

# Trying to hit a moving target: A study of perspectives and practices in VET staff development

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers and trainers employed in the vocational education and training (VET) sector have been subjected to unparalleled change in the last ten years. Substantial reforms have taken place in the sector, all of which have had a dramatic impact on the nature of teachers' and trainers' work. VET teachers/trainers are now working in a system that is characterised by increasing competition between providers, calls for greater accountability and the need to develop cooperative and flexible responses to their clients.

Tight economic conditions, government rationalist policies and a changing labour market have altered the role of the VET teachers/trainers dramatically. One recent report boldly pronounces it "a paradigm shift ... in the profile of the TAFE teacher's professional relationship with the TAFE enterprise" (OTFE 1997, Vol 1:6). The most influential factors in this change arguably have been the emphasis on competency-based training and assessment, the introduction of an open training market, and the national focus on demand rather than supply. Collectively, these factors have fundamentally transformed VET's orientation from education to business and service, and shifted the VET teacher from teaching and creating curriculum more towards entrepreneurial brokering and delivery of prescribed competencies.

In this context, then, staff development today assumes a significance greater than it has ever had before. Many reports pontificate about the need for VET staff development to assist teachers/trainers cope with change and their own rapidly shifting role. However, it is no easy task. The notion of staff development is itself undergoing fundamental transformation.

This paper is based on research conducted as part of a NREC-funded, national study exploring staff development activities and modes of employment in VET public and private providers. The paper reports descriptively on the results of one component of the study, namely, the expectations of RTOs for their staff to hold or complete formal qualifications and the activities of the teachers/trainers in this area. The data are reported from two perspectives — one from the Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and the second from the teachers and trainers.

## BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The changing environment of VET has seen the number of private providers registered on the National Training Information Service database increase to over 3,000 across all states and territories. In addition, a number of enterprises are now involved in the delivery of VET across a range of industries. It is now difficult to define their work in terms of the number of classes or the numbers of students with whom they may work over a given time period. In many instances teachers and trainers in VET are working part-time. Persons filling the role of teacher or trainer can have a range of qualifications (e.g. specific trade, human resource development/management) and are often working under a variety of non-teaching awards and conditions (ACCIRT 1998).

A small-scale qualitative study undertaken in 1997 (Mathers) examined the trends in employment for VET staff that reinforced the growing presence of 'non-standard' employment within the VET sector. Specifically, it was noted that:

- TAFE institutes generally are increasingly becoming reliant on casual and contract staff. According to data from the 1996 Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics, only 58% of teaching hours were provided by full-time staff;
- Several state systems have experimented with or implemented 'assistant' teaching positions as one mechanism for providing a limited range of teaching tasks at a considerably reduced cost.

These positions are usually part-time, offer a lower salary and require different levels of qualifications;

- Private training providers, in response to the emerging reforms, have also shown a preference for casual and contract employment as a key mechanism to facilitate quick responses to market conditions (p. 69); and
- There is increasing evidence of a separation between the management and delivery of training (p. 72).

The changing modes of employment undertaken by VET teachers and trainers raise a number of issues relating to the provision of staff development (both initial and on going) for staff. There is growing research evidence which suggests that part-time and casual employees are less likely to participate in training than other employees (Austen 1995; Wooden 1996; Curtain 1996). 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 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 for professional development from the employer to the employee. No empirical evidence to date suggests that the VET sector might be operating in a manner counter to these trends.

Workforce trends for VET teachers and trainers increasingly emphasise the 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. Alternative pathways to develop teachers' and trainers' skills have proliferated. Coupled with the rise in non-standard forms of employment within the sector, the issue of the most appropriate forms of staff development to meet both work-related and personal development needs of staff has become problematic.

## THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The data on which this paper is based were obtained from two sources. Data for the RTOs were collected by means of a telephone interview survey of human resource personnel in 394 VET providers across Australia. Data from teachers and trainers were collected from a postal survey of teachers and trainers employed in 311 of the organisations responding to the telephone survey who agreed to distribute a questionnaire to small samples of their teachers /trainers.

