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Shifting mindsets

The changing work roles of vocational
education and training practitioners

*Roger Harris
Michele Simons
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Shifting mindsets

The changing work roles of vocational
education and training practitioners

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Key messages

- ✧ Three major external drivers of change have impacted on the daily working lives of vocational education and training (VET) practitioners over the past three years. These are government policy, the expectations of industry and the community, and funding and financing.
- ✧ The greatest changes in the working lives of practitioners have been in the areas of work responsibilities, relationships with industry and relationships with colleagues.
- ✧ The introduction of training packages, increased competition among training providers and changes to funding have had the greatest impact on practitioners' work. These are followed by technology, competency-based training and flexible delivery.
- ✧ Practitioners are generally positive about the changes. Private providers are most positive and are more focused on external matters, such as funding, understanding changes to vocational education and training, and meeting industry needs. Those in public providers are more focused on matters concerning teaching–learning practice, such as flexible delivery, training packages and the effects these have on their roles and work. They are more negative than those in private providers in their attitudes to change.

Executive summary

Vocational education and training (VET) practitioners have been subject to unparalleled change in the past ten years. Building on previous work (Harris et al. 2001), this project set out to explore how the changing environment is impacting on practitioners' work and the implications these changes have for the quality of VET provision and the role of the new VET professionals.

Three main research approaches were employed—a literature review, ten focus group discussions in five states in both capital cities and regional areas, and individual interviews. A total of 64 interviews were undertaken (with respondents different from those in the focus groups). Since group discussion only generates contextual information and provides the general picture of VET change, there needed also to be information from individuals to 'ground' the personal impact of such change.

The sources of information were VET practitioners who included teachers and trainers, industry mentors, training brokers, assessors, providers of learning support and managers. These practitioners were working in a wide range of registered training organisations, public and private, large and small.

Practitioners perceived that drivers for change were largely attributable to influences outside their place of employment. They named government policy as having the most marked effect, influencing curriculum practices and the way training is provided. The second major driver was the expectations of industry and the community, and the third was economics/finances. These three factors were judged to be closely interrelated and to drive each other, with policy being the prime driver of change affecting VET practitioners, especially at this time of transition to training packages. Internal drivers included increased expectations for responsiveness, pressure for greater accountability, rethinking approaches to teaching and learning and access to learning opportunities, changing workloads, and student characteristics.

These identified drivers of change have led to many shifts in various aspects of the working life of VET practitioners and their relationships both within and outside VET organisations. By far the greatest change reported was in their work responsibilities, with 86% claiming that this aspect of their working life had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent' (63% saying 'a lot'). The second most important change for VET practitioners related to their relationships with industry (71%). This is not an unexpected result, and is in keeping with policy directions which have emphasised as a key outcome a greater relationship and involvement with industry in the provision of vocational education and training. Changing relationships with colleagues (64%), students/trainees (61%), and other registered training organisations (59%) are represented as significant, but less felt areas of change.

Analysis of personal reactions to these changes found that:

- ✧ VET staff in public training providers (97%) noted significantly greater change in work responsibilities than did those in private providers (71%).
- ✧ VET staff in private training providers (67%) noted significantly greater change in relationships with students and trainees than did those in public providers (54%).

- ✧ Training packages, followed by competition and changes to funding, have had the greatest impact on practitioners' work over the past five years. These were followed by technology, competency-based training and flexible delivery.
- ✧ Technology, and then competition and flexible delivery, are anticipated to have the greatest impact on practitioners' work over the next five years, followed by training packages, changes to funding, and understanding changes to VET.
- ✧ Staff from private providers are more focused on the external environment (for example, funding, understanding changes to VET and meeting industry needs), while staff from public providers are more focused on teaching–learning practice (for example, flexible delivery, training packages and their effects on the roles and work of teachers and trainers).
- ✧ Staff in managing roles were more focused on funding changes and developing partnerships and opportunities to increase their business than were teachers and trainers who, in turn, were more focused on their changing roles and work, and organisational restructuring.
- ✧ VET practitioners were more positive than negative about changes they had experienced in their work context, with 61% of practitioners judged to be positive and 24% negative (with 15% neutral).
- ✧ Practitioners in private providers (75%) were significantly more positive towards these changes to work than their counterparts in public providers (48%). In fact, all those reporting a negative feeling (n=13) were from public providers.
- ✧ A majority of practitioners gauged that they had had reasonable control over changes to their work over the past five years: 11% reported no control, 24% minimal control, 3% some control, 56% major control and 6% complete control.
- ✧ Those in a managing role (74%) reported a greater sense of control over the changes they had experienced, which was significantly more than teachers and trainers (48%).
- ✧ Compared with key VET stakeholders' views from a study undertaken two years earlier, VET practitioners have similar perspectives. Both highly rank competition and keeping up with changes as major challenges, although practitioners noticeably place more importance on understanding their changing educational work, work in general and their role.

The scope and nature of the reforms that VET practitioners have been asked to implement are not simply a matter of substituting one set of teaching and learning practices for others. Changes to the VET system have required shifts in practitioners' habits, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge. The findings illustrate the important position that VET practitioners occupy in the policy-making and implementation processes in the sector. It would appear from this study that practitioners are attempting to alert policy-makers and managers to their perceptions of the very real issues and concerns being confronted in their daily working lives.

The study concludes with a discussion of the changing context of VET practitioners' work and of the VET workforce itself, and an exploration of the notions of role expansion, role diversification, role balance and role tension, all concepts relevant to today's VET practitioners. The key theme is the differing impact of the various drivers for change on VET organisations and individual VET practitioners. The report indicates that policy frameworks and implementation strategies need to be sensitive to the nature and scope of change required for the different contexts in which vocational education and training now operates. The size and complexity of the VET sector demands a rethinking of a 'one size fits all' approach to policy implementation.

This study may act as a trigger for policy-makers to reassess the role of VET practitioners in the policy-making process and to give consideration to practitioners becoming more active and empowered participants in the change process, rather than passive and sometimes resistant recipients of change.

Introduction

Background

Vocational education and training (VET) practitioners have been subject to unparalleled change in the past ten years. These changes have been largely driven by three core beliefs: the need for competitive advantage in an increasingly globalised economy; that competence could best be developed in real-world learning environments; and the need to increase the skills base of the Australian workforce while containing costs (Hawke 1998).

VET practitioners are now working in a system characterised by increasing competition between providers, calls for greater accountability and the need to develop cooperative and flexible responses to their clients. This environment has seen the number of private providers registered on the National Training Information Service database increase to over 3000 across all states and territories. In addition, a number of enterprises are now involved in the delivery of vocational education and training across a range of industries. Teachers working in the public sector are increasingly involved in arrangements whereby their services are 'sold' to meet a variety of training needs in local industry and in overseas countries. These changes have resulted in a fundamental shift in the notion of a VET practitioner, in a sector where a business and service orientation competes with the more 'traditional' education focus (Office of Training and Further Education, Victoria 1998).

Employment trends in the VET sector point to an emerging model of a differentiated workforce, comprised of a smaller core of permanent VET practitioners alongside a growing 'peripheral' group of contract staff and casual staff with varying degrees of attachment to the VET sector (Harris et al. 2001). Along with the changing profile of the VET workforce, the role of the VET practitioner is also undergoing considerable rethinking.

Recognition of the changing role of VET teachers and trainers and their importance in the development of a quality VET system was noted as far back as the early 1970s, the major impetus being the Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974, pp.87–91). At that time there was evidence that staff development for technical and further education (TAFE) teachers was being undertaken on a fairly ad hoc basis. Kangan asserted the importance of teacher development as a key to improving the overall quality of education in the TAFE system.

The Kangan report resulted in a succession of reviews on the role of TAFE teachers (Tertiary Education Commission Staff Development Advisory Committee 1978; TAFE National Centre for Research and Development 1987), as well as a number of TAFE teacher education conferences. A national review of TAFE teacher preparation and development was undertaken in 1991 (Hall et al. 1991a, 1991b) and focused on the knowledge, skills and attributes required of beginning TAFE teachers. Preparing TAFE staff to meet the demands of training reform was further explored in the report, *Staffing TAFE for the 21st century* (Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee Working Party on TAFE Staffing Issues 1992).

The development of workplace trainer and assessor competency standards (Competency Standards Board–Assessor and Workplace Trainers 1994) represented a watershed in the training and development of the VET practitioner. This may be seen as perhaps the first specific articulation of

the role of VET teachers and trainers. TAFE teachers were subsumed into a much broader grouping of teachers and trainers who worked in a diverse range of settings.

Research by Chappell and Melville (1995) has focused on the development of 'a professional competence profile' for use in developing programs of initial and continuing education for TAFE teachers in New South Wales in keeping with the demands of the developing VET sector. Lepani (1995) adopted a more futuristic view of the role of the TAFE teacher in her work in New South Wales by developing a range of roles capturing the work of the 'VET practitioner in 2005'. These roles included: specialist learning facilitator; market analyst and researcher; consultant to enterprises and industry groups; developer of strategic partnerships; researcher; designer of multimedia learning products and services; knowledge management strategist; business manager; communication strategist; career pathing strategist; and assessment and accreditation specialist. More recently, new enterprise standards for TAFE teachers in Victoria were developed which built on and expanded the units of competence from the workplace trainer and assessor standards (Victorian Association of Directors 1998).

There is also evidence to suggest that the functions of delivery and management of VET are increasingly being separated (Mathers 1997, p.72). The VET workforce is therefore being constructed around the competence needed to perform the tasks of the organisation, and could vary from classroom-based delivery of training programs through to supporting the delivery of qualifications in workplace environments, or entirely through the use of flexible delivery modes. In many respects, what is occurring is a convergence of the previously separate fields of human resource development and education.

In a recent national study on the changing role of VET staff development (Harris et al. 2001), one component was a Delphi survey of key VET stakeholders. Round one identified challenges which they believed teachers and trainers faced now and over the next five to seven years. Round two arranged these challenges in priority order. The eight most critical challenges were:

- 1 operating in a competitive market
- 2 keeping up to date/understanding changes to VET
- 3 flexible delivery
- 4 understanding/working with training packages
- 5 using technology
- 6 understanding dilemmas in educator's role (such as industry needs versus education)
- 7 understanding the changing nature of work
- 8 changing to the role of facilitator.

