

QUALITY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: WHERE DOES STAFF DEVELOPMENT FIT?

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary review of literature on VET staff development underpins a national project exploring links between employment modes and staff development. Three key themes are distilled: changing VET context, increasing non-standard employment and shifting models of staff development. The paper then explores issues arising from each of these themes.

Introduction

This paper presents the preliminary findings from a literature review focusing on the role of staff development for teachers and trainers in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. This review underpins a study (funded by the National Research and Evaluation Committee) examining links between the nature of staff development and quality in teaching and learning. Our work is being undertaken in parallel with a 'scoping' exercise on current programs (Choy, Pearce and Blakeley 1999) and a Delphi study on roles of VET teachers and trainers (Smith and Hill 1999). This paper focuses on three key themes emerging from the literature and their implications for the nature and availability of staff development.

Theme 1: The changing context of VET

VET teachers and trainers have been subject to unparalleled change in the last ten years. These changes have been largely driven by three core beliefs: that the VET system prior to the mid-1980s was not capable of delivering the training needed to create a flexible, skilled workforce in an increasingly globalised economy, that the competence required by the workforce could best be developed through real world activities; and that ways needed to be found to increase the skills base of the Australian workforce (Hawke 1998).

Reforms since the mid-1980s have included the following (OTFE 1998: Simons & Harris 1997):

- a competency-based training system
- development, and re-development, of national frameworks for provider registration
- development of a national system for accreditation of courses, now replaced with Training Packages
- moves to a more industry-led VET sector and an increase in provider responsiveness to client (industry) needs
- development of various systems of entry level training
- development of an open training market, with private providers and *User Choice*
- strategies to enhance access to VET for under-represented groups
- new learning technologies with implications for course delivery
- public sector reforms resulting in a range of responses including amalgamations and restructuring.

VET teachers and trainers are now working in a system characterised by increasing competition between providers, calls for greater accountability and the need to develop cooperative and flexible responses to clients. In addition, many enterprises are now involved in VET delivery across a range of industries. Teachers are increasingly involved in arrangements where their services are 'sold' to meet a variety of training needs in local industry and in overseas countries.

These changes have resulted in a fundamental shift in the notion of a VET teacher. It is difficult now to define their work in terms of numbers of classes or students. In many instances they are working part-

time. The role is being filled by persons who have a range of qualifications and who are working under a variety of non-teaching awards and conditions (ACIRRT 1998, 8).

The literature dating from the beginning of the reform process suggests that the management of change has presented considerable challenges for all involved. The pace and scope of change has been variable (Chant Link & Associates 1992; Brough 1993; Allen Consulting Group 1994). Significant difficulties have emerged in attempting to balance the needs of industry with those of individuals whilst at the same time ensuring that a nationally consistent framework was established and maintained (CEDA 1995; Bright 1996). VET staff have had to respond to micro-economic reforms which have significantly altered their working conditions and resulted in a fundamental reappraisal of their functions and role (Holland 1992, 1994; Peoples 1995). The sector is now working in an environment where a business and service orientation competes with the more 'traditional' education focus (OTFE 1998). Whilst there has been relatively strong support for reforms that show benefits for learners, other aspects such as the open training market have had limited support (Lundberg 1996).

Theme 2: The emergence of non-standard employment

The ways in which many Australians are employed have changed significantly in the past ten years. The education industry, of which VET is a component, is subject to these changes. Of particular significance has been the increase in part-time and casual employment, increased outsourcing of labour functions by enterprises, the growth in the number of self-employed people and the decline in the numbers of people employed in the public sector.

Whilst there are no specific data collected from VET providers on the numbers of staff employed (NCVER 1998, 317), recent data on employment in the education industry in general reveal some relevant information - that just over 590,000 people are employed in the education industry, nearly two thirds of all employees are women, and the industry is characterised by a fairly high level of part-time employment with approximately one third of all positions being part-time (NCVER 1998, 315).

