**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 2017***

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 commenced on 1st April 2015 and all fieldwork, including the consultation phase, will be complete by the end of 2017.

The proposed method has been closely followed, aside from a few minor changes; moreover, some additional items have been added to the method to accommodate suggestions from the sector.

Analysis has been ongoing in order to disseminate findings to the sector and for the purposes of the final ‘Delphi’ process in which findings have been provided to stakeholders in a three-phase survey. The published outputs are listed at the end of this document.

The Key Findings of the substantive phase of the project (i.e. pre-Delphi process) are as follows:

Key Finding 1: Higher level qualifications in VET pedagogy improve teaching approaches, confidence and ability to address diversity in contexts, learners and AQF level of teaching.

Key Finding 2: VET teachers often have high level qualifications in their industry area or other disciplines and these too improve teaching approaches, confidence and ability to address diversity in contexts, learners and AQF level of teaching.

Key Finding 3: Higher level qualifications in VET pedagogy make a significant difference to VET teachers’ confidence in teaching a diversity of learners.

Key Finding 4: The key qualification level that makes a difference is a degree.

Key Finding 5: Participation in both formal and informal PD, in both industry/discipline and VET teaching/training increases with higher qualifications, irrespective of the type of qualification.

Key Finding 6: VET teaching/training PD should be tailored for teachers with higher levels of VET pedagogy qualifications

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. A view was even expressed that higher-level discipline qualifications might result in the teaching being pitched at too high a level. Generally, TAFE managers were more interested in, and talked more about, VET teaching qualifications than discipline qualifications.

Non-TAFE senior managers tended to be less convinced of the value of 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.

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 was sent initial quantitative data of its own cohort compared with the overall cohort and TAFE Institutes were sent their own results as well as the numbers were large enough to do this and preserve anonymity. Response rates were 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 not employed at one of those RTOs.

One surprising result of the survey was the extent to which the teachers/trainers had higher-level qualifications that were not in VET pedagogy nor in their teaching area. Over one-fifth of respondents were in this category, mainly with degrees.

Items within the Queensland College of Teachers Professional Standards for VET Practitioners were used to examine people’s perceptions of the importance of various aspects of teaching and their confidence; and to provide qualitative insights into their teaching approaches. In the absence of observations of practice, which in any case would be subjective, this is considered a good way of evaluating teaching. As we also had case study evidence, these quantitative findings were very useful. The five domains that we used were:

Domain 1: Know learners, their context and how they learn.

Domain 2: Know the content and how it can be taught.

Domain 3: Plan, design and deliver effective teaching/training experiences.

Domain 4: Assess, provide feedback and report on learning.

Domain 5: Engage with industry, colleagues, community, regulatory and professional bodies.

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. **Greater confidence was reported by teachers with higher levels of qualifications, and the difference was statistically significant in every domain.** **The difference held true for both VET pedagogy qualifications and industry qualifications. [[1]](#footnote-1)** We tested some particular items in the first domain and found that those with higher-level VET pedagogy qualifications (Diplomas or Degrees) had significantly more confidence in the items relating to teaching for diverse learners.

We also asked people with higher-level qualifications (industry and VET pedagogy) what extra skills and knowledge they had gained from their qualifications. On a scale of 1 to 5, 69% selected 4 or 5 for their VET pedagogy qualification, and 77% selected 4 or 5 for their industry qualification, indicating that the extra skills and knowledge were highly valued by around three-quarters of those who had undertaken them. For industry qualifications, as there is no benchmark qualification, the question related to qualifications above the regulatory minimum for the industry area.

We gained detailed qualitative responses on all of these matters, which are being progressively 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 were written up individually and cross-case analysis focused on differences among 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. We found that some RTOs used external professional development heavily, with webinars being a major feature in some instances. Also several of the case study RTOs had very well-developed internal programs.

In general it was reported that teachers with higher-level qualification levels did undertake more professional development, but most RTOs did not keep records which enabled this to be statistically validated. Sometimes this was because only teachers at certain levels were eligible for certain professional development opportunities. Changes to RTO standards at the time were making RTOs become more systematic in this respect and this aspect could be researched more readily at provider level in the future. The surveys (see next section) provided firm statistical evidence for our project.

Professional development survey 2016

A survey about professional development was distributed in November through the three leading external professional development providers (ACPET, the VET Development Centre and VELG) to VET teachers/trainers who had undertaken professional development in 2016. In the case studies we had found that RTOs, public and private alike, used these providers quite heavily. The survey asked about the VET teachers’ 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 survey focused on development in VET pedagogy rather than development in industry areas; although some of the events related to relationships with industry.

The responses were analysed by teachers’ qualification levels to see how these levels affected both engagement and also satisfaction. At the same time as we analysed this survey, we also analysed data from the Teacher Survey which had a section on professional development, meaning we had responses from over 800 teachers and trainers on the topic, from public, private and community providers throughout Australia.

The results indicate that a significant amount and variety of PD activities are being undertaken on a regular basis by teachers and that this is in both industry/discipline areas and VET teacher/training. The findings indicate a somewhat stronger focus on industry/discipline related PD, both formal and informal, rather than on VET teacher/training PD. There were high levels of self-motivation reported, which were especially high for the TAFE participants, and it was found that a significant proportion of PD (especially for TAFE and private/community RTO teachers/trainers) is conducted in teachers’ own time and at least partially funded by themselves.

