JOHN MITCHELL & ASSOCIATES

RESEARCH PLANNING EVALUATION

Submission to the Productivity Commission in response to the June 2010 discussion paper on the Vocational Education and Training Workforce

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Covering letter

30 July 2010

Productivity Commissioner
Education and Training Workforce Study
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Commissioner,

Response to Issues Paper on Vocational Education and Training Workforce

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the excellent set of points and questions raised in your Issues Paper.

I have set out in the following pages some responses to a range of your questions. In many cases I have attached a supporting document. Wherever possible I have limited my responses to areas where we have undertaken research.

I write in my capacity as Managing Director of two research companies that focus closely on workforce development in vocational education and training (VET):

- John Mitchell & Associates (JMA), a company established in October 1992 and specialising in research, planning, evaluation, strategy and innovation in relation to workforce development in VET. Please see http://www.jma.com.au

- JMA Analytics Pty Ltd, a company established in April 2010 following two years as a business arm of JMA, focusing specifically on quantitative measurement in workforce development. My partner in this company is psychometrician John Ward. Please see http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx

I look forward to supporting your important work in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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Issues Paper Section 2: VET in the education sector and the economy

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

I would like to table these background points:

- It is also important to note that the Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008) was not a review of the VET sector and the sector – with twice the enrolments of the higher education sector – warrants a similar review that would provide a full description.
- It is difficult to define the VET sector although Moodie (2008, *From Vocational to Higher Education. An International Perspective*) has provided a highly useful set of alternative definitions.

The Issues Paper (pp.4-7) correctly draws attention to the diversity of the VET sector and the vast range of influences on it, including industry and local communities. Some features of the VET sector that I would add to those identified in the Issues Paper are as follows:

- the tension for governments around opening up the VET provider market while maintaining quality standards
- the tensions for providers between meeting the common good and being entrepreneurial
- the tensions for practitioners between deepening their professional practice while being encouraged by some parties that the entry-level Certificate IV is a sufficient qualification for a career in VET.

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

I suggest that this study focus on:

- practitioners for whom teaching, training or assessment – in relation to accredited national qualifications – is part or all of their job
- professionals who manage such VET practitioners and the organisations or units (e.g. the training department of an enterprise RTO) for whom they work
- administrative and other support staff who support such practitioners.

Are there particular issues affecting the VET workforce that arise due to the increasing overlaps between the various education sectors?

Our research shows that there are increasing complexities for VET managers to handle, including managing the interface between VET and schools and VET and higher education (e.g. Mitchell, ed. 2008, *Authentic, sustainable leadership in VET*).

Our research also shows that VET practitioners (trainers and assessors) only have 80% of the skills they currently need to undertake their work (Mitchell & Ward 2010, The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development). Requiring VET practitioners to also work in Schools or in higher education programs adds further layers to their requisite skills base.

Do you agree with the terminology used in this paper to refer to the three broad groups of employees (box 2) identified in the VET sector? If not, what alternative would you suggest and why?

While there is still much value in the NCVER (2003) categories of VET practitioners (trainers and assessors), VET professionals (VET practitioners such as managers and support staff) and general staff, those categories and definitions only sit comfortably on a large VET provider such as TAFE Institute or large private provider. For instance, within the category of VET practitioners there are many different sub-groups such as institution-based RTO employee, enterprise-RTO employee and freelance trainer or assessor. One sub-group that is easily overlooked yet is performing a critical role is the workplace supervisor for whom training and assessing may only be a small proportion of her or his daily work. Another is the VET in Schools practitioner.

Please see a discussion of these issues in Attachment 1, *Just who is a VET trainer and assessor?*

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?

Not all members of the VET workforce are employees of VET providers. Some work for community colleges, universities or enterprises. The enterprise based workplace supervisors and the VET in Schools practitioners are two sub-groups who are key parts of the VET workforce. There are also increasing numbers of people who are developing learning materials, including online materials, who do not work for a VET provider but supply them with resources.

What key objectives is the VET workforce seeking to achieve?

While the description of VET objectives in the Issues Paper (pp.9-11) is familiar and widely accepted, there are ongoing tensions about how to meet bold objectives such as satisfying the diverse and changing needs of individuals, community and industry. COAG has a right to set objectives for the VET sector, but it is fair to ask whether VET providers and practitioners are receiving sufficient funding to meet such objectives, in particular funding for professional development.

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

On the surface, yes.

But when looking below the surface, questions arise about whether sufficient funding is available for the VET workforce to upskill to meet these ambitious objectives. The two main professional

development programs for VET practitioners, Reframing the Future and LearnScope, both of which received around $4m per annum, were discontinued in recent years. Curiously, significant federal funding has continued to flow to national professional development in schools and higher education (Australian Learning and Teaching Council). While State and Territory Governments do fund VET sector professional development, it is unusual that VET as a national sector does not attract specific and targetted national funding for professional development. Such national funding could to cater for the fact that many providers operate nationally, across State borders; and industries and economies pay no heed to State boundaries.

What metrics should be used to measure achievement of those objectives?

Most of the objectives set by COAG for VET are too broad to be measured. VET would benefit from a review similar to the Bradley Review of Higher Education that could determine some objectives that can be measured.

Is information available, relating to those metrics?

Course completion rates are of great relevance to the COAG objectives. Regrettably, the collection and reporting of data about student completion rates is far from ideal. Please see a relevant literature review, stakeholder review and a critique of the national VET data system we prepared recently for Service Skills Australia: http://www.serviceskills.com.au/completion-rates-for-the-service-industries

Please see:

- *Why measure non-completions?* http://www.serviceskills.com.au/sites/default/files/Literature%20review%20for%20SSA%20project%20Evaluation%20Frameworks%20for%20VET%20version%202%20July%202010.pdf

- *VET stakeholder views about completions* http://www.serviceskills.com.au/sites/default/files/JMA%20Paper%20for%20SSA%20on%20Stakeholder%20views%20on%20evaluation%20frameworks%20for%20VET%2021%20July%202010.pdf

- *A Review of Issues with AVETMISS and VET Statistics* http://www.serviceskills.com.au/sites/default/files/JMA%20Review%20for%20SSA%20of%20issues%20with%20current%20AVETMISS%20and%20VET%20statistics%20Version%209%20July%202010%20-%20for%20WEB.pdf

These documents acknowledge that both COAG and NCVER are aware of and seeking to improve the national VET data collection and reporting systems.

Issues Paper Section 3: An overview of the VET workforce

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

Anecdotally, the highly attractive superannuation schemes (the so-called 'old schemes' which mostly closed in the early-mid 1990s) and working conditions agreed to in the 1970s for the public provider (e.g. 49 days leave plus 11 days of public holidays) were so compelling that many practitioners were tempted to stay for their entire career. While this resulted in TAFE in retaining experienced staff, which is a positive for TAFE, it accidentally created a spectacularly large problem: a lack of novices in those organisations to replace those about to retire.

Quantitative studies by JMA Analytics in the last nine months confirm this lack of novices in VET providers.

It is important to say that age should not be viewed as a negative. And more can be done to tap into the expertise of people who have had lengthy careers and experienced, as modelled so well by Box Hill Institute.

Please see Attachment 2, *Mature age productivity*.

Preliminary consultations have suggested that the workforce of private VET providers is considerably younger than the TAFE workforce. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, why do you think this is the case?

Following on from the point above, there were limited opportunities over the last few decades for people to win permanent positions in TAFE Institutes.

Additionally, some private providers work to a different business model, where an experienced VET practitioner mentors many novices. Typically, these novices are far younger than their TAFE counterparts.

Is this profile representative of the sector overall? Are there significant differences in various sub-groups?

Quantitative analysis of VET providers by JMA Analytics shows that there are some gender and age differences between practitioners in different disciplines. For example, we find that there are more women of an older age with higher qualifications than there are men in fields such as community services or business training. One speculative theory is that many of these women missed out on the old superannuation schemes due to a gap in their working career due to child-rearing and as a consequence now need to work longer to secure their finances.

What are some other defining characteristics of VET workers?

I have researched and written at length about two groups of VET workers – managers and practitioners (trainers and assessors).

Managers in VET providers

I have a deep interest in VET managers, demonstrated in particular by my doctoral thesis completed at Deakin University in 2004, *The management of flexible learning in VET*, in which I focused on senior managers as opposed to supervisory level managers in VET providers. I have also authored or edited:

- *New Leadership for Innovative Organisations* (lead author; available from IBSA, 2007)
- *Women's Leadership in VET* (editor; available from IBSA, 2008)
- 'Business Skills for Managing Flexible Learning', chapter in *International Handbook of Distance Education* (Emerald, United Kingdom, pp.783-802, 2008)
- *Authentic, sustainable leadership in VET* (editor; available from IBSA, 2008)
- *Position paper on key issues facing VET managers and leaders* (L H Martin Institute, Feb 2008; unpublished paper)
- *The nature, work focus and indicators of effective VET leadership* (Jan 2009, unpublished chapter for forthcoming report by L H Martin Institute).

I am also the second author of:

- *Approaches for sustaining and building management and leadership capability in VET providers* (NCVER, 2007).

Based on that research, some very broad but defining characteristics of VET senior managers are set out below. Senior managers are defined as managers to whom other managers report.

- **Respond to macro drivers**. VET provider senior managers twenty years ago were more inwardly focused, focused on improving their organisations internally. Nowadays they are expected to respond to macro-economic issues such as addressing skills shortages, increasing productivity, leading workforce development across communities and industry, increasing workforce participation and aiding international competitiveness.
- **Invent customer-facing organisations**. VET senior managers are expected to invent and lead customer-responsive organisations that are attuned to fast-changing markets, new opportunities and fluctuating trends.
- **Balance incumbency, talent and succession**. With an ageing leadership cohort, senior managers walk a fine line between supporting incumbents in management positions, fostering talented future managers and developing succession plans.
- **Balance entrepreneurship and social good.** An ongoing challenge for senior managers is to generate higher revenues while attending to the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities.
- **Straddle numerous boundaries**. VET senior managers often need to partner with providers in the school and higher education sectors. They also need to be able to function effectively in a variety of industry and community environments.

Such broad defining characteristics of VET managers are complemented by another set of characteristics based on gender. While VET has traditionally been dominated at senior levels by males, senior women managers and leaders bring another set of characteristics to their work.

