who had the most recent CIV, most already had the earlier CIV or the CIV (BSZ), and 25 had all three. In drawing together the responses to the teaching qualifications, 62.6% of respondents had post graduate qualifications, over 50% an educational degree and 62% Diplomas. (see graph below)



Considering that many respondents would have multiple qualifications, it is hard to draw exact conclusions, except to say that most Head Teachers had more than one educational qualification and it appeared that only 2 respondents had no graduate qualifications. Given the decision of the Department of Education and Training in 2008 around qualifications for Head Teachers, this is

not surprising, and those two may not have been Head Teachers yet. But there are still some interesting questions that arise as to the consistency and appropriateness of educational qualifications for Head Teachers, and this is addressed further in the survey.

In answering the question as to whether these qualifications were enough, 61% said 'no'. 75% of respondents commented further, and the comments overwhelmingly said that these educational qualifications were not about the leadership roles of Head Teachers. Many would of course be referring to the CIV, but others to their post graduate qualifications in adult education or vocational education and training. Some felt no one qualification could provide all the skills you needed as a Head Teacher, and others itemised what they saw as being some of the most significant parts of the job to emphasise how varied and difficult it was.

One such quote was:

“The role of Head Teacher includes HR management and team management skills, planning and project management skills, marketing and commercial activities, managing finances and resources. None of these are educational skills.”

Another made the point: “Uni quals give underpinning theory and framework but the Head Teacher role is very specific to TAFE administration. It also requires political judgement and people management skills which are not taught in these courses”.

Overall the view appeared to be that the educational qualifications they had were good for teaching, but not for administration, management or leadership.

When asked what other qualifications might assist you in your Head Teacher role, most picked up on those aspects of the job and said they also needed qualifications in management and human resources. There were 160 responses on this type of qualification. A qualification in accounting and finance was also identified by 38 respondents, and 25 wanted a qualification in leadership and frontline management. A number were also concerned about their computing skills and marketing skills. A number also wanted mentoring skills. There was strong support for a higher level qualification which was not identified, a TAFE specific course and a course especially for Head Teachers. Added to that 21 said they wanted an induction course as Head Teachers. One respondent put it this way: “A special program tailor made for Head Teachers incorporating the skills and knowledge needed by Head Teachers e.g. business skills, management skills, financial planning, budgets, people skills etc.”

Part of the reason for this paper was to look at qualifications needed to be a Head Teacher. At the same time we wanted some idea of career progression for Head Teachers, and whether they believed they would need additional skills and capabilities to take on a further promotional position. The response as to whether they might apply for a non teaching management role in TAFE was about 50:50.

When asked what skills and capabilities they might need for such a role, the responses included:

- time as a Head Teacher
- strategic management
- innovative skills
- Masters in educational leadership/ a leadership program
- opportunities to act in such positions/work experience/mentoring
- whole of business focus
- experience outside the industry area

- organisational management
- understanding of the influences on education/understanding of government and its mentality/knowledge of the external environment
- good people skills

The point was made by a number of respondents that there are similarities and differences in the roles, and that TAFE should recognise this and plan for it. One respondent said about skills and capabilities: “I would put a high priority on integrity and wisdom, as well as ethical and honest communication. I think such managers need to have a grasp of educational issues, and be able to see the *big picture*”.

