



Australian Education Union

Creating a Future Direction for Australian Vocational Education and Training – Australian Education Union Response

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Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is an industrial and professional organisation representing more than 180,000 members nationally in public schools, TAFEs and Early Childhood Centres. The AEU represents the vast majority of teachers working in the public VET sector and as a consequence has a fundamental interest in advocating for a high quality and well resourced TAFE system. The TAFE sector, as Australia's premier vocational education provider, is foundational to strategies to drive and sustain quality vocational education in Australia.

The AEU believes that the Skills Australia discussion paper *Creating a future direction for Australian vocational education and training* represents an important contribution to the continuing discussion and debate around the future of the VET sector, and the role it must play in ensuring a prosperous and equitable Australian society. We particularly welcome the canvassing of unresolved issues around quality, equity and resourcing that have been largely absent from recent public policy debates on vocational education. The AEU welcomes this opportunity to provide some feedback on key issues raised in the discussion paper.

In this submission, the AEU will focus its attention on two fundamental issues raised in the discussion paper. These are:

- The critical role of the public TAFE sector and the central role that TAFE institutes must play in driving the future Australian vocational education and training system, underpinning both its contribution to workforce development and productivity, to sectoral educational quality and in the broader development of Australia's citizens and society;
- The importance of a renewed focus on the TAFE teaching workforce, in the context of a number of well documented problems, including the impact of almost two decades of the lack of any significant or sustained investment in the workforce, unsustainably high levels of casual employment, the aging of the workforce and the need to develop collaboratively a workforce renewal strategy and the lack of any systemic approach to VET teaching qualifications and professional development.

There is an emerging consensus amongst policy makers in Australia of the critical significance of a high quality and well resourced vocational education sector to the future prosperity of an equitable Australian society. Australia's internationally renowned TAFE system is the dominant provider of high quality vocational education, yet its potential in recent decades has been gradually undermined by funding and policy neglect by successive State, Territory and Commonwealth governments. As TAFE in Australia attempts to position itself to play an important role in the emerging tertiary sector, it is increasingly apparent its institutional capability and the quality of its teaching workforce will play a crucial role in

creating positive social and economic futures for citizens of all ages and regions of the nation.

The public TAFE system – key to the future of VET in Australia

The TAFE sector remains the dominant provider of high quality and broadly accessible vocational education to the Australian community, despite almost twenty years of it struggling for ongoing funding under the crushing weight of contrived and distorting market mechanisms to frame funding of VET that has constrained the ability of TAFE to offer broad, high quality and inclusive vocational education across occupational and preparatory domains. Its ability to continue to offer such high quality vocational education is a testament to the dedication and determination of its teaching workforce who have worked hard through periods of reform and economic restraint to absorb the ever greater demands placed on their capabilities.

Unlike newly emerging providers, TAFE continues to offer a broad educational and institutional framework for vocational education, including essential support infrastructure such as student services, libraries and learner support. It is this unique institutional capability based on stable high quality teaching and learning support which has been fundamental in meeting the needs of successive generations of students who have found their future vocation and opportunities for further study as a result of their education in TAFE. Yet the contemporary brutality of the VET market has meant these support services and educational delivery itself is under extraordinary pressure, particularly threatening the chances of the most disadvantaged and under-skilled to engage in the VET system and subsequently participating in the labour force. This has the increasing potential of lessening the opportunities for those disconnected from work to make economic and social contributions to Australian society.

The Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2010* found that the public VET system was both highly efficient in terms of accepted measures of expenditure, and educationally effective with high levels of support in terms of student and employer satisfaction.

The 2010 report showed:

- Nationally, 88.5% of TAFE graduates surveyed (by NCVER) indicated that they were either in employment and/or pursuing further study after completing a VET course in 2008, compared with 85.7% in 2004;
- Of those TAFE graduates who continued on to further study, 60.6% pursued their further study within the TAFE system, while 22.3% went on to further study at

universities and 17.1% went on to further study at private providers or other registered providers;

- 62.2% of all TAFE graduates in 2008 indicated they had improved their employment circumstances after completing their course, an increase of 6.7 percentage points from 2004 (55.8%);
- 86.7% of TAFE graduates surveyed nationally indicated that their course helped (73.9%) or partly helped (12.8%) them achieve their main reason for doing the course — slightly higher than the 80.7% total reported in 2004;
- 89.1% of TAFE graduates surveyed nationally indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of their completed training. The satisfaction levels across students undertaking training with different objectives were very similar — students seeking employment related outcomes (89.1%), seeking further study outcomes (88.4%) and seeking personal development outcomes (89.1%).