RTOs were perceived to value and support their teachers’/trainers’ participation in PD. This varied across the sector, with private RTOs seen as more likely to view their RTO ‘totally’ valued and supported PD compared to TAFE and enterprise RTO teacher/trainers. Trainers from enterprise RTOs were more likely to say that their RTO only valued and supported PD to ensure compliance. Apart from enterprise RTOs, teachers/trainers saw their RTOs as supporting both industry and pedagogical development.

The most common barriers to PD were ‘time’ and ‘cost/money’. This is in line with trends across industry as a whole, as identified in a recent study on employer training (Smith, Callan, Tuck and Smith, 2017). Interestingly, the most common stated priority area for future PD was to commence or complete a formal qualification followed by ‘maintain currency’, either in their industry/discipline area or in VET teacher training. The high priority placed by teachers/trainers on further qualifications identified in the teacher survey was supported by the PD survey with a third of respondents undertaking a qualification at the time of the PD survey.

There was a preference for face-to-face delivery, but time and cost were frequently identified as issues to participating, and webinars were favoured by some due to time, cost, travel, flexibility and convenience, reinforcing the issues raised by self-funding and participating in PD in their own time. The evidence indicates that while teachers/trainers participate in external PD activities in both their industry/discipline area and the VET sector, the majority undertook more VET related external activities, more or less equally distributed between teaching/training and assessment. From the PD survey, the focus for preferred future PD events was not on teachers’/trainers’ industry/discipline area, but rather on VET and particularly VET teaching/training (as opposed to assessment).

For PD providers, the findings provide insight into the type of PD favoured and sought by teachers and trainers. The different reasons propounded for face-to-face delivery versus webinars may assist with targeting PD and matching content to delivery mode. The findings demonstrate that PD in the VET sector continues to be influenced by the support provided by and preferences of the RTOs; however the personal motivations and needs of the individual teachers/trainers are equally if not more important especially when they are expected to – and are prepared to - contribute their own time and money to undertake PD. From a policy point of view, it seems that the void created by the withdrawal of Commonwealth and State governments in direct provision of PD for VET practitioners, has been filled partly by the growth of major providers of VET-related PD, three of whom participated in the PD survey.

To be completed: ‘Delphi’ process 2017

The Delphi process has been examining policy and implementation issues through surveying national and international experts in VET policy and practice. The Australian phase has involved two streams: a policy stream and a senior RTO manager stream. Each expert is surveyed three times and 70 people have been involved. It is uncovering uncover the national VET teacher workforce development implications of the findings, and also institutional-level implications.

The international phase will follow in December 2017 after the three rounds of the Australian Delphi have been completed. It was added to the project method due to interest in the project from overseas academics and policy personnel.

Outputs from the project to date

**Peer-reviewed journal articles**

Smith, E. & Yasukawa, K. (2017). What makes a good vocational education and training (VET) teacher? Views of Australian VET students and teachers*. International Journal of Training Research*, special edn, *15*(1), 23-40.

**Refereed conference publications** (\* denotes overseas)

Smith, E. (2017). Teaching practices among college-based teachers of apprentices. Proceedings, *Modern apprenticeships: Widening their scope, sustaining their quality, 7th Research Conference of the International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship, US Bureau of Labor Statistics,* Washington, 1-2 October, edited by R. Lerman & E. Okoli, pp. 47-53.

Tuck, J. & Smith, E. (2017). VET teachers’ and trainers’ participation in professional development: A national overview. ***Renovate or Rebuild? Exploring the Architecture of VET,* *20th*** *Annual Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association Conference,* William Angliss Institute of TAFE, Melbourne, 18-20 April.

Smith, E. & Yasukawa, K. (2016). What makes a good VET teacher? 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 Conference,* TAFE Northern Sydney campus, 21-22 April*.*

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

Smith, E. & Tuck, J. (2017, abstract accepted). What a difference a qual makes: Pedagogical and vocational qualifications for VET teachers. *Driving the future quality of VET teaching in Australia, 3rd Annual National Conference on VET Teaching & VET Teacher Education*, TAFE Queensland South Bank Campus, 7-8 December.

Smith, E. (2017). Australian VET: Quality teaching, quality teachers. ***Community Education: Investing in our Future*,** Community Colleges Australia (CCA) Annual Conference, Citadines Conference Centre, Melbourne, 26-27 July. Invited keynote presentation.

Smith, E. & Tuck, J. (2016). ‘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, 8-9 December. ACDEVEG Conference 2016 papers are available here: <http://www.acde.edu.au/networks-and-partnerships/acde-vocational-group/2016-acdeveg-conference/>

Smith, E. (2016). VET teachers’ and trainers’ qualifications: What difference do they make, and to whom? ***ACPET Victoria VET RTO Breakfast Series.* Melbourne, 1 December.**

Smith, E. (2016). Investigating the effects of teachers’ qualifications on their teaching … and on VET quality more generally*.* ***Education Research Sharing Day, Federation University Australia*, Melbourne, 25 November.**

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. Federation University Australia*, 18 October. Presentation slides from OctoberVET 2016 are available here:**

<https://federation.edu.au/faculties-and-schools/faculty-of-education-and-arts/research/fea-research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education>

\*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.

\*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.**

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*.*

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.

ACDEVEG Conference 2015 papers are available here: <http://www.acde.edu.au/acdeveg-conference-2015/>

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.

ACDEVEG Conference 2015 papers are available here: <http://www.acde.edu.au/acdeveg-conference-2015/>

More information

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1. Except that higher-level industry qualifications were not associated with a statistically significant increase in confidence in the assessment domain. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)