Skills and Capabilities

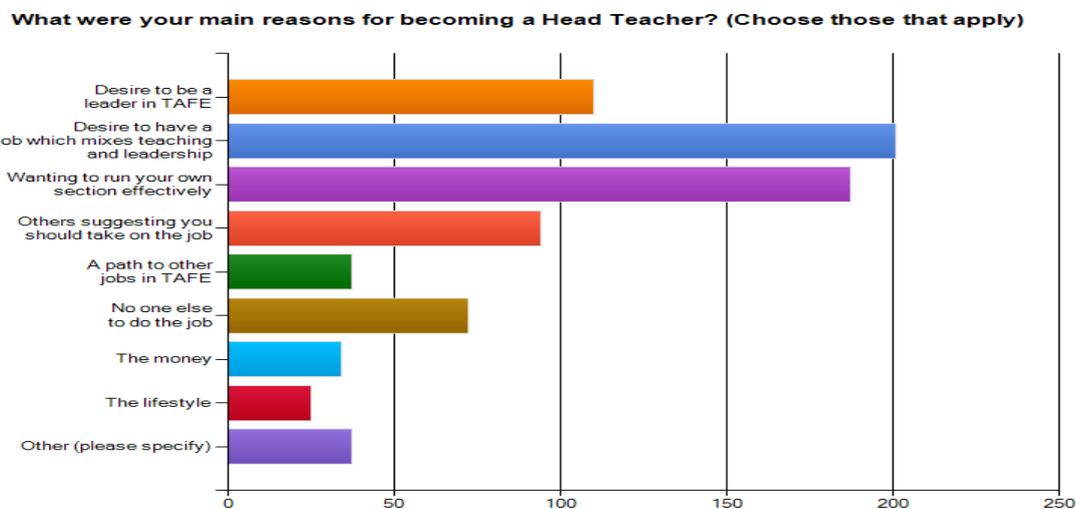
This next section of the survey focussed on a number of specific issues: the main reasons they became Head Teachers and whether this had changed; how they saw the role; how they would change the role and their challenges for the next three years; and skills and capabilities to face those challenges. In other words, we wanted to find out more about some of those skills and capabilities that many had already identified as needing for the job. We deliberately asked about what they saw as being the most important aspects of the job, and some respondents drew out attention to the fact that the way they saw the job and the way some management saw it, were two different things. This is one of the reasons for wanting to know why they took the job in the first place – did they want a job that was about management, finance and systems, or had they seen the job as something different?

When asked to select all the reasons they became a Head Teacher the most popular responses were:

- the desire to have a job which mixes teaching and leadership – 62%
- wanting to run your own section effectively - 57%
- desire to be a leader in TAFE – 33.7%

This then dropped down to:

- others suggesting you should take on the job – 28.8%, and
- no one else to do the job – 22.1%



The responses to this question demonstrate strong support for the educational leadership role of Head Teachers, and the desire to be both a teacher and leader of a TAFE teaching section. This is a theme that runs through many of the survey responses, along with the desire to do the job effectively, i.e. the job as Head Teachers see it. The following two quotes further highlight this perspective about why they became a Head Teacher. It was about “having a strong belief in the TAFE product and wanting to be a part of the future directions of TAFE” and “another challenge after a fulfilling teaching role”.

When asked whether these reasons still apply, 69.9% said yes, and 13.5% no. 16.6% said some of the reasons still applied. When asked why, there was a mixture of responses, obviously depending upon whether they still really enjoyed the job or had become disenchanted with it. The responses included: feel I’m doing the job well and love the teaching; there is some uncertainty about my continued position; the job is challenging; there are immense workload issues; enjoy engaging with industry; the role is different from the actual job; and, I am not able to do what I feel needs to be done. A number of respondents said they either wanted or planned to regress, and others felt that nobody else would do the job and they were stuck with it.