This work continues in TAFE institutes across the country almost despite, rather than because of, the intervention and support of governments at State, Territory and Commonwealth level. The severe pressure that the valuable social and economic asset that is Australia's TAFE system is now under is now being publicly acknowledged.

There is a broad consensus in the TAFE system and in emerging economic and social research, that market design as the key policy tool in organising vocational and other education has failed. The policy drivers for the vocational education in the coming period must focus on the critical role played by public education institutions in the provision of coherent and high quality public goods – vocational pathways both into work, but also into further education. This is the way forward for an equitable and prosperous Australian society.

Significant changes have swept across the TAFE and VET system over the last two decades. These changes continue to have far reaching consequences for the overall capability and sustainability of Australian vocational education system. It demonstrates that the Australian TAFE system – the pre-eminent public provider in the delivery of vocational education in Australia – has suffered significantly with declining government funding for VET, which has resulted in a 22% decrease in per student contact hour funding since 1997.

Recommendation One

Restoration of Adequate TAFE Funding

The AEU therefore calls for a restoration of adequate TAFE funding as a key strategy to achieve a more skilled and productive Australian workforce. Such a restoration is essential to

driving in a real sense broadened workforce participation and productivity, particularly those most socially and economically disadvantaged. The coherent range of programs, learner support and pathways of TAFE are a critical ingredient to this objective and are largely absent from the for-profit VET sector.

Unless State, Territory and Commonwealth governments seriously address this persistent underfunding and the arbitrary consequences of government policy to impose crude 'per-hour' efficiency measures on TAFE, no strategies to improve the state of the whole VET sector will succeed. A sustained re-investment in the public TAFE system must be the bedrock upon which any broader workforce development strategy needs to be based. None of the many challenges which face the Australian economy and society can be addressed effectively unless policy makers place at the centre of their considerations a well resourced, highly regarded public vocational education endeavour, situated in an enhanced tertiary sector. A professional, well qualified and fairly remunerated TAFE workforce can drive this vision into reality.

A renewed focus on the TAFE teaching workforce

In their report prepared for the Australian Education Union entitled *Education Work and Economic Renewal*, the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney asks an important question:

Are uncertain times an asset not a liability for moving forward? ¹

The challenges confronting TAFE and vocational education in Australia, and the system's workforce open the possibility of conceiving a more productive future for the sector, and the Australian workforce and community that relies on it. It is critical that the commendable targets that the government has set for increasing the skills and capability, through the achievement of higher level vocational education and training of the Australian community are seen as opportunities for the vocational education sector to reframe its future, and to deepen the engagement of students with high quality vocational education. This can only be achieved by seriously addressing the current state of the TAFE workforce.

The development of a coherent tertiary sector in Australian education cannot and will not occur by merely resetting the regulatory environment, or by fiddling with the ideological framework of a market. We must move beyond the fragmented, utilitarian approach to VET, and to qualifications, and seriously consider how in the future work can become more than

¹ J Buchanan, J, Yu, S, Marginson, S and Wheelahan, L *Education, Work and Economic Renewal: An issues paper* prepared for the Australian Education Union, Melbourne, June 2009. p.3

just endless toil, significant inequalities in society can be overcome and the education system can work with the community to build the capability and participation of citizens.

The discussion about the future of the TAFE and VET workforce must occur in this context. The logic of building the capabilities, the esteem and the professionalism of the TAFE and VET workforce as an integral part of building a new and revitalised vocational education sector within the tertiary system is inescapable. And this project cannot occur unless the TAFE workforce is acknowledged as acting, not acted upon; capable, not degraded; and a powerful agent in a process of transformation and change.