An ABS Labour Force Study (Catalogue #6230.0) showed that there were approximately 31,400 TAFE teachers and "a further 57,500 extra systemic teachers and instructors" (NCVER 1998, 317). Many in the latter group would be teachers and trainers in private training providers and persons employed as trainers in a wide variety of enterprises. The NCVER study notes that this estimate of TAFE teachers is probably not an accurate one since it would not include those instructors employed on a casual or part-time basis and whose primary place of employment is elsewhere (NCVER 1998, 317).

Within the Australian workforce generally, and in VET specifically, these data suggest that the concept of permanent, full-time employment is no longer the usual form of employment for many workers. Curtin (1996) notes that there is a growth in "non-standard" employment which he defines as

... working arrangements that are a departure away from the 'traditional' concept of full-time, on-going work with the same employer. It can refer to work that is casual or part-time and includes temporary, fixed term and irregular work and workers who are self-employed.

Trends towards non-standard forms of employment do not appear to be merely aberrations that can be attributed to specific economic and social conditions unique to the past few years. Predictions show that over the next decade there will be substantial growth in part-time employment, only limited growth in 'standard' forms of employment and relatively strong growth in jobs which involve over 45 hours per week (Centre for Policy Studies 1998, Access Economics 1998).

A small-scale qualitative study undertaken in 1997 (Mathers) examined the trends in employment for VET staff. Key issues arising from this study that are relevant to our current research include:

- TAFE institutes generally are increasingly becoming reliant on casual and contract staff; according to the 1996 Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics, only 58% of teaching hours were provided by full-time staff
- TAFE institutes provide a wide scope of education and training services when compared with other private providers (Fooks *et al.* 1997). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that TAFE would require a greater complement of full-time teaching staff to resource this wider range of educational services (p. 66)

- TAFE teachers are increasingly becoming involved in the delivery of VET-related courses in schools, which has implications for initial teaching qualifications of these teachers
- Several state systems have experimented with 'assistant' teaching positions for providing a limited range of teaching tasks at considerably reduced cost. These positions are usually part-time, offer a lower salary and require different levels of qualifications
- Private providers have also shown a preference for casual and contract employment as a key mechanism to facilitate quick responses to market conditions (p. 69)
- There is increasing evidence of a separation between the management and delivery of training (p. 72).

Research undertaken for the Office of Training and Further Education in Victoria (1998) provides a valuable snapshot of how current employment trends have impacted on TAFE staff development. In Victoria TAFE allocated 0.7% of gross salaries and wages to staff development in 1996. Different groups had access to differing amounts of this staff development. Management, comprising only 6% of the total staff, received one quarter of the staff development expenditure while teachers received the least amount. Teachers were more likely to make a private investment in training than any other employment category. Differences in private investment in training for teachers in various categories (part-time, casual and on-going) were not substantial, but fewer casually employed teachers undertook private training for their role. Staff development was usually delivered using traditional modes of delivery (eg: workshops), though there was evidence suggesting that new delivery models encompassing action learning and flexible delivery were beginning to emerge. Finally, responsibility for undertaking staff development rested largely with the individual employee.

Whilst this study is not able to be generalised across the TAFE sector in Victoria or beyond due to the sample size and return rates (OTFE 1998, 38), it nonetheless provides some indicative trends relating to potential linkages between employment modes and participation in staff development.

Theme 3: Shifting models of staff development

Prior to the reforms of the 1980s, VET and TAFE were virtually synonymous. Each TAFE system had a central staff development unit that offered a variety of courses. For many years, TAFE providers also offered internal basic teaching skills programs for permanent, contract and casual staff, such as the New Entry Lecturers' Methodology and Induction Course (NELMIC) and various other "train-the-trainer" programs. More recently, the Teaching and Learning package has been used extensively as part of the induction process for new staff and a means of up-skilling existing staff.

Universities have also played a significant role in VET professional development, providing practitioners with initial teacher training. In some states, attainment of various levels within teaching qualifications was clearly linked to progress through teacher salary barriers. More recently, this relationship has changed, with TAFE in some states severing such formal links and no longer offering paid leave for study or assistance in meeting fees.