These challenges identified and prioritised by the key stakeholders appear to resonate with the current literature here and overseas, and reflect the VET environment in Australia, as it is now, and projected changes in the near future. It is interesting to note that most of the so-called challenges relate directly to compliance with changes already in the workplace. This means that the key stakeholders have assumed that such challenges will remain current for some years. Furthermore, this Delphi study revealed that key VET stakeholders believe that only around half of the VET teaching and training workforce has the necessary skills, knowledge and attributes to cope with the challenges which lie ahead over the next five to seven years. The research team therefore saw the need to explore further this changing environment, and in particular, the nature of these changes and how much they are impacting on VET practitioners' work.

Purpose, objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine:

- ✧ the nature of the changes in the VET sector
- ✧ the perceived extent of these changes on VET professionals
- ✧ the nature of the impact of these changes on VET professionals' work
- ✧ the implications for the quality of VET provision, and the role of the new VET professionals.

The objectives of the study were to:

- ✧ identify the critical factors generating changes to work in the VET sector over the past five years
- ✧ determine the extent of the identified changes in a range of registered training organisations and systems
- ✧ examine the relationships between the critical factors influencing change in the sector
- ✧ examine the attitude of VET professionals to changes in the sector and the role of personal choice in embracing change
- ✧ identify the organisational and systemic imperatives and change management strategies which affect the implementation of changes to work practice in registered training organisations.

The following research questions were used to frame the study:

- ✧ What have been the critical factors generating changes to work in the VET sector over the past five years?
- ✧ How have these factors changed roles and responsibilities of VET professionals and to what extent? Has there been variation in impact across registered training organisations and systems?
- ✧ How are the critical factors influencing change in the sector interrelated?
- ✧ What is the attitude of VET professionals to the changes in their work? What is the role of personal choice in determining whether or not an individual initiates change and/or responds positively to factors generating change?
- ✧ What are the organisational and systemic imperatives and change management strategies affecting the implementation of changes to work in registered training organisations?

The research process

In order to examine these questions, three main research approaches were employed: a literature review; focus group discussions; and individual interviews. The approach to data gathering in this study deliberately focused on interviewing, since a recent project on the changing role of VET staff development (Harris et al. 2001) had gathered a great deal of quantitative data from human resource officers in 394 training providers through structured telephone interviews, and from 686 VET teachers/trainers through mail questionnaires. The aim here was to build on this quantitative information, by probing in greater depth the issues of change and role impact, issues that demanded more intensive, personal interviewing.

To take advantage of the synergies available within group discussion, focus groups were held. In this way, the general issues and perspectives on change in the VET sector could be identified, along with the significant changes the groups believed had occurred over the past five years.

Individual interviews were conducted to bring this general discussion to the personal level and to seek information on the extent of change on individual VET practitioners. Information was sought

about where these changes had impacted, and in what ways, over the past five years (and those anticipated in the next three years).

Since general group discussion only generates contextual information and provides the general picture of VET change, the researchers firmly believed that there needed also to be information from the individuals to enable an understanding of the personal impact of such change. To a certain extent, this approach is analogous to the espoused-theories versus theories-in-use distinction propounded by Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith (1985)—that what people say may not necessarily be congruent with what they do. In this case, the belief was that what people say within general group discussion may not necessarily reflect what is happening to them personally. Of course, the assumption here is that the second approach (of individual interviews) will provide an accurate portrayal of the extent and impact of change on individual respondents. This assumption may not be valid, but our belief is that personal views are more likely to be accurate than those expressed in general group discussion. Our actual experience of asking, on a one-to-one basis, for evidence on their situation ‘five years ago’ and ‘what it is like now’, and seeking their personal reactions to such change, gave the researchers no reason to suspect that the information did not reflect their personal experience.

The sources of information were ‘VET professionals/practitioners’, including: teachers and trainers; industry mentors; training brokers; assessors; providers of learning support; and managers who were working in a wide range of registered training organisations, public and private, system-based and devolved, large and small. The range of organisations contacted by telephone and agreeing to send participants (sometimes more than one) to the focus groups is given in appendix A. These organisations were selected from the National Training Information Service database.

Following ethics clearance from the University of South Australia, the first data-gathering stage of the study consisted of ten focus groups conducted in five states and territories. Five of these groups were located in capital cities, while the other five were spread in regional areas over the four states. The people agreeing to participate in the focus groups were employed in a diverse range of both public and private training providers (see appendix B for these organisations) and the number who participated was 67. Table 1 outlines the locations, and types and numbers of participants in these focus groups. The focus groups were approximately two hours in duration, with the discussion audio-taped (see appendix C for the focus group protocol). All tapes were transcribed, and the transcriptions analysed for patterns in the qualitative text.

Table 1: Focus groups—locations, types and numbers of participants

Locations	Types of participants invited	Numbers accepting	Numbers participating
Adelaide	Public providers	17	10
Toowoomba	Public and private providers	16	3
Brisbane	Private providers	19	5
Sydney	Public providers	14	5
Melbourne	Private providers	18	4
Mt Gambier	Public and private providers	18	10
Dubbo	Public and private providers	11	6
Wodonga	Public and private providers	18	6
Canberra	Public and private providers	16	14
Brisbane/Toowoomba	Private providers (by teleconference)	7	4
Totals		154	67

It is important to acknowledge that the participants who attended expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to meet away from work and to discuss their situations and the changes that have affected their work over the past five years. With diminishing space and time to meet and network

with colleagues, both in their own workplaces and at meetings involving cross-institutional staff, they enjoyed the chance to talk freely and openly, and to share ideas and experiences with others in like contexts, but in most cases personally unknown to them.

An interview schedule was developed as a result of the analysis of data from the focus group discussions (see appendix C). Eight registered training organisations which had been in existence for at least five years were selected to be included in this phase of the study: two in the Australian Capital Territory (one public and one private); three in each of New South Wales and South Australia; two metropolitan (public and private) and one regional (public) in each state. Individual interviews were conducted with six to eight teachers, trainers and managers from each registered training organisation from a range of fields of study (horticulture, business studies, automotive and community services), delivery modes and employment statuses, as well with several representatives of the relevant industry training advisory bodies. A total of 64 individual interviews were completed. (These were different respondents from those in the focus groups.)

Table 2 summarises the characteristics of these interviewees. Half were in South Australia; just over a quarter in New South Wales; and just under one-fifth in the Australian Capital Territory. One-third were in rural areas. Fifty-six per cent were male and 44% female. Just over one-half of the respondents were employed in public providers and just over one-third in private registered training organisations, while 8% were employed in state and national industry training advisory bodies. Eighty per cent were employed permanently, with the other 20% on contract, and their length of service spread from one to 32 years. Thirty-six per cent worked predominantly in classrooms, 5% predominantly in workplaces, and the rest were involved in various combinations of training delivery.

Table 2: Interviews—characteristics of the sample of VET practitioners

Demographic factor	Characteristics	Number of interviewees (N=64)	Percentage of interviewees
Location	SA	20	31.3
	SA rural	13	20.3
	NSW	10	15.6
	NSW rural	7	10.9
	ACT	12	18.8
	Qld	1	1.6
	Vic	1	1.6
Gender	Female	28	43.8
	Male	36	56.3
Type of registered training organisation	Public	35	54.7
	Private	24	37.5
	Industry training advisory bodies (national and state)	5	7.8
Employment mode	Permanent full-time	51	79.7
	Contract full-time	9	14.1
	Contract part-time	4	6.3
Length of service (years)	0–5	8	12.5
	6–10	20	31.3
	11–15	17	26.6
	16–20	7	11.0
	21–25	7	11.0
	26–30	3	4.8
	32	2	3.1
Modes of delivery	Predominantly classroom-based	21	36.2
	Predominantly workplace-based	3	5.2
	Combination of modes	3	58.6
	Missing data	6	-

Structure of the report

An understanding of the characteristics of these two different samples, and of the different ways in which information was gleaned from each is necessary for interpreting the findings reported in subsequent sections. This understanding is important since information from these two samples is interwoven through the analysis—first the focus group discussion themes, followed by the interview data.

Rather than structure this report into sections by methodology, the decision has been taken to structure it by theme, with results from both approaches integrated throughout. These key themes became evident to the research team during the focus groups in the states and territories. Thus, sandwiched between two general bookends—one on the drivers of change in the VET sector over the past five years and the other on the personal reactions to these changes—each of the middle sections analyses the effects of the changes identified by the respondents. These sections address changes in work responsibilities and roles, changes in relationships within their organisations (for example, with students and staff colleagues), and changes in relationships outside their organisations (for example, with industry, unions and other professional bodies, and other training organisations). The final section rounds off the report in providing an overview of the change process on VET practitioners, and relates it to the literature review.

Literature review

Introduction

Governments have traditionally had great expectations of their vocational education and training systems (Gill, Dar & Fluitman 1999, p.405; Powles & Anderson 1996). Policies aimed at dealing with a diverse range of issues, such as unemployment, skills shortages, deficits in basic skills (language, literacy and numeracy), reducing the burden on universities, attracting foreign students, reducing inequality and enhancing access, have all, over time, required a range of responses from the sector. The variety of policy agendas has often resulted in high levels of government intervention (at both state and territory and federal levels) in the provision of vocational education and training. This has, in turn, impacted on the extent and pace of change which the sector is expected to manage and respond to. Within the current context, VET teachers and trainers occupy a unique position. They are both *subject to* the dramatic changes which have impacted on the Australian workforce in the last decade, while also being expected to *support and facilitate* the change process (Waterhouse, Wilson & Ewer 1999, p.1).

This literature review begins with a brief overview of the changes which have occurred in relation to the broader context of work. In this context, the second section of the review examines the changing role of VET teachers and trainers, both overseas and in Australia. The third section highlights some of the key debates currently prevalent within the literature in relation to the 'professional' nature of VET practitioners' work, particularly the role of teachers employed in publicly funded VET organisations.

The changing context

During the last 20 years there have been a number of significant global trends which have impacted on education provision. The rise of the global economy, with its concomitant social processes now permits greater flows in information and capital across national boundaries than ever before (Lingard et al. 1994; Seddon 1999a). This has also promoted the rise of the 'new competitive state' (Cerny 1990) where there has been a retreat from intervention by governments in favour of market forces as the 'primary steering mechanism' (Lingard et al. 1994, p.2). In Australia, these two trends have manifested themselves in the rise of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism, both of which have transformed the way in which states operate and their relationships with institutions, including education. Within this changed economic and social context, strong links have been established between economic prosperity, international competitiveness and the development of human capital. Education serves global interests and the development of human capital as an invaluable means of gaining a competitive advantage in a global marketplace.

