



NSW Community Services and Health ITAB

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Submission to the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues paper

The Community Services & Health ITAB (CSH ITAB) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues paper. The Community Services & Health workforce is disparate and diverse incorporating more than 70 sectors. It is the fastest growing workforce in Australia with a recently identified growth rate of 3%/year. It employs over 10% of the workforce, 46% of workers are over 45 (9% above all industry average). It has an 87% female workforce, 52% part time workforce with a large volunteer & unpaid carer base. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (ISC) Environmental Scan 2010 highlights modelling used in Australian Workforce Futures predicting that community services will see the highest annual occupational demand in growth of all industries continuing to 2025.

The NSW Community Services and Health ITAB

The NSW Community Services & Health ITAB is a tripartite, not for profit, autonomous incorporated association which:

- provides strategic advice to NSW Government and Community Services & Health industries regarding training and education opportunities, needs and reforms
- promotes excellence in vocational training to achieve a highly skilled, professional and valued workforce
- is responsive to industry providing leadership, information and assistance to relevant stakeholders.

We provide independent, authoritative advice to guide state government and industry decisions in the attraction, development and retention of the Community Services & Health workforce.

Feedback

We concur that the extent of industry engagement in VET sets this sector apart from schools and universities. The Community Services & Health workforce has a close relationship with vocational

training. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2010 Environmental Scan identifies the skill mix across the sectors as

- 38.4% higher education
- 33.7% vocational education
- 28.0% no qualification.

Embedded in these statistics are people with more than one qualification and the 'highest' is the one registered. Using a VET pathway to gain a higher education qualification is seen as an opportunity for those who may otherwise not be able to access university study. This aspect of Community Services & Health utilisation of VET opportunities also underscores the relevance and importance of a closer and more transparent mapping of VET and university outcomes – systemic consistent credit transfer is a significant focus for the VET Workforce. In order to facilitate this we must have a VET workforce that produces confidence both in pedagogy and industry vocational outcomes.

While many may see the traditional career pathways moving 'staircase like' up the Australian Qualification Training Framework (AQTF) from school, through VET to University qualification outcomes, across the Community Services sector it is not uncommon to have university graduates using the higher level VET skills as training outcomes for professional development to enhance their ability to do their job. This supports the development of higher level qualifications and identified skill sets in our sector Training Packages to meet workforce development needs. By implication it also requires the knowledge and skills of the VET workforce to have higher level VET teaching qualifications that include attention to discipline-specific pedagogy.

The inherent flexibility of vocational qualifications also supports the professional development of workers responding to their changing job roles to meet the evolving complexity in service delivery and client expectations. This enables not just a progression 'up' the staircase from one qualification to a higher one, but building depth and broader scope of practice at a particular AQF level. Such outcomes support the valuable role played by Training Packages in the development of the national training system.

The implications for the VET workforce are significant:

- maintaining industry currency in light of rapidly changing scope of job roles and changing industry practice (In industries, such as health and community services, it is seen that RTOs do not keep pace with changes in service models, government policy and legislation)
- working closely with organisations to ensure training is relevant, meeting the needs of the individual as well as the activity and outcomes of the agency
- working with a breadth of learners – from those with university experience to those requiring LLN support needs coming in as an entry level worker
- meeting the needs of an ageing cohort of learners at all AQF levels
- recognising the learning of existing workers, mapping this into qualification outcomes and addressing gaps to enable achievement of full qualifications or identified skill sets



Standard 3 of the AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Registration means the way the VET workforce is defined must be broader than just the practitioners involved in direct training and assessment and the immediate upshot of this. To meet the minimum requirements, all RTOs must have defined processes and mechanisms to meet all aspects of the AQTF. This encompasses the broader groups as defined in the issues paper – those who provide leadership, management and support, administration, quality assurance and continuous improvement review. The scope of VET reaching across both the school and university education systems also means the VET workforce must liaise and work closely in across all systems as well as maintaining the significant industry focus.

The increasing complexity of the world in which the VET workforce operates means this review is well timed. Increasing the long term national targets as identified by COAG, requires greater VET workforce capacity. This also provides an opportunity for fly by night operators to jump in to fill the gap, taking the training dollars and delivering qualifications but not delivering a graduate who is work ready. To uphold the integrity of vocational training in Australia expanding the capacity of the VET workforce MUST be done within rigorous parameters. The gatekeepers (State Training Authorities and shortly the National Regulator) have the responsibility of ensuring the trust industry has, that their workforce will be sufficiently skilled and work ready at the end of a training period, remains. Key findings from National Quality Council research report June 2008 show that this faith is already diminished with only 16% of employers believing that a VET graduate is work ready.

In some cases employers seek to address this with active workplace training and learning structures – not necessarily becoming an enterprise based RTO but perhaps working closely with an external RTO. While the VET workforce as discussed in the paper recognises training and assessment professionals as having industry experience (emphasis first on training then on industry skills), there is a cohort of workplace-based front line workers who also carry out training as a secondary part of their role in the workplace. These too make up the VET Workforce although not primarily employed as trainers and assessors. When collecting data on the VET workforce, capturing this cohort may be more problematic than those industry people teaching (at TAFE for example) as a second or part time job. The National Quality Council research report June 2008 found the closer an employer is to the training decision making processes, the greater the confidence of the employer in the outcome.

In building the capacity and capability of the VET Workforce we recommend several current issues be addressed.

- Encouragement for indigenous trainers and assessors to address this shortage in the anticipation of increasing the engagement of and outcomes for aboriginal candidates.
- Trainers and assessors based in regional and remote areas to address the issues of thin markets and to overcome poor distance learning practice experienced by many in our sectors.
- Guidelines agreed by industry peaks and organisations of what constitutes ‘industry currency for the VET workforce’ for different industry areas integrated into Training Packages. Is there a period of industry experience that should be required before training/assessing – is it three months experience, three years, ten years? Is there an expiry date for industry currency - how recently one *worked* (rather than



has been a trainer/assessor) in the sector? Is it how often one was 'refreshed' i.e. does a training course count as industry currency if one is not working in the sector?

The 'World of VET' is complex, multilayered and its language is disenfranchising to those not 'living' in it. Consequently it is critical that additional complexity should be minimised. Publicly funded and privately funded RTOs should continue to be regulated to the same standards as they have equivalent outcomes; VET language should be standardised nationally and used consistently across the VET workforce; AQF structure should be reasonably accessible to the non VET worker. This is essential to encourage engagement of industry managers and employers, allowing them to easily communicate with the VET Workforce to facilitate outcomes appropriate to the workplace. Key findings from National Quality Council research report June 2008 indicated that employer involvement is critical to an effective assessment process.

Susan Scowcroft
Executive Director

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