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To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission to the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Study

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback, in relation to issues identified in the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues paper, issued by the Australian Government Productivity Commission, in June 2010.

AIWCW is the recognised professional body for welfare and community workers in Australia and was founded in 1969. It represents at a national and state level the interests of welfare and community workers employed within government departments, non-government social welfare agencies, self help groups, commercial and industrial enterprises. The Institute is a means by which welfare and community workers come together through national and branch meetings, enabling them to share and benefit from their combined knowledge and experience.

AIWCW acknowledges and supports the principles behind the strategy of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to develop a 'common strategic framework' to guide government policy action as regards "*workforce planning, development and structure of the early childhood development, schooling and VET workforces in the short, medium and long term*".

AIWCW seeks to provide the Productivity Commission with an overview of issues identified as having an impact on 'human capital' (Banks, 2010) in the social welfare and human services, as well as comment on selected productivity issues in the VET and Higher Education sectors. The discussion will also review structural impediments to change that impact on the capacity of the VET and Higher Education sectors in the short, medium and long term. AIWCW recommendations will be presented for consideration by the Commission in Part 2 of the present submission. The section below will review issues of concern to AIWCW that frame and inform the content of Part 2 of this submission.

Part 1: AIWCW approach, assumptions and framework

A Critical Definition: The diversity of the social welfare and human services workforce makes it difficult to "*develop a shared understanding of the scope of the workforce and for future planning (Healy and Lonne, 2010)*". A cursory review of definitions and terminology employed to characterise the social welfare and human services workforce, shows that the issues and terms are contested. Definitions reveal a wealth of difference and inconsistency in the nomenclature used to characterise workers in this sector. One generic characterisation that has value is as follows:

> *"We refer to social work and human service workers as those involved in practice with individuals, groups and communities to assess social needs and to intervene to promote quality of life through improving access to resources and services, or through the provision of social support or personal care services (*Healy and Lonne, 2010, p.7)".

AIWCW accepts this as an operational definition of the workforce at large as it clearly includes practitioners such as welfare and community workers for whom AIWCW is the umbrella organisation.

Working Together: In order to make sense of policy proposals that may arise as a result of the current inquiry, it is essential to have insight regarding the subtext in which recommendations for sectoral changes are cast and promoted. Regardless of the level at which change in the social welfare and humans services is proposed: macro, meso or micro, it is essential to appreciate that the discourse of change is frequently cast in terms that reflect dominant sectional or ideological interests (Banks, 2010; McDonald, 2006).

As such, otherwise sound policy proposals are at risk of being discounted on the basis of narrow sectional interests or for ideological, instead of utilitarian reasons.

AIWCW respectfully urges all participants in the present inquiry to ensure that narrow sectional or ideological views concerning the control and structure of the social welfare and human services in the VET and Higher education sectors, do not prevail over identifying equitable, flexible and enhanced academically credible opportunities for people to participate in the social welfare and human services workforce with a view to enhancement of the quality of life for many of Australia's most disempowered, frail and vulnerable members: regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, social status or geographical location. To make this point another way, in 2009, a disabled Australian, Kurt Fearnley (OAM) crawled the entire 96 kilometres of the Kokoda Track. On the basis of the level of difficulty of this feat, stakeholders have both capacity and resources to make the VET and Higher Education sector more efficient and responsive to national needs.

A Voice for All: The current review by the Commission implies the advent of structural change at the institutional level for all stakeholders. AIWCW sees that it is essential that social welfare and human services workers, and service users have an opportunity to engage in the debate at the institutional level through effective community based forums, and possibly via newer media, in order to ensure that key stakeholder groups are not excluded from having input into a discourse that may shape decision making in the social welfare and human services workforce for the coming decade. The terms of reference for the present study, identifies the need for consultation addressing specific needs of Australian Indigenous people and AIWCW is fully supportive of all and any measures that can make a difference to Indigenous disadvantage across all key performance indicators in the Closing the Gap Framework (2009).

