**Would more highly-qualified teachers and trainers help to address quality problems in the Australian vocational education and training system?**

**Australian Research Council Linkage Project No: LP140100044**

***Progress summary, November 2016***

The project research questions are:

1. What differences do VET teachers’ levels of qualification (both pedagogical and discipline-based) make to their teaching concepts, approaches and practice?
2. What differences do VET teachers’ levels of qualification make to their ability to navigate complex training contexts, to teach across the large range of qualification levels and diversity of learners typical of VET, and to contribute to improved student outcomes?
3. How do levels of qualification affect VET teachers’ engagement in further professional development activities (pedagogical development and industry engagement), and how can PD be tailored for different groups?
4. In what ways do more highly-qualified VET teachers contribute to improved quality in VET? What actual and potential barriers and facilitators are associated with this contribution, including resourcing issues and policy changes?

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Partner Organisations: Australian Council for Private Education and Training, VET Development Centre, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, TAFE Queensland, Federation Training.

The project started nine months later than initially planned, officially commencing on 1st April 2015. The late start was due to a range of changes in the partner organisations and personnel, and some other factors. Progress is consistent with the revised timelines. Initially the project was expected to end in mid-2016; it is now expected that it will conclude in March/April 2017. The proposed method has been closely followed, aside from a few minor changes; moreover, some additional items have been added to the method.

While systematic analysis of the data has yet to be undertaken, some analysis has been completed for the purpose of publications and conference presentations. These outputs are listed at the end of this document. The following sections provide a very brief overview of the method and some of the findings.

Stakeholder interviews and focus groups 2015

Nine stakeholder interviews (with 11 interviewees), six student focus groups, and five teacher focus groups were held across three States/Territories in a range of public and private providers. The range of discipline areas covered was great, as was the range of qualification levels at which the participants were learning or teaching. Some international students were captured in the sampling. This phase was designed to find out ‘What makes a good VET teacher/trainer?’ and was designed to inform later stages of the project to ensure that the extant literature covered the current Australian situation. This phase of the project yielded very rich data, beyond what had been expected.

The stakeholder interviewees described a diverse range of characteristics and qualities possessed by good VET teachers, enabling students to feel comfortable, motivated and willing to learn. Good teachers were described as open to new knowledge and professional development, with the ability to help and inspire others to learn. In terms of teaching and learning, it was said that good teachers had the skills to communicate with a diverse range of students. Extensive industry experience and the skills to transfer knowledge, theory and practice to learners were also mentioned. Descriptions of poor teachers were basically the converse of good teachers.

The comments of student focus groups and teacher focus groups alike could be divided into the following domains: ‘Professionalism’; expertise and standing in the industry; relationships with and attitudes towards learners; and pedagogical knowledge and expertise. However students’ and teachers’ conceptions of the domains differed; students thought of professionalism as being organised, prepared and efficient while teachers had in mind higher-level matters. The order of importance also varied, with professionalism being the major attribute valued by students, but the least most important domain mentioned by teachers.

Case studies in public and private RTOs 2015-2016

Detailed case studies were undertaken in eight Registered Training Organisations, involving four TAFE and four non-TAFE sites across four States. Each case study included interviews with senior managers and professional development/learning and teaching personnel at the institutional level; and then at departmental level where appropriate, interviews with department heads/lead teachers, and focus groups of teachers and students. The larger RTOs included focus groups and interviews in up to three industry/discipline areas: trade, non-trade (professional), and non-trade (other). The research in the case studies was primarily around the effects of teacher qualifications on teaching quality and on quality more generally. While we intended to discuss discipline qualifications as well as teaching/training qualifications, most respondents focused on teaching qualifications

It was reported, of course, that it was essential for VET teachers and trainers to hold a Certificate IV in TAE and to have industry experience. The Certificate IV TAE qualification was contentious. There was a general view that the qualification was only a bare minimum, as is generally accepted.

The TAFE Institutes had a senior management view that higher-level teaching qualifications were useful and indeed desirable, and two Institutes had schemes in place to encourage staff to undertake them. Teachers were not, however, expected to have these qualifications on recruitment; they were expected to acquire them after entry. Managers at all levels reported that people with higher-level teaching qualifications had more sophisticated approaches to pedagogy and to assessment, and also to compliance matters and general organisational contribution. Department heads mostly concurred with this view, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Generally, TAFE managers were more interested in, and talked more about, teaching than discipline qualifications. A view was even expressed that higher-level discipline qualifications might result in the teaching being pitched at too high a level.

Non-TAFE senior managers tended to be a little sceptical about higher qualifications for their teachers. They focused on industry qualifications and experience. In discussing these they tended to focus on either or both of the following: that their RTOs serviced particular industries and it was essential that staff were up-to-date and engaged in those industries; and that regulatory compliance required demonstration of industry currency. One non-TAFE RTO encouraged its teachers to gain more qualifications (allied to their current field) to enable them to teach into more courses.

Case studies have been written up individually, but cross-case analysis has yet to commence.

National Teacher/Trainer Survey mid-2016

A national on-line survey of VET teachers and trainers, about qualifications, approaches to teaching, engagement in professional development, and views about quality was completed, with 574 viable survey responses (58% TAFE, 32% ACPET members-private or community; 10% ERTOs). The respondents were obtained through 7 TAFE Institutes, 36 private RTOs (i.e. ACPET members) and 12 enterprise RTOs. Each respondent group has been sent initial quantitative data of its own cohort compared with the overall cohort and TAFE Institutes have been sent their own results as well as the numbers were large enough to do this and preserve anonymity. Response rates are still to be calculated precisely and varied quite considerably across providers. So far they are calculated as around 10% for TAFE; around 32% for the private RTOs; and 8% for ERTOs. The overall response rate was 12.7%. Each participating provider was required to stipulate the number of teachers/trainers to whom it was forwarding the survey link and we did not accept responses from anyone who was not employed at one of those RTOs.