Please see Attachment 3, *Characteristics of women leaders in VET.*

VET practitioners

As lead author of *Quality is the Key* (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, NCVER, 2006), I identified fifteen features of the new VET practitioner:

Table 1. Fifteen features and attributes of the new VET practitioner identified by Mitchell et al. (*Quality is the Key*, NCVER, 2006)

1. Views individual students as lifelong learners on career pathways
2. Respects the business risks and pressures of enterprise clients
3. Appreciates that enterprises need skills to achieve business outcomes
4. Understands links between training, HR and workforce development
5. Functions effectively within supply chains and skill ecosystems
6. Exercises professional judgment in delivery and assessment
7. Develops and sustains long-term relationships with clients
8. Participates within a team to access colleagues' specialist skills
9. Taps into wider networks for information and resources
10. Understands the value of accessing and applying industry research
11. Contributes to the development of innovative products and services
12. Commits to achieving and maintaining the quality of the profession
13. Improves the tools and frameworks of professional practice
14. Updates technical skills and industry-specific knowledge
15. Copes with complexities and uncertainties about industry skill demands

We found that all of the fifteen features and attributes may not be evident in the one individual, but given the new expectations of VET practitioners – to be demand-driven, client-focused and highly responsive to industry – all of the above attributes are ideally evident in a work team within the one training provider. Highly skilled VET practitioners and work teams are developing the necessary skills and knowledge required for them to operate effectively in an industry-aligned, customer-responsive sector.

Since then I have written three books on the characteristics of the VET practitioner (that is, the trainer and assessor):

- *Ideas for Practitioners* (available from IBSA, 2006)
- *Innovation and Entrepreneurship in VET* (available from IBSA, 2007)
- *Advanced VET Practitioners* (available from IBSA, 2009).

These books are based on extensive interviewing and observations and analysis of documentation and provide more details about the characteristics of conventional, new and advanced VET

practitioners.

Please see Attachment 4, *Emergence and characteristics of the new VET practitioner*.

Please see Attachment 5, *Characteristics of advanced VET practitioners*.

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?

The research cited above demonstrates that not only are trainers and assessors a complex cohort, they are worthy of special focus by the Commission. Similarly, VET managers are worthy of separate focus. Additionally, administrative and support staff of VET providers deserve special analysis.

I have the view that each of these components of the VET workforce deserve to be honoured and researched because the VET workforce is critical to Australia's prosperity but it is often overlooked and under-rated, as demonstrated in public pronouncements where so many times Australia's leaders say "Schools and Universities".

Do you have any information on the size of the VET workforce in general, or some of its components in particular?

In January 2010 JMA Analytics released the *JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development* based on a survey of 2,200 VET trainers and assessors nationally. The report provides a clear model of how practitioners perceive their professional practice and their skill levels. The report also notes that practitioners believe they only have 80% of the skills they need to do their jobs and that the professional development currently available only meets 55% of their needs.

Please see the full report at http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics

Are adequate data available to facilitate effective planning and analysis of the VET workforce?

To assist planning and analysis of the VET workforce, together with my colleague John Ward, in 2010 at JMA Analytics we have developed two unique tools to measure the capabilities of VET practitioners: VETCAT™, the VET capability analysis tool measuring the training and assessment skills and CURCAT™, the industry currency capability analysis tool.

We currently have contracts with VET providers around Australia to implement these tools. One provider that has implemented both tools is TAFE SA Regional Institute, which is now using the data and findings from these tools to re-examine its workforce and review its professional development strategies.

What additional data on the VET workforce are required? How should they be generated, disseminated and used?

More data is needed about VET workers' motivations, intentions and possible future directions. The challenge in acquiring such data at a systemic level is that VET is now a competitive sector and such data is commercially valuable for each provider.

Issues Paper Section 4: Demand influences on the VET sector

What do stronger commercial pressures in the VET sector imply for the future size, skills and knowledge requirement, of the workforce?

Surprisingly, the research by JMA Analytics has revealed that the level of commercial skills of VET practitioners is high, so stronger commercial pressures will be handled with some assurance. However, the same research shows an alarming lack of skills in advanced learning and assessment skills. So if commercial pressures are accompanied by a need for high quality training, a skill deficit will become obvious.

Please see attachment 6, *Shortage of Learning Specialists.*

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

The move towards higher level qualifications will drive higher qualifications for VET practitioners, countering those who are comfortable with the entry level Certificate Level IV as an adequate qualification for a VET practitioner.

Please see Attachment 7, *Elevating the Profession*.

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

Research by JMA Analytics showed that recognition of prior learning is viewed by VET practitioners as an advanced skill area. That is, a VET practitioner needs to have a sound foundation practice to make decisions about a straightforward RPL candidate but a practitioner needs a raft of skills to make professional judgements about candidates who present with complex portfolios of evidence. When faced with an RPL candidate who is not straightforward, the practitioner needs to be able to draw on previous experience and case studies. So this shift to a greater use of RPL will drive an increased level of VET practice.

Examples of the complexities faced by practitioners providing RPL are given in the following publication I prepared for the Queensland Government, *Confident RPL Assessors,* available at*:*

http://www.vetpd.qld.gov.au/resources/pdf/tla/confident-rpl-assessors-c2c-a.pdf

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?

Give the current government's 'transparency agenda', one likely push by governments will be on sharing more data with the public. With the advent of MySkills website in July 2011, predictably there will be an increasing focus on raising student course completion rates. In the short term there will a stumble because currently the VET measures module completions and qualifications gained, not course completion rates. So this policy change to a greater focus on course completion rates will accelerate the development of better data collection and reporting systems.

Hopefully this increased focus on course completions will have many positive impacts on VET practice as there will be a high degree of interest in reducing non-completion rates, intervening when a student is at risk of leaving a course, using innovative services to retain students and making changes to ensure successful completion.

What impacts do you anticipate that the use of technology in the VET sector will have on:

- ***teaching delivery and methods over the next five to ten years?***
- ***demand for training, particularly from regional/remote areas and overseas?***
- ***demand for the VET workforce, both in terms of numbers, and of knowledge and skills requirements?***

The mere availability of new technology will not change teaching delivery and methods. To use e-learning thoroughly and effectively requires advanced level facilitation and assessment skills.

Please see attachment 8, *Specialists not novices for e-learning*.

Please also see Attachment 9, *E-learning capability requirements*.

The use of technology may have a larger impact on back office and front office efficiency than on teaching methods.

Please see Attachment 10, *Looking beyond MySkills website*.

Please also see Attachment 11, *Productivity possibilities*.

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

The development of a tertiary sector focused particularly on advanced diplomas and graduate certificate and graduate diploma programs will inevitably lead to pressure to loosen the strict adherence to competency based training. It is likely that providers operating in this 'tertiary' zone and the students enrolled in these programs will jointly express their desire for modifications to training packages to enable a more seamless transition for students to higher education programs.

However, similar arguments were put by the OECD in 2088-2009 and they were rejected, so change may not happen for some years.

Please see Attachment 12, *Small packages for big skills*.

Issues Paper Section 5: Supply of the VET workforce

The right mix of industry and education skills need to be achieved … Are there tradeoffs between technical skills and teaching skills and, if so, which skills are more important?

An often overlooked area of professional development is industry currency and we commend the Queensland Government publication on this topic, earlier this year.

Please see Attachment 13, *Realities of industry currency*.

JMA Analytics totally accepts the concept that VET practitioners need two sets of skills and knowledge – one set around their VET practice in teaching and assessing and another around their industry skills.

Please see Attachment 14, *For and against teacher standards*.

JMA Analytics has responded to this issue of industry currency in a thorough-going manner by inventing and psychometrically testing in mid-2010 a new tool called CURCAT™ – the VET industry currency capability analysis tool. The tool contains 55 questions with 30 subsidiary questions and measures two fundamental aspect of a VET practitioner's industry currency, as follows:

1 The practitioner's perception of opportunities available to maintain industry currency
2 The practitioner's preference for different ways of maintaining industry currency.

These measurements are taken across the following five dimensions:

1 Accredited and non-accredited training
2 Industry experience and engagement
3 Networks and personal connections
4 Active inquiry into my industry's practice
5 Opportunities through my work in my RTO.

The benefits of CURCAT™ include the following:

- it shows practitioners in what ways and to what extent they are current with industry
- it helps practitioners to plan to remain current with industry
- it enables practitioners to have an in-depth and ongoing professional conversation with their managers and industry contacts about their industry currency.

We have contracts to implement CURCAT™ in VET providers around Australia. For instance, we recently implemented it in TAFE SA Regional where over three hundred staff completed the tool. The Institute received a thirty page report summarising industry currency across the Institute and

each of the six faculties received a thirty page report on their faculty's level of industry currency. Additionally, each practitioner who completed the survey and supplied an email address received electronically a seven-page report on their industry currency. Modeling good practice in workforce development, the Institute is now actively investigating the many ways it can use these reports to guide future professional development.

Would increasing qualification standards make entry into the VET workforce more appealing and/or more difficult? Would these changes produce better student outcomes?

Raising the entry level requirement will be viewed as a barrier.

The Certificate Level IV Training and Assessment (TAA), recently revised and renamed, is the entry level qualification. It is designed for new entrants or novices. A problem arises for VET providers if the Certificate Level IV becomes the only qualification the practitioner ever acquires or if the new practitioner is told or believes that he or she does not need to embrace extensive learning on the job to add to that short qualification. This is a major issue already, as research by JMA Analytics shows that a large proportion of the VET workforce now has the Certificate Level IV as the highest educational qualification.

Student experiences and student outcomes are at risk if a VET practitioner only has the basic Certificate Level IV qualification and does not continue to learn on the job.

Please see Attachment 7, *Elevating the profession*.

Please see Attachment 15, *Circumventing controversy over teachers.*

What workforce development options exist for VET workers seeking to develop their VET knowledge and skills? Industry currency? Trainer/assessor competence?

JMA Analytics has quantitative data on these and related questions, based on its self-funded national survey of VET practitioners in late 2009. The 2,200 respondents to that survey represent a statistically valid sample for the VET population of trainers and assessors, providing a level of accuracy for the results of 95% or higher. In this free report released in January 2010 we gave away headline findings but not what is termed the 'demand data' for professional development. However, we offered to prepare for governments, on a commissioned basis, state versus national comparisons on the above and other questions, including this demand data.

We are now providing customised services to VET providers across Australia, implementing the tool that came out of the survey, VETCAT™, the VET capability analysis tool. As noted earlier, we are also implementing the research-based CURCAT™ to assist VET practitioners to enhance their industry currency.

Are these options adequate? For public and private providers? If not, what other workforce development activities are desirable? How should these be funded? How should they be delivered*?*

Research by JMA Analytics reported upon in *The JMA Analytics VET Capability Development Model* (January 2010) revealed that VET practitioners believe that current professional development opportunities only meet 55% of their needs.

The same survey revealed a raft of preferences for how VET practitioners would like to access professional development (how it could be delivered) and what they would like to access. The survey data distinguishes between the PD interests of public and private providers. The survey data also summarises the views of practitioners about who should pay and what percentage different parties, including practitioners, should pay.

While the individual practitioner can be expected to pay for some of her or his professional development, governments have a significant responsibility for professional development.

