



Issues Paper

Supporting the VET workforce: Developing a VET Workforce Quality Strategy

Context

Vocational education and training (VET) trainers and assessors¹ are a vital component of Australia's VET sector, with responsibility for skilling and upskilling 4.2 million learners in 2019.² They are at the front line of ensuring that learners in the VET system receive high quality and engaging training that helps them to meet changing skills needs to improve employment outcomes and support Australia's productivity.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data shows that in February 2019 there were an estimated 71,379 people in the VET workforce who were employed as trainers and assessors.³ Trainers and assessors undertake their role in a variety of settings - from small private registered training organisations (RTOs) through to large public institutions such as TAFEs and dual sector universities. Additionally, training can be delivered through community not for profit organisations, in a school setting and by enterprise RTOs – companies that deliver training to their own workforces.

Trainers and assessors deliver training to a diverse range of learners including those gaining skills for the current and future needs of industry, undertaking lifelong learning, improving their foundation skills for employment or further study, international students, equity cohorts, and learners that have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging from education and employment.

The trainer and assessor role is demanding as there is significant diversity in how each RTO looks and operates, coupled with trainers and assessors being required to maintain industry currency, engage learners – including those with more complex needs – alongside management of administrative and compliance workloads. The development of a VET Workforce Quality Strategy will provide the

¹ Trainers and assessors are also referred to as VET teachers or VET practitioners. The use of the term trainer and assessor in the Strategy is intended to include those who consider themselves under these terms.

² NCVER (2020) *Total VET students and courses 2019 statistical report*, p.1

³ NCVER (2020) *Understanding the Australian vocational education and training workforce*, p.7

opportunity to support RTOs and trainers and assessors to ensure they can excel in their role and promote excellent learner outcomes.

There are a range of issues often raised in relation to the quality of the VET workforce. These include, but are not limited to, the adequacy of entry level qualifications to the profession, the need for additional skills and support to deliver training to learners from equity cohorts and learners with specific or complex needs, career structure and progression, and the effectiveness and availability of high quality professional development – particularly in the areas of teaching practice and online learning delivery.

The Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, signed by all Australian governments in July 2020, outlines immediate reforms to strengthen Australia’s training system to support Australia’s economic recovery. This includes reforms to strengthen quality standards, build RTO capacity and capability for continuous improvement and develop a VET Workforce Quality Strategy (the Strategy).⁴

The aim of the Strategy is to promote high quality training and assessment in a diversity of VET settings to all types of learner cohorts. It is envisioned that the Strategy will be split into key themes, such as capability frameworks, qualifications and entry requirements, professional support and best practice. More information on key themes is provided below. It is intended that the Strategy will benefit the following stakeholders by ensuring:

- **Registered training organisations (RTOs)** have the necessary information and strategies to establish workforce development plans, and build the capacity and capability of their trainer and assessor workforces.
- **Trainers and assessors** have access to materials and professional development to support their ability to provide high quality, inclusive and engaging training and assessment that supports learner outcomes.
- **Learners** are supported throughout their training by a high quality trainer and assessor workforce that delivers inclusive and engaging training.
- **Industry and employers** are assured that VET graduates have received high quality training that provides learners with the necessary skills for their role in the workforce.

Key themes for consultation

Capability frameworks and professional standards

A capability framework is a tool that can be used to help RTOs and trainers and assessors with workforce planning, performance management, career progression, self-reflection and to manage professional development gaps. Capability frameworks generally set out behaviours and expectations of a workforce at different points in their career progression.

⁴ (2020) Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform – accessed from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/heads-of-agreement-skills-reform.pdf>

Professional standards are used in addition, or as an alternative, to capability frameworks in some industries. They generally set out a series of practices and behaviours for particular professional groups, and are usually set out in statements of competence, rather than capability.⁵

In the VET sector, some RTOs have developed their own capability frameworks to use within their own organisations and others use publicly available frameworks, such as the Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) VET Practitioner Capability Framework, which was developed in 2013. Many VET stakeholders are concerned that professional standards may not be suitable for the VET sector, due to the sector's complexity and diversity.⁶

We are interested in learning from you how capability frameworks and professional standards are used in everyday practice to improve the quality of the VET workforce.

Qualifications and entry pathways

It is estimated 77.1 per cent of trainers and assessors hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment⁷. It is important that the Training and Education Training Package prepares trainers and assessors to deliver in a variety of VET settings, and to all types of learner cohorts, including those with specific or more complex needs (for example barriers due to low levels of language, literacy or numeracy). Any updates to the Training Package need to take into account the diversity of roles within the sector and ensure that changes do not impose unnecessary barriers for entry into the workforce, or for the existing workforce. Additionally, it is important to allow appropriate entry points for industry experts to become trainers and assessors and ensure that entry qualifications do not impact attraction of industry experts to the workforce. Passing on industry knowledge and skills to VET learners from industry experts is a cornerstone of the VET system.

We are interested in your views on how the Training Package, and in particular the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, is preparing future trainers and assessors and whether it could be improved to ensure future graduates are ready to enter the VET workforce upon completion. Additionally, we are interested in how to encourage career progression, and the uptake of higher level qualifications to further develop the capability of the VET workforce. We would similarly like to hear your views on how to support industry experts to become trainers and assessors and whether there are other pathways for entry that should be considered.

Ongoing professional support

There is value in exploring how trainers and assessors can be supported through induction support, professional development – including undertaking higher level qualifications, facilitating mentorship arrangements and maintaining industry skills, knowledge and linkages. Some RTOs have the capacity to invest to provide specific support for their staff, however, it is acknowledged that other RTOs may have financial and time constraints and therefore would benefit from support material being developed that can be tailored to their organisations' needs.

We are interested in your experience of what has helped support you in your role, or what you have in place at your RTO, to help us consider what could be worthwhile in a broader VET context.

⁵ NCVET (2020) *Building capability and quality in VET teaching: opportunities and challenges*, p.12

⁶ Ibid, p.7

⁷ NCVET (2020) *Understanding the Australian vocational education and training workforce*, p.16

Fostering better practice and continuous improvement

Best practice principles, examples and case studies can be a useful way to demonstrate what constitutes quality. They can also showcase the diversity of the roles within the sector.

The VET sector has a wealth of experience in delivering high quality training and assessment. We would like to explore what constitutes best practice to support the development of the trainer and assessor workforce. It is anticipated that this be shared more broadly with the sector to provide a common understanding of quality and promote a culture of continuous improvement.

Your feedback

To support the development of the Strategy, we encourage you to complete the VET Workforce Quality Strategy survey. We welcome all feedback from anyone who engages with the VET sector, including trainers and assessors, RTO managers as well as other VET stakeholders. The survey will be based around the key themes outlined in this issues paper and will help to identify the strengths of the VET workforce, and areas for improvement and further support. Your response to the survey will be used to inform the directions and measures included in the Strategy.

A series of virtual workshops will also be held at a later stage to support development of the Strategy. Information on the opportunities to engage in surveys and workshops will be available through the consultation hub.