A number of researchers have noted the impacts of globalisation and technology on the nature of work and the structure of the workforce (Waterhouse, Wilson & Ewer 1999; Young & Guile 1997; Attwell 1997). While it is difficult to generalise across all industries, a number of significant shifts have occurred in:

- ✧ the composition of the workforce, with changing rates of participation for men and women

- ✧ the level of employment across industries, with declines in some (for example, manufacturing) and significant rises in others (information technology)
- ✧ the decline in the influence of unions and the rise of individualised workplace contracts
- ✧ significant casualisation of the workforce, along with a growing gap between the those working long hours and other workers who are under-employed or tenuously attached to the workforce, often via employment with labour hire firms
- ✧ a significant rise in the number of people employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (Waterhouse, Wilson & Ewer 1999).

There is a growing recognition of the importance of knowledge and knowledge creation in many types of work (Avis 1999; Waterhouse, Wilson & Ewer 1999). The growth and change in information technology has also impacted on the way in which workplaces are organised. New technologies have altered a range of work practices including:

... [the] temporal and spatial organisation of work; the nature of manufacturing systems, the professional identity of employees and in-company human resource development.

(Young & Guile 1999, pp.204–5)

These changes to work in society pose significant challenges for VET practitioners, predominantly in two ways. They have altered the nature of vocational learning which the practitioners need to promote in order to develop the types of workers now needed, as well as the ways in which opportunities might be provided. Curtain (2000) argues that vocational education and training will increasingly take place in a wide range of contexts, and workplaces in particular will continue to be a primary site for learning. In addition, the content of VET will also need to become more fluid in order to meet the diverse needs of users and to enable learners to ‘construct their own pathways’ via individualised processes which incorporate features, such as recognition of prior learning and individual learning plans (Curtain 2000, p.36). Waterhouse, Wilson and Ewer (1999, pp.2–3) suggest that this emerging context will require VET practitioners to work responsively and creatively, to enable them to deal with contradictions and difference as they work to implement policies developed within an overarching federal and state framework. At the same time they need to be responsive to local needs and issues.

The changing role of VET practitioners

Within this context there is ample evidence to suggest that the work of VET teachers and trainers has undergone significant changes over the past ten years as a result of the introduction of a wide range of policy mechanisms which have included:

- ✧ the introduction of a competency-based system of vocational education and training
- ✧ the development and re-development (by subsequent governments) of national frameworks for the registration of providers
- ✧ the development of a national system for the accreditation of courses which has recently been replaced with training packages
- ✧ moves to a more industry-led VET sector with a concomitant increase in provider responsiveness to client (industry) needs
- ✧ development of new systems of entry-level training (previously the Australian Vocational Training System, then the Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System and now New Apprenticeships)
- ✧ the development of an open training market, including the introduction of private providers, and later, the development of ‘user choice’

- ✧ strategies to enhance access to VET for groups which have historically been under-represented in the sector
- ✧ the introduction of new learning technology which has had implications for the delivery of courses
- ✧ the implementation of public sector reforms which has resulted in a range of responses, including significant amalgamations and restructuring (Office of Training and Further Education, Victoria 1998; Simons & Harris 1997).

Much of the published work on the changing role of VET teachers and trainers has, to date, been restricted to the study of staff within TAFE institutions. This is perhaps because this sector is responsible for providing the bulk of vocational education and training in Australia, and TAFE institutes continue to be the main employers of VET teachers. This body of literature highlights both the changing conditions under which teachers and trainers are being employed and asked to work, as well as the changing nature of the work they undertake.

Writers have critiqued the emergence of the training reforms, noting that they have resulted in significant decentralisation, the establishment of principles of customer choice and increasing centralised regulation through the use of purchaser–provider agreements (Kell et al. 1997; Forward 1999; Seddon 1999a). These conditions in turn have altered the nature of the work that TAFE teachers and managers are asked to undertake, including an increasing emphasis on ‘fee-for-service’ work both in workplaces and off shore. New work practices arising from corporatisation and regulation have contributed to the diversification and intensification of teachers’ work. New technologies and curriculum frameworks have significantly altered what is valued in terms of pedagogical practices. Altered industrial relationships have given rise to the development of new ways of meeting skill requirements in TAFE. This has seen a significant rise in the employment of part-time and sessional staff and, in some instances, the employment of para-professional staff, such as lecturer’s assistants (Harris et al. 2001; Malley et al. 1999; Mathers 1997).

A number of research studies have illustrated the impact of training reforms on educational practice (Robinson 1993; Sanguinetti 1994; Mulcahy 1996; Harper 1996; Smith et al. 1997; Billett et al. 1999; Mucahy & James 1999). All point to the varying impacts that educational reforms, such as competency-based training, have had on teachers’ and trainers’ work and the significant variations that have occurred in the implementation process. Billett et al. (1999, p.164) noted that the implementation of a unified curriculum framework, imposed during the early years of training reform, undermined teacher autonomy. This impact was not uniformly felt and had been shaped by conditions that existed prior to the training reforms. These conditions included existing teaching practices and individual beliefs about the role of teachers (Billett et al. 1999, p.10). The implementation of competency-based training has resulted in a number of changes to teaching practices including:

- ✧ greater emphasis on the currency of teachers’ knowledge
- ✧ use of a greater diversity of teaching methods, including delivery of training in the workplace
- ✧ greater emphasis on assessment
- ✧ decreased role for teachers’ professional judgement in assessment and their relationships with students
- ✧ increased responsiveness to the needs of industry
- ✧ restrictions in relationships between teachers and students (Billett et al. 1999, p.11).

A study of teachers’ experiences in implementing a competency-based training framework across a range of program areas in TAFE institutes in South Australia highlights that educational reform of the nature and scope that teachers were asked to implement is a complex and dilemma-ridden process (Simons 2001). The introduction of this framework not only required teachers to adopt

new ways of working in relation to the conception, delivery and assessment of their programs. As a component of the training reforms, the competency-based curriculum framework also carried with it the imperative that the philosophy embedded in the Kangan report's reforms of TAFE in the 1970s be reworked in the light of a strong emphasis on the needs of industry to take precedence over the needs of individuals. As such, the reforms also sought to re-order the relationship between teachers and industry.

The changing scope and construction of VET teachers' and trainers' work has given rise to considerable debate regarding the 'professional' nature of their work and how it has been affected by reforms of the past ten years, and subsequent predictions about how the work of VET teachers and trainers may be conceived over the ensuing years.

De-professionalisation or re-professionalisation?

The introduction of a vocational education environment founded on the adoption of competency-based frameworks as a primary vehicle to deliver the required changes to the VET sector has given rise to arguments (both in Australia and overseas) that the role of the VET teacher and trainer is being de-professionalised (Waterhouse & Sefton 1997; Hyland 1998). This argument is usually made with special reference to teachers employed in post-school institutions concerned with the development of vocational expertise. Teaching in these institutions has been 'standardised, commodified, pre-packaged to meet accountability and other needs' (Hyland 1998, p.9)

The de-professionalisation of TAFE teachers is supported by arguments which compare the role of VET teachers today with that of some years ago (Harris 1999). The 1970s in Australia were growth years in building TAFE teacher education programs and staff within universities. It was a time when TAFE teachers pressed for parity with their primary and secondary teacher counterparts, and part of the process of achieving such parity was perceived to be teacher training encompassed by three-year higher education qualifications of equivalent length and quality. That decade was also the golden time of TAFE following the highly influential Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974), which, as noted earlier, established TAFE as a distinct educational sector, and defined for TAFE a broader educational and social role based on the principles of access, equity, primacy of the individual learner and the need for continuing vocational education.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the role of the TAFE teacher was one encompassing a high degree of classroom teaching and curriculum development, together with industry liaison. The context in which this knowledge and skill were to be demonstrated was relatively more stable than it is today. The 1990s changed this situation markedly. Tight economic conditions, government rationalist policies and a changing labour market altered the role of the TAFE teacher dramatically. One report boldly pronounced it as: 'a paradigm shift ... in the profile of the TAFE teacher's professional relationship with the TAFE enterprise' (Office of Training and Further Education, Victoria 1997, vol.1, p.6). Changes have fundamentally transformed VET's orientation from education to business and service, and shifted the VET teacher along a continuum from an emphasis on teaching and creating curriculum, towards entrepreneurial brokering and delivery of competencies within pre-packaged modules in a climate of intense market competition (Angwin 1997).

As the introduction chapter highlighted, the development of workplace trainer and assessor competency standards (Competency Standards Board-Assessor and Workplace Trainers 1994) represented perhaps the first specific articulation of the role of VET teachers and trainers. TAFE teachers were subsumed into a much broader grouping of teachers and trainers who worked in a diverse range of settings. It also made possible the disaggregation of the role of a VET teacher and trainer into a number of functions, all with their own separate developmental pathway. And the most recent version of the standards (in the training package, National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body 1999) potentially allows for teachers and trainers to work as: assessors; trainers of

small groups (the equivalent to the former Workplace Trainer Category 1); deliverers of training; deliverers and assessors of training; and managers of assessment and training.

The knowledge and skills of the broad-based teacher are being supplanted by a 'middle person' role of, on the one hand, interpreting written competencies developed by non-educational 'others', and on the other, checking performance of students on these competencies.

There is also evidence to suggest that the functions of delivery and management of VET are increasingly being separated, with two 'classes' of VET worker emerging (Mathers 1997, p.72). There is a smaller group of workers who require a more 'holistic' perspective of training and assessment systems, and a larger group of teachers and trainers whose work is confined to a limited range of tasks, such as delivery and assessment or coaching employees in the workplace. The VET workforce is therefore being constructed around the competence needed to perform the tasks of the organisation and which could vary from classroom-based delivery of training programs, through to supporting the delivery of qualifications in workplace environments, or wholly through the use of flexible delivery modes. Employment trends in the VET sector support the notion of an emerging differentiated VET workforce which comprises a smaller core of permanent VET practitioners alongside a growing 'peripheral' group of contract and casual staff with varying degrees of attachment to the VET sector (Harris et al. 2001).

