

# THERE IS A TIDE...

*or is it head in the sand  
(again)?*

‘Reforms of TAFE and VET have always taken place without any clear analysis or contextual understanding of the knowledge, skills and capacities TAFE teachers need to have.’

## Pat Forward

THE Australian VET system is about to see yet another version of its ‘core’ qualification: this time the slightly more extravagantly titled Certificate IV in Training and Education (CIV TAE). This is the third version of this qualification, which continues to desperately struggle for both credibility and relevance in the sector. The Skills Council which has responsibility for this troubled qualification, Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) in arguing the need for this ‘revised’ version of the qualification, suggests that even though the CIV TAA “had been received very well throughout the vocational education and training sector as a benchmark qualification” the new qualification had “a wider conceptual basis”. According to IBSA, “colleagues from around the country have contributed to a robust critique of the existing qualifications”. Yet somewhat surprisingly, “the basic material has, however, remained unchanged and any provider currently delivering the CIV in Training and Assessment should encounter nothing new”. So this raises the obvious question: how robust has this critique really been, given the widespread criticism of the ‘revised’ CIV TAA over the last five years and its continued irrelevance (or perhaps contrived relevance) to contexts outside those of ‘workplace training’?

Perhaps the answer lies here. Shortly after the NQC endorsed the CIV TAE, the following email was circulated to RTOs from a private training provider:

*To upgrade to the New TAE40110 from your current TAA40104 is as easy as 1,2,3!*

*1. Complete the Enrolment Form below and return to XXX Institute.*

- 2. Include a certified copy of your current TAA40104 qualification together with a Statement of Results.*
- 3. XXX will process your submission and issue your TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment certificate.*

The cost? A very modest \$250.

For many private providers of this qualification, it has clearly become impossible to elevate its purported function as an educational qualification beyond the commercial interests they attach to it. This reality is what makes this qualification precarious in the eyes of many in the broader VET sector.

The Certificate IV in TAA (and its antecedent the Cert IV in AWT) has been a problematic and narrowing qualification, preoccupied with minority workplace training settings, beset with problems around its sectoral credibility and struggling to prove any relevance to the entry level qualification for TAFE and VET teachers. The largely unchallenged hegemony of the IBSA led CIVTAA over the last decade has occurred without questions being asked about what has been lost as a result and what a more credible and educationally sound alternative may look like. Changes to qualifications requirements for TAFE teachers in the last twenty years have been 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. Contemporary VET teachers do not have the same level of access to the theoretical basis of their practice as they used to.

Reforms of TAFE and VET have always taken place without any clear analysis or



contextual understanding of the knowledge, skills and capacities TAFE teachers need to have, and indeed have. 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. The main focus of any debate has been on the surface level capacities teachers need to be responsive to ‘customers’ in a ‘market’, rather than to 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 this yet further revised CIV TAA (now CIV TAE). The CIV 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 CIV TAA is the only qualification requirement altogether. This recent revision of the TAA, and its recasting as an entry-level qualification will in and of itself do nothing to build the capacity of the TAFE teaching workforce, or establish confidence in the ability of the VET sector to hold its own in the emerging tertiary sector. This is also at a

time where the complex and expectations of high quality vocational teaching and learning has never been higher. This is something that has been entirely missed in the gentle revisions prescribed by IBSA over the decade.

The development and evolution of the tertiary sector in Australia should be framed by a focus on learning flows between VET and higher education and on vocational pathways between the sectors and between education and work. This brings into sharp relief the important role that will be played in the development of this sector by the teaching workforce in TAFE. Increased demands around learning and delivery styles, the expectations of students, and the support required to guarantee a successful and high quality educational experience for vocational students must refocus policy makers on the vocational teaching workforce.

At the most elementary level, no strategies to build the status of vocational education, or to refocus the sector on quality programs will succeed unless two critical and related things occur — the sector engages seriously with the teaching workforce and works collaboratively with it to rebuild its capacity, and the whole project of vocational education, particularly in its dominant institu-

tional form, is taken much more seriously by governments.

To build a strong and resilient capability for further high quality vocational outcomes, stronger labour market capacity and future learning capabilities, it is essential the harder questions of vocational learning theory and practice and its implications for vocational teaching be a front and centre focus of governments and policy makers in the coming period. Central to understanding this is a much more direct engagement 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. This is well manifested in the latest CIV version developed by the IBSA.

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 capability required to create the anticipated future of a high skills economy.

The AEU has produced a discussion paper on the issue of TAFE teaching qualifications. It is available at: [www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/frame.pdf](http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/frame.pdf)

The AEU and the Australian College of Educators are holding a TAFE and VET teachers conference in Melbourne on October 22, and a policy makers forum on this issue in Canberra on October 29. Details of the teachers' conference can be found on the inside front cover of this edition and at: [www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/documents/VETconf221010.pdf](http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/documents/VETconf221010.pdf) ❖

*Pat Forward is AEU  
Federal TAFE Secretary*



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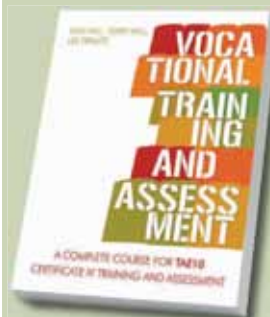
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