A further development in staff development occurred with the advent of national workplace trainer and assessor competency standards. These have de facto become the minimum entry requirement for many teachers and trainers. There is now a wide range of training providers offering courses to meet these standards and increasingly universities are taking, or have been asked to take account of these courses in articulation arrangements.

In response to VET training reform, a number of staff development activities were developed at both state and federal levels. Examples of these programs included Implementing CBT, CBT in Action, AVTS Professional Development, National Transition Program, various National Staff Development Committee initiatives and more recently Framing the Future and Learnscope.

In contrast with earlier staff development initiatives that were derived from a skills deficit notion and used "train the trainer" models of delivery, more recent programs have used action learning, work-based learning and flexible delivery as core components. In a recent analysis of staff development programs undertaken in the 1990s, Perkins (1997) concluded that multiple programs had been offered that were not often linked in any way and involved duplication of effort (p. 6). Staff development is frequently viewed as a peripheral activity which takes teachers and trainers away from 'core' tasks, and there is often little or no support from managers/supervisors for staff development, which can limit

its impact (p. 7). Moreover, there are competing views on whether staff development is a responsibility of an organisation or an individual.

Perkins also notes evaluations that show the potential for action learning approaches to have greater impact on organisational change and participant development (Kelleher and Murray 1996). Research has shown that staff development that was planned and integrated within a planning process aimed at achieving VET objectives was more effective in achieving long-term change. Frequently in cases of successful organisational change, 'people development' was not considered a separate activity. These cases often embraced a reconceptualisation of the nature of staff development such as that recommended by Hill and Sims (1997), who contend that professional development needs to be about more than skills and knowledge. It needs to embrace the development of teachers at the professional, personal and general levels, thus providing educative experiences which are not restricted to specific current or future roles and cater for the reality that the nature of work is in a state of considerable change. Staff development thus becomes an entity that serves two functions: contributing to the broader human resource requirements of the organisation and meeting the individual development needs of staff.

Recent research into the strategic use of staff development within a variety of VET organisations highlights various approaches to staff development that have emerged in response to the changing environment. A recent study (Harris & Simons 1997) examined a number of case studies in which staff development had been successfully integrated into a change management process. What emerged from this analysis were a number of key dimensions along which staff development activities could vary, giving rise to at least four different types of staff development: just-as-planned, just-in-case, just-in-time and just-for-me. These have been reported elsewhere (Harris & Simons 1998).

Issues arising from these key themes

These three key themes raise a number of issues for those charged with the provision of VET staff development. A summary of these issues is presented here, as they impact on the 'bottom line' – namely, improved quality of learning experiences for participants.

- There is growing research evidence (Austen 1995; Wooden 1996; Curtain 1996) that part-time and casual employees are less likely to participate in training than other employees. In addition, employers with a greater proportion of part-time or casual workers invest less in training activities than other employers (ABS, cited in ANTA 1998). There is no empirical evidence to date that suggests that the VET sector might be operating any differently.
- There is a growing trend for responsibility for staff development to be devolved from central training units to the local area of work. This has in effect entailed a shift in responsibility for staff development from employer to employee. It has also given rise to a range of development models focused on the workplace (eg: action learning, work-based learning).
- Teachers and trainers appear to have struggled to keep abreast of reforms that have had a significant impact on their work. The literature suggests there is a range of development needs of teachers and trainers which have not been met including, for example, those associated with working within a competency-based system, the interpretation of standards, issues relating to assessment (Choy *et al.* 1996; Cornford 1995, 1996; Roux-Salembien *et al.* 1996; Smith *et al.* 1997) and the open training market (Kell *et al.* 1998).
- The literature suggests that strategies are needed to assist teachers and trainers to deal with the change to their role in an increasingly diverse and competitive market (Simons & Harris 1997). Effective staff development is a 'three-fold' activity - that teachers and trainers are well equipped in their technical areas of expertise, they have a solid foundation in facilitating learning in a wide range of settings and they have opportunities to develop personally and professionally (Askins & Galloy 1992, Holliday 1995). The third element is vitally important in an environment where many VET staff are 'change weary' and the prospect of further change can easily be viewed less than positively. Staff development needs to address the process of change as well as the key elements within the system which are the focus of new initiatives.
- Industrial relations agreements can affect approaches to the provision of VET staff development. Many teachers and trainers are, however, employed under non-teaching awards and agreements. More importantly, recent research from ACIRRT (1998) suggests that awards and contracts may in future play a lesser role in determining the skill and knowledge requirements for

teachers and trainers. Rather, it will be mechanisms such as Training Packages that will provide significant impetus to staff development directions and priorities.