Further evidence of the differentiated VET workforce can be found in the growing numbers of private registered training organisations, particularly those based in enterprises. The phenomenal growth of these organisations has given rise to large numbers of VET practitioners whose primary occupation is not that of a teacher or trainer. Many of these new VET practitioners are people who have a range of qualifications (for example, specific trade, human resource development/management) and who are working under a variety of non-teaching awards and conditions (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training 1998, p.8).

In a survey of people whose positions within organisations included some form of training and development or human resource development/management, Johnston and Chappell (2001) supported these observations. They noted that often the provision of training was viewed as a role which was shared amongst groups of people, including 'learning specialists' (both internal and external to the organisation), as well as a range of people who did not hold any formal qualifications in training and development. This group of people have some part, however informally, to play in the learning (and mentoring/supporting and often assessing) of fellow workers and are often the unseen VET practitioners whose work is integral to the provision of work-based learning opportunities (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000). The role of these practitioners can vary considerably, depending on such factors as the nature of work in that enterprise, and the character of and interplay between that enterprise's work network and the learning network. The VET practitioner in this context operated in ways quite removed from the formal training environments of TAFE and other institutionalised private providers, and was usually required to juggle the twin demands of worker/employer/business owner and trainer/mentor (Harris et al. 2000). Smith (2000) also supports the emergence of a 'new species' of workplace trainers, which includes employees whose job involves some responsibility for training their colleagues at work.

Other researchers and authors do not agree with the grim picture of a shrinking role for VET practitioners or the diminution of a role gradually being dispersed throughout a range of occupations. They prefer to paint a more optimistic picture, where teachers' and trainers' work is being reshaped and 're-professionalised' in new ways in keeping with the emerging demands for knowledge workers in globalised economies. The main message is one of a broadening role, with new and exciting possibilities for VET practitioners, particularly for people whose primary occupation is the development of workplace competence.

Avis (1999) refutes the notion of the de-professionalisation of VET practitioners, arguing that a transformation of teaching and learning is taking place, which, in turn, 'opens up new forms of

practice and identities' for practitioners (Avis 1999, p.245). He asserts that teachers' work is a labour process which has always been subject to change, as ideas about teaching and learning have changed. Arguments promoting the de-professionalisation of VET practitioners rest on the assumption of conflict between professionals and management. Therefore, if couched in these terms, the opportunities afforded in this context for the profession to be 'revitalised' in the light of changes to what are considered to be valued learning experiences are missed. In this view, the 'de-skilling of VET teachers' (as evidenced, for example, in increasing workloads, demands for new pedagogies etc.) presents a partial picture in a much broader endeavour which aims to 'modernise the sector'. The process of transformation requires that some activities 'central to teachers' identity and sense of worth' be 'closed off or downplayed' while 'new possibilities' are opened up for teachers (Avis 1999, p.260). The notion of re-professionalisation does not fully capture 'the essence of the process' which is, at once, both encouraging, but also contradictory and fraught with difficulty as it is framed by increasing surveillance of teachers' work and in a context where the value of education is more tightly linked to economic objectives. It is simultaneously a process of opportunities and limitations.

Attwell (1997) argues that changes to the nature of work, requiring workers to be learners represents a convergence in the interests of human resource development professionals and VET practitioners. In the past, VET practitioners (usually defined as practitioners working in technical colleges or specialist VET centres) have been largely concerned with the attainment of vocational expertise, while human resource development professionals were interested in promoting learning that would further organisational goals and ongoing professional development of staff (Attwell 1997). Reporting on the outcomes of a large study involving 16 partners drawn from universities and research institutes across 14 different European countries, Attwell (1997) and his colleagues report that VET teachers and trainers would:

- ✧ lead the way in the opening-up of new learning processes, placing greater emphasis on learning by doing and a deeper understanding of the knowledge components of all jobs (Papadopoulos 1994 cited in Atwell 1997)
- ✧ be responsible for promoting productive learning through work by attention to the growing body of knowledge on situational learning (Engenburg 1994).

Celerrio and Miguel (1996) likewise assert the emergence of a 'new polyfunctionality' for human resource development professionals which will include the imperative for greater cooperation between themselves and other training consultants, a shift to views on management and training which are more in keeping with trends towards improving corporate competitiveness through the valuing and development of learning organisations, and the promotion of work as a means of achieving a learning society.

Ray (1999) believes that personnel involved in training and development will increasingly be working in high-technology environments where collaboration across traditionally separate organisational components (for example, information technology and internal communications training) will be the norm. Trainers will no longer be required to convey information to workers, but rather to assist them to meet the specific needs of learners in considerably tighter timeframes than previously. Trainers will operate in a 'systematic world' where there is:

... the adoption of a project-based approach ... some trainers suddenly become project managers, designers of learning and relationship or account managers. People talk about performance and learning instead of training and courses ... they are working more closely with the business ... training no longer simply takes the order and delivers the courses ... it focuses on people and performance ... proposes a wider range of solutions, educates the customer in the best way to use training ... the role widens into areas of project management and design, internal consultancy and occupational psychology ... [trainers] do it with them [the individuals and teams] ...

(Ray 1999, p.24)

Evidence from Europe promotes the view that VET teachers and trainers will need to be viewed as critically reflective professional learners (Bright 1996). Drawing on the work of Schon (1983), Attwell (1997) argues that:

... teachers need to be able to reflect on their own professional activities and experiences in order to create learning experiences and model expert processes for students ... such reflection has a dialectical bent: reflection in action as professional teachers, on didactic and pedagogic processes and reflection in action as vocational experts and on the application of bodies of vocational knowledge that find representation as work process knowledge. (Attwell 1997, p.4)

This call for the development of VET teachers and trainers as reflective professionals is somewhat removed from competency-based approaches to training which emphasise performance of predetermined skills. The emphasis on critically reflective practitioners is also important, given that research evidence to date shows that all workplaces are not equal in terms of their potential to provide equitable and effective sites for learning (Strickland et al. 2001; Billett 2001).

Work emerging from the Netherlands and Australia using network learning theory as a means of further illuminating the relationship between learning and work, suggests that trainers have a role in creating spaces for learning (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000; Van der Krogt 1998). These spaces are derived from being able to critically analyse the work and learning networks residing in enterprises in order to develop ways of 'teaching' that best fit with the demands of the work and learning in a specified context. VET practitioners coming into enterprises to promote, develop and manage training, occupy a different position and therefore, by necessity, play a different part in carrying out these functions (Waterhouse & Sefton 1997). If meaningful learning spaces are to be created, these externally based teachers and trainers will need to spend time and effort understanding the culture of enterprises with which they work. They will need to develop and draw on skills and knowledge bases quantitatively different from those held by the trainer who is 'inside' the enterprise (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000).

Young and Guile (1997, p.205) believe that, in their new roles, VET professionals need to be able to confront a range of new demands, including:

- ✧ supporting the skill development process for an increasingly diverse population of learners
- ✧ having the ability to work simultaneously across a number of geographical locales, usually in collaboration with other professionals
- ✧ supporting the development of transferable skills (for example, key competencies)
- ✧ developing 'poly-contextual' pedagogic skills (Engestrom 1995) which enable practitioners to work across boundaries, particularly those that were previously divided groups of practitioners (for example, TAFE and school teachers)
- ✧ developing the ability to support enterprises as well as their own organisations in becoming learning organisations.

The emerging demands of facilitating online learning have resulted in significant expansion in the role and work of VET practitioners. A study of 18 practitioners who were involved in online delivery (Schofield, Walsh & Melville 2001) found that:

- ✧ The adoption of online delivery was driving a job redesign process which was not reflected in current human resource policies within organisations (p.6).
- ✧ There was a blurring of specialist functions (such as program design and teaching) which required practitioners to be multi-skilled and prepared to take on a range of functions, some of which (for example, budgeting) were previously the province of middle management (p.7).
- ✧ Relationship-building with both students and colleagues is a critical component of the role of an online practitioner (p.7).

- ✧ The work undertaken by participants reinforced the knowledge-based nature of their practice which required the development of abilities as critically reflective practitioners actively involved in ‘meaning making’, as they worked in a dynamic and continually changing environment (p.9).
- ✧ Working conditions of participants—particularly in relation to work intensification and difficulties in achieving sustainable work/family life—are having an impact on the realisation of this newly emerging role for VET practitioners (p.13).

In a landmark study, Brown, Seddon and colleagues have mapped the changing nature of TAFE teachers’ work in Victoria (Brown et al. 1996; Seddon, Angus & Rushbrook 1994, 1995; Seddon & Brown 1997; Seddon 1999a). They note that the changes are at once both ‘empowering and disempowering’ (Brown et al. 1996, p.312). Training reforms have been welcomed by some teachers and resisted by others. This research supports the argument that the general environment in which VET resides has changed, and that, within this context, VET teachers can exercise a range of options and choices. This is, in fact, one of the paradoxes of the change process where, despite increasing surveillance of teachers’ work, many are able to ‘create spaces’ in which they can independently interpret the curriculum and even co-opt the curriculum to achieve alternative outcomes (Brown et al. 1996; Mucahy 1996). Within these environments, teachers’ relationships and ways of working are being reshaped, with the result that new professional cultures become possible.

Seddon asserts that the reforms challenge the long-held notion of TAFE teachers’ work being controlled and regulated by centralised authorities. This historical legacy has contributed to a ‘sense of learned helplessness’, particularly in relation to teachers taking responsibility for ‘managing their careers, employment relations and the economic basis for vocational education’ (Seddon 1999b, p.5). Seddon further argues that, within the current context, a new form of teacher professionalism needs to emerge. This new professionalism has a number of defining characteristics including:

- ✧ the valuing of self-management as a means to opening spaces in which VET teachers are able to act in creating learning spaces for themselves and their students
- ✧ a commitment to continuing to promote the value of education amid the requirement for a consumerist approach to ‘selling educational goods’
- ✧ the development of new relationships and spaces for learning beyond the traditional bounds of the institutions in which teachers operate
- ✧ the promotion of lifelong learning as integral to the role of teacher
- ✧ the re-valuing of teachers as knowledge workers across a range of learning sites in ways which move beyond the traditional teacher role into functions that might include, for example, supporting the emergence of learning organisations.