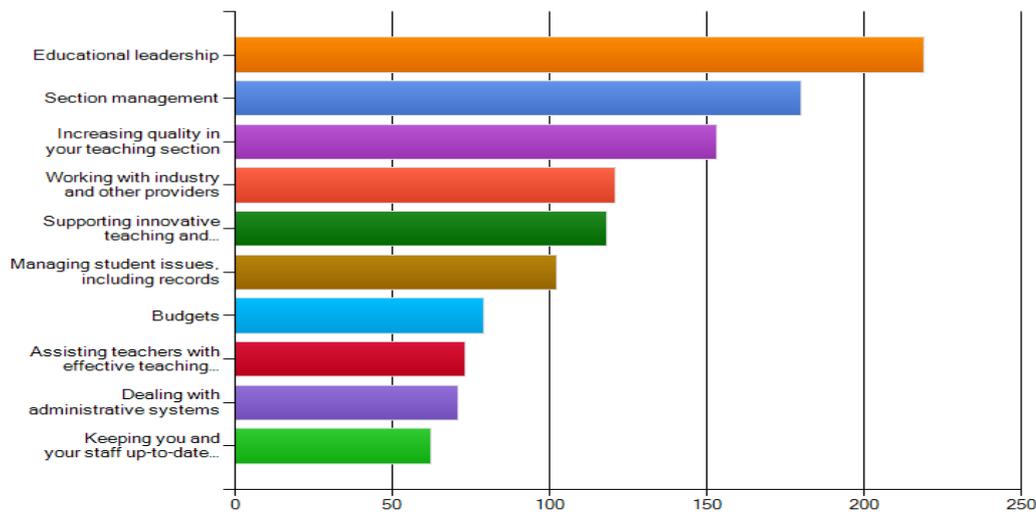
The following quotes represent these different points of view:

- “I have been a Head Teacher for 17 years. The job has changed. The role in the section is still fulfilling and valuable, but the pressure from senior management and the lack of understanding of the realities in the section make it very difficult”
- “I like the combination and responsibility, and the opportunity to be creative”
- “Because the Head Teacher role gives me the opportunity to make a big contribution to my students and community”
- “I’ve regressed to a teaching role having become exhausted by the demands and frustrations of the Head Teacher role. I’m much happier now and have regained a balanced life style and am regaining my health”
- “This is such a dreadful job nobody will take it on. They see the amount of work I have to do on top of my teaching load, and with the erosion of technical and clerical support the job of Head Teacher is very difficult”.

Respondents were then asked to identify what they saw as the most important aspects of their role and to choose five issues from the list given. In this list of 27 issues, we attempted to cover the main aspects of the job ranging from educational leadership, to budgets, to entrepreneurial skills, to dealing with student issues and networking with other Head Teachers and sections.

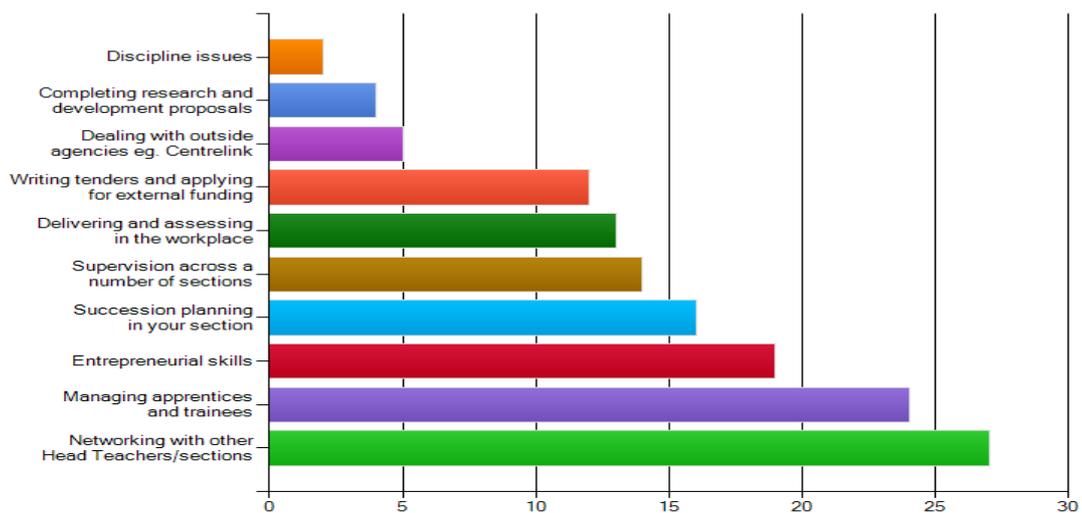
The five most popular answers show an interesting range of jobs (see graph), and indicate the importance that Head Teachers give to quality and leadership, teaching and learning, although many acknowledge later on that these are not the aspects of the job that they sometimes spend the most time on.