Figure 1 of the Productivity Commission Issues paper (2010), the summary of the structure of the current national education and training system, maps in the broadest sense, the range stakeholders and the diversity of interests at stake in this review. AIWCW takes the view that service users or clients should

also have status as stakeholders in the current discourse. There is no reference as to how the users of community services, provided as a result of an 'improved or updated' VET system, are to be conceptualised. Is the service user a client? This refers back to an older, possibly dated model of service delivery and implies a certain status and power relationship between providers and clients. Is the service user a 'customer', which in a neo-liberal framework implies more of a commercial, contractual relationship with a service provider or is the service user accessing services seen in the context of a 'rights' discourse, mental health, disability, aged care or Indigenous health are some of the more obvious categories in this respect. The issue is not trivial, as the outcome of answers to such questions will construct, define or perhaps even constrain the professional relationship between service providers and users.

If any of the AIWCW proposals for wider sectoral, community or service user consultation are seen to be worthy of further development by the Commission, it will also be essential to ensure that mechanisms are in place to ensure how user feedback can be collected and used to continually inform policy development and implementation of change in the VET and Higher Education sector.

The Challenge of Change: Since foundation, AIWCW has played a key role in the establishment of formalised training for welfare and community workers and recognition as the body for registration and accreditation of courses designed to meet the training needs of the welfare and community worker profession.

In order to monitor the cumulative impact of change and the impact of possible future trends, AIWCW has informed its own work through use of research by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC). Data sources that have been equally critical for AIWCW have included the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER).

The data shows clearly that the social welfare and human services sector has changed. Much of the data accessed describe the consequences of change but offers less in terms of an understanding or analysis of the drivers of change.

AIWCW acknowledges and understands that service delivery and practice in the social welfare and human services has been impacted by structural changes in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes, locally, nationally and internationally (McDonald, 2006).

The Context of Change: Social welfare and human services work is shaped by its institutional context. The conditions and context of practice in the workforce have undergone significant change in Australia, as it has in many other countries. A number of structural drivers have provided the impetus for change and they have profoundly impacted how social welfare and human services work has been conceived: internally, by practitioners, managers and educators and externally, by funders, industry and service users or clients.

Key drivers include the 'economics of change': national and international trends, macro and micro economic trends that have contributed to a restructuring of the relationship between the Welfare state, service providers, practitioners and citizens; the 'politics of change': that involve changes made to the institutional and governance frameworks necessary to implement economic drivers; and the 'ideas of change': which represent challenges to sectional interests across the social welfare and human services sector (McDonald, 2006).

In a recent study, Healy and Lonne, (2010) identified key structural drivers that impact on the VET and Higher education workforce:

- *Market driven expansion of VET and higher education sectors;*
- *The marketisation of service delivery structures and processes;*
- *Altered social mandates for its traditional social welfare services;*
- *The introduction of New Public Management (NPM) and its attendant managerialist practices such as strategic planning and review, and organizational restructuring to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness into both social work and human services education and practice; and*
- *The rapid and unregulated expansion of the workforce with the employment of practitioners holding a broader diversity of VET and professional qualifications that led to a blurring of disciplinary boundaries.*

Many longstanding AIWCW members have had direct personal experience of the impact of these high level changes as they wound their way through the workplace and down to the 'shop floor' where they impacted on modes of service delivery, professional practice and client outcomes. On another level, Healy and Lonne, (2010) identified corresponding issues that arose from these changes organisational levels within the VET and Higher education levels:

- *The purported adequacy of the educational preparation of graduates to meet changing sector needs*
- *The effects on social work and human service education generally including a lowering of hitherto high academic standards*
- *The apparent lack of standardisation across the rapidly growing social welfare and human services programs, particularly the advent of a broad range of applied social and behavioural science programs*

Demand factors, due to an ageing population, and an ageing workforce has increased employment across the social welfare and human services sectors and the equally significant health sector. AIWCW concurs with Healy and Lonne, (2010) who found that "*it appears that much of the employment growth has been unplanned and reactive to pressing service need [p.59]*." The latter characteristic of the workforce has also contributed to structural problems that impact on the supply and demand sides of VET and Higher Education sectors.