Chappell also argues that training reforms have ‘disturbed the distinctive organisational cultures of TAFE’ and thus raise considerable issues for the identity of the VET professional, particularly those who are employed in public institutions:

... TAFE as a public sector organisation has an identity built around public service ... the discourse of equality, impartiality and adherence to the rules and regulations designed to increase public confidence and political accountability have been central to the construction of a shared organisational culture ... the ‘businessing’ of TAFE has disturbed this construction, with the new TAFE constructed as an organisation ... that is largely indistinguishable from those found in the private sector. (Chappell 2001, p.7)

Summary

In many respects, arguments relating to the changing professional nature of VET teachers’ and trainers’ work reflect the old conundrum of whether a glass of liquid is half-empty or half-full. Evidence from the literature suggests that the role of VET teachers and trainers is simultaneously

both expanding and contracting. Arguably, more people are now concerned with the task of building the skills of the workforce than ever before. All are subject to different contextual factors shaping the degree to which they can attend to the task of developing vocational competence. Previously separate occupations of human resource developers, training and development specialists, school and TAFE teachers now appear to be converging, creating the potential for collaboration and the opening-up of new ways of work. Every worker in an enterprise is a potential trainer/facilitator/mentor involved in supporting learning.

The complex web of teachers and trainers who now form the VET workforce present a considerable challenge to researchers concerned with understanding how the nature of work in the VET sector is changing and impacting on teachers' and trainers' attitudes and roles. Each sub-group of VET teachers and trainers (be they TAFE teachers, human resource development professionals, private trainers, contractors) works in environments shaped by a range of contextual factors, such as workplace cultures and occupational cultures, which have the potential to impact on their attitudes to VET reforms. These factors have also affected how their work has changed over the past five years. The study presented here is an initial attempt to 'unpick' the diversity which comprises the VET workforce and to derive some insights into the impact of changes to work on their roles as VET practitioners.

Views on changes in becoming and being a VET practitioner

The VET sector has been noted for its growing diversity, both in terms of the nature and scope of work expected and characteristics of those teachers and trainers who are part of the sector. In the last ten years in particular, significant reforms have transformed this education sector. A range of factors have often been cited as acting as key drivers in the change process. In this section, teachers and trainers offer their perspectives on the key drivers they believe have provided the impetus for the changes experienced in their work. They also describe the impact these changes have had on the way in which they move into and through their careers as teachers and trainers and offer their perceptions of the value and status attributed to their work.

Most important factors influencing the changes experienced by practitioners in the past five years

The literature review has highlighted a number of researchers who have devoted significant effort to conceptualising the changes which have impacted on educational provision. They have referred to a range of theoretical perspectives in their attempts to provide a cogent explanation of the ways in which particular factors have shaped decisions made by successive governments in relation to education and training policies. This macro-level analysis is an important aid to assisting those implementing these policies to come to terms with some of the general influences shaping their working lives.

At the micro level within TAFE institutions and private training providers, these factors may take on new guises, as teachers and trainers come to grips with the process of transforming policies of governments into systems to provide education and training to their clients. At this level, teachers and trainers in focus groups attributed the changes they experienced in their work over the past five years to a range of factors. These may loosely be categorised as internal (or institutional) and external (or environmental) to their organisations (Brady 1992; Caffarella 2002). Table 3 lists these internal and external drivers of change as perceived by the focus group participants.

In keeping with previous assertions relating to the demands placed on VET systems (Gill, Dar & Fluitman 1999; Powles & Anderson 1996), it was not surprising that teachers and trainers perceived that drivers for change were more attributable to influences outside their place of employment. In addition, they named government policy as having the most marked effect, influencing curriculum practices and the way training is provided. The second major factor related to the expectations of industry and community, particularly industry's input into policy, while the third most important factor was economics/finances. These three were judged to be closely interrelated and to drive each other, with policy the prime driver of change affecting VET practitioners, especially at this time of transition to training packages.

Discussions in focus groups also highlighted teachers' and trainers' sensitivity to the changing social and cultural values and expectations impacting on their work. Globalisation, individualism, post-modernism, consumerism and economics were all either directly mentioned or alluded to in discussions. As Eckersley (1998) notes, these characteristics of modern culture powerfully influence values, and hence the choices being made in relation to a range of issues. In the case of the respondents, these values are pushing them to consider new ways of thinking about vocational

education and training and the role that they, as practitioners, are now being asked to play in the sector. The changing role of teachers and trainers has, at its root, shifts in the ways in which individuals come into their employment, and the opportunities they have for progression once in the sector.

Table 3: External and internal drivers of change derived from focus group discussions

External drivers of change	Internal drivers of change
✧ Government policy	✧ Increased expectations (responsiveness)
✧ Economics/finances/funder/purchaser model	✧ Rethinking what it means to learn and how to access learning opportunities
✧ Restructuring of public sector	✧ Fragmentation of TAFE into individual units
✧ Performance/productivity agreements	✧ Casualisation of the workforce
✧ Competition	✧ Changing work conditions and workloads
✧ New trends in online technology	✧ Student characteristics
✧ VET in Schools	
✧ Changing relationship between public and private sectors	
✧ Globalisation	
✧ Changed demands within the labour market (pressure to upskill etc.)	
✧ Demands of clients	
✧ New partnerships to provide 'one stop shops' in regional areas	

Data collected during the interviews reinforced the focus groups' perceptions that the main drivers of change were external to teachers' and trainers' workplaces and operated at a macro level (table 4). Government policies, reductions in funding (arguably, a product of government policies), international and national trends, industry demands and competition (also products of government policies) were clearly identified by respondents as critical drivers influencing their work.

Table 4: Drivers for change reported by interview respondents

Driver	Frequency of responses*	Per cent of interviewees (N = 64)
Government policies	36	56.3
Reductions in funding	13	20.3
International and national trends	11	17.2
Industry demands	10	15.6
Funding models	8	12.5
Technology	7	10.9
Competition	6	9.4
Push to diversify types of training providers	6	9.4
Restructuring	5	7.8
Changing economic policies	5	7.8
Greater accountability	4	6.3
Introduction of user choice	3	4.7
Motivation of teachers/trainers	3	4.7
Changing nature of student characteristics	2	3.1
Desire for increased efficiencies	2	3.1
Shift to work-based learning	2	3.1
Flexible delivery/learning	1	1.6
Reductions in supports for teachers	1	1.6
Reductions in staff	1	1.6
Expansion/changes to business	1	1.6

Note: * Respondents could list up to three drivers.

Changes in recruitment and career pathways

Over the past five years there has been a significant shift in employment status for VET teachers and trainers. However, opinions were somewhat divided on the short- and long-term impacts of these shifts. Previous practices, particularly in TAFE institutions, where staff were formerly recruited as full-time or on permanent/semi-permanent contracts, have largely been replaced by sessional and contract staff. Respondents clearly believed that the numbers of full-time positions had declined in the past few years. This trend towards a casualised workforce was viewed in different ways. On the one hand, the use of these employment practices provided some flexibility and the opportunity to ascertain how people coped with various aspects of the work (for example, working in a team). Conversely, the reduction in full-time staff was labelled as 'frustrating' because of the lack of job security for incumbents. Some TAFE staff also noted that they felt pressure to generate more funds (for example, fee-for-service work) to enable more secure contracts to be offered to staff. The impact of casualisation was also of concern to some respondents who believed that current staffing practices would have an impact on the future staff profile, with fewer people attaining the levels of expertise and experience required for progression to management levels.

Both public and private providers reported some unique challenges in recruiting staff for their sectors. One of the difficulties in recruiting staff to TAFE (depending on the program area) is the salary gap between what people can earn in industry and what they can earn as a teacher. Large gaps in salaries, combined with other working conditions (such as the expectation that teachers have to fund their own professional development) can impact on the number and quality of people applying for positions. In addition, because private training organisations have greater flexibility in the salaries they can offer, recruitment and retention of staff in the public VET sector can be further compromised. Recruitment practices are now located closer to the point-of-service delivery, rather than at the state level as was previous TAFE practice. Greater involvement at the local level has provided an opportunity to ensure a better fit between prospective applicants and the skills and knowledge required for a particular position. Industry continues to be a key source for new staff, particularly where programs have an on-job component. In contrast, private training providers face a different challenge when recruiting staff, particularly when existing or previous TAFE staff are applicants, as they are often perceived to be ill-equipped to cope with the demands of training and assessing in the workplace.

Views in relation to the notion of career pathways were also varied. Within both public and private training providers, respondents believed the notion of 'opportunities' rather than defined career pathways was a more realistic approach to describing the manner in which teachers and trainers were able to move through the various stages of their working life. Working conditions in the public sector, whereby roles such as 'head teachers' are not rewarded, and where there is a lack of support for attaining educational qualifications, confirmed the lack of career progression opportunities. Within the private sector, notions of career pathways have been considerably disrupted, particularly when business conditions could vary dramatically with wild swings in cash flow and changing accountability requirements. Under these conditions, career pathways are virtually non-existent, with providers preferring to 'buy in' part-time workers (especially as workplace assessors) or use contract staff.

The career pathway for most teachers and trainers is one of moving from the periphery of a program area as an hourly paid instructor, to increasing involvement and engagement with the program with the attainment of a contract, and then a permanent position. Initially, hourly paid instructors are loosely coupled to a program area. They are employed for their expertise in a specified area and are effectively 'tested' prior to being offered increased hours and a broadening scope of work. The progression is not always rapid and respondents reported a number of instances where staff can remain on short contracts (six to 12 months duration) for extended periods of time. The increasing competition between a growing number of part-time and contract staff for a declining number of permanent positions has also produced significant 'credential creep', with

many hourly paid instructors and contract staff being more highly qualified than their managers or permanent counterparts. Opportunities can also come in the form of acting positions, for example, as a project officer (usually at a higher level), but these are often short-term and leave incumbents feeling 'displaced' when they return to former positions. The availability of career pathways in the public sector also seemed very heavily predicated on teachers' preparedness to move through a succession of positions, often within quite short spaces of time.