Compared to schools, TAFE teachers face a different set of challenges: in terms of teacher preparation, qualification requirements and ongoing professional development. In many ways, TAFE teachers are dual professionals: experts in their trades or occupations as well as teachers. Moreover, TAFE teachers are developing learning for highly fluid vocational work environments that are increasingly driven by demands of innovative practice and technological transformation. This sophisticated range of professional and contextual challenges is only heightened and attenuated by the onerous expectations embodied in national policy considerations outlined above. Market reform has had the effect of fragmenting the sector, decreasing government funding, increasing reliance on fee for service activity and increasing student fees and charges.

In terms of teacher training and professional development, employers in the sector have blamed underfunding for the decline in teacher education and support. Governments and employers in the sector have resisted funding TAFE teachers getting HE qualifications, or any serious professional development.

Yet, reforms of TAFE and VET have always taken place without any clear analysis or understanding of the knowledge, skills and capacities teachers need to have, and indeed have. Instead, a key feature of reform of the VET and TAFE sector has been the problematising of teachers or the reduction of their role to that of a passive delivery agent of pre-defined national Training Packages or competencies. Therefore, the main focus has been on debating the surface level capacities teachers need to be responsive to 'customers' in a 'market', rather than students in an increasingly challenging learning environment. The introduction of training packages has resulted in a diminution in the minimum qualifications needed for permanent TAFE teachers – from the requirement that they have a HE qualification, to the Cert IV TAA (now CIVTAE). The CIV Training and Assessment Training Package (Cert IV TAA) has become the de facto minimum (and in many cases the only) qualification for people teaching, training and assessing in RTOs, including all TAFE institutes in Australia. In some states, the CIVTAA is the only qualification requirement.

In the context of marketisation and reduced funding, the new minimum is the maximum that employers are willing to fund. This has occurred without questions being asked about what has been lost as a result. These are changes driven by stakeholders *external* to education, without insights into teaching and learning. As knowledge has been stripped away in training packages, it has been stripped away in teaching qualifications – and this has problems because teachers don't have the same level of access to the theoretical basis of their practice as they used to.

Yet to build a strong and resilient capability for further high quality vocational outcomes and a stronger labour market capacity, it is essential the harder questions of vocational learning theory and practice and its implications for vocational teaching is a front and centre focus. Central to understanding this is engaging much more directly with the professional domains occupied by vocational teachers and elucidated by their teacher unions, the voices of both having been marginalised in the recent era at the expense of the knowledge teachers have about their own field of professional practice.

TAFE Teacher Qualifications – the way forward for the TAFE workforce

The transforming context of vocational (and tertiary) education represents a significant challenge to the existing skill base of teachers in TAFE. The introduction of a minimalist, workplace trainer-training focussed Certificate IV level qualification a decade ago has produced a demonstrable reduction in the capability of teachers engaged in institutionally focussed teacher education whose learning needs have been largely ignored at a sector level. The renewed challenges facing TAFE and this record of disregard for institutionally based vocational educators necessitate a fresh approach to capability development.

However, defining the nature of this approach is challenging. Teachers who are engaged in TAFE represent a heterogeneous population in ever more complex roles who increasingly need a range of capability development at the commencement and at important threshold points during their professional careers. Adding to this, widespread increases in casual and contract employment of TAFE teachers have reduced institutional willingness to engage in broad professional development and eroded reciprocal loyalties of these teachers. The extent of university provision of vocational teacher education has diminished dramatically over the last decade under the oppressive weight of the 'good enough' sense created by the Certificate IV level qualifications. Moreover, as has always been the case most teachers commence employment in TAFE with an industry qualification and experience, and with no teaching qualification or experience. Teacher education is always necessarily integrated with work, rather than preceding it as is more familiar in school education.

Recommendation Two

Collaborative strategy for TAFE teacher education for a new economy

There needs to be a new collaborative strategy between the Commonwealth, States and Territories to significantly enhance and invest in TAFE teacher education in response to the broadly acknowledged need for the more complex vocational education pedagogies required for future participation and productivity in ever more diverse and demanding vocational occupations.