Please see Attachment 16, *Driving capability development.*

Is a workforce development plan needed? How might a plan be developed? What would be its key elements?

Workforce development plans for the VET workforce, of different types and degrees, are in place in most states and territories but not at the national level. With VET regulation moving to a national basis, bringing a greater need to clarify national standards for trainers and assessors similar to those defined for school teachers, it will be difficult for the national government to continue to remain one step removed from VET workforce development.

What are the key knowledge, skills and abilities required of effective VET professionals?

With regard to VET trainers and assessors, this vast question is addressed in depth in the report *The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development* (Mitchell & Ward) available at http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx The report is based on national survey conducted in late 20019. Patterns in the survey responses enabled us to condense the mound of data obtained from the survey into nine logical and coherent 'skills sets'. These skills sets represent the way in which our survey respondents conceptualise and categorise skills within their professional practice.

With regard to VET managers, we are proud to have assisted the L H Martin Institute in its study of VET managers. The imminent report from the Institute will address this question in terms of managers.

Are the avenues through which practitioners can acquire the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to move into professional roles adequate?

As reported in *The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development* available at http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx, there is no inclusive, coherent model of VET professional practice. While there is some understanding in the sector of the types of skills sets that comprise VET professional practice, as articulated in various accredited training programs, there is no clear model of how these skills sets and qualifications come together to enable VET trainers and assessors to perform their full range of professional duties.

This lack of an overarching model further means that there is no comprehensive understanding in the sector of how VET trainer and assessors transition from basic or foundation level to advanced practice. It also means that professional development programs are likely to be 'hit-and-miss' and not methodical in terms of specifically catering for participants' changing needs. This lack of a thorough model to guide professional development possibly explains the heavy emphasis on novice

level skills in many professional development programs around VET, and the paucity of programs for advanced practitioners. The report cited above now provides a coherent model and potentially fills this gap.

Regarding avenues for moving from the teaching to management ranks, providers and state systems use a variety of professional development strategies to encourage staff to progress to management positions, and now they can be mapped to the new model of VET capability. Following our work and the work of L H Martin Institute, we now know the difference between VET practitioners' and VET managers' skills, knowledge and abilities. They are distinctly different groups.

Issues Paper Section 6: Institutional arrangements

Do job design and allocation allow VET providers sufficient flexibility, at present, in managing their human resources?

Research reported in *The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development* available at http://www.jma.com.au/JMAAnalytics.aspx indicates that there is a difference between the way practitioners nationally perceive their VET practice and how it is described in institutions. We now have a precise model of VET practice and how the skills and knowledge of the VET practitioner fit together. Hence it is highly likely that many people will have, to some extent, inappropriate job titles, job tasks and performance measures.

How might job design change to enhance workforce efficiency and effectiveness?

Now that we know more about VET practice, such as the nine skills sets, and the categories of novice, established and specialist, it is possible to match practitioners with tasks. For example, there is no point asking a novice to handle a complex recognition of prior learning (RPL) case; that is better dealt with by a learning and facilitation specialist.

Are there any other areas of human resource management in which a different approach might enhance workforce efficiency and effectiveness?

Our report to the National Quality Council, *Carrots, Sticks, a Mix, or Other Options*, investigates a wide range of reward and recognition strategies that could be promoted more widely, to improve workforce efficiency and effectiveness.

Can you foresee a greater role for performance pay in promoting workforce efficiency and effectiveness?

Ethically, this would work best if the performance pay was aligned with a clear concept of the skills being requested. For example, it would be ideal if those people with specialist skills in, say, e-learning or RPL or workplace assessment were rewarded appropriately, compared with someone with novice level skills in these domains.

Are team approaches becoming more common in the VET sector? In public or private providers? Do they hold potential to enhance the performance of the workforce? Are there any impediments to their implementation?

As noted in *Quality is the Key* (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, NCVER, 2006) all of the fifteen features and attributes of the new VET practitioner may not be evident in the one individual, but all of the attributes are ideally evident in a work team within the one training provider. Such teams are becoming more common and do hold the potential to enhance the potential of the workforce.

VET teams I have analysed (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2005, *New Ways of Working in VET*, DEST, Canberra)

provide examples of creativity in the following ways: implementing a qualification not previously offered in a local region; embedding sustainability principles in the delivery of Training Packages; integrating employability skills in training; and establishing a simulated working production company for the delivery and assessment of a training package.

Are teaching and non-teaching roles in VET blurring? If so, what does this imply for the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce?

The model of VET practice articulated in the report *The JMA Analytics Model of VET Capability Development* shows that VET practitioners have important professional work to perform without having to undertake non-teaching roles. In other then very small VET providers where there was no-one else to do the non-teaching work, it would seem inefficient for a VET practitioner to undertake non-teaching roles.

Attachment 1: Just who is a VET trainer and assessor?

Following is an excerpt from a study we completed for the National Quality Council in late 2009, *Carrots, Sticks, a Mix, or Other Options* now publicly available from the NQC website:

http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/53795/Carrots_and_Sticks_Report.pdf

The excerpt notes a number of characteristics of that cohort relevant to Section 3 of the Issues Paper. The excerpt provides some windows for understanding the VET practitioner: diverse cohorts; a breadth of training and assessing skills; a range of skills related to industry and technical competence; a range of skills related to industry and technical competence; complex identities; and professionally certified, mostly.

Just who is a VET trainer and assessor?

Before beginning any analysis of issues around registration, recognition and reward, some discussion is required of the definition of VET trainers and assessors, particularly as there have been numerous attempts to define the VET practitioner over the last decade (e.g. Dickie et al. 2004, Guthrie 2004, Harris et al. 2005, Mitchell et al. 2006, Guthrie et al. 2006, Mitchell 2009).

To avoid debates when defining a VET trainer and assessor during the project, the researchers remained open to the broadest possible definition and were guided by the many different stakeholders interviewed who almost unanimously emphasised the following points:

- **Diversity of cohorts**. VET trainers and assessors vary in terms of employment status and work contexts, for instance:
    - their employment status may vary from institution RTO employee , enterprise RTO employee, freelance consultant or contractor or other
    - the context or contexts in which they work may vary from a school, TAFE, private RTO, community college, enterprise workplace or it may be an online or distance education context.
- **Breadth of training and assessing skills**. VET trainers and assessors vary in terms of their breadth of knowledge and skills, for example across the following parameters:
    - the training skills and knowledge they require (e.g. ability to use blended learning; an understanding of andragogy)
    - the delivery methodology used (e.g. online delivery, distance education, workplace delivery)
    - the assessment skills and knowledge they require (e.g. the use of questioning tools; knowledge of concept of validity)
    - the type of assessment provided (e.g. formative, summative).
- **Range of skills related to industry and technical competence.** VET trainers and assessors vary in terms of their industry currency and related competence. As one interviewee noted:
    - **"**there is there's quite a diversity of views, within industry and within VET, about what makes up currency

- **“**RTOs haven’t always considered that industry might have a different view about technical currencies than what they do, so there’s work to be done around aligning the expectations and understandings”
- **“**industry currency becomes meaningful and significant when you VET practitioners strong industry relationships”.

- **Complex identities**. VET trainers and assessors vary in terms of their self-perception as a VET practitioner and as a member of the industry in which they train. They also vary in terms of their industry currency and engagement. For example:
  - Some institution-based trainers and assessors primarily might relate to their institution and might have only occasional connections with enterprise workplaces and the wider industry
  - Some enterprise based trainers and assessors may be immersed in their enterprise and industry and for these people training and assessment may only be a minor part of their work.
  - Some VET in schools people may have multiple identities, seeing themselves as part of the school industry, the VET industry and the industry in which they train and assess, e.g. retail, hospitality.
- **Professionally certified, mostly.** For most people interviewed for this study, the ‘ticket’ enabling a person to claim the title of a VET trainer and assessor was possession of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
  - But to complicate the topic, some interviewees pointed out that some trainers and assessors do not have this certificate. These people may have a Certificate III and hopefully, said the interviewees, they would upgrade to a Certificate IV.
  - This is not meant to denigrate these people, as many of them may have advanced skills and knowledge of their chosen industry, for example hospitality or hairdressing, and may be new to the formal VET industry. Many of them are workplace trainers who may have the support of a person with a higher VET qualification.

Source:
http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/53795/Carrots_and_Sticks_Report.pdf

Attachment 2. Mature age productivity

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 6 July 2010

What value are mature age workers for training providers.

In my regular visits to training organisations, a common conversation I have with experienced staff is that they are about to retire and they really don't want to stop working, but they can't see any options available to continue to work part-time.

The loss of such experienced people, from both the management and teaching fields, is a calamity, particularly as training providers in many parts of Australia are finding it hard to attract new staff, and when they do those staff often are inexperienced and need considerable guidance.

Who is doing something about it? Fortunately Box Hill Institute in Melbourne has a comprehensive, long-standing and highly successful scheme for attracting back and retaining people who have recently retired. Their scheme deserves widespread recognition.
The scheme was started "quite a number of years ago" says CEO and president John Maddock. "And we've now built up a register of people who are available to fill gaps."

"We've looked at an ageing workforce in the VET sector and recognised that there was a lot of talent going, particularly people who are encouraged by their superannuation [requirements] to leave organisations. We're saying they've still got an enormous amount to offer."

The institute attracts back its previous employees as well as people who have worked for other organisations. "We approach people from external organisations we know are retiring and who have the same values and cultures we want within our organisation."

"For instance, we've had about four CEOs from organisations come back and act as coaches and mentors for us."

Maddock finds that mature age employees "are usually exceptionally committed and engaged and also satisfied workers".

"The very fact that they're wanting to return or continue in the workforce means that they've had a positive experience and that they're really committed to continuing to help us grow the business, but also importantly to develop people and that's our charter."

Maddock prizes the attitudes and values they bring to the institute. "They bring a positive and optimistic sort of attitude, they bring collegiate values which we value very strongly. But ultimately the critical thing is their willingness to share their skills and experience and a commitment to assisting people to grow.

“So what we’re doing is not only filling gaps but getting knowledge transfer so that we can grow other people within the organisation. And that is absolutely essential in terms of what we’re looking for.”

The Institute’s executive is motivated to retain mature age workers because of the business pressures arising from growth. “Because we’ve gone through such massive growth in the last ten years we’ve had a need to expand our workforce and in expanding our workforce we needed to retain the people that were really talented.

“We’ve had overseas opportunities where these mature age people have undertaken project work, and we’ve had them help us with major developments in some of our innovative projects in e-learning.”

Success stories

Success stories that come to mind for Maddock start with a very senior executive who reports directly to him. “That person handles absolutely any confidential thing that is outside other people’s current roles and functionality. That’s been an outstanding success for us and for me personally because it enables me to get on with things. He’s been doing that for about seven or eight years.”