Another significant career pathway is from teaching to management. This pathway, however, appears not to be well supported by many respondents for a number of reasons. Acting in a managerial role is usually expected as the first step in this career progression, but many teachers are reluctant to take this pathway because acting positions are normally of a short duration. The stresses associated with returning to substantive positions where considerable change might have taken place during absence are an additional disadvantage. Respondents also perceived a trend of uncoupling the functions of teaching and management and, in some instances, a preference for recruitment practices which seek managers who do not have a background or qualification in education. Previous career pathways provided greater opportunity for combining teaching and management, but reductions in classification levels in public providers and a preference for management-only positions have effectively required teachers when seeking promotion to choose between management and teaching. There was a perception that teaching-only career pathways were diminishing, with the demise of classifications (in some TAFE systems), such as senior teacher.

There was considerable debate amongst respondents on the issue of recruitment into management positions. Some public and most private providers argued that there was a significant preference for recruiting managers who are external to organisations, with the concomitant view that teachers were ill-suited for the business-oriented nature of these roles. Others argued, however, that this was not always the preferred option, suggesting that other attributes developed while in the position of a teacher, such as knowledge of industry, were also important to the role, and appropriately equipped them for management.

During discussions on issues relating to recruitment and career progression, a special note was made of the unique place of school teachers working in VET in Schools programs. In many respects, respondents judged the school system to be similar to TAFE, in that 'the higher you go the less you teach'. The recruitment of school teachers into VET in Schools programs depended on the program area. For example, in tourism and hospitality, teachers receive training from TAFE and have intensive courses every two years to upgrade skills, while in the business area, teachers do not have a great deal of industry background. However, to overcome this problem, some hourly paid instructors at TAFE are recruited into VET in Schools programs because they have this experience. In some places, assessor training has been provided to teachers involved in VET in Schools programs, but this has been largely ad hoc and not a success, and lack of funding has been a barrier to ongoing development.

Changes to the role and status of VET

Many participants believed that the status of VET teachers and trainers has been eroded over the past five years. They cited a range of reasons for this view, including declining salaries and working conditions, difficulties in recruiting staff and a changing public perception associated with a shifting emphasis and downgrading of teachers' roles from educators to trainers. This shifting perception was of particular concern for respondents from TAFE.

A significant number of TAFE respondents believe that TAFE is now seen as part of the training sector rather than as part of the education sector. VET is perceived as a 'poor relation', a second alternative to universities (although respondents pointed out that this was not the case in all program areas). They believe that the general public is not aware of what actually happens in TAFE and view it only in terms of 'traditional trade areas'. However, some respondents expressed the

positive view that attitudes were beginning to change slowly as a consequence of marketing activities and the emergence of VET in Schools programs. There was recognition, also, of the increasing links being developed between TAFE and universities.

Participants also referred to the perception of the narrowing focus of VET qualifications and their emphasis on employment-related tasks. They believed that such training limited opportunities for people to move from one enterprise to another. Thus, the more critical perspective was that the 'whole agenda is more rationalistic—it is about people having skills, nothing more, nothing less'. Teachers trying to take a broader perspective believed that have to 'work against the system to do it'. The key issue is perceived to be how to put the 'E' back into VET.

Views on the term 'VET professional'

Within the context of shifting societal values in relation to the role of vocational education and training, and the concomitant impact on staff employed as VET teachers and trainers, it was not surprising that the term 'VET professional' was viewed as problematic by many respondents in the study. Some believed it merely to be a descriptive term, coined to embrace the growing diversity of roles people are now being asked to fill, as well as an attempt to overcome some of the clumsy nomenclature associated with the diverse range of business, management and pedagogical roles undertaken by staff across both human resource and education sectors. Use of this term also reduced the division between public and private sector employees. Others saw the term as a way of articulating the essence of the changes to the sector in the rise of a new work role, which was neither trainer nor teacher, but a new breed of workers who are cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary in their focus.

Some respondents thought the word 'professional' was significant, suggesting that it sought to provide an image of a group committed to quality educational outcomes and standards and a growing professionalism in the way they were expected to undertake their work. It also sought to highlight, not the emergence of a profession per se, but that roles in the VET sector are complex and require a particular way of working which moves beyond teachers and trainers and technicians.

Some respondents noted the apparent contradiction between the introduction of this term and the introduction of training packages, which they believe place greater emphasis on being competent in what they are delivering, rather than on being educators. Put simply, they asserted that educational 'professionalism' was now 'missing' and was being further eroded by practices which promote attainment of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as distinct from tertiary educational qualifications as a basis for practice in the sector.

Summary

This section has explored drivers of change as perceived by VET practitioners and how these have altered their work, the ways in which they are recruited and their career pathways, and the status of their work.

Practitioners believed that the drivers for change were due to influences external to their places of employment. Specifically, they cited government policy, the expectations of industry and the community, and economics/finances as the key determinants of change to their work, with other influences being national and international trends, competition and technology. Internal drivers included increased expectations for responsiveness, pressure for greater accountability, reconceptualisations of learning and access to learning opportunities, changing workloads, and student characteristics.

These changes have resulted in different patterns of recruitment and career progression. Increasing casualisation has led to enhanced flexibility but also to decreased job security. Recruiting is now closer to the point-of-service delivery. Altering notions of career have resulted more in 'opportunities' than 'pathways'; they have meant that progression depends more heavily on preparedness to move through a succession of positions, sometimes within short timeframes; and they have encouraged movement from teaching into management, a move not always desired by practitioners.

Most practitioners in this study perceived that the status of VET teachers had been eroded over the past five years. They saw an over-emphasis on training as distinct from education, and many expressed the view that they wanted the 'E' put back in VET. They believed that VET was the 'poor cousin' in the tertiary sector and that the public mainly viewed VET as 'trade-oriented'. These attitudes were seen to be fuelled by the narrowing focus of VET qualifications.

The concept of the 'VET professional' was seen to be problematic. On the one hand, the term was seen to be merely a descriptive and convenient nomenclature for embracing the diversity of roles in the sector and to mask differences between public and private employment. On the other, it was perceived as a term that could well embrace a collective new identity for the diverse workers in the sector, provide an image of a growing professionalism, and reflect ways of working beyond the technician level. Many drew attention to the apparent contradiction here between what they saw as an attempt to enhance professionalism at the same time as introducing training packages with their focus on interpreting industry's wishes as opposed to creating educational experiences for learners.

Changes in work roles and responsibilities

The previous section noted the considerable shifts occurring in the ways in which teachers and trainers within the VET sector think about themselves and their roles. It is likely that these shifts are influenced to a large degree by the way in which teachers enter and navigate the sector during their working lives. It is at the level of their daily working lives where the full impact of changes to work practice are realised. In this section, the focus turns to the daily work roles and responsibilities of teachers and trainers to enable an examination of the nature and extent of the changes experienced.

Nature of changes to practitioners' work and work roles

Focus group respondents noted that they are now working in a more competitive environment involving a great variety of training providers. This increasingly complex operating environment creates considerable opportunities as well as challenges to previously accepted ways of operating. The context is now one where shifting relationships between organisations (including other training providers, schools and the higher education sector) are constantly being reworked in the light of the most recent policy mandates or administrative demands. Thus teachers and trainers are increasingly mindful of the contexts in which they operate and are required to be sensitive, not only to the demands of their immediate working environments, but also to the organisation which employs them to ensure its position is maintained within the training market.

This changed and increasingly complex environment has resulted in a major shift in the focus of what teachers and trainers are employed to do, namely, vocational education and training. On the one hand, respondents made the general observation that the permanent staff, particularly within TAFE institutes, are contracting in number, while the areas of expertise they are expected to cover are expanding. Work roles have become broader in response to the need for providers to be able to offer a wider range of products. Teachers and trainers feel the need to continually up-skill in order to remain competitive in the marketplace, and recognise that they carry an increased responsibility for more aspects of work (managing budgets, recruitment, planning, industry liaison).

On the other hand, there is a strong perception that, as teachers and trainers have become more open to the demands of the marketplace, there has been a dilution of educational effort in favour of providing training to students. TAFE teachers particularly perceived this shift in emphasis as a loss, although respondents from both public and training providers clearly felt that 'students are not getting the education and training they should be' or 'what they need'. Respondents argued that this shift fundamentally challenged notions of quality, with many teachers and trainers remaining unconvinced that new systems have promoted the maintenance of standards. Central to this assertion was the claim by some that, while they have always been concerned with developing competent graduates, current notions of competency encompassed a narrow range of competencies which often do not meet the needs of industry, or produce people with transferable skills. Given the timing of this research study, it was not unexpected that teachers and trainers devoted a great deal of time in the focus groups to discussing the impact of the latest innovation, namely training packages, claiming that this innovation embodied many of the challenges they currently faced.

Training packages were clearly viewed by some respondents as a 'very diluted education strategy' which required considerable effort on the part of teachers and trainers to 'bridge the gap to make

[the training package] better'. They asserted that the introduction of training packages had shifted the balance in teachers' and trainers' work from implementers to interpreters of these tools, and from a focus on learning to a greater emphasis on assessment as a core function of their work. These changes in emphasis posed significant challenges to teachers' and trainers' values and beliefs about a range of issues, including the nature of competency, their ability to make decisions that were 'educationally sound, and the ways in which they handle dilemmas, such as the ethic of 'educating the whole person' (a strong ethic within the schools sector), and the need to deliver what was demanded by the training package and nothing more. These dilemmas were also closely associated with recognition of the funding implications of any decisions which extended opportunities beyond what was required of the training package.

The shift from curriculum built around modules to a learning system built around competency standards is significant, and one which is taking considerable time to integrate into current practice. Some respondents believed that the replacement of curriculum with training packages is not well understood and a great deal of professional development is needed to support this transition.

Comments also indicated that there was a desperate need to develop the resources required for implementing training packages. The picture presented by focus group respondents is one of considerable tension and internal conflict, as teachers and trainers attempt to reconcile their values and beliefs about learning, assessment and teaching with the demands of training packages. It is a time of transition and, for some respondents, it is also clearly a time when they perceive that they are being asked to eliminate long-held practices and beliefs and substitute new approaches in which so far they have little confidence.

The implementation of training packages also appears to have significant implications for senior and full-time staff within registered training organisations who perceived that some sessional staff appear to lack the educational expertise to work with training packages. This situation is therefore putting extra pressure on existing staff to assist, train and mentor new staff. While sessional staff clearly have the required content knowledge and industry experience, they need considerable assistance with the educational aspect of training packages and in learning how to interpret them.