**What do you see as the most important aspects of your role? Choose the five (5) top issues.
(Requires at most five (5) responses.)**



The most unimportant aspects of the job appear to represent areas that might be at the edges of the job and/or aspects of the job that not all Head Teachers need to undertake all of the time. They are represented by the graph below:

**What do you see as the most important aspects of your role? Choose the five (5) top issues.
(Requires at most five (5) responses.)**



When asked whether Head Teachers and their sections would benefit from further developing their skills and capabilities in the areas identified, the overwhelming answer was yes. Examples of these benefits included:

- a more effective teaching workplace
- to help the section grow
- the section would benefit from the Head Teacher being able to concentrate on educational needs
- the ability to have professional conversations with colleagues
- better management and financial skills
- leadership and developing skills to support others
- technical currency
- being able to refocus on quality teaching not systems compliance

They also commented further on some of the skills and capabilities they would develop, and said that the benefits would give them time to mentor and be mentored, to be more innovative in their teaching and learning, to network and develop communities of practice, and to be constantly learning as teachers and leaders should.

The following are quotes, and represent once again the diverse views about further benefits to the section of developing their skills and capabilities:

- “the section would benefit from head teachers being able to concentrate on educational needs”
- “probably not. All the other aspects listed are part of the job so even if I developed my skills I’d have little time to use them”
- “time to mentor and be mentored to improve quality, time to plan and implement projects”

The next question asked the respondents that if they had the opportunity to get rid of 5 tasks, what would they be. The answers were fairly clear:

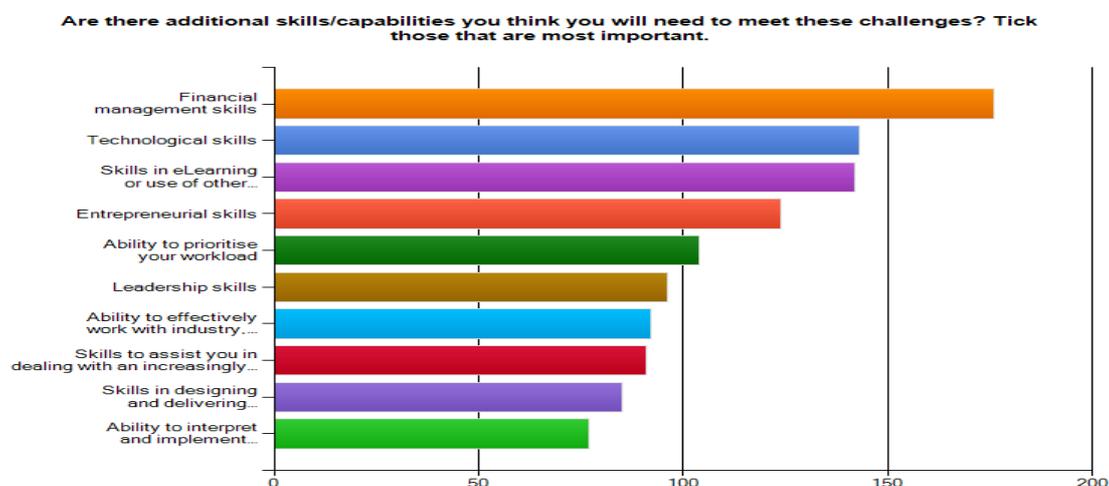
- dealing with Systems, including SAP, TPD, TIPPA, ATRs and data entry – 195 responses
- administration and paperwork – 83 responses
- marketing/commercial/promotional work – 56 responses
- budget and finances – 52 responses
- audits/ roll books/records/AQTF – 47 responses
- research and development of tenders, and applications for external funding – 45 responses
- replying to requests from management/reporting/management issues – 34 responses
- meetings – 33 responses
- CLAMS/setting up rolls/results – 33 responses
- enrolments/MEVI/paperwork – 27 responses
- dealing with student records/course inquiries – 23 responses
- supervision of staff/Annual Reviews/recruitment of staff – 27 responses