This requires the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments work collaboratively with the TAFE teaching profession to develop a renewed strategy to enhance and sustain TAFE teacher education as a means of developing the vocational teacher workforce required to provide more complex and demanding vocational education required in Australia's economic future.

Recommendation Three

A new framework for TAFE teacher education

This new approach to TAFE teacher education should consider the following critical principles:

- a) vocational teachers in institutional contexts have fundamentally different and significant learning and pedagogical environments to those of local workplace trainers;*
- b) that ongoing accredited professional education, including the opportunities for mentored practice and discipline engagement, is essential to skill the TAFE teacher of the challenging future environments of vocational occupations and vocational education;*
- c) teacher education needs to include integrated formal off the job and informal on the job dimensions, to allow teachers time to critically reflect on their practice and theory with other teachers at a similar stage, and with more experienced teachers;*
- d) teaching qualifications should have embedded standards, agreed with the profession which are the aims of the qualification – the things teachers should achieve during their study and practice;*

- e) that learning design of teacher education encounter the practice of teaching, theories of teaching, learning and assessment (including theory and practice associated with specialist or industry area) and that these are approached both critically and creatively;*
- f) teachers need access to an understanding of the social, cultural and political contexts of education and teaching, and the disciplines that consider these issues;*
- g) teacher education programs are designed to reflect current and emerging labour market demands on vocational education (i.e. literacy and numeracy, green skills, innovation and creativity and OHS demands) as well as to skill teachers for the broader nature of student learning (through secondary, vocational, workplace and higher education);*
- h) it is critical for high level learning that professional capability development of teachers is not provided solely by the employer and that sufficient release time is made available to maximise the learning potential of programs;*
- i) an increasingly diverse society necessitates an expanded focus on teaching with cultural inclusion and in diverse contexts (including issues specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students);*
- j) all teacher education in TAFE needs to reflect the broader agreed sectoral paradigms of professional pathways in tertiary education;*
- k) recognition of prior learning needs to be transparent and widely facilitated to prevent teachers undertaking irrelevant learning; and*
- l) clearer recognition of high level teaching capability in vocational education needs to be integrated through a process of registration that follows the acquisition of significant experience and qualifications.*

Three phases of capability development for TAFE teachers

Given the future significance of vocational education to Australia's economic future and TAFE's fundamental importance to the sector, the time has now come for similar funding of quality teacher education in TAFE to ensure the ambitious expectations for future skills are met. Given such demands, it is essential that at least a three phase approach is taken to developing TAFE teacher capability:

a) The **first phase** should be a specifically designed entry-level TAFE teaching qualification (to at least AQF Level 4) for the overwhelming number of teachers working in institutional environments. It would feature:

- an initial teacher education program for institutionally based TAFE teaching with an initiation/intensive “how to teach” unit focussed specifically on the practice of teaching face-to-face in different settings including competency based education;
- a supervised teaching practicum that melds off-the-job and on-the-job learning;
- introduction to theories and the related practice of vocational teaching, learning, assessment and evaluative reflection;
- current and emerging instructional TAFE teaching environment;
- mentoring from experienced colleagues.

b) The **middle phase** should have the following features:

- consolidating advanced and innovative teaching and learning practice;
- theories of high level teaching, learning and assessment;
- specialist units dealing either with industry/subject knowledge, or context (online, distance, workplace).

c) The **third phase** should have the following features:

- specialist learner centred teaching and learning practice;
- advanced theories of expansive teaching, learning and assessment;
- specialist units dealing either with industry/subject knowledge, or context (online, distance, workplace).

Recommendation Four

Developing TAFE teacher capability – high quality teaching qualifications

That State, Territory and Federal governments resource and support the development of high quality teacher qualifications in TAFE and VET, based on a three phased initial, consolidating and advanced approach. Such an approach recognises the dynamic nature of the contemporary vocational education environment, where qualifications for teaching are often acquired following initial employment, and where the importance of both education and vocation are acknowledged.

Professional Development

In most part, TAFE teaching qualifications have to be acquired on the job – that is, during a teacher’s employment. Linking professional development to the acquisition of a qualification makes the activity purposeful, and captures the notion of continuing professional development. It also overcomes the risk that professional development and the development of standards against which a teacher may be registered become disconnected from qualifications.

