



A future framework for TAFE teacher qualifications, professional development and registration

A discussion paper by the Australian Education Union (TAFE Division)

Introduction

It is now being widely acknowledged that significant change will occur in the Australian vocational education and training system over the next decade. It is inevitable that such change will generate the need for a significant enhancement of the capability of teachers working in the TAFE sector, which remains overwhelmingly the dominant provider of vocational education in Australia. These changes, identified by a range of recent reports¹ include:

- the consensus amongst policy makers of the need for greater participation and higher level vocational qualifications to provide the critical vocational skills for a transforming economy;
- the significant generational loss of teaching capability with a rapidly aging teaching workforce;
- the declining number of TAFE teachers that have had access to high level vocational teacher education programs, as a result of the significant decline in the numbers of TAFE teachers being able to access higher education over the last decade with the advent of the minimalist Certificate IV level qualifications;
- the emerging tertiary education system and the need for the creation of valid and robust pathways between VET and higher education, whilst at the same time producing the necessary vocational capability for those facing ever more complex vocational work;
- likely redefinition of the complex and prescriptive Training Package system toward standards of occupational expectation that will require higher levels of pedagogical interpretation by teachers;
- the growing expectations shared by industry, students and TAFE institutions of the need for more sophisticated and flexible forms of delivery for vocational learning.

¹ Skills Australia, Lifting Quality in Training – Communique following the second Strategic Industry Forum 20 November 2009 accessed online 20/4/2011 http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/PDFs_RTFS/CommuniqueSIF.pdf.
Clayton, B Practitioner experiences and expectations with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104): A discussion of the issues, NCVER, 2009 accessed online 20/4/2010
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr08504r.pdf>

TAFE Teacher Qualifications

This 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 clear reduction in the capability of teachers who previously were engaged in institutionally focussed teacher education. The renewed challenges facing TAFE necessitate a fresh approach to capability development.

However, defining this approach is challenging. Teachers who are engaged in TAFE represent a heterogeneous population who increasingly need a range of capability development at the commencement and at important threshold points during their professional careers. Widespread increases in casual and contract employment of TAFE teachers have reduced reciprocal loyalties. 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.

Principles of new approaches to TAFE teacher education

A new approach to TAFE teacher education must recognise these critical principles:

- a) that vocational teachers in institutional contexts have fundamentally different learning and situational needs to workplace trainers;
- b) that ongoing accredited professional education, including the opportunities for mentored practice and discipline engagement, is essential to the TAFE teacher of the future;
- c) teacher education must 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) 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);

- g) 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;
- h) 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);
- i) all teacher education in TAFE needs to reflect the broader agreed sectoral paradigms of professional pathways in tertiary education;
- j) recognition of prior learning needs to be transparent and widely facilitated to prevent teachers undertaking irrelevant learning; and
- k) 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

It is significant that decisions of the Commonwealth in recent years have led to the support for ongoing professional teacher education in primary and secondary teaching (Teaching Australia) and higher education (Australian Learning and Teaching Council). Given the acknowledged significance of vocational education and given TAFE's continuing significance in the sector, the time has now come for funding of quality teacher education in TAFE to ensure the ambitious expectations for VET 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).

Any related professional development for TAFE teachers should be based on accredited modules, which contribute to the completion of the initial qualification, but also to the acquisition of higher level qualifications.

This has a number of advantages:

- TAFE teaching qualifications have to be acquired on the job – that is, during a teacher's employment, and 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 is registered become disconnected from qualifications.

Registration

Upon completion of an approved qualification at at least AQF Level 7, a teacher should be deemed fully qualified and be eligible to be registered as a high level practitioner of vocational education. This will provide the capability and parity of esteem to allow vocational teachers to work in secondary and higher education contexts, making notions of pathways more tangible in pedagogical terms.

Such registration will 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 will embody a requirement for continuing professional development.

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.

Once 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.

Pat Forward
Federal TAFE Secretary