AIWCW is unable to respond to all of the questions raised for discussion by the Productivity Commission. Some issues are not directly applicable to the role of AIWCW as a peak organisation. In other instances, data sources available to the Commission through the sector are much more comprehensive than our own internal resources. Data from such sources can be accessed as deemed appropriate by the Commission.

AIWCW affirms the fact there is much to be gained through consultation and collaboration between all stakeholders within the sector. AIWCW affirms that debate within the sector needs to be encouraged at all levels and that debate needs to be solution focussed and not bound to beliefs, and practices that are no longer reflective of the modern social welfare and human services sectors

Finally AIWCW is convinced that such collaboration is the key that will empower reflection on current systems within the VET and Higher education sectors, will acknowledge structural elements of the system that are working well but will also lead to identifying opportunities for innovation and new ways of working and to provide for the needs of a modern responsive workforce. The focus of this vision for the

workforce is the continued well being of service users and clients and a national commitment to social justice through education for all citizens.

Conclusion

As stated above, Part 2 of this report contains the AIWCW response to selected issues raised by the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues paper 2010.

Feedback provided to the Commission is based on knowledge of the sector gained by AIWCW as the recognised professional body for welfare and community workers in Australia. Acknowledgement is made of the extensive research into the sector workforce by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC). Particular recognition and acknowledgement is rendered to Karen Healy and Bob Lonne (2010) whose seminal report: "*The social work and human services workforce: report from a national study of education, training and workforce needs"*, informed and confirmed many of the proposals, observations and recommendations in this submission.

The AIWCW feedback is structured in terms of the major subject headings used in the discussion paper and specific feedback has provided under the key subsections of the Commissions discussion paper.

AIWCW would like to thank the Commission for offering the organisation the opportunity to providing a submission in relation to the current review of the VET and Higher Education Sectors and welcomes the opportunity to receive a copy of the final report.

Yours Sincerely,

Lynda Ford
Executive Officer
Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers

29 July 2010

PART 2: AIWCW response to the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Issues paper 2010.

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1. **Question Category:** What is the VET sector?

1.1. What are the particular features of the VET sector that need to be taken into account in this study of the VET workforce?

- The absence of one consistent set of national standards governing both the VET and Higher Education sectors across all state and territory jurisdictions.

- The demands on the social welfare and human services workforce are immense and the demand trends can be seen in the CS&HISC's environmental scan 2010. The consequences of poor or ineffective service provision can either be fatal or result in long lasting impairments to the quality of life of some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens.

1.2. What criteria should the Commission use to define the scope of the VET sector for the purposes of this study?

- AIWCW believes that the scope the VET sector is adequately covered by the overview by Lonne and Healy (2010). Key elements have been detailed as follows:

  - *The VET sector incorporates a wide variety of educational institutions including Technical and Further Education colleges (TAFE) and private (RTO).*

  - *The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) is responsible for defining and setting the standards for the education and training within the VET sector while the Australian Qualifications Framework operates under the auspice of the Australian Qualifications Framework Council and provides a national unified system of qualifications.*

  - *VET qualifications are subject to accreditation and monitoring by National Councils within specific industries (such as the National Council for Community Services and Health) and State and Territory government training authorities, and in some instances by [other peak professional bodies such as the AIWCW who accredit and monitor many TAFE Community Services Diploma programs].*

- In contrast to Lonne and Healy (2010), AIWCW believes that despite the fact that *"the number and range of social work and human services qualifications offered in higher education and VET sectors has grown dramatically over the past three decades [p.12]*, there may in fact be a point of diminishing returns where some overall consolidation and rationalisation of the programs and courses provided across the sector may be appropriate. Regardless of the title or duration of a social welfare and human services course there is a necessity for a combination of core competencies, options for specialisation to meet specific industry or regional needs as well as a common minimum standard of fieldwork experience. While there are cost benefit issues associated with the latter point, AIWCW sees that quality outcomes for service users and clients are of the highest priority.