A second story is “one of a senior manager who retired from another organisation who was an absolutely outstanding person and she came back and started mentoring people who were aspiring to get into leadership roles. She also assisted with some team building and planning activities within one of our key teaching centre operations and has undertaken reviews on our behalf.”

A third story is about a person who was an outstanding overseas project teacher. After he retired “he came back and started mentoring and coaching some of the younger teachers that were coming through in the trade area about how it’s different to teach in other countries.”

A final story is about a person from the administration area “who retired and then came back and became involved in the administration of a very large project that we’re doing offshore, and coaching two other people on how to do that.”

Given the Productivity Commission’s year-long inquiry into VET workforce, the Box Hill initiatives in retaining the services of mature age people deserve attention. Hopefully its practices will spread to other training organisations before the Commission hands down its report and before other talented people are lost from the sector.

Attachment 3: Characteristics of women leaders in VET

In the Introduction to the 55,000-word publication *Women's Leadership in VET (2008),* I table some defining characteristics of thirty women leaders in VET:

> This book illustrates a range of capabilities of VET women leaders. For instance, the think pieces demonstrate their capacity for fresh thinking and the articles show their substantial abilities as strategists, change agents and innovators, as well as their ability to function effectively in the midst of complexity. However, the overriding characteristic which emerges from this publication is the authenticity of these women leaders, so the term deserves discussion.
>
> The term authentic is commonly used to describe people who are open, transparent and honest and whose word can be trusted. They are not fake or insincere. They don't wear masks. They know their strengths and weaknesses. Authentic people are true to their values and their word; they have integrity and they stick to their principles.
>
> Authentic leaders 'walk the talk': their actions match their words. They take responsibility for their emotions and actions and don't try to blame others for their own moods or mistakes. Nobody is perfect, but it is possible to consciously make the pursuit of authenticity a powerful component of one's life and leadership. Laura Morgan Roberts (2007) says that "leaders must be intentional about bringing their whole selves to work as a source of strength" (p.333).
>
> The first authentic aspect of the women leaders portrayed in this book is they are able to present their **true selves**: they don't wear masks or pretend to be someone they're not**;** their unique, individual voices and views come through the pages. Such authentic people are to be prized: management theorist, author and psychotherapist Manfred Kets de Vries (2007) finds that people who are authentic tend to be "more centred, balanced, compassionate, forgiving, sensitive, peaceful, secure, and self-confident" (p.371)
>
> The second authentic aspect of these women leaders is their **humility,** their willingness to admit they do not know it all. They say, in the think pieces in section one and in the interviews in section two of this book, that they are always learning, from their staff, their industries, their communities, and their students. Kets de Vries (2006) finds that, to be successful, organisations need leaders who are able to "present themselves as they are, who have confidence in combination with humility, and who are viewed by others as having integrity and being worthy of trust" (p.375). These leaders "recognise their strengths and weaknesses" (p.375).
>
> The third authentic aspect of these women leaders is their **compassion**: they are very willing to talk about their values and how values such as a commitment to their industry or their communities or their learners motivate and fuel them. Kets de Vries notes that authentic leaders "are aware of (and trust in) their motives, feelings, and desires" (p.375).
>
> The fourth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their **positive outlook**; the glass is half full; they see the possibilities provided by VET. Kets de Vries (2006) says that authentic people "have a more optimistic outlook on life, report a higher level of self esteem, and feel a greater sense of life satisfaction" (p.371). Roberts (2007) notes that authentic leadership has numerous positive connotations including "self-confidence, genuineness, reliability, worthwhileness, a deep sense of one's values and beliefs, a focus on building followers' strengths, and an ability to create a positive and engaging organisational context" (pp.332-333).

The fifth authentic aspect is their **determination** and perseverance. Kets de Vries (2006) says that authentic people demonstrate behaviour that reflects "self-determination, autonomy, and choice, as opposed to behaviour that's been imposed on them by others" (p.372). They are willing to "face reality as it is, not as they wish it were" (p.375). Roberts (2007) notes that authentic leadership "requires more than jst doing what comes naturally" (p.333).

The sixth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their **sense of community**. Kets de Vries (2006) shows how authentic leaders create a framework "for the kind of values that make an organisation a great place to work" (p.377). By creating a sense of community, employees feel trusted and the conditions are set for distributed, shared leadership and active mentoring of aspiring leaders.

The seventh authentic aspect of these women leaders is their ability to form and **sustain relationships,** both within and outside their organisations. Kets de Vries (2006) notes that effective leadership in this century will depend heavily on networking structures, which imply a focus on relationships (p.375).

The eighth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their ability to **cater for the individual needs** of a variety of staff. Kets de Vries (2006) finds that authentic leaders are in tune with themselves and their inner lives, they are "more equipped to 'read' and articulate what lies unspoken in the hearts and minds of their employees" (p.376). Roberts (2007) suggests that authentic leaders can accommodate the range of needs of their staff for self-expression and self-fulfilment, which results not only in employees' increased self-expression but in employees' increased strategic contribution (p.352).

The ninth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their understanding that staff want a workplace that is **enjoyable**, where exploration is encouraged. Kets de Vries (2006) finds that "exploration, enjoyment, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation are all closely linked" (p.378). The benefits of creating an enjoyable workplace are profound, finds Roberts (2007):

> …bringing one's 'whole self' to a welcoming work environment enables individuals to reach maximal effectiveness, productivity and performance (p.330).

Attachment 4: Emergence and characteristics of the new VET practitioner

Excerpt from *Advanced VET Practitioners* (Mitchell, 2009)

Perhaps the starting point for the investigation of the characteristics of the 'new VET practitioner' – and possibly the first time that term was used – was in the work conducted at the University of Technology in 2003 around changing pedagogy. For instance, Chappell and Johnston in *Changing work: changing roles for vocational education and training teachers and trainers* (2003 NCVER) discuss new VET practitioners such as those who work as consultants:

> The competitive VET market has invoked new roles for these VET practitioners that are not only additional to the traditional 'teaching' role but are also substantially different in terms of focus, purpose and practice. Moreover, examples of these new roles can be found in all of the sites investigated in this research. The competitive market has also encouraged the emergence of new VET practitioners who operate as VET consultants and who earn their living by entering into commercial contracts with particular organisations and enterprises. (p. 5)

Note that their use of term 'new VET practitioners' was to describe those practitioners who operate as VET consultants. This definition was extended in subsequent research, particularly by Chappell working with Bateman, Roy and me in 2005 in compiling *Quality is the Key* (2006).

A number of other VET reports from 2002-2005 underlined the need to develop new approaches to enhancing the capability of TAFE staff to meet future challenges. These reports included, among others:

- *Shaping the VET Practitioner of the Future* (Rumsey 2002)
- *Enhancing the Capability of VET professionals project: Final report* (Dickie, Eccles, FitzGerald & McDonald 2004)
- *Moving on…Report of the high level review of Training Packages* (Schofield & McDonald 2004)
- *The vocational education and training workforce. New roles and ways of working. At a glance* (Guthrie 2004)
- *Shifting mindsets: The changing work roles of vocational education and training practitioners* (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005)
- *New ways of working in VET* (Mitchell, McKenna, Perry & Bald 2005).

In *Quality is the Key* (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman & Roy 2006) we noted that the environment for VET is changing, increasing the need for VET practitioners to extend existing skills and develop new skills in teaching, learning and assessment. Environmental change factors include government policy, skill shortages, new technology in industry, changes in the structure of work, the needs of youth and mature-aged workers, competition between providers, and the expectations of industry and the community.

In this challenging environment, critical issues in terms of addressing what industry clients and

individual learners want include the following:

- meeting the increasing demand for the customisation and personalisation of training services
- developing a deeper understanding of individuals' learning styles and preferences
- effectively providing services and support for different learner groups such as learners from equity groups and learners in the online learning environment.

Other critical issues are an understanding of the many different ways learning can occur in workplaces and developing partnerships between external teachers and enterprise-based managers and trainers.

We also noted in *Quality is the Key* that critical issues in terms of the skills and resources needed by VET practitioners include the following:

- many VET practitioners need enhanced skills in implementing Training Packages, despite their widespread availability in the sector in some cases for seven or eight years
- VET practitioners need skills to take advantage of the new digital technologies that become available each year
- and VET practitioners need skills and resources to provide effective support for learning that occurs in the workplace.

New skills and resources are needed in the design of learning programs and resources because a heightened recognition that there are different types of learning, for example, formal and informal learning. New skills are needed to provide assessment services, for example to conduct assessment in the workplace, to provide a recognition process and to assess generic skills.

Further, we noted in *Quality is the Key* that as VET shifts from being supply-driven to demand-driven, a new practitioner is emerging, to satisfy the increasing expectations of industry clients and individual students. Traditionally, the VET practitioner was supply-driven. This practitioner believed that the best or only learning environment was the classroom – a site for learning far superior to the student's workplace. In contrast, the new VET practitioner is demand-driven and only provides services that are wanted by enterprises and individuals. This progressive practitioner can customise programs to suit enterprises and personalise learning activities to suit the individual. The new VET practitioner lets go of the old certainties, like pre-set curriculum and didactic instruction, and develops attributes, attitudes, ideas and techniques that meet the needs of clients. The new practitioner looks outwards at market needs and seeks to meet those needs…

To address the idiosyncratic demands of each and every student and enterprise client, we argued that the new VET practitioner needs this raft of new skills and perspectives: so many, in fact, that many practitioners need to be able to draw on the specialist skills and knowledge of colleagues and partners. New skills are required by the range of VET practitioners, from those employed by RTOs, either part or full time, to workplace trainers and assessors employed either by an enterprise or by an RTO. New skills are needed by all VET personnel, from managers to front-line trainers and support staff, in both public and private RTOs, although this book focuses on those practitioners with teaching-related activities as part of their workload.

Notably, these features and attributes represent a new hybrid mix of educational and business thinking infused with values such as a commitment to service and quality. This mix of educational and business frameworks is understandable, given that VET practitioners are being encouraged to work

more closely with industry and enterprises.