## THE SAMPLES

### Registered Training Organisations

In the sample of 394 RTOs were 42% (n=167) commercial providers, 30% (n=117) community-based providers, 16% (n=62) enterprise-based providers and 12% (n=48) TAFE colleges/institutes. Fifty one percent (n=200) were reported to be single site organisations, the remainder multi-site. Only 6% (n=3) of the 48 TAFE institutions were single site, compared with 61% (n=100) of commercial, 59% (n=69) of community-based and 44% (n=26) of enterprise-based providers. The breakdown by state and territory is given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of RTOs: type of VET provider by state/territory**

	TAFE	Commercial provider	Community-based provider	Enterprise-based provider	Total
South Australia	6	17	9	6	38
Victoria	12	29	37	15	93
New South Wales	4	32	25	15	76
Northern Territory	3	4	4	1	12
Western Australia	9	22	12	8	51
Queensland	13	47	22	15	97
Tasmania	1	7	5	2	15
Australian Capital Territory	0	9	3	0	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>394</b>

Figure 1 presents the proportions of training providers offering various levels of qualifications to clients. These data show that, at every level, higher proportions of public than private institutions provide these qualifications, particularly so at the level of Diploma and above.

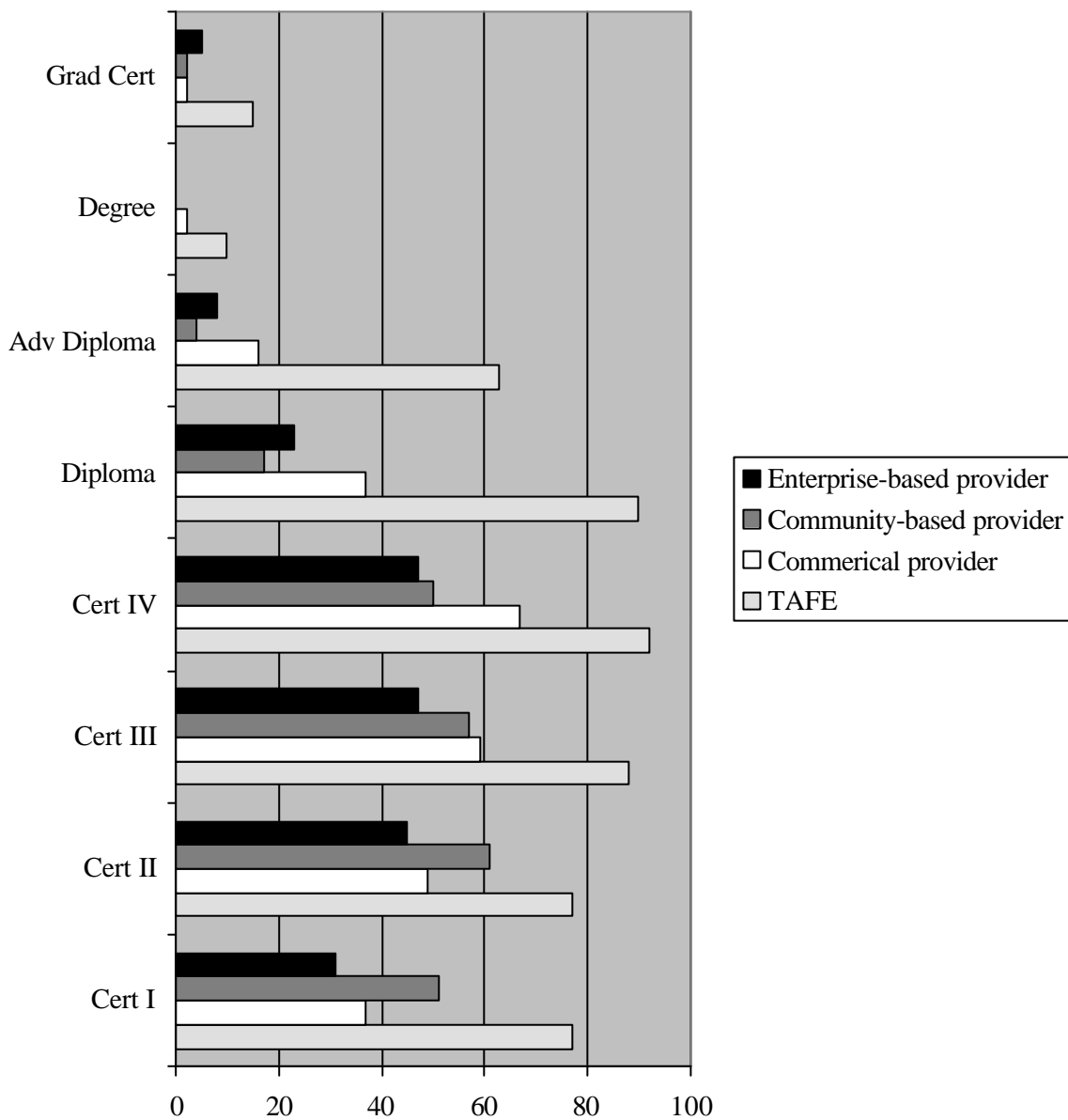


Figure 1: Type of qualifications offered x type of provider

### TEACHERS/TRAINERS

The sample of teacher/trainers was fairly evenly divided in terms of gender (47% male, 53% female). Almost 53% (n= 361) were employed on a permanent basis with 23% (n = 159) employed on a contract basis, 20% (n = 135) on a casual/sessional basis and 4% working as self-employed contractors (n= 28).

Twenty seven percent of the sample had been employed by their current RTO for two years or less. Of this group, only one third had been employed in permanent positions. (n = 59). In contrast, over 80% of those teachers and trainers who had been working for their organisation for 11 or more years were employed in permanent positions.

Almost 55 % of the sample were employed in the TAFE system. Permanent staff represented the highest proportion of respondents across each type of provider (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Mode of employment x type of RTO**

Type of organisation that distributed questionnaire	Permanent		Contract		Casual/seasonal		Self-employed contractor			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
TAFE	190	51	112	30	69	19	2	1	373	101
Commercial provider of VET	39	54	7	10	16	22	10	14	72	100
Community –based provider of VET	63	47	27	20	37	27	8	6	135	100
Enterprise-based provider of VET	23	66	4	11	3	9	5	14	35	100
Other	43	69	7	11	10	16	2	3	62	99
Total	358	53	157	23	135	20	27	4	677	100