It is fairly obvious that Head Teachers would like to relinquish tasks that are time intensive, but that they see as contributing little to the quality teaching and learning they referred to above – the time to mentor and be mentored, and to keep learning. Many of these are also the tasks that other research such as Stephen Black’s ‘Head Teacher Voices’, identified as being able to be most effectively performed by clerical staff thereby freeing up the Head Teacher to focus on educational matters.

Given the responses earlier in the survey, it is no surprise that the 3 most challenging areas over the next three years are seen as being: finance and budgets – both the systems and the lack of funding; marketing/commercial activities/consultancy/applying for external funding; and technological changes and new systems. Succession planning was the next most highly rated, obviously reflecting the staffing challenges that many sections are facing. This was followed by staff shortages, support for new staff and assisting teachers who may not have tertiary level teaching qualifications. E-learning/online /flexible delivery also rated fairly highly, followed by compliance and audits.

The next group included dealing with Training Packages, curriculum and course development, and also dealing with diverse student groups. Changes to government priorities, increased workload, doing more with less, changes in section hours and profiles, and changed working conditions also received a fair number of responses.

When then asked about the additional skills and capabilities they might need to meet these challenges, it is no surprise that the following were identified in this order: (see graph)



There were additional comments that included: job interviews, where to access funding and political lobbying.

The responses to these questions need to be taken into account by TAFE NSW, in providing the opportunity for Head Teachers to undertake a variety of courses that include financial management, but also the updating of technological skills. Entrepreneurial skills and leadership skills appear to focus on qualifications that reflect important parts of a Head Teacher's role but are not covered in low level Certificate IV or Diploma TAA or TAE qualifications. There is definitely a message being given in 'ability to prioritise workload' being so highly rated, and it emphasises what we have known from previous research that the workload of Head Teachers is too high.

Issues for Head Teachers

In the first question in this section, respondents were asked to identify 5 issues of most concern and their responses were aggregated. The issues of most concern were workload with 264 responses, funding with 217 responses and TAFE systems with 209 responses. TAFE management was considered an issue, followed by need to bring in own funds to run courses and competition with other providers. This was followed by facilities and equipment. These issues had all arisen earlier in the survey and reflect concern with workload and lack of government funding to ensure the delivery of quality teaching and learning.

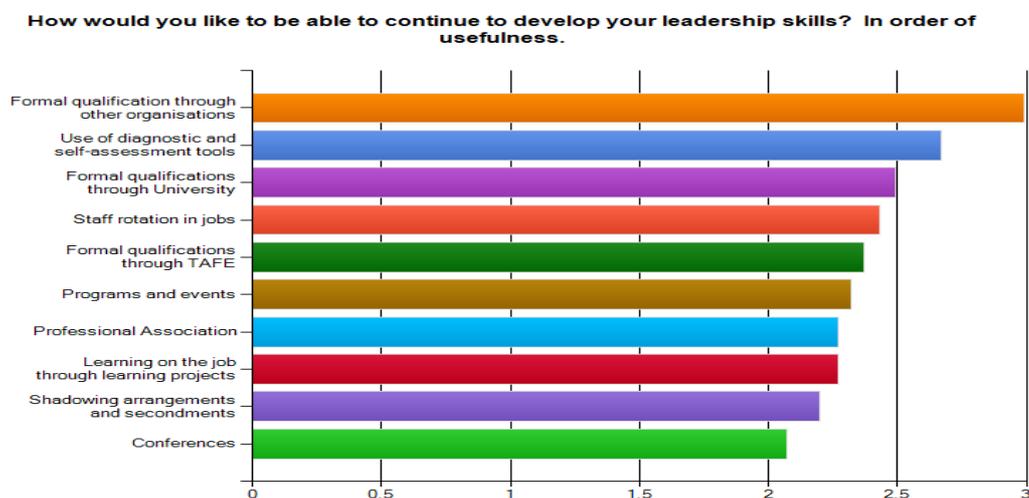
Additional comments were added by respondents and these included: timely maintenance and repairs, lack of IT support, lack of computers, paperwork overload, lack of qualified teachers, generic managers, courses not being advertised, too many actors, need for more classroom support, managing students who come to TAFE without basic skills, restrictive and time consuming policies, ever changing Training packages, and loss of Curriculum Centres.