Attachment 5: Characteristics of Advanced VET Practitioners

In *Advanced VET Practitioners* (Mitchell 2009), the features of such practitioners were summarized as follows:

> My research from 2007- 2009 showed that the VET practitioner works in a changing context. One feature of the new context is that VET organisations such as TAFE Institutes are becoming more outward looking and customer focused. This was described by Kevin Harris, director of TAFE NSW – North Sydney Institute whom I interviewed for *Campus Review* in October 2007. To become more responsive and viable, his Institute is "absolutely focused on customers," and as part of this focus, "we don't do business plans anymore, we do marketing plans."
>
> > That's not a cliché. What we are attempting to do there is to find out exactly what our market wants and try to deliver that. That is the reason, for example, in our strategic approach, our key performance indicators are expressed in customer terms. Of course we measure net revenues and student hours and module completion rates, but they're all secondary, they're enablers. They allow us to get information about how we're tracking towards the customer service indicators we're focused on. (*Campus Review* 9 Oct 2007)
>
> Harris notes further that "what we are doing to remain viable is to remain valid. And we are only valid if we deliver on our mission which is to achieve economic growth and community well being. And we have to measure that achievement in customers' terms."
>
> In response to this new context for training providers, some practitioners are inventing and modelling the use of advanced skills. This superior strand of the VET practitioner deserves public attention because its representatives are challenging previous concepts of the limits of capability of the VET practitioner.
>
> **Three advanced practitioners from the private sector**
> One of the practitioners who fits this advanced category is Churchill Fellow recipient and current PhD candidate Terri Simpkin, the Hobart-based CEO of a micro training provider called Catalyst*development* and a consultancy company Mischief Business Engineering (see article 1.2). Another exceptional VET practitioner is Barbara McPherson, the managing director of a boutique training provider, River Murray Training, which came to public notice when awarded the national small training provider of the year in 2004 (see articles 1.1 and 3.4).
>
> Simpkin and McPherson share the characteristics of an advanced practitioner with Lesley Wemyss, director of Crestfern Pty Ltd, a small provider in Queensland and previously a finalist in the national training awards. Wemyss has managed Crestfern since 1992, but over the last five years has shifted her focus from the booming Gold Coast region to servicing remote mining companies and indigenous communities in far north Queensland. The opening article, 1.1, extends this discussion.
>
> As well as running their small businesses, all three have direct involvement with training-related activities. Characteristics of advanced VET practitioners, such as Lesley Wemyss, Terri Simpkin and Barbara McPherson, include those set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Fourteen characteristics of advanced VET practitioners (from Mitchell 2007d)

Characteristics of advanced VET practitioners, such as Lesley Wemyss, Terri Simpkin and Barbara McPherson, include:

1. A breadth of experience in industry, refreshed by ongoing research and networking
2. A deep knowledge of niche areas within their industry
3. The ability to offer services both as a consultant and as a training provider
4. The capacity to design, deliver and improve the use of flexible learning strategies
5. A focus on linking training to an enterprise's strategic planning and innovation
6. The ability to design training that benefits both the individual and their employer
7. A skill for positioning enterprise training so that it supports workforce development
8. A track record of personalising training for each and every client
9. A personal commitment to extensive and ongoing professional development
10. An active involvement in professional associations such as ACPET
11. A commitment to continuous improvement of their provider organisation
12. An ability to develop a sustainable training business despite thin markets
13. A positive focus on the bountiful opportunities in the VET market
14. A determination to positively influence the VET sector

This list of characteristics of the advanced VET practitioner can be compared with the list cited earlier in Table 3 of the features of the new VET practitioner. The comparison reveals that advanced VET practitioners have:

- a deeper knowledge of both education and industry
- more skills in both customising training and devising business solutions.

Advanced VET practitioners extend the capabilities of new VET practitioners.

Ten advanced practitioners from the public sector, TAFE

The capabilities of the advanced VET practitioner are further clarified by a set of case studies I prepared in late 2007 in Western Australia. The case studies were prepared to show how some TAFE colleges are becoming more responsive to customers and clients. But to achieve this responsiveness in most colleges involves turning around large groups of staff who, in many cases, are used to being inward-looking, not outwardly focused. Progressive TAFE leaders around Australia, like TAFE NSW's Kevin Harris above, are implementing different strategies to help staff develop this client-focused mindset.

Attachment 6. Shortage of learning specialists

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review online*, 5 April 2010

Are VET learning specialists an endangered species?

There are nearly ten times more commercial specialists in the VET sector than specialists in learning and assessment. More pointedly, the number of learning specialists is very low, at 2.4% of the sector, potentially placing at risk the future quality of learning and assessment across the sector. How did this shortage come about and what can be done about it?

Commercial specialists are skilled in writing tender proposals, pitching training products to business clients, customising the product to suit a particular enterprise, maintaining good client relationships over a period of time and ensuring there is a healthy profit margin at the end of the service delivery. While VET needs commercial specialists to ensure the sector remains customer focused, we may have too many of them now.

Learning and assessment specialists are skilled in the variety of delivery methods, ranging from delivering in the classroom to the workplace and even online. They know much about learning theories and learning styles and are also highly skilled in the different forms of assessment, from summative to formative and diagnostic and in providing recognition of prior learning.

Like medical specialists, they have progressed past the foundation level of general practice and are able to operate at the sharp end of practice. VET needs learning specialists to ensure its core product, education, remains healthy. And VET needs a good number of them, say 10% not 2% of the VET workforce.

The finding that there are many more commercial specialists than learning specialists was one of the surprising results from the extensive national survey of VET practitioners conducted by quantitative researcher John Ward and me late last year. Over 2,200 practitioners undertook the survey which contained 140 questions. The results are statistically valid, to a level of 95% or slightly higher, says statistician Ward.

The survey results show that 23.2% of VET practitioners are commercial specialists but only 2.4% are learning and assessment specialists. While the number of commercial specialists reveals an important strength in VET, the low number of learning specialists potentially puts the sector at risk of being weak in its core area.

How did the VET sector end up with this lopsided profile? Margaret Dix, Manager, Staff Learning and Development at TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute is immersed in developing specialist capability and has her theories about why the VET sector has sprouted so many commercial specialists.

"It is a business survival thing. It is also a response to government policy. It was a strength we didn't have before and, now that we have it, people recognise it in action, whereas we have always had teachers and assessors. To be a learning specialist is not trendy."

Dix believes that VET recognises commercial expertise much more easily than teaching and learning expertise, "because everyone is supposed to be an expert in teaching and learning. That's why we call them teachers. And it is assumed they have a level of expertise, but they may or may not, because we never test it. We qualify them but we don't test their ongoing degree of capability. We just assume they're all very good."

Developing extra capability

Rather than strive to develop specialists that are excellent in all aspects of learning and assessment, Dix and her colleagues are seeking to develop specialists in particular aspects. "Overall excellence in teaching and learning is something we are working towards but very few will obtain. But excellence in specific aspects of it is certainly possible and that is what we are working towards."

"We have a lot of people who are extremely good teachers and definitely specialised in one area if not more, but often they don't realise that. They've just been plugging away, doing their jobs. What we need to work hard at is connecting those people to the rest of the organisation.

To connect learning specialists with their colleagues, Dix uses work-based learning strategies such as mentoring and work shadowing. "We have a number of project-based groups that use action learning, so we're growing capability from people who already have experience."

Dix believes in developing specialist capability in new areas of learning and assessment "when there is an imperative to do so, rather than training them as specialists for the sake of training them. What we look for is where is the business need, and what expertise do we need to service the students in that business area."

"Automotive training tipped the balance here, very strongly, because we had a competitor in the market. It reinforced the view that to maintain our share of the market we had to be a whole lot more responsive to employer needs. We had been responsive, as far as we were concerned, but here was a competitor offering something we weren't, which was workplace assessment to a much larger degree than we were.

"So we specifically focused on building specialist strengths in workplace assessment. It wasn't good enough to only have one or two people who were strong in this area, we had to grow a whole lot of capability reasonably quickly. These were good teachers, but the market had moved and we needed to develop that extra capability."

Attachment 7. Elevating the profession

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review* online version, 22 February 2010

Will a tertiary sector impact positively on VET practitioners?

There is a light flickering on the horizon that offers a way out of some tangled debates in VET. That light is the emerging tertiary system in Australia, and it represents the removal of barriers between VET and higher education and the creation of one seamless post-compulsory education sector.

That light will eventually take attention away from endless debates such as whether VET practitioners are professionals or not. Eventually everyone teaching in the tertiary sector will be encouraged to become a professional tertiary educator.

The arrival of a tertiary system will end the debate in VET about whether a simplistic certificate level IV in training and assessment is an adequate qualification for a professional educator. In the tertiary system, a graduate certificate or diploma, not a lowly certificate, is likely to emerge as the common qualification required for admission to the profession.

This prediction is based on the fact that such graduate qualifications are emerging as the standard for teachers in higher education, and it will be untenable to lower that standard when the tertiary system becomes a reality. VET practitioners who can't reach this new standard will miss out on full participation in a vibrant, stimulating community of practitioners who will elevate teaching to new heights.

An immediate benefit of these developments will be the promotion of a renewed public discussion about the definition of a professional educator. And the resultant definition will be richer and more valuable than previous ones.

A further benefit will be the invention of professional development strategies for tertiary educators that are more diverse and effective than many scatter-gun methods used to date. The ultimate benefit will be the increased quality of teaching and learning, enabling Australia's tertiary system's light to shine internationally.

Is the above description pure fantasy? Most of it is desirable, achievable and being actively pursued by progressive educational providers, according to Dr George Brown, group academic director of Think: Education Group. Think is a new-style organisation offering both VET and higher education programs through its eight training organisations in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, such as the iconic Billy Blue College of Design.

Think is already firmly positioned in the tertiary sector and Brown is ensuring that the teaching staff are conversant with good practice from both VET and higher education. For instance, every year Think offers staff the opportunity to undertake a graduate certificate in foundations in learning and teaching.

“The program is bent towards the higher education sector, but it cuts across both VET and higher ed and covers the principles of adult learning,” said Brown.

“It brings together our industry professionals and we give them professional developments on engaging with students. Tapping into the principles of adult learning is a real imperative.”

Breaking down barriers

Brown has moved past the debates about whether the certificate IV is a sufficient for grounding for a practising professional.

“There’s a real need for ongoing professional development of teaching professionals. We require our certificate IV staff to come to the FILT program and engage with other educators in the community of practice about what Think is about in teaching and learning. We try to break down the barriers between VET and higher ed and together we hit the hard points about different approaches to assessment in the two areas.”

Brown readily admits that it is difficult to blend VET and higher education teaching staff in professional development activities, but he perseveres.

“Different assessment approaches are the types of hard issues we’re talking through. Do we have a perfect solution? No. But we bring the issues to the fore and we’re currently working on a whole range of special development activities to address those areas.

“The bottom line is, what happens in the classroom will make or break us. And that’s our bread and butter, so we’ve got to work hard at that. Think is dedicated to that.”

This blending of professional development for staff in VET and higher education is also bringing to the fore the definition of a professional tertiary educator, and Brown advocates the use of new terminology to describe these professionals.

“Our lecturers are trainers and assessors, but they’re more than that. They’re professionals who espouse the virtues of industry and the skills and knowledge and attributes that are necessary to be successful in industry. They must be cutting edge in their industry approaches and they must be contemporary and fresh and critiquing developments.”