The predominant fields of study in which the teachers and trainers worked were business/administration (n=127), multi-field education (ESL, literacy, numeracy) (n=125), health/community services (n=103), computing (n=78), and service/hospitality (n=65). TAFE staff were concentrated more than private staff in architecture/ building (7% cf. 3%), surveying/ engineering (10% cf. 4%), hospitality/service (12% cf. 7%) and arts/humanities/social sciences (12% cf. 5%). Private staff were more involved than TAFE in the four areas of health/community services (21% cf. 12%), ESL/literacy/numeracy (21% cf. 17%), education (13% cf. 6%) and computing (15% cf. 10%).

A noticeable trend in the data is the shift in employment patterns in various educational fields across the years of service. In the case of the teachers/trainers appointed in the last two years, the appointments were most numerous in business/administration (20%), health/community services (16%), multi-field education (14%), computing (13%), service/hospitality (11%) and agriculture/horticulture (7%). Very small percentages of staff were appointed in the more 'traditional' areas such as architecture/ building (3.9%) and surveying/ engineering (2.8%). This contrasts with the figures for staff who have been working a long time in their organisations (for example, 21 years or more), where heavier numbers are concentrated in surveying/ engineering (25%) and architecture/ building (10%), and lesser numbers in computing (4%), service/hospitality (4%) and agriculture/horticulture (2%). Many of these more traditional fields of study are located in TAFE. This may have implications for the workforce as these more experienced teachers/trainers retire from the workforce in the near future. This issue can be further highlighted by data that show the large numbers of older staff who are employed on a permanent basis. The finding is consistent with those noted by Malley et al. in their study examining employment trends for the TAFE workforce in Victoria (1999).

### **RTO PERSPECTIVES ON QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED FOR TEACHERS/TRAINERS**

Seventy six percent (n=299) of the providers require teachers/trainers to have a minimum teaching/training qualification at the time of their appointment, and 42% (n=167) require them to complete teaching/training qualifications after they have commenced employment in their organization. There was a statistically significant difference in the approaches of public and private providers in their patterns of recruitment. While only 54% of TAFE institutions required a minimum teaching/training qualification at the time of appointment, as many as 81% of commercial, 79% of community and 73% of enterprise-based providers required this ( $X^2 = 16.04$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Conversely, the equivalent percentages of providers requiring these qualifications to be completed after appointment were 69% for TAFE, and 41%, 33% and 44% for the three types of private provider ( $X^2 = 17.81$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

Table 3 shows what qualifications are required by these providers for each of the employment modes, both at the time of appointment and following employment in the organisation.