With vastly increased numbers of part-time staff, full-time teachers work exceptionally hard, since a substantial amount of the 'incidental' work (for example, checking roll books), itself demanding and stressful, falls to full-time staff. Work in preparing and supporting new staff is not funded. Teachers perceive the system as surviving on good will, both in TAFE and in schools. Senior teachers feel they are now the 'meat in the sandwich', trying to cope with staff who are disillusioned and tired with coping with demands 'from above'.

A key consequence of the changed environment in which registered training organisations operate is an increased emphasis on accountability. Teachers and trainers feel they are more open to being challenged about their work than before. However, some respondents, in debating this changed aspect of their work roles, suggested that this change was not felt uniformly across all teachers and trainers, and claimed that part-time teachers had little accountability. Growing accountability was a particularly pressing issue in relation to assessment practices. Some respondents believed that there was now more pressure on staff when determining whether a student had achieved competency. Issues of validity and demonstrable outcomes are strongly emphasised. This is particularly problematic for teachers and trainers involved in the delivery of diploma and advanced diploma-level qualifications where competencies are quite complex (Foreman, Davis & Bone 2002). Time and cost of assessments is an issue, as assessments often need to be signed off by a number of people, all of whom must come to a shared understanding of competency. This is a significant shift from previous practices where teachers and trainers assumed sole responsibility for assessment processes.

In addition to the shift from education to training, there has been a significant increase in the importance of management as a key function of teachers' roles. Along with keeping up to date with changes within their industry area, VET practitioners felt they also needed to be aware of funding

opportunities and to keep abreast of administrative requirements. This broadening of responsibilities has impacted on VET practitioners across a range of contexts, including those involved in VET in Schools programs where a degree of tension has been created for teachers. VET coordinators in schools are largely interested in and focused on preparing young people for going to work, and cannot assume an interest or skill in management. However, it is expected that they will take greater responsibility for managing budgets and be more focused on financial issues. They have to be more aware of funding opportunities, costs of training and the need to generate income, and to work out ways of ensuring that learners get the support they need. This represents a significant shift in focus and responsibility for these teachers.

Many practitioners also reported a significant shift in their role as a 'traditional' face-to-face teacher to facilitator, although this shift varied considerably across program areas. In this respect, traditional face-to-face teaching was equated with 'pouring information into students' while the role of facilitating was linked directly to learning, and the role that teachers and trainers played in working with adults who expected their experience to be used as part of the learning process. Some respondents suggested that there was too much emphasis on 'facilitating', with the result that students are not achieving the required outcomes. Other respondents talked about the very essence of teaching having changed, from being in front of a class communicating predominantly content knowledge, to an expectation that teachers and trainers have the knowledge and skills for online delivery, flexible delivery, workplace training and the ability to interact more directly with learners. This is in keeping with changes noted in previous research which emphasise the reworking of the role of VET teachers and trainers in the light of successive waves of reforms (Simons 2001; Smith et al. 1997).

Teachers and trainers believe they are now required to work across a wider range of roles or contexts than that of 'traditional' face-to-face teaching in a classroom, with a particular emphasis on developing an 'outward focus'. They work in organisations such as institutes, schools and a great variety of workplaces. They need to build industry links and relationships with a variety of other organisations, such as New Apprenticeship Centres. This move to a more external focus is viewed as a good change, but teachers need to build networks and this creates a dilemma in how to 'keep track' and maintain the networks and funding bases required to support programs. They need to build partnerships between employers, trainees and their organisation, constantly juggling the needs of the learners with the need to work in as cost-effective manner as possible. Building the business of the training provider so that clients will return at a later date is also included within this area of work.

Some teachers and trainers also expressed the view that they now have to demonstrate a greater degree of flexibility in terms of when and how they undertake their work. There has been a significant increase in workplace delivery and assessment. Institution-based staff visit employers more regularly for monitoring purposes and they need to work more frequently with industry personnel. Other teachers and trainers, however, suggested that, in some program areas, not much has changed in the past ten years and they remain working in ways not dissimilar to previous practices. Greater flexibility is also demanded of teachers and trainers because the support systems around teachers and trainers have changed. Teachers have to do more and yet have fewer resources to draw on.

Preparation for teaching is more an individual activity than previously. The nature of the student population has also changed, and this has impacted considerably on teachers' work. Students are seen to be more assertive, demanding and wanting 'value for money', with the student placed in the position of 'consumer'. Students also have increasingly complex lives, and therefore a greater range of factors affecting their capacity to learn/study. Many students are no longer attending classes, but instead, a wide diversity of learning takes place in workplaces. This represents a major overhaul in the way training takes place, such that it is concerned with facilitation, and teaching students how to learn. Content is no longer the critical factor. Training is now concerned with developing a self-

paced, self-reliant, independent learner, since it is recognised that students cannot be experts in all content areas. There have also been significant increases in student numbers. With no increase (and sometimes a real decrease) in overall full-time staff numbers, and the growing demands of the management component of their job roles, teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to 'squeeze in educational work'.

Another significant change affecting the work of all VET practitioners has been the development in the use of online technology. There is now considerably more training and assessment online, and teachers and trainers are constantly working with clients who are interstate and sometimes overseas. The use of email, audio- and video-conferencing facilities has increased dramatically. Respondents believed they had yet to feel the full impact of technology, with the expectation of 24-hour access to teachers a possibility. The introduction of computer-based administration systems has greatly affected work in the VET sector without, in some cases, any support, especially in relation to access to computers and building levels of literacy in the use of information technology. What was particularly highlighted was the rate of change in such teaching areas as information technology.

Increased workloads, growing calls for accountability and flexibility, and role diversification were presented as significant undercurrents to a range of other changes which, while not directly affecting the work undertaken by teachers and trainers, were nevertheless having a significant impact on their working conditions. In general, respondents believed that work conditions had been eroded. Erosion in tenure (full-time positions being converted to part-time), redundancy, no real wage increases, changes to award conditions, increased travel costs (especially for teachers and trainers in rural areas) and restructuring have all made it difficult for practitioners to work effectively. There was a perception that teachers and trainers were expected to deal with changes, regardless of employment status. Another significant change felt keenly by focus group participants was the increased administration and paperwork. These were perceived to have made work more onerous and, together with uncertainty in funding, often created difficult working conditions. The increased amount of paperwork was linked to greater accountability and a number of respondents reported working long hours to cope with these demands.

A common theme in participants' discussions was how little interaction they had with other staff. They noted that previously they used to meet with people from across the state (for example, in program areas or teams), but now they worked in virtual isolation, having little contact with other staff working in related areas. Some respondents, however, disagreed with the notion of being isolated, and instead asserted that they now had better relationships with industry. Others also commented on the delivery of courses being more varied; for instance, community people coming in for courses, working with other faculties, providing commercial courses, all of which were considered very interesting and creative.

Changed working conditions impacted on issues relating to the decline in the level of professional preparation and lack of accessibility to ongoing professional development for VET teachers and trainers. The introduction of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as the base-line qualification for all staff was viewed as 'not lifting professionalism'. Furthermore, the adequacy of this qualification for the diverse range of work roles that teachers and trainers were required to undertake was questioned by a number of participants. Many also commented generally on the declining accessibility of staff development, particularly for teachers and trainers in rural and remote locations where the lack of replacement staff was a significant barrier to staff attending professional development opportunities.

Extent of change to practitioners' work and work roles

The experiences of changes to work roles and responsibilities reported in the focus groups were contextualised in the interviews where almost two-thirds of respondents reported that their work responsibilities had changed 'a lot' in the past five years (table 5). Further analysis revealed that, for

just over one-half of all respondents (52%), these changes were the result of a broadening of their work responsibilities. Work roles now embrace a wider range of contexts, where staff are required to facilitate learning in an increasing number of different ways for an increasingly diverse student population. The numbers of programs across which staff now work had also increased markedly. Just over one-third (36%) of interviewees emphasised the expansion, rather than the diversification, of their work roles over the past five years, particularly in relation to the significant increases in management, administration and teaching loads staff were expected to carry.

Table 5: Extent of change to work responsibilities reported in interviews

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (N = 64)
Not at all	3	4.7
Slightly	6	9.4
To some extent	14	21.9
A lot	41	64.1

Data examining the ways in which the types of positions held by VET practitioners in the study have changed over the past five to ten years further illuminated these shifts in work responsibilities (table 6).

Table 6: Current position of interviewees compared with their positions of five and ten years ago

Title of current position	Number of interviewees who were in a different position five years ago	Number of interviewees who were in a different position ten years ago	Total number of interviewees (N=64)
Teacher/trainer	14	20	31
Manager	19	19	28
Industry training advisory body	4	4	5

Forty-five per cent of teachers and trainers reported they currently occupied a different position from the one they held five years ago, and 65% had a different position from that occupied ten years ago. In contrast, 68% of managers held a different position five years ago. These figures are indicative of a group of respondents who show relatively high levels of job mobility, and are suggestive of a dynamic working environment where work roles are both broadening and expanding in response to internal and external pressures.

Summary

This section has investigated the nature and extent of changes to VET practitioners' work and work roles. With regard to the *nature* of the changes, the following themes emerged as the most significant from focus group discussions:

- ✧ a far more competitive environment
- ✧ a major shift in the focus of what practitioners are employed to do
- ✧ a shift in balance from implementers to interpreters, and from a focus on learning to a greater emphasis on assessment
- ✧ extra pressure on existing full-time staff to assist, train and mentor new staff who are mostly part-time, sessional or casual; increased emphasis on accountability and being open to challenge

- ✧ a significant increase in the importance of management responsibilities
- ✧ a significant shift in role as a 'traditional' face-to-face teacher to a facilitator
- ✧ requirement to work across a wider range of teaching contexts
- ✧ emphasis on developing an 'outward focus' and building partnerships with a wide range of organisations
- ✧ requirement to demonstrate a greater degree of flexibility in when and how they work
- ✧ developments in the use of online technology
- ✧ erosion in working conditions
- ✧ increased administration and paperwork
- ✧ less interaction with other VET staff
- ✧ a decline in the level of professional preparation and lack of accessibility to ongoing professional development.

Almost two-thirds of interviewees reported that their work responsibilities had changed 'a lot' over the past five years. For just over one-half of all interviewees, such changes were claimed to be the result of a broadening of their work responsibilities, while over one-third emphasised the expansion, rather than the diversification, of their work roles over that time. Relatively high levels of job/position mobility accentuated these perceptions of rapid change to the working lives of these VET practitioners.