This is no fantasy. The emerging tertiary sector has the potential to change definitions, end old debates and light up the entire post-compulsory teaching profession.

Attachment 8. Specialists not novices for e-learning

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for Campus Review online, 14 June 2010

Are most VET practitioners capable of increasing the use of e-learning?

As part of its year-long investigation into the VET Workforce, the Productivity Commission has released an issues paper. And one of the questions raised in the paper is whether the use of technology will impact on VET teaching delivery and methods over the next five to ten years.

Fortunately we have some data that directly responds to this question, but the findings may surprise those who are breezily confident that VET practitioners are ready and able to expand the use of e-learning.

The data comes from the national survey of 2,230 VET practitioners conducted by pyschometrician John Ward and myself in late 2009 in which we asked respondents to rate their skills and their need for professional development across 140 questions. While we have publically workshopped the findings about e-learning, this is the first time we have released these results on paper.

Our full report explains why the results are a statistically valid representation of VET practitioners nationally, to a very high level of confidence.

When asked to rate themselves in relation to over 55 skills, the respondents rated their e-learning skills as their absolutely lowest. By the proverbial country mile. They also indicated that, of all the professional development on offer in the sector, their highest demand for VET professional development is for developing skills for designing and delivering e-learning.

Ward comments that "these two results indicate that, as a whole, Australian TAFE teachers perceive e-learning skills as the area in which they are most lacking".

The survey respondents seem to share with the Productivity Commission an expectation that technology will play an increasing role in their future teaching delivery. Ward notes that "VET practitioner place great value on e-learning skills – higher than any other skill. And they perceive e-learning as intricately wedded to their future roles."

While VET practitioners have a strong desire to improve their e-learning skills, they can't do this until they have their foundation skills in place, says Ward. "Our research shows that there are a set of core skills that need to be mastered by all VET practitioners before they can consider moving on to more complex skills like e-learning.

"Our research shows how e-learning is a specialist learning and assessment skill. This means that to master e-learning, a VET practitioner must have previously mastered a set of core teaching and assessment skills."

This has implications immediately for the content of the highly contested Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA), the entry level qualification for a VET practitioner, designed to introduce the practitioner the core set of VET teaching and assessment skills.

Educational nuances

“Teaching e-learning as part of the TAA is, frankly speaking, a waste of time,” says Ward.

“TAA students will not have the core teaching and learning skills, and will not be able to understand the educational nuances, benefits and pitfalls associated with designing and conducting e-learning.

“It might take them a number of years to acquire these skills, by which time they will have forgotten those e-learning skills taught to them as part of the TAA. They will just have to do professional development again. It is a waste of resources to do this.”

Skills in designing and developing e-learning need to be taught to those VET practitioners that have had considerable experience in classroom and workplace training and assessment, says Ward. “Expending resources on providing PD in e-learning to novice practitioners is a waste of money. Their skill levels are just not yet ready.”

Our research also shows that e-learning is at the high end of VET professional practice. “Only those practitioners who are well versed in the foundation teaching and assessment skills can be expected to full comprehend and master the skills required of an effective e-learning practitioner.”

“We have been told all too often that e-learning is easy. If the VET sector wants to see the widespread provision of e-learning, the people within training providers chosen to develop e-learning need to have high levels of expertise in training and assessment. We cannot expect a novice teacher to succeed in designing and developing e-learning.”

These research findings will be a jarring note for those who wish to see the speedy increase in the provision of e-learning across Australian VET, without committing substantial and targeted funding for professional development in e-learning. That PD needs to be carefully aligned with the level of expertise of the practitioner.

The findings also are a reminder to the Productivity Commission about the complexities of VET practice, as the Commission starts its major investigation into the VET Workforce.

Attachment 9. E-learning capability requirements

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 28 June 2010

Do VET practitioners need professional development in e-learning?

E-learning is a contentious arena, for a number of reasons. One reason is that technology is used for e-learning and technology keeps changing, challenging decision makers to decide which technologies are appropriate for learning. Another reason is the temptation for decision makers to hope that smart technology will replace teaching skills and no professional development will be required.

E-learning in the VET sector is affected by such contentious issues, as demonstrated by the axing several years ago of the national professional development program for e-learning, LearnScope. Why was it axed? National research I conducted recently showed, to a level of validity of 95% or higher, that VET practitioners across Australia rate e-learning as the area in which they require most professional development, both now and in the future. Practitioner capability is the critical issue, not technology functionality. And that capability is at risk.

The following case study of the effective use of e-learning demonstrates that educators need to exercise considerable professional judgment in deciding on which technology, or combinations of technology, to use. It also demonstrates that staff capability in the use of technology is pivotal for effective learning.

Over the last few years, success with e-learning has become increasingly commonplace for First Impressions Resources, a private provider in the retail training field, with headquarters in Brisbane and staff spread around every state of Australia.
General Manager Michael Wallace explains that one success, funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, was a project with the national retailer Tradelink, involving the development through the Tradelink intranet system of a set of e-learning activities in workplace health and safety, aligned with a certificate IV.

In 2010 another national retailer Best and Less approached First Impressions Resources (FIR) because it wanted to implement the Diploma of Retail Management program for its management team across its large network of stores.

Normally the delivery of this diploma involves managers attending face to face sessions in State capitals, said Wallace. "However this was a problem for regionally-based managers, so we suggested running live, facilitated classes online, using the Elluminate platform.

"Best and Less did not have the e-learning technologies in their stores to provide for this and so we agreed that FIR would run these two-hour sessions first thing in the morning, from 8-10am, to allow managers to participate using their home computers, before going to work."

The FIR trainer for this program is based in Sydney and course participants are spread from Townsville and Cairns in Queensland to Warrnambool and Shepparton in Victoria to Broome and Geraldton in Western Australia.

“The program is now over halfway through and is going really well. There has been virtually no drop-out and this looks set to have a very high completion rate.”

To enhance the learning experience, FIR uses the Moodle course management system to “provide online support such as discussion groups and a richer learning environment for all”.

Staff with specialist skills

This success influenced the educational design of a new program for KFC in Queensland with regional managers participating through Elluminate and supported through Moodle.

FIR is using Moodle to facilitate some of the assessment activities, providing online documentation and the facility for participants to upload completed assessment materials and workplace documents. “We can also include additional resources, such as a podcast from the CEO explaining the company’s strategic plan.”

“This delivery method has other advantages, such as the ability to record the online sessions so that absentees can catch up or participants can go through parts again that perhaps they did not quite get the first time.”

As a result of these successes, FIR appointed a new instructional designer who is able to design online resources. FIR also has equipped its trainers with the e-learning technologies required for remote delivery.

“Those are the things we now have to think about. Our trainers need to have the technologies to be able to participate.”

FIR is now looking differently at its staff and programs. “If we have a trainer in one area who might be a little light on for work, we can utilise them in other states if we’re able to use that technology platform, provided they have the skills we need.

“In terms of our capability development, as well as the other sorts of skills sets that our trainers need to have for workplace delivery, we need to have a group of staff who have the specialist skills required to handle the online environment.”

This brief case study illustrates that technology is best used as the servant, not master, of the skilled educator. LearnScope, or another similar national professional development program in e-learning, deserves urgent reconsideration.

Attachment 10: Looking beyond MySkills website

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 31 May 2010

Which training providers are not afraid of the MySkills website?

Following the media profile given to the MySchool website, there was no sense of public surprise when the Government announced in the budget that it would allocate $4.1 million over four years to establish and maintain a website, MySkills, to provide information to users of the vocational education and training system.

The budget papers noted that the website will support skills development through the provision of comprehensive information on vocational education and training. "This will assist students and businesses identify and choose appropriate training options and increase the transparency within the sector".

The website will provide performance information on registered training organisations (RTOs) obtained from employers and students, data on the level of commencements and completions and a description of the training provided by different RTOs.

While training providers may take some time to digest the implications of these inclusions, the head of one of the national award-winning providers, the Australian College of Training which has its headquarters in Perth, is more focused on using data not collected by the MySkills website.

Terry Richards, CEO of this company that was a finalist in the WA Small Training Provider in four of the last five years, is thinking a long way past the passive approach to displaying data on the MySkills site.

"We are actually launching a new electronic system in early July which will substantially increase our data right down to knowing how long a trainer spends with each student and how long they spend on each worksite," said Richards.

"This is extremely detailed data that isn't currently available, but it is how we will use that data that is important.

"At the moment we collect pretty much similar data to any other RTO but what we do in addition is a lot of data analysis. For example we'll measure completion rates versus frequency of visits from trainers to see whether we need to have more frequent visit rate to get better completion rates."

Richards also uses the student achievement data to review internal processes. "We'll collect data on the actual progress of students and sites in terms of commencements or completions. We will then use that information to determine a lot of our internal processes, for example whether paperwork's been presented, whether trainers are up to date on their paperwork, whether students are progressing at correct levels."

“We feel that there’s a direct correlation between our digital information and the efficiency of our organisation.”

Most of all Richards is focused on using data to improve student completion rates. “We’ll be able to measure, based on their time taken, how far students are progressed and what’s their likelihood of completion on time. Sometimes we can’t do anything about it but where we can we certainly try to get early intervention.”

Commercial sensitivities

Understandably, Richards views much of this data as commercially sensitive and therefore inappropriate for the MySkills website. “Information that may not be appropriate for public use is information, for example, about how many of our training resources were required per employer.”

But such information may be made available to his valued clients. “For some employers where we visit their multiple sites, we’ll give them the benchmarked information between their sites so they can see which sites are more advanced in their training than others.”

Other information Richards would not want displayed on the MySkills website is detailed data about his staff input, which he is about to start collecting. “Our new electronic system is about complete digital workflows, and we’ll be able to monitor the total contact time of staff with students, total contact with individuals, time spent on each site. And I suppose the benefit of that approach is that we can see whether we are best placing our resource.”

While others may be more concerned about the intrusion of MySkills into their businesses, Richards is looking beyond it, to the competitive benefits of digital information. “This next step we’re going to make in July with our digital workflows we believe is not only going to put us a huge jump ahead of the rest of the industry, but it’s also going to significantly change the way we deliver our service, to the point where it’s going to give us enormous competitive advantage.”

“We’re quite heavy on technology in terms of our IT. We’ve been trying to do things that organisations might do with a $2m IT budget. We haven’t got that kind of money, but we’re getting smarter and better and more knowledgeable about how to do that.”

Attachment 11: Productivity possibilities

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 3 May 2010

Are teachers the only source of future efficiencies in VET?

The recently announced review of the VET workforce by the Productivity Commission is a critical research project, and focuses on trainers and assessors. However, productivity also can be improved by improving management and administration systems and by implementing new business models, says Alan Manly, Managing Director of Group Colleges Australia (GCA).