**Table 3**  
[See overleaf.]

**Table 3: Minimum level of Teaching/Training Qualification required by providers for each employment mode, at time of appointment and, after commencing employment (n = 299 at time of appointment; n = 167 after appointment)**

Type of qualification	Numbers of RTOs requiring a teaching/training qualification													
	for permanent staff				for contract staff				for casual/sessional staff				for self-employed contractors	
	at appointment		after appointment		at appointment		after appointment		at appointment		after appointment		at appointment	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>WPT Cat 1, Train S/Groups</b>	38	13	13	8	32	11	12	7	36	12	17	10	23	8
<b>WPT Cat 2, Certificate IV</b>	138	46	80	48	108	36	55	33	107	36	53	32	71	24
<b>Other train-the-trainer program</b>	17	6	6	4	9	3	9	5	19	6	7	4	14	5
<b>NTL</b>	5	2	4	2	1	-	2	1	3	1	1	1	4	1
<b>Workplace Assessor</b>	14	5	10	6	11	4	11	7	15	5	1	7	13	4
<b>Teaching qual. degree/diploma</b>	60	20	23	14	35	12	19	11	24	8	15	9	18	6
<b>Not applic/other</b>	58	19	31	29	129	43	59	35	122	41	6	38	179	60

\* Some providers gave more than one response within each employment mode

It is clear that the Certificate IV in workplace training has now become the minimum qualification for teaching/training in the VET sector. The requirement to have, or to obtain after appointment, a teaching diploma/degree is no longer the expectation in the majority of the organizations, even for permanent staff. It is also interesting that there is not a great difference in employer expectation across the various modes of employment - for example, even in the case of casual employees, still 107 (36%) and 24 8% organisations expect them to have, respectively, a Certificate IV and a teaching diploma/degree at time of appointment.

**TEACHER/TRAINER PERSPECTIVES:**

**FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS ACQUIRED BEFORE AND AFTER EMPLOYMENT**

Teachers and trainers were asked to provide details of the formal qualifications they held and when they had completed studying them. Respondents could provide details on up to five qualifications they had completed. These data are reported in Tables 4 and 5, firstly by the type of RTO they were currently employed by and secondly, by mode of employment.

**Table 4**  
[See overleaf.]

**Table 4: Formal qualifications acquired before and after employment x type of RTO**

Qualification*	Employed in public RTO (n = 362)				Employed in private RTO (n = 297)			
	Acquired before		Acquired after		Acquired before		Acquired after	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Certificate (other)</b>	65	18	32	9	39	13	29	10
<b>Advanced certificate</b>	8	2	8	2	5	2	-	-
<b>Trade</b>	57	16	2	1	15	5	2	1
<b>Technician</b>	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Diploma (other)</b>	44	12	11	3	41	14	13	4
<b>Associate diploma</b>	20	6	4	1	13	4	3	1
<b>Advanced diploma</b>	4	1	1	-	3	1	2	1
<b>Bachelors degree (other)</b>	133	37	18	5	112	38	9	3
<b>Postgraduate qualifications (other)</b>	23	6	30	8	42	14	29	10
<b>Workplace assessor certificate</b>	4	1	33	9	8	3	31	10
<b>Workplace Trainer Cat. 1</b>	4	1	11	3	10	3	12	4
<b>Certificate IV in Workplace Training</b>	15	4	87	24	36	12	85	29
<b>Bachelors degree (teaching, adult, voc. ed.)</b>	4	1	24	7	4	1	7	2
<b>B Ed</b>	28	8	31	9	33	11	16	5
<b>Teaching Diploma</b>	30	8	43	12	36	12	13	4
<b>Diploma of Education</b>	36	10	16	4	19	6	3	1
<b>Postgraduate qualification (teaching, adult, voc. ed.)</b>	26	7	64	18	16	5	13	4
<b>Teaching Certificate</b>	9	3	8	2	7	2	2	1
<b>Other formal qualifications</b>	66	18	67	19	82	28	65	22

\* Respondents could give more than one answer

Once significant trend to emerge from these data is that a large number of qualifications held by teachers and trainers prior to their employment in the VET sector relate to their discipline area (that is, non-teaching qualifications). Once employed, a large number of teachers/ trainers gain qualifications which further develop their teaching/training skills. However, teachers/trainers working in private RTOs were more likely to have a teaching/training qualification prior to employment (57% compared with 43%). This is in keeping with trend noted above from the RTO data in relation to the requirements of private RTOs for their newly appointed teachers/trainers already to have teaching/training qualifications prior to appointment.