1.3. Are there particular issues affecting the VET workforce that arise due to the increasing

overlaps between the various education sectors?

- AIWCW believes that particular issues are impacting on the VET workforce in terms of academic, professional and industry experience for VET teaching staff. This applies specifically in relation to teaching abilities and competencies in comparison to requirements for Higher Education staff whose academic imperatives appear to be largely focussed on publication and research. The anecdotal view from the Higher Education lecture theatre is that teaching and real debate of differing approaches to practice issues is simply a distraction from real academic work and that on-line discussion groups are a poor substitute for real interaction with teaching staff.

- AIWCW is supportive of the principle that skills need to be updated to reflect the requirements and structural characteristics of the contemporary practice environment. As such, the need for CPE programs as implemented by professional registration bodies including the AASW, can provide the VET workforce with opportunities for quality improvement in the short term and some assurance of a long term developmental pathway for quality standards. This can only benefit all stakeholders in the sector. Tighter standards in terms of certification of claims for RPL Industry experience for teaching staff need to be industry based and relevant to units of competency.

- AIWCW believes that there is a need for a set of standardised national criteria for RPL that applies to staff and students in both sectors. For example, in the VET sector, an applicant for employment as a teacher or student in a social welfare and human services course, is able to gain RPL for a verifiable 14 year history of fully social work supervised mainstream statutory child protection work. The same work experience has been refused credit by a mainstream Victorian Higher education institution on the basis of an internal policy that classifies work experience that is more than 10 years old as being ineligible for RPL. It appears that the same standards do not apply to the work experience of academic staff within the same institution.

- AIWCW believes that RPL or other accreditation exceptions should not be permitted for graduates of any VET courses that do not have national accreditation.

2. **Question Category:** The VET workforce within the labour market

2.1. Do you agree with the possible approach to defining the VET workforce as all employees of VET providers — including managerial and administrative staff, self- employed persons and independent contractors — but excluding government and peak industry group employees? If not, what alternative would you suggest and why?

- AIWCW is unclear why government and peak industry group staff should be excluded from VET workforce. This is particularly relevant in times of a workforce that is increasingly casualised, sub-contracted and sessionalised and where such staff move across a number of relevant areas during the course of their time in the VET workforce. It is respectfully suggested that the Commission considers whether such proposals have more to do with cost containment for training and service providers as opposed to genuine productivity issues?

- AIWCW believes that there are significant industrial relations issues associated with such a proposal that will need closer scrutiny. It is evident that there will be cost implications in

relation to changes to award based working conditions and remuneration rates but as some peak body staff are paid a minimum of at least $10000.00 less for equivalent government jobs, there is no evidence to support that improved workforce productivity within the sector will be attained through lower pay rates or the exclusion of some categories of employees within the sector.

2.2.	*The concept of an 'employee' is a matter of continuing debate. VET providers typically use a range of forms of employment, such as permanent employees, casuals or sessionals, and fixed-term employees.*

- AIWCW is not supportive of the casualisation of the workforce in this way. The arguments of flexibility and cost containment etc are about ideology and profit margins values that are at direct odds with the caring, supportive, compassionate nature of the industry. Neoliberal values are largely incompatible with the provision of care with compassion. In this respect, managed care systems found in the USA where "*routinely welfare services such as child care and disability support services are provided by large corporations (McDonald, 2006 p.74; p.105)",* where staff are 'corporate employees' and non government providers work on tight profit margins, there is a risk to the quality of standards of care we would want for the most vulnerable members of our society. Some evidence of this has already been observed by AIWCW in the aged care and disabilities sector for example where RTOs place students on welfare field placements and it is found that agencies effectively use these students as cheap labour in non welfare activities such as lifestyle and recreation or personal care activities.