As head of this ten-year old Sydney-based organisation enrolling over 4,000 mostly VET students per annum through its four colleges, Manly is focused on organisational efficiencies, and is not convinced he can extract more value from his teachers.

"Our board of directors observed many years ago that in education wages are about the same across the board. There's only so much you can do with teachers' wages. How do you make a teacher teach faster? Very hard. We like to think that we actually make the [productivity] gain in administration."

GCA's business model is unusual in that its small head office oversees four colleges: an English college Metro, a high school St James, a VET college Central and a higher education provider UIC. GCA's efficiencies are gained mostly from keeping lean that head office and related administration.

"We have one head office for several colleges. In the past we could grow and keep our head office costs down. That was our economic gain," said Manly.

How can educational organisations reduce administrations costs? "You'd better get to computers fast. You've got to remove the most expensive part of administration which is labour. So we have things online. As a private education institution we would probably have the most automated model of our private competitors. Basically we make our money out of investing in IT."

Some of that IT is used in the classroom and some in the provision of other services by GCA. "We have a strong emphasis of the use of technology. All classrooms have interactive white boards, courses are being taught using Moodle, we use [measurement] matrixes, and we have a constant review of service to all stakeholders – students, staff, agents and regulators.

"So it's about economies of scale and using technology. Our head office is quite lean. The entire place runs on very, very few human beings."

Reducing administration costs does not mean a reduction in services, says Manly, who came to education from the computer industry. "In the computer industry I used to be in charge of servicing major computer sites. Consequently I knew about post-sales service. [I learnt that] as a customer the only thing you'll be irritated about is when you don't get what you want or what you expected."

Hence GCA measures “the turn-around time of things such exam results, the length of queues at customer service counters, the waiting time for any request from students. GCA measures turn around time for any regulatory request for information. We have a constant review of all costs, and there are no holy cows.

“We actually monitor the queues with cameras. There are five screens in the Executive area. The Directors have screens in their rooms where they can monitor the queues downstairs.”

The supply chain

Manly is also focused on efficiencies in terms of offering students the opportunity to stay with GCA from English language courses through to VET and higher education. He calls this the supply chain and he sees it as inefficient for GCA to educate an individual up to a certain point and then hand them over to another educational organisation.

“We’ve become more of a one stop shop. Our English language college augments the big Central College, and the Central College then feeds the UIC.”

Not surprisingly, Manly believes that to stay successful GCA cannot only operate in the VET sector. “To be in the private education sector, to be successful you’ve got to be in higher ed.”

One reason he gives is that the recent exposure of dodgy private providers demonstrated that higher education has what he calls “more logical education foundations”. Another reason is that HE organisations are opening up VET colleges, extending their supply chain.

“Take Monash University, which now has Monash College. Well that [initiative] absolutely wipes out someone who cannot provide that supply chain.”

Manly is also conscious that VET is being squeezed by schools who are retaining more students in Years 11 and 12 that might have previously enrolled in VET.

“So we’re seeing high schools encroaching onto VET and we’re seeing the HE people saying we can provide a diploma, so the [VET] guy in the middle is really under a lot of pressure.”

Rather than be squashed in the middle, Manly is creating an efficient supply chain from “feeder colleges to diploma level education” and on to degrees. For Manly, developing this sustainable business structure is more important than increasing teacher efficiencies.

Attachment 16. Driving capability development

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 2 February 2010

Who needs to pick up the baton regarding the professional development of the VET workforce?

The editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) on 21 January 2010 put the case for school teachers to be positioned at the centre of the government's education revolution: "the [teaching] profession remains the missing part – the essential part, we think – of a genuine 'education revolution' ". Then the editorial boldly targeted the Deputy Prime Minister:

"So far we've got the [national literacy and numeracy] tests, laptop computers and showpiece buildings, but not any discernible efforts to build up the human resources. Does Gillard really get it?"

Does this also apply to VET? What I can say with great confidence is that in VET we now know why and how the federal government, or any other body for that matter, could support the human resource development of VET practitioners.

This confidence is due to the generous response to a national online survey of VET skills that my business division, JMA Analytics, sent out to the sector, through informal networks, in late October 2009. We received enormous support for disseminating the survey from government and other senior officials who will remain anonymous. Much goodwill exists in VET.

The survey design was led by my colleague and psychometrician John Ward, and we cheekily framed over 140 questions about the current skill levels and professional development needs of VET practitioners.

To our great surprise, 2230 VET practitioners responded. This high response rate is a finding in itself: clearly VET practitioners are passionate about their profession, their skills and their own continuous improvement.

For example, 130 survey returns were received on a Saturday, 7 November 2009. And the urban myth that VET practitioners lose interest on Fridays was dispelled on Friday 6 November 2009 when we received nearly 300 returns. We estimate that, collectively, respondents spent around 400-450 hours completing the survey.

In return for their support for the survey, we promised respondents we would release a public report. That 15,000 word report was released on 29 January with the headline finding that a significant gap exists between the current skill levels of VET trainers and assessors and the skills required to perform all their professional duties. These current skills face rapid redundancy over the next five years.

“The current skill levels of the average Australian VET trainer and assessor meet only 80% of this group’s professional work requirements. By 2014, the current skill levels of the average Australian VET trainer and assessor will meet only 62% of this group’s professional work requirements.”

It is not uncommon for skills to become redundant over time and individuals can thwart the onset of this redundancy through engaging in professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, Australian VET trainers and assessor believe that current professional development opportunities are less than adequate for their professional requirements. “Current professional development opportunities meet only 55% of VET trainer and assessor’s professional requirements.”

In the report we then set about identifying what those professional development (PD) needs are and how future PD programs can be aligned with those needs.

Roles for providers

In high-flown but less emotional terms than used by the SMH in championing the cause of school teachers, we put a case that the development of VET practitioners is in the national interest.

“The quality of our workforce is highly contingent upon the ability of the Australian VET sector to train a vast proportion of the nation’s current and future workers, especially given that annual VET enrolments are almost exactly twice those of universities.

“This places great responsibility upon the VET sector, the capacity of which is almost entirely underpinned by the skill levels of its trainers and assessors. The higher the skill levels of these VET practitioners, the greater the capacity of the VET sector to ensure the quality of our nation’s workforce.”

John Ward and I end the report by taking the blow torch off government and focusing most of our recommendation on what individual practitioners and training providers can do with the survey results.

This focus is appropriate as providers are closer to the world of VET practitioners. While State and Territory governments are key players in VET capability development, and hopefully will continue to be involved, they often work on twelve-month funding cycles for supporting professional development initiatives. This is a slow process.

In contrast to the SHM’s call for government to drive the development of teachers, we risk our friendly relationship with the VET sector by ultimately putting the onus on providers and practitioners to pick up the baton of VET professional development. Government funding alone is insufficient to address all the needs.

Attachment 12: Small packages for big skills

John Mitchell's 'Inside VET' column in *Campus Review*, 3 February 2009

Why cumbersome training packages need radical surgery not band-aids.

New ideas are often destabilising and uncomfortable, so we humans tend to find ways to pay them lip service, while quietly continuing on with the old ways. Possibly the best example of this in the VET sector is the way we have postponed major improvements to the design of training package, hoping the problems will quietly disappear.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has decided to confront some of the uncomfortable issues in VET by convening a major national conference in Sydney in early March, called Big Skills. DEEWR aims to bring together major national and international players with an interest in skills and training to debate issues, think differently and stimulate change in the Australian tertiary sector.

To ensure there is debate at the conference about the future of training packages, DEEWR has invited to the conference the lead author of the recent OECD review of VET, *Learning for Jobs*, Kathrin Hoeckel. A policy analyst with OECD, with masters degrees from Munich University and the London School of Economics and Political Science, she is responsible for country reviews of VET in Australia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, England and Wales.

In her OECD report, Hoeckel was straight to the point: "given the range of problems affecting training packages, radical reform is needed". Further, "they have outlived their usefulness". I contacted her recently in Paris to see whether she wanted to add to her comments in the review and was surprised by her passionate response.

One of her main interests is that the design and approval of new or revised training packages be faster and more efficient. "We propose a radical reform of the training packages, drastically cutting back on the process of setting them up and making the whole process much more efficient and responsive to the changing needs of industry and the outcome more user-friendly."

She believes that the lengthy approval process involving many stakeholders is too costly. "It is time consuming and requires substantial logistical effort – something that is difficult to manage in a country the size and diversity of Australia."

"The content might be out of date if designing and updating takes too long. A fast changing economy needs quick reactions from the education system to accommodate skills needs.

"New innovative industries with special skills needs might be hampered in their development if the process of setting up new training packages takes too long."

"If the process results in very long comprehensive documents, training packages may be used by stakeholders only selectively," she adds.

"There is even a risk that training packages may simply not be used at all or that providers – as some told the OECD team during our study visit in Australia - will offer higher education qualifications instead, because training packages for VET seem unmanageable."

Hoeckel points out that training packages are under-used. "About 80% of all publicly recorded enrolments in 2006 were in just 180 qualifications out of the 1709 qualifications available. And 70 qualifications were not used at all."

Outlived their usefulness

To partly calm the nerves of those VET people who focus on the inconvenience of changing training packages, Hoeckel says that "our intention is not to encourage Australia to abolish the concept of training packages altogether".

"The principle of having a national framework for competencies of VET occupations should be maintained. But their format should be revised radically."

"Training packages were set up for a reason in the 1990s and have made important contributions to putting in place a truly national VET system in Australia. Now that this national system is firmly established, they have somewhat outlived their usefulness and become a burden because of the way they are designed and the process through which they are produced."

For these reasons, she and her colleagues are recommending "making better use of this kind of tool to improve the responsiveness of Australia's VET system to labour market needs, and to avoid waste of resources and frustration and disengagement among stakeholders".

Hoeckel also recommends that the term training packages be dropped: "A change in terminology should accompany this reform to indicate that a real change is taking place.

"The term training packages sounds as heavy as these documents often are, whereas the term 'skills standards' centres the attention on the skills needed for a given profession and states their function – to set standards that ensure quality."

It will be interesting to see whether the participants at the Big Skills conference embrace immediate surgery for training packages or politely reject the OECD diagnosis.

See http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/11/41631383.pdf

Attachment 13. Realities of industry currency

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 12 April 2010

What does industry currency really mean to VET practitioners?

The credibility of the VET sector hinges largely on whether the skills of its practitioners match the skills used in contemporary industry. But the industry currency of VET practitioners is rarely discussed in public, and when it is raised people normally talk about practitioners undertaking a quick stint in industry.

"When people see the words industry currency, they think of industry release. We really need to broaden their understanding of what it encompasses," says Peter Skippington, director, strategy and research, product services, in Queensland's department of education and training (DET).