- Workplace trainer and assessor competency standards have had a dramatic effect on the provision of staff development. A number of programs have been undertaken to ensure that all staff either complete courses in workplace training or undertake a recognition of prior learning process to confirm their competence. In many areas these standards have become the minimum qualification for teachers and trainers, thus supplanting, to a considerable extent, previous requirements for undertaking university studies. Yet the relevance of these standards for VET teachers has been questioned and this has led, for example, to the development of new competency standards for TAFE in Victoria (RCVET/VETASSESS 1998). Moreover, a recent review of these competency standards (Gillis, Griffin, Falk & Catts 1998) revealed that these standards are largely being ignored in the development and delivery of training for workplace trainers and assessors, and that there are serious doubts about levels of awareness and use of the standards in the assessment of competency for the training of workplace trainers and assessors.
- There is growing evidence to suggest that the functions of delivery and management of VET are increasingly being separated. For those in predominantly management roles, the workplace standards and recent relevant industry experience assume lesser importance. People filling management roles need a wider range of skills and knowledge aimed more at the systems level and dealing with issues such as design and maintenance of training systems, managing innovation and change, and supervision and appraisal of staff. In many respects, there may be a converging of the previously separate fields of human resource development and education.
- The increasing use of casual staff presupposes that employers will be looking for teachers and trainers who already hold relevant qualifications and experience. This has been relatively unproblematic so far, particularly with relatively high numbers of teachers from the public sector moving into the labour market. This supply, however, is limited. While it may be expected that employers will continue to provide staff development in those areas perceived to give their enterprises a competitive edge, it is unlikely they will invest in training of a more generic nature. Generic training subjects employers to the risk of staff being 'poached', thus reducing return on investment.
- Initial qualifications are only one aspect of ensuring staff are able to provide quality learning experiences. The maintenance of technical expertise to ensure relevance to industry is also a significant aspect. In the past, mechanisms such as the Return to Industry Scheme have played a valuable role. The adequacy of such approaches, especially given the increasing divide between management and delivery of VET, is an issue of debate. Additionally, for part-time staff who juggle more than one job in addition to family responsibilities, the question of participating in staff development could pose significant problems which are well beyond the issue of who will pay for those activities.

Conclusion

A review of the literature emphasises the increasing uncoupling of structured entry level training for VET staff with participation in full-time employment. In the recent past, initial training consisted of a mix of industry specific skills and knowledge, training in a university and on-job experience, usually at a TAFE college.

While industry specific expertise is still very highly valued, the pedagogical skills required by VET teachers and trainers have been questioned. What constitutes teachers' and trainers' work and how it is valued has undergone dramatic reconceptualisation as a result of massive changes to VET provision. Alternative pathways to develop teachers' and trainers' skills have proliferated. The impact of these diverse approaches to the initial development of VET staff are yet to be exactly determined. The issue of the most appropriate forms of staff development to meet both work-related and personal development needs of staff has become problematic. Finding solutions to how best to prepare oneself and maintain a high level of expertise (and so to maintain a secure foothold in employment) are increasingly being left to individuals with minimal support from employers.

The work of VET teachers and trainers is also increasingly being melded with other roles, such as human resource development and entrepreneurial work of marketing courses nationally and internationally. These changes influence employers' perceptions of the development needed by their staff.

The next phase of our research involves a national survey and intensive case study research. We believe the data captured in these activities will enable us to bring together insights from multiple perspectives to inform current approaches to staff development and to provide strategic directions for the future.

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