Table 5 reinforces this trend. These data also show that larger numbers of contract, casual/sessional and self-employed contractors hold workplace trainer qualifications at the time of their appointment compared with permanent staff. Equally important, however, is the concentration on acquiring workplace trainer qualifications after appointment for all modes of employment. These data underscore the importance placed on these qualifications and hint at the compliance-driven nature of staff development activities to assist RTOs meet the requirements set out in previous curricula and current Training Packages.

Table 5 also highlights the apparent trend for permanent staff to continue to study formal qualifications after appointment and, in particular, to complete further study related to their teaching/training skills. This finding is further explained when data on the level of support that teachers/trainers receive from employers for staff development are examined.

**Table 5**  
[See overleaf.]

**Table 5: Formal qualifications acquired before and after employment x mode of employment**

Qualification*	Permanent staff n=351				Contract staff n=153				Casual/sessional n=131				Self employed contractors, n=28			
	Acquired before		Acquired after		Acquired before		Acquired after		Acquired before		Acquired after		Acquired before		Acquired after	
Certificate (other)	48	14	42	12	23	15	8	5	28	21	10	8	7	25	-	
Advanced certificate	4	1	5	1	4	3	2	1	5	4	1	1			-	
Trade	48	14	3	1	13	9	1	1	10	8	-	-	1	4	-	
Technician	-		-		1	1	-		-		-		-		-	
Diploma (other)	35	10	14	4	20	13	6	4	22	17	2	2	8	29	2	7
Associate diploma	17	5	4	1	6	4	3	2	9	7	-	-	1	4	-	
Advanced diploma	3	1	1	-	3	2	-		1	1	2	2	-		-	
Bachelors degree (other)	13	37	16	5	64	42	5	3	39	30	6	5	10	36	1	4
Postgraduate qualifications (other)	36	10	37	11	9	6	7	5	12	9	9	7	8	29	4	14
Workplace assessor certificate	3	1	38	10.8	6	4	17	11	1	1	9	7	2	7	1	4
Workplace Trainer Cat. 1	3	1	6	2	4	3	10	7	5	4	6	5	2	7	1	4
Certificate IV in Workplace Training	18	5	94	27	18	12	45	29	14	11	28	21	1	4	9	32
Bachelors degree (teaching, adult, voc. ed.)	6	2	19	5	1	1	10	7	1	1	2	2	-		-	
B Ed	29	8	41	12	19	13	5	3	11	8	1	1	2	7	-	
Teaching Diploma	34	9.7	49	14	12	8	4	3	17	13	3	2	3	11	-	
Diploma of Education	35	10	15	4	16	11	4	3	4	3	-	-	-		-	
Postgraduate qualification (adult, voc. ed.)	19	5	57	16	17	11	13	9	6	5	5	4	-		2	7
Teaching Cert.	8	2	8	2	1	1	-		4	3	1	1	3	11	-	
Other formal qualifications	64	18	84	24	34	22	24	16	42	32	22	17	10	36	5	18

**SUPPORT FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT REPORTED BY RTOS**

Table 6 presents the percentages of organisations reporting forms of support they provide for the various categories of teachers and trainers. It shows that financial support is most frequently available in the form of reimbursement for attendance/ registration costs and travel expenses in getting to staff development activities.

**Table 6: Types and frequency of support currently provided by organisations for staff in different employment modes**

Assistance with:	Permanent staff		Contract staff		Casual staff	
	always	s/times	always	s/times	always	s/times
fixed amount of paid time	23	30	10	14	7	11
HECS fees	10	20	2	8	3	7
cost of books/ materials	30	33	9	18	11	14
cost of attendance fees & registration fees	49	24	18	16	17	17
cost of travel to activities	44	24	15	16	14	17
other assistance	2	3	1	2	1	2

\* Remaining percentages = 'Never', 'No' or 'Don't know'

The data also reveal that most support is afforded to permanent staff and that there is very little difference in the types and levels of support given to contract and casual staff.