In taking up the challenge to broaden the understanding of the term, Skippington's group recently released a research paper entitled 'Keeping it real. Industry currency of trainers in Queensland'. The easy to read and informative 12,000 word paper is "a starting point on the big issue; a broad brush look at it," says Skippington.

One of the two DET authors, Melinda Toze, explains that the aims of the paper were "to raise awareness about the issues that are relating to industry currency and stimulate discussion about what's required, so trainers demonstrate and maintain their industry currency".

When undertaking the field research, Toze was surprised by the level of interest in the topic. "Practitioners are very passionate about their training and what they do. They want to know that what they're delivering is current out in industry. And that the training that they're delivering is relevant, up to date and meeting the needs of their local industry."

She also found that industry stakeholders are passionate about the topic. "They want to be confident that VET trainers have current skills to be able to train workers for their industry. That's what's really important to them, because they want skilled, work-ready employees who can meet their current and emerging needs in their industry."

If VET practitioners have current industry skills, it provides industry with confidence. "It builds industry confidence about what is being delivered. And better relationships between industry and providers enable an improved sharing of ideas and expectations and experience."

There are various definitions of industry currency, but this is not the issue says Toze. "I don't think we need a new or a better definition of industry currency. There are quite a few definitions out there that RTOs can take and either use or refine to meet their own purposes. It's more about creating a better understanding of how to operationalise the concept of currency in a meaningful way, at least to improve training outcomes."

Innovative learning

How can practitioners become more current? Toze says that all practitioners have dual roles, as trainers and assessors on the one hand and as industry people on the other, and “they need to be able to balance those roles when they’re planning their professional development activities for the year”.

One of the issues canvassed in the paper is whether VET practitioners can improve their currency while simultaneously undertaking training and assessing in the workplace. However, Toze recommends that the two activities not be combined.

“It’s probably better if practitioners address their industry currency separately. Industry currency might involve, for example, a professional conversation with the employer or with the supervisor, their familiarisation with policies and procedures [in the enterprise], and their access to workplace manuals.”

Progressively, the topic of industry currency is coming to the attention of providers around the sector, due to a greater emphasis on it in the forthcoming version of the AQTF, commencing on 1 July. And Toze believes that with some uncertainty around what “the AQTF 2010 will mean in terms of expectation of providers, it is important that providers operationalise their concept of industry currency”.

“They’ll need a good level of confidence when they’re doing their planning that they will be meeting those AQTF obligations.”

When they visit colleges to talk about the paper, Toze and colleagues are promoting some key messages. “We’re saying that providers need more innovative approaches to overcome the barriers that we’ve identified to maintaining industry currency, that they should be applying an outcomes focus during their planning, and they should develop greater clarity about what they’re actually trying to achieve in their industry currency activities.

“We’re encouraging providers to look at industry currency in a more innovative way because if they have an industry endorsed approach and they’re looking at innovative ways of sharing information and learning and bringing that back into improving their teaching and learning processes, then that will take care of their compliance with the AQTF 2010.”

Attachment 14. For and against teacher standards

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 8 March 2010

Is it possible to rank VET teachers' skills and knowledge?

There are moves afoot to define teaching standards for all school teachers in Australia, so the question follows as to whether standards can be set for VET practitioners.

The Australian newspaper reported on 24 February 2010 that the National Professional Standards for Teachers are soon to be released, detailing teaching standards in three main areas: professional knowledge (what is taught), professional practice (how it is taught), and professional engagement (involvement in the school and ongoing education).

The standards are the first step in "a planned uniform system of teacher accreditation and registration, which will also provide national accreditation and standards for teacher education courses in universities". The standards were approved by the newly established Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which comprises representatives of the federal, state and territory governments, private schools, teachers and principal groups.

The four levels of expertise built into the proposed national standards are graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead. Beginners must meet the 'graduate' standard to be registered and be 'proficient' a year later to qualify for a permanent licence. 'Highly accomplished' and 'lead' levels are open to all experienced teachers but are not mandatory.

This initiative raises a number of contentious issues such as how can teachers prove they have skills at any of the four levels and what payment is appropriate at each level.

Stepping around these controversies for now, a fundamental question is whether it is worthwhile and feasible to apply similar levels to VET practitioner skills. From research I have recently undertaken with psychometrician John Ward, we can immediately put one argument for supporting such a move in the VET sector and one argument for caution.

We have evidence to support the argument that there are levels of VET teacher knowledge and skills. In comparison with the levels identified in the school area – graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead – we have identified in VET the levels of novice, established, specialist and advanced.

Our evidence is drawn from the recent national survey of over two thousand VET practitioners and the analysis of the data using a technique called structural equation modelling. This technique enabled us to identify the skills sets used by practitioners at different levels of practice, beginning at the novice or foundation level.

Importantly, our research identified what Ward calls a causal model of VET practice, which means that “some skills come before others”.

“What has been unrecognised in VET is that there is a very strong progression of skills from the basic level of practice to the more advanced level. Along the way, the new skills build upon others acquired earlier,” said Ward.

“The classic one is e-learning, for example. All of our new evidence shows that for a VET practitioner to be proficient in using e-learning, that practitioner requires all the basics like classroom facilitation skills, workplace facilitation skills and flexible learning skills. Our analysis shows that if practitioners don’t have these types of foundation skills, their e-learning skills will be significantly limited. E-learning requires knowledge of almost everything else.”

As a result, Ward challenges the wisdom of locating e-learning units of competence within the novice qualifications for VET practitioners, as it is “a specialist skill that can only be acquired by people who have been in the system for quite a while”.

This evidence of a causal model of professional practice strongly supports the logic behind identifying levels of skills and knowledge of practitioners, as proposed for secondary teachers.

Two sets of skills

However, we are cautious about supporting a simplistic approach to levels of VET practice, because VET practitioners are very different from most school teachers. The key difference is that VET practitioners need two sets of skills and knowledge – first, the skills of teaching and assessing and working with clients, and second, the skills acquired from working in an industry position, say in hospitality, hairdressing, plumbing or manufacturing.

Ward notes that the typical VET trainer and assessor has a dual identity: as an educational practitioner and as an industry practitioner. Our recent research identified one of these two identities of the VET practitioner, the educational practitioner.

“We’ve worked out one side of the coin; and now we have to work out the other. We need to do this for each and every industry, because the vocational skills you develop in the building industry are different to the vocational skills you build in tourism or retail.”

It is then possible to identify levels of VET practitioners, as trainers and assessors, much like the schools model, but it is a complex task to marry levels of educational skills with levels of vocational skills. For this reason we recommend a cautious approach to defining standards for VET practitioners.

Postscript: John Ward and John Mitchell have since invented, psychometrically tested and implemented CURCAT™, the VET industry currency capability analysis tool. The tool contains a total of 85 questions and identifies the practitioner’s perception of opportunities available to maintain industry currency and the practitioner’s preference for different ways of maintaining industry currency.

Attachment 15. Circumventing controversy over teachers

John Mitchell's Inside VET column for *Campus Review*, 26 January 2009

What are the benefits of mandatory standards and compulsory professional development for teachers, asks John Mitchell.

There is always controversy when governments propose compulsory basic standards for teachers, no matter whether it is the higher education or VET sector. This tendency to stir controversy is illustrated by immediate opposition voiced in *The Australian* (13 January 2010) to the DEEWR proposal to use the proportion of staff holding a graduate certificate in higher education as a quality proxy.

Making obligatory an entry level qualification such as this graduate certificate inevitably raises contentious issues including whether the certificate is pitched at the right level. The VET community is familiar with this debate, as its own entry-level certificate IV in training and assessment (TAA) is the focus of ongoing discussion in the sector. Many people criticise the TAA certificate as being pitched too low, potentially endangering the profession.

While the topic of basic qualifications for VET practitioners stirs emotions, governments in Australia are particularly loathe to intervene in the related area, continuing professional development (CPD) for higher education and VET teachers and trainers.

This contrasts with other professions such as medicine or accountancy which not only have strict entry requirements but require CPD professionals to undertake a certain number of hours annually of relevant professional development. The requirement for CPD of doctors and accountants is generally accepted and uncontroversial.

Meanwhile, the Australian VET sector continues to debate the appropriateness of the entry-level TAA qualification, and in all states and territories there is no requirement for VET professionals to undertake a specific amount of annual CPD.

How does this VET approach compare with other countries? The situation is significantly different in the further education (FE) sector in England, which I revisited over Christmas, where the government intervened heavily in 2007 by issuing new professional standards and mandating new qualifications for three levels of FE teachers.

To maintain their licence to practice, full-time teachers in the English FE sector need to undertake at least thirty hours per annum of CPD. The content of the CPD is not prescribed, but teachers are expected to maintain a portfolio that contains evidence of their updating of their industrial competence and subject knowledge, as well as their membership of appropriate professional bodies.

The new standards for FE teachers cover three levels of practitioners – those preparing to teach, associate teachers and full time teachers. And the standards range of domains such as professional values, planning for learning, assessment for learning and specialist learning and teaching. To complement the standards, full-time teachers are required to undertake course in order to attain the status of qualified teacher, learning and skills (QLTS).

Additionally, a code of professional practice is now in place, overseen by the Institute for Learning, and all FE teachers are required to register with the institute and adhere to this code.

What needs to change?

According to a new book by English academic Dr Angela Seward, these FE professional standards, compulsory qualifications and obligatory CPD have stirred some debate but no fierce opposition. Surprisingly, much of the debate is about how to improve and embed the standards, qualifications and CPD, not dismantle these initiatives.

Seward finds that while the imposition of CPD generally is not a contentious issue in the FE sector, what needs to change are the "escalating administration and additional responsibilities" imposed on FE teachers, preventing them from accessing CPD. "Teachers are often weighed down and encumbered by organisational obligations that constrain what they want: quality teaching".

Seward advocates a "whole-college commitment to their staff's professional learning" and the positioning of teacher CPD as "an integral part of the management of human resources" in the college.

Rather than oppose the new standards, qualifications and related CPD, Seward says that FE organisations need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the value of professional development. "Improvement of quality [teaching] requires "ongoing workplace learning [that] is long-term".

"Improvement in quality teaching and learning in the sector is not achieved exclusively through short-term external professional development and training activities but requires ongoing workplace learning which is long term in focus, practice-oriented and work-based."

In focusing on the effective design of and support for teacher professional development at the college level, Seward moves past the public debates around the structure of teacher qualifications and the nature of professional standards. Ultimately she seeks a higher goal for every FE college: "to get every member of staff to feel excited about teaching again".

Perhaps Seward's goal of getting staff excited about teaching could be promoted in Australian VET to circumvent the recurring controversies about teacher qualifications, standards and professional development. In this way the profession could be re-ignited, regardless of other debates.