- AIWCW believes that the "managed care system" is at odds with the models and values of social care taught at all levels in the Australian social welfare and human services sector.

2.3.	*Some providers also use the services of self-employed persons, such as independent contractors, on an ongoing or intermittent basis. This suggests that, in many instances, these contractors are substitutes for a firm's own employees, and could, therefore, be regarded as in-scope for this study.*

- In light of the discussion in section 2.2 above, AIWCW agrees that contractors should be seen to be in scope for this study.

3.	**Question Category:** VET, the Economy and Society
3.1.	*What key objectives is the VET workforce seeking to achieve?*

- AIWCW believes that VET has four roles (a) post secondary pathway into the workforce (b) pathway from workforce into retraining and back into the workforce (c) staged pathway for less academically able students or current workforce members to gain skills, (upgrade skills/ qualifications in the case of those already in the sector) confidence and ability to progress into workforce areas accessed through higher Ed and, (d) general Adult Ed, life long learning.

- AIWCW also believes that in addition to the demand for services within the social and human services sector, the VET workforce will need to work across sectors to meet the

challenges of increasing demand across a range of related sectors including: community health and primary health care, the COAG 'Closing the Gap framework, youth services, mental health, drug and alcohol, gambling, refugee and migrant services as well as the traditional range of services addressed by service providers with the sector including: managing the consequences of poverty, marginalisation and access and equity and then services delivered through residential care, family support, disability support, community aged care and the consequences of as a whole.

- AIWCW believes that the VET workforce needs to be equipped with a standard range of core skills competencies as well as localised, speciality skills applicable to specific sectors within the industry. The outcome of such a project is to demonstrate a national commitment to the principles of access, equity and social justice for all Australians.

3.2. *Should the workforce be assessed against its capacity to achieve those objectives?*

- Yes. Outcomes should be assessed, as should the quality of the inputs.

- Qualitative and quanitative measures are required. Measurement of performance against set competencies is no guarantee that relevant professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and values have been internalised as part of professional training.

- In community services work national standards regarding fieldwork requirements for recognition of professional status should be required of all VET courses in the social and human services sector. This may result in greater costs for providers but the benefits from the client's perspective are likely to be significant. For two year diploma courses AIWCW currently recommends a total of 400 hours fieldwork over the course. An increase to 800 hours for Vocational Placement should be included as a compulsory unit (previously called Collaborative Worker subject in CNN76) in the AQF. This will enhance the employability of any graduate whose VET provider offers training at this level. Despite initial establishment costs, VET providers stand to gain if students enrol knowing that employers see the benefits of greater practical skills.

- AIWCW is also mindful of the following caveat and feels that it is worth drawing again to the attention of the Commission: "*The sector also lacks coherent human resource strategies for matching worker capacity and qualifications with tasks (Healy and Lonne, 2010)*".

- AIWCW is unaware of any relevant data in this respect however the students, VET providers, employers and clients all stand to benefit from improved professional training.

- AIWCW is supportive of any recommendation to review and develop consistency in human resources strategies and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

4. **Question Category:** Characteristics of the VET workforce

4.1. *What are the key reasons for the apparent older age of VET practitioners relative to the total labour force?*

- AIWCWs understanding of the research into the sector supports the proposition regarding the ageing of the VET workforce. This understanding is compatible with the Commission's

own findings, and confirms that there is a significant age gap for VET practitioners relative to the rest of the workforce. Supporting evidence has also been identified through research in to the workforce by Healy and Lonne (2010) who confirm the findings of: "*an ageing workforce, with substantial growth in the proportion of workers in the 56-64 age bracket [and] high rates of workforce turnover relative to other Australian industries p. 8*"

- Some of the possible reasons that VET is not attracting younger practitioners include: the impact of government policies at the end of the 1990's which reduced security of tenure for teaching staff and increased casualisation of the workforce; and wages growth within the VET sector not commensurate with increasing skills requirements.