**SUPPORT FOR FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS REPORTED BY TEACHERS/TRAINERS**

Forty six percent of the public (n=58) and 50% (n=43) of the private teachers/trainers who were studying formal qualifications at the time of the survey were receiving some form of support from their employer. This support came mainly in the form of assistance with HECS and other course fees (especially for those in TAFE, 49% compared with those in private RTOs, 28%), followed by assistance with costs of books/materials and paid leave from work. Other forms of support included accommodation and travel costs, encouragement, information sessions, support and mentoring, resources (such as a laptop computer and software), a scholarship and time to attend.

By employment mode, 53% (n=53) of permanent staff reported employer support, compared with 46% (n=33) of contract and 29% (n=14) of casual/sessional staff. This picture of differential support by employment mode corroborates that provided by the human resource personnel, as well as the findings of the Office of Training and Further Education in Victoria (OTFE 1998). However, financial support aside, analysis of their reported reasons for undertaking formal qualifications provides insight into their motivations for study.

## REASONS FOR COMPLETING FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS

Teachers/trainers were asked to give their reasons for undertaking formal qualifications. Nine reasons were offered and respondents were asked to rank these in order of importance for themselves. Table 7 presents the ranking of these reasons by the mode of employment of the teacher/trainer.

Teachers/trainers employed on a contract or casual/sessional basis were more likely to view formal qualifications as an investment in their long-term career prospects. One assumes this to mean that these teachers/trainers were hopeful that investment in formal qualifications would lead to a permanent position some time in the future.

It is also interesting to note the different perspective on the value of formal qualifications offered by self-employed contractors. Formal qualifications for this group were viewed as a means for updating their industry knowledge and skills and as a means of maintaining their place in the job market. Undertaking formal qualifications to enhance long term career prospects was a far less important reason for this group.

These data reveal the importance placed by most teachers/trainers for staff development, particularly that which lead to formal qualifications, which will assist them in their career development. This is particularly important for teachers/trainers employed on a casual or contract basis.

**Table 7: Teacher/trainer rankings of reasons for undertaking formal qualifications x mode of employment**

Reason	Permanent	Contract	Casual/ sessional	Self- employed contractors
To acquire qualifications	Ranked 2	Ranked 2	Ranked 2	Ranked 3
To enhance qualifications already achieved	Ranked 1	Ranked 3	Ranked 3	Ranked 2
To keep up with current job	Ranked 5	Ranked 5	Ranked 6	Ranked 5
Requirement of employer	Ranked 8	Ranked 8	Ranked 7	Ranked 8
Update industry knowledge/skills	Ranked 4	Ranked 4	Ranked 4	Ranked 1
To increase job satisfaction	Ranked 6	Ranked 7	Ranked 5	Ranked 7
To get promotion in the short term	Ranked 9	Ranked 9	Ranked 9	Ranked 9
To assist long-term career prospects	Ranked 3	Ranked 1	Ranked 1	Ranked 6
To maintain place in the job market	Ranked 7	Ranked 6	Ranked 8	Ranked 4

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has reported on a subset of data from a survey of staff development practices in VET providers across Australia. It focused specifically on the expectations of RTOs for their VET staff to hold or complete formal qualifications and teachers'/ trainers' activities in this area.

The data presented in this paper have revealed quite different patterns in the approaches of public and private VET providers. One of the most important differences is in what is expected of teachers/trainers at the time of appointment. The private providers are far keener to recruit already qualified staff, while TAFE is more prepared to allow their staff to complete teaching/training qualifications following appointment.

It is also the case that TAFE institutions offer far more courses at all levels than private providers, especially at Diploma levels and above, reflecting their longer history in VET provision and their larger size. It might be argued that these higher level courses require teachers/trainers with more detailed and ongoing staff development than lower level courses. It is clear, however, that the Certificate IV in assessment and workplace training has become the minimum qualification for teaching/training in VET. This will increasingly be reinforced by the common stipulation within Training Packages for this level of qualification and by the finding in this study (though not reported here, see Harris & Simons



1999) that decisions about VET staff development tend to be influenced more by policy imperatives such as RTO registration requirements than by more traditional arrangements such as industrial relations agreements or career plans.

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