70.4% of respondents agreed with the statement that educational leadership was the most important part of their role. There were 117 comments on this question, and they included:

- it is important but other areas are encroaching
- overturned by business administration

- more important to have sound administrative and financial skills
- main reason I took the role
- leadership in the broader sense too
- not enough time to be an educational leader
- most satisfying aspect of the job
- not the part we spend most time on
- it is the difference between an average section and a good one
- more a financial manager now
- becoming an increasingly entrepreneurial role
- as important as other factors
- anybody can do the administration. It is important to know about the industry to effectively teach it

When asked how they would like to continue to develop their leadership skills, formal qualifications rated the highest, whether through other organisations than TAFE, university or through TAFE. Programs and events rated highly with professional associations and learning on-the-job through learning projects, next. The on-the-job learning was also reflected in the high response to staff rotation in jobs, which was seen in the earlier response to promotions to management positions. The fairly high ranking of use of diagnostic and self assessment tools, could at least in part be a reflection of the current work of John Mitchell in a number of TAFE NSW Institutes. It was interesting that coaching and mentoring from others in the workplace was the lowest rated, whereas it had been mentioned in a number of earlier questions as being of benefit, but may instead have been picked up in the shadowing arrangements and secondments. (see graph below)



In finishing up, Head Teachers were asked how satisfied they were with their job. 63% were satisfied or very satisfied, (44.9% satisfied) whereas 24.6% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (6.5% very dissatisfied). 15.6% could take it or leave it. This perspective is reflected in all the comments about the good parts of the job, as opposed to the workload issues already identified.

There were 144 other comments, which reflected issues such as concern about workload and time to do the job properly; some wanting reduced teaching hours in order to be an effective section manager; the need for proper training for the job; many calls to be able to return to the core business of a Head Teacher's role; the need for job satisfaction; and the lack of recognition and reward for an increasingly difficult job.

Some critical quotes included:

- “I see huge potential benefit to the organisation if we work and make decisions together. Being told without real consultation has led to a very unhappy and unmotivated team”
- “TAFE does not value its staff these days as its most important resource, making economic decisions without considering the impact on staff and students”
- “The job has become more administrative, and takes me away from my educational leadership role”
- “Not enough hours in the day to do everything properly and teach the hours we are supposed to”
- “Satisfied but frustrated that the role has changed significantly of recent years with no consideration for the added demands that has put on Head Teachers”
- “Mostly I am very satisfied with my job. I love classroom teaching and the management side. I feel I have the best of both worlds in that regard”
- “I’m leaving TAFE, as not enough time for students now”
- “Head Teachers are no longer educational leaders. They are admin managers who are left to run their own sections by competing with other colleagues and colleges for students and funding”
- “Not enough time to be a good teacher and a good manager”

In looking back at Stephen Black’s report on ‘Head Teacher Voices’, it is disappointing to see that so little has changed. The concerns of Head Teachers then are the same concerns now – too little time to carry out the important parts of the job, with unimportant administrative tasks and use of unwieldy systems taking up too much time.

Do they feel equipped to continue to meet the challenges of their changing roles? Many Head Teachers continued to demonstrate the need for professional tertiary qualifications relevant to vocational education and training, but most also wanted qualifications that addressed their particular role, and gave them skills and capabilities in educational leadership and effective management of their sections.

Linda Simon and Annette Bonnici
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