4.2. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, why do you think this is the case?

- AIWCW believes that key reasons for this workforce characteristic includes (a) general stability in the sector in terms of fewer Industrial relations issues and (b) the large number of staff returning to the sector from a time in the workforce to teach and train. AIWCW holds that this scenario may be more applicable to public VET providers than private RTOs whose priorities may be more driven by costs and responsibilities to shareholders.

Based on the available data, other notable characteristics of the VET workforce include:
- *a majority is female*
- *a majority is employed part-time*
- *around a third is employed on a casual basis*
- *around a quarter hold multiple jobs, also outside the VET sector*
- *five per cent work in a higher education setting*
- *around 60 per cent have a degree or higher qualification.*

4.3. *Is this profile representative of the sector overall? Are there significant differences in various subgroups*

- AIWCW is unable to comment on the composition or nature of the internal workforce of with public to private RTOs however based on data in the CS&HISC Environmental Scan 2010, AIWCW believes that the Commissions profile of the VET workforce is both representative and consistent.

4.4. Should the Commission think about particular subsets of the VET workforce? If so, how could these subsets be defined, and why do you hold that view?

- AIWCW is supportive of the use of subsets of data to better characterise the VET workforce. The degree of detail to be gained through increased data granularity will give added weight to hypotheses about the workforce and will also provide a more reliable evidence base for policy recommendations in relation to the sector and its workforce.

- AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to participate in the design and analysis of such data and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

5. **Question Category: Data issues**

5.1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the SET and Census data? Would data based on administrative collections be more useful than these datasets?

- AIWCW is unaware of much relevant, peer reviewed and independent literature that

addresses employer perceptions of the adequacy of VET or Higher Education programs to meet workplace requirements. Measuring client outcomes is a complex and involved process as it is not easy to quantify qualitative changes in the life experience of service users and clients. This complexity has been highlighted by Felton (cited in O'Brien, Whiting, Stephenson, Hinch, Pearson, Hockey and O'Malley-Jones (2005) who asked:

"How can measurement be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to both professional and client needs?(p.3)".

Despite problems in finding "*meaningful and obtainable measures of success*" (Jacobs and Weiss, 1988), a project of this nature could be informative and relevant should funding for such a study be made available to appropriately qualified, independent parties.

AIWCW believes that the reliability and validity of inferences from such research will be enhanced if it is conducted within an evidence based research paradigm. The necessity and urgency for such a research program is emphasised by the assertion of Mendes (cited in Healy and Lonne, 2010) that:

"The debate about the adequacy of preparation of social work and human service workers for practice has occurred in the context of a dearth of research on this topic [p.16]".

- AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to form a working party to develop an outcomes evaluation of this nature and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

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6. **Question Category: Demand influences on the VET sector:** Demographic and economic change

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6.1. *What emerging technological developments could significantly alter industry skill needs?*

- AIWCW understands that technology offers significant economies of scale and efficiencies across any number of vocational or industrial sectors. Regrettably it is often the case that the effectiveness of the learning outcomes derived from the use of new technology is less adequately monitored and evaluated. In relation to professional practice within the social welfare and human services sector, AIWCW believes that there is no substitute for direct hands on fieldwork experience. Evidence for this perspective has been validated in many of the reflective practice reports submitted by graduate students applying for AIWCW membership. This view has been validated by the research of Healy and Lonne (2010) who found:

"*There is substantial evidence that field placements, a substantial feature of all accredited social work and human services programs and many VET programs, provide an important bridge between academic and practical knowledge and, further, facilitate preparation for employment "p.16.*

- To this end, AIWCW endorses the primacy of hands-on skills in direct service provision and training service providers should be mindful that technology is a tool, not an end in itself as the focus of service delivery should always be on the client not the medium.