Professional development must also recognise the role of TAFE teachers as dual professionals, whose work requires a complex knowledge of the workplace, but also of the complex knowledge base that underpins practice and the pedagogy of teaching in the specific industry area. Sectoral expert Leesa Wheelahan argues that VET teachers ongoing engagement with their specialist industry area must go beyond only maintain industry currency:

Maintaining the (changing) knowledge base underpinning practice and pedagogy associated with different occupational area is difficult when this is not included in VET teacher education programs.²

Professional development is a neglected but crucial feature of TAFE teaching, and it must be reconceived collaboratively with the profession, and properly resourced by governments.

Recommendation Five

Funded, accredited professional development

Professional development for TAFE teachers should be based on accredited qualification frameworks which contribute to the completion of the initial qualification, but also to the acquisition of higher level qualifications, at least at the current seventh level of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

² Wheelahan, L, *The quality of teaching in VET – Literature Review*, Australian College of Educators, p.21

Recommendation Six

Creating industry experience to maintain vocational currency

That the Commonwealth government work with State and Territory governments to facilitate and resource significant industry exposure for TAFE teachers to ensure continuing current occupational knowledge in the transforming context of vocational work. Such industry experience should centre on investigating and designing new teaching and learning strategies and learning support resources which reflect innovation in the workplace.

Recommendation Seven

Funding to investigate and enhance vocational teaching and learning

That State, Territory and Commonwealth governments collaborate with the TAFE teaching profession and TAFE employers to initiate, fund and support projects which focus on teaching in vocational disciplines. This would mirror arrangements in the higher education sector supported by the Australian Teaching and Learning Council, which funds and disseminates discipline level projects to enhance teaching and learning in defined areas of significance. In addition, it is recommended that State, Territory and Commonwealth government work with local and peak industry bodies to develop a framework for funding projects which focus on innovation in the workplace and the transformation of this into the contexts of institutional vocational learning.

Registration

A TAFE teaching workforce in a modern VET system cannot be locked into (or out of) either sector.³

The accreditation of teacher qualifications and registration of teachers are crucial features of the Australian school system. In the schools sector in Australia, and in education sectors in the UK, registration is seen as an important way to define and determine educational quality, and to build professionalism. Professional bodies are essential to the development of professional knowledge and skills, and their deployment. Wheelahan argues that ‘the

³ Seddon, T et al, *Education Qualifications in the Victorian TAFE Workforce*, (Executive summary), Monash University, March 2004

establishment of a profession can contribute to increasing the skills and knowledge in an occupational area.’⁴ The development, with the profession, of mechanisms for registering teachers on the basis of the qualifications required for vocational teaching will provide the capability to allow vocational teachers to work in secondary and higher education contexts, making notions of pathways more tangible in pedagogical terms. In addition, it will critically ensure the essential parity of esteem that is indispensable to the acceptance of vocational educators within domains of secondary and higher education.

Any registration must be predicated on the standards of high level practice founded in entry and mid level qualifications and affirmed in extensive practice. Moreover, such accreditation of teachers should embody an explicit and robust requirement for continuing professional development.

Recommendation Eight

Vocational Teacher Registration

That State, Territory and Commonwealth governments engage collaboratively with the TAFE teaching profession and their union to develop a framework for vocational teacher registration that acknowledges the particular nature and circumstances of TAFE and VET teaching, and that facilitates recognition of the high quality teaching practice that occurs in TAFE.

Conclusion

It is evident to all that the challenges facing TAFE teachers over the next decade to contribute to the development of broader, higher level vocational skills are considerable, particularly given the rapid generational change this workforce will itself confront. Clearly a significant investment is essential to bring vocational teaching capability in TAFE to a level where it is able to deliver the quality of learning that provides students with the ability to negotiate emerging labour market demands and the high expectations of sustainable pathways into the new models of tertiary education.

One thing is clear....business as usual will not suffice and the dominant provider of Australia’s vocational education, the TAFE system, needs significant and immediate support to develop the teaching and system’s capability required to create the anticipated future of a high skills economy.

⁴ Wheelahan, L, OpCit. p.25