Detailed statistical analysis of the responses is now underway. Patrick Korbel and Michelle Circelli from NCVER are taking the lead in this. This will include analysis by: highest VET teaching qualification, highest industry/discipline qualification, highest overall qualification, years of teaching experience, mode of employment, and training domain (industry/discipline area of teaching). The latter three factors are being investigated to see if they are significant modifiers for the effects of level of teacher qualification.

Initial findings for the whole survey cohort show that about one-third of respondents held a job outside of the VET workforce in addition to their teaching role, and generally this job was related to their teaching area. Respondents generally held higher industry qualifications than VET teaching qualifications. Likewise there was a higher focus on industry or discipline professional development than VET teaching professional development across the cohort. Informal professional development was generally reported at higher levels than formal professional development.

Items within the Queensland College of Teachers Professional Standards for VET Practitioners were used to examine people’s perceptions of their teaching/training ability, and to provide qualitative insights into their teaching approaches. At the moment, analysis has been undertaken of this section by highest level of pedagogical qualification. The items in the standards were generally rated of greater importance by those with higher pedagogical qualifications, and these respondents also reported greater confidence against these items than those with lower pedagogical qualifications. Teachers’ mean confidence against each item was generally lower than the reported mean of importance. Qualitative responses have yet to be analysed.

Professional development case studies 2016

Six Registered Training Organisations (three TAFE and three non-TAFE – in three States) were visited to examine teacher/trainer professional development and whether qualifications have an effect on engagement in professional development. The case studies will be written up individually and cross-case analysis will then be undertaken, focusing on differences among teachers with different qualification levels. The visits have only just concluded, and data analysis will be complex due to the need to separate out the responses from teachers with different qualification levels.

In the visits, senior manager interviews, interviews with learning and teaching/professional development staff, and up to three focus groups of teachers were undertaken. These visits found that teachers were generally more focused on qualifications and professional development in their industry/discipline area than qualifications and professional development in VET teaching skills. Also, teachers from some disciplines were more likely to undertake professional development than other disciplines. Some teacher groups (e.g. fitness) said that their discipline area required people to accrue professional development points in that discipline.

Professional development data were sought from the RTOs and were made available by some RTOs, but the inconsistency among the RTOs in the way that records were kept makes the data difficult to analyse.

To be completed: Professional development survey 2016

A professional development survey will be distributed in November through the three leading external professional development providers (ACPET, the VET Development Centre and VELG) to VET teachers/trainers who have undertaken professional development in 2016. In the case studies we have found that RTOs, public and private alike, used these providers quite heavily. The survey will ask about the VET teacher’s experience and qualifications, the nature of the professional development undertaken, what the VET teacher gained from it, and what types of professional development the teacher would like in the future. The responses will be analysed by teachers’ qualification levels to see how these levels affect both engagement and also satisfaction.

To be completed: ‘Delphi’ process early 2017

The Delphi process will examine policy and implementation issues through surveying national and international experts in VET policy and practice. The Australian phase will involve two streams: a policy stream and a senior RTO manager stream. Each expert is surveyed three times. It will uncover the national VET teacher workforce development implications of the findings, and also institutional-level implications. The international phase is still under development and has been added to the project method due to interest in the project from overseas academics and policy personnel.

Outputs from the project to date

**Refereed conference publications**

Smith, E. & Yasukawa, K. (2016). Views of VET teachers, managers and students about VET teacher qualifications. *Putting VET research to work: Collaboration, Innovation, Prosperity.* ***19th*** *Annual Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) Conference,* TAFE Northern Sydney campus, 21-22 April*.*

**Other conference presentations and papers** (\* denotes overseas)

Smith, E. & Tuck, J. (2016, forthcoming.) ‘I place myself in the shoes of a learner’: VET teachers’ and trainers’ descriptions of their practice*. Research, Policy & Teaching Practice: Building connections: 2016 National Conference on VET Teaching & VET Teacher Education,* University of Technology, Sydney.

Smith, E. (2016). What makes a good VET teacher/trainer and how do you get there? *Teaching, training and learning: VET's true business:* *OctoberVET 2016*, Federation University, Ballarat, 26 October.

Smith, E. (2016). ‘How to reframe debates about quality after the VET FEE-HELP scandal’, Criterion conference ‘Driving quality’, Melbourne, 27-28 July 2016. Invited plenary speaker.

\*Smith, E. (2016): Re-qualifying the further education teaching workforce in Australia: How research evidence can help. ***Vocational Teacher Education in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges conference*. Stirling, 24 June. Keynote speech.**

\*Smith, E., Yasukawa, K. & Harris, R. (2016). Do the qualifications of Further Education teachers make a difference? The views of managers and departmental heads in training providers. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education’s 2nd International Research Conference of the Further Education Research Association*, Harris Manchester College, Oxford, 8-10 July.

Harris, R. & Guthrie, H. (2016). What is good teaching in VET? Comparing the perspectives of VET stakeholders, staff and students. *Putting VET research to work: Collaboration, Innovation, Prosperity.* ***19th*** *Annual Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association Conference,* TAFE Northern Sydney campus, 21-22 April*.*

Yasukawa, K. (2015). What makes a good VET teacher? Teachers’ views. *Refocusing on teaching and training in vocational education and training. 1st Annual Conference of the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group,* Karsten’s Conference Centre, Melbourne, 14 December.

Smith, E. (2015). What makes a good VET teacher? Students’ views. *Refocusing on teaching and training in vocational education and training. 1st Annual Conference of the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group,* Karsten’s Conference Centre, Melbourne, 14 December.

More information

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