6.2. How do providers go about planning for, and responding to, demands for new skills arising from technological developments?

- Despite the clear cost savings to RTOs and higher educational providers, the benefits of education and learning through the newer e-Learning strategies remain unvalidated against workforce performance outcomes. Face to face tutorial groups have a greater learning impact by virtue of closer exchange of ideas and experience. AIWCW has anecdotal evidence that use of 'low tech' learning strategies appears to be on the wane in the higher education sector.

- AIWCW believes that the benefits of implementing new learning technologies should be evidence based. As such AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to form a working party to develop an outcomes evaluation of this nature and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

- Given this stance, AIWCW recognises that the use of new technology will entail a range of costs and benefits to providers. One issue may be greater costs to employers and training providers catering for smaller workforce groups. Less popular sectors may not get enough trained workers into their area as the work is too hard or unpopular for some other reason and so make investment decisions in new technology more problematic. On the other hand, economies of scale may be gained through widespread introduction of new technologies but unless the uses are evidence based then a new set of confounding variables may be introduced into the educational schema.

- AIWCW is supportive of recommendations to review the appropriate role of the newer educational technologies and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

6.3. Are there particular difficulties related to the recruitment or development of practitioners who are able to deliver training in new technologies?

- AIWCW understands that the combination of technical and professional technological skills in the social welfare and human services sector is relatively uncommon.

- Options that may be canvassed by industry or government may include the inclusion of additional electives in Industry Skills packages; accessing appropriate staff through enhanced salaries or conditions of service; deliberate partnerships and collaborations between human services organisations and technology providers; or developing team approaches to training where the skills of staff with technical experience are combined in a practice context with a suitable welfare or human services practitioner.

- AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to review proposals for options or development of practitioners who are able to deliver training in new technologies, or to have input into relevant content of the ISC training skills packages themselves.

- AIWCW is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

7.	**Question Category:** Sector-specific influences

7.1. *Do you anticipate that demand for VET from learners from disadvantaged backgrounds will increase in the next five to ten years? If so, what implications do you think this will have for the VET workforce?*

- AIWCW is unable to comment on the long term impact of government or COAG strategies designed to address the needs of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- AIWCW is supportive of affirmative action for disadvantaged groups and internal proposals exist to ensure that policies and practices addressing issues such as cultural safety and cultural competence are promoted in any appropriate and relevant forum available. This may also include future membership or course approvals policies.

- AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to promote affirmative action for disadvantaged groups in the VET sector and is also willing to participate in any such collaborative activity within the sector.

7.2. *What implications might a trend towards higher level qualifications have for demand for VET, and the VET workforce?*

- In principle, AIWCW has no difficulty with the concept of higher level qualifications within the VET sector. The primary qualification recognised by AIWCW is the two year Diploma of Community Services work. This qualification also requires the completion by students of an additional 400 hours for fieldwork. As such the addition of an extra year of study plus an extra fieldwork component could result in attainment of an Advanced Diploma. This then begs the question of whether the qualification should be an Advanced Diploma or a Bachelor Degree. AIWCW is aware of some tension at an industry level between the relevance or utility of qualifications that correspond to tertiary level equivalents.

- The issue of generic or specialist training is equally contested across the sector between industry, training providers and social welfare and human services practitioners. Finally there is the eternal issue of who it is that determines curriculum content (Healy and Lonne, 2010).

- AIWCW recommends a formalised articulation process from VET to university. Creating closed education and training links between VET and universities will be of great benefit to students, educators and the sector as educational pathways may be used to develop a process of linking career pathways to education to upgrade the skill base of the sector over time.

- AIWCW is aware of the long history, nationally as well as overseas, in relation to reconciliation of the competing needs and vested interests in achieving a national consensus in relation to the form, structure and content of a national framework for social welfare and human service courses.

- Given this scenario, AIWCW would be supportive of any recommendation to work towards such an aim and is also make a commitment to be willing to be a constructive, collaborative participant in any proposals to address such issues across the sector.

7.3. What implications might other shifts in delivery, in particular towards more RPL and RCC, have for the VET workforce?

- Three issues have been identified that will need to be addressed as a matter of priority. These issues have to do with limitations for Higher Education institutions to respond expeditiously to the needs of industry due to longer course timeframes; the knowledge and skill base of courses does not map well with employer perceptions of workplace need and perhaps most crucial of all (Healy and Lonne (2010), the issues have been contextualised as follows:

  "Tensions exist between some higher education providers and employers in the social welfare and human services sector and these tensions have their genesis, in part, in the lack of institutional structures for ensuring mutual accountability and consistency between educators and employers. {Healy and Lonne, 2010, p.16]".

- AIWCW believes that should jurisdictional, sectional interests or agency interests be found to be resistant to change and essentially argue for the status quo, that the Commission gives consideration to development and promotion of a reconfigured body that cuts across structures and processes that are impediments to real change and innovation.

7.4. What other key effects do you anticipate that government policy will have on the VET sector, and the workforce in particular, over the next five to ten years?

- AIWCW is aware that there is a history of unresolved tension across the sector concerning issues around professionalisation and regulation. This situation is compounded as a result of structural changes at the macro-economic level as well as the introduction of market principles into the social welfare and human services sector through government policy as well industry pressures. This has impacted on areas of service provision that have previously been relatively independent of such external influences. National regulation with levels of professional accreditation and membership for all members of the social welfare and human services sector is one option open to consideration by the Commission.

8. **Question Category:** *Business of VET*

8.1. Are training packages still appropriate as a basis for designing vocational training arrangements? Is a shift away from competency based training at higher qualification levels desirable? Might it happen in the next five to ten years?

- AIWCW does not have a specific position in relation to this issue. However, the organisation would be very interested in participating in a wider sectoral or industry forum where issues such as these can be canvassed more broadly. This in line with its role as a peak representative body for the Welfare and Community Worker profession.

8.2. If so, what implications, if any, might this have for demand for the VET workforce?

- Once again, AIWCW does not have a specific position in relation to this issue, however it is evident that a case can be made for genuine consideration of training provisions for social welfare and human services workers at higher levels. The issue of such higher qualifications should continue with the competency based model, a curriculum based model or a strategic combination of the two has yet to be resolved.

- AIWCW is committed to working with the sector in any appropriate capacity in order to ensure that new models of VET or Higher Education workforce training arising from the work of the Commission reflects the needs of industry but is also built on a sound basis of practice and research evidence.

- AIWCW reiterates the hope that the work of the Commission will continue to be informed by the voices of service users and clients through direct consultation as well as a commitment that client wellbeing is monitored through comprehensive quality assurance outcomes evaluation strategies.

9. **Question Category:** *The international dimension*

9.1. What have been the impacts on the VET sector and its workforce of the demand from international students?

- AIWCW believes that the impact of the international student group on VET has been significant. However AIWCW believes that it is too soon to assess the impact that the increase in skilled migration in the social and human services sector will have on workforce outputs or client wellbeing. Despite this, the organisation is fully supportive of the need for follow up using qualitative research to assess the impact on workforce issues and client outcomes.

9.2. Do you anticipate that demand for VET from international students will continue to grow? If so, with what further impacts on the VET sector and its workforce?

- It is expected that with the changes to the Skilled Migration scheme from 1 July, 2010 demand will be reduced at least for the foreseeable future.

- For future courses, international students should have the opportunity to complete an introductory Community and Human Services course which will better prepare them for their studies in the Diploma, and in view of the identified future needs of our sector, the Federal Government should reassess the Skilled Migration Program and its relevance for the future wellbeing of the community.

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