Changes to relationships within the organisation

The drivers of change identified by the VET practitioners have led to many shifts in relationships within their organisations. The study explored three types of relationships: with students; with other teachers/trainers; and with management. This section examines the nature and extent of the changes in these relationships.

Changes to relationships with students

In the focus groups, teachers and trainers reported that there had been marked changes in relationships with their students. These changes primarily relate to the nature of the student clientele, student expectations and the learning climate and process.

Respondents drew attention to the changed nature of the student body. Changes to university entry requirements (for example, a perceived lowering of entrance scores) and volume have meant that 'the top-end school leavers' are now lost to the VET sector. Furthermore, there are claimed to be more people leaving the schooling system and entering the VET sector with emotional and behavioural problems, and VET teachers/trainers are neither trained nor have the specialised resources to deal with them. These changes have resulted in different kinds of students from earlier years, and teachers have to spend a great deal more time and energy dealing with them. Increasing social pressures are also impacting on students, affecting their retention in and completion of programs.

Another change frequently mentioned was that students have far higher expectations than previously, and are therefore more demanding. They expect more because they are paying more for their training. They are now framed in the position of 'consumers', expecting a high level of and timely customer service. They are also more demanding in terms of assessment processes and outcomes. VET practitioners claimed that far more students now want to know exactly how good they are, whereas previously they were not so demanding and tended to be satisfied to know they had passed. As a consequence, many students find it difficult to deal with non-graded assessment. Thus, staff have now to develop and maintain a more personal relationship with their students than previously.

The learning climate and process have also changed with the advent of competency-based training. This system has shifted the power base between teachers and students, and altered the way teachers relate to students. One expressed it in terms of now not being able to 'hide behind my chalkboard', but instead teachers and trainers have to work differently with their students. For some teachers this was not a big change, but for others it has been a marked shift in attitude and approach. The VET practitioners viewed competency-based training as providing a more relaxed environment for students, where students are, in effect, asked to be partners in learning, and teachers accompany them 'on a journey rather than giving information'. They are 'all in it together', with a closer partnership between staff and students. Students' contributions to the learning process have been valued and teachers and trainers are also learning along the way. Thus, VET teachers have to be more responsive, and demonstrate greater flexibility in their ways of working with students. They talk about having to please and accommodate students rather than, as was previously the case, students having to take what was offered.

Interviewees confirmed the view that relationships with students have changed considerably in the past five years, with two-thirds of respondents believing their relationships had changed ‘to some extent’ or ‘a lot’ (table 7).

Table 7: Extent of change of relationships between VET teachers/trainers and students

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (N = 64)
Not at all	11	17.2
Slightly	14	21.9
To some extent	19	29.7
A lot	20	31.3

Interviewees were evenly divided over the nature of these changes, with about half suggesting that relationships have become closer, while others suggested that relationships have become less personal. Of those teachers and trainers who noted that relationships had changed to some extent or a lot, 38% perceived that there had been a shift in power relationships between VET staff and their students. Students were described as ‘more autonomous’, with staff needing to be ‘more careful about what we do and say’ and to treat students as ‘clients’. Approximately one-third of teachers and trainers attributed this shift in power relations to the introduction of new pedagogies, such as flexible learning and work-based learning, which demanded that teachers and trainers act more as mentors, counsellors and facilitators offering support to students. This shift was clearly seen in a positive manner by some staff, but in a negative light by others who lamented the loss of the closer, face-to-face contact of the classroom. A smaller number of VET staff explained that relationships between themselves and their students had become more remote because of the increasing burden of administration, or the perception that the emphasis on outcomes required a more distant relationship—because teachers and trainers had to ‘push’ students to achieve course outcomes within specified time and financial constraints.

Changes to relationships between teachers/trainers

Many changes in the relationships between VET teachers and trainers were recognised by the focus group participants. One marked change has been the loss of interaction and networking between those who once used to be colleagues within the same discipline, such that now individuals worked more on their own. Alluding to their increasing busyness, teachers and trainers lamented the loss of opportunities to sit down and talk with colleagues. Most practitioners claimed that it was getting harder and harder to meet with other teachers, even to schedule formal meetings where all were able to attend. This was particularly the case in relation to interaction with teachers and trainers from other campuses and sites. Moreover, such networking was even harder in rural areas because of the distances, times and costs of travelling.

One view was that relationships are also different now because staff are ageing—‘getting to the age where they want their long service leave’—and that, because training providers have commercial targets to achieve, management looks for staff who are younger, more energetic and more enthusiastic! Another opinion was that, with the widespread introduction of training packages, VET practitioners have been very busy adjusting to the different approach, and there has been little collaboration between programs. There has also been the need to ‘look after’ casual staff—by ensuring that students are there, that classes are viable so that these teachers will have work, and that as much as possible, all work together to ‘juggle jobs around’.

Relationships now tend to be more formalised, for example, in Queensland where, in the last few years, Strategic Product Implementation Groups have been established as formalised networks of teachers to assist in collaboration and information dissemination.

Increasing casualisation in the VET sector has also considerably affected relationships between staff. Teachers and trainers often work more in isolation, ‘just turning up for sessions and then disappearing’ and not getting involved with other staff or with campus activities. The VET practitioners therefore perceived that, as a consequence, there is a declining team environment in VET organisations, a lessening of collaborative ‘going the extra mile’ for one’s colleagues.

Another factor altering relationships between staff is increased competition, convincingly articulated in the words of one practitioner as: ‘Have you done your required number of hours of teaching?’ The advent of performance agreements linked to funding has altered relationships. The degree of collaboration between teachers, however, depends on the team they are in. The effects of increased competition were challenged by one person in a focus group who worked within a teaching team primarily made up of hourly paid instructors and where there is a greater team sense.

In regard to the school sector, the VET practitioners’ views were that, since VET in Schools is relatively new, school teachers have had to work in teams in order to assist one another—summarised bluntly as: ‘there is no one else’.

Interviewees echoed many of the themes enunciated in the focus groups, emphasising that relationships between teachers and trainers had changed considerably in the past five years (table 8).

Table 8: Changes to relationships with other teachers/trainers within own organisation

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (N = 64)
Not at all	14	21.9
Slightly	9	14.1
To some extent	20	31.3
A lot	21	32.8

For 30% of respondents, these changes resulted in greater interaction between teachers and trainers. New methodologies, such as work-based learning and flexible delivery, required greater sharing of resources and processes to assure quality, consistency in assessment and accountability. Increased interaction was also attributed to declining staff numbers in some areas and the need to ‘work together’ in order to deliver courses effectively and efficiently.

While some teachers and trainers clearly viewed the closer interaction with their colleagues as positive, a smaller proportion (12%) saw the greater interaction as a source of strain and tension. Relationships tended to be strained because staff were being ‘pushed harder’ and fewer staff necessarily resulted in stress and sometimes tension and conflict around workloads.

Approximately one-third of interviewees reported that they had felt a decrease in support from their colleagues over the past five years. Increased workloads, increased stress and little time for interaction contributed, in varying degrees, to a growing sense of isolation with ‘low morale and [high] cynicism’ affecting some relationships. Declining opportunities for interaction between teachers and trainers was also noted by one-fifth of respondents as having a significant impact on relationships. Increasing numbers of part-time and contract staff, combined with a growth in the use of electronic communications, increased workloads, reduced opportunities for face-to-face interaction and changed ways of working (for example, working in enterprises) all appeared to contribute to the erosion of the social contact and networking between teachers and trainers.

Changes to relationships between teachers/trainers and management

A considerable number of managers in VET (particularly TAFE) had once been teachers and trainers when a different system had operated, or when circumstances were quite different. With the introduction of competency-based training, and more recently training packages, the context had changed and many VET practitioners considered that managers did not understand some of the difficulties being encountered by teachers. It was felt that management often did not appreciate the stress that teachers experienced as they tried to perform their work well. For example, respondents drew attention to the tensions between managers, who have to be very aware of finances and providing best-quality service, and teachers/trainers who want to provide best possible service, but perhaps do not understand the financial environment as well as their managers.

Others believed that changes in the relationship between teachers and managers were less related to training packages than to the constant change in management every year and the formation of semi-autonomous work teams. This constant change and move towards team-based work arrangements, which invariably resulted in changed relationships with managers, has made staff more discerning about managers, so that they do not just accept the decisions that managers make.

A view from a regional area was that remoteness of managers in the capital city does not help relationships and neither does the short-term contract nature of many of the management positions. Teachers make day-to-day decisions, but long-term planning is a real problem. Again, constant change in directors implies that directors are often more concerned with 'building empires' than looking for alliances and collaborative partnerships in a broader environment. Yet others, again particularly in a regional area, considered that relationships have not really changed, and have always been good. They believed that because their institute is small and relatively new, the relationship between staff and management is 'fairly good'.

Some practitioners believed that an important change was that they now see little of the senior management, probably due to the nature of their work. There is generally a 'lack of presence' as they are not around quite as much. In fact, one practitioner claimed that a vast number of sessional staff would not even know who their director was. Other comments highlighted the situation where people at the delivery level have now taken on more of a management role, and that there are fewer people in management.

Respondents from private providers believed that managers had more paperwork to deal with, because their role also involved interacting with their trainers to ensure that the trainers were aware of the work and its importance. The suggestion was that managers in these private organisations often played a significant 'oversighting' role, and this sometimes created barriers between these two groups of staff.

Managers also have to monitor teachers to ensure that they understand the differences in approaches between classroom and workplace-based training and assessment, and also to ensure a balance, because all teachers and trainers do things differently. In other words, monitoring to ensure that goals are achieved. Managers, while not getting in the way of individuality, also act as coaches and mentors for trainers to ensure that 'they bring themselves up to an acceptable level'. They help them to manage their expectations and their time, and provide 'customer service' to them, delivering the same service as if they were students. One practitioner highlighted that working as a contractor—and therefore relatively independently—was very different from being located in a workplace.

A small number of interviewees referred to a perceived increase in the formality of relationships, particularly with their managers, which they attributed largely to the growing need for accountability and efficient use of resources.

Summary

Relationships within organisations have clearly altered in recent years. The VET practitioners described significant changes in their dealings with students, with other teachers/trainers and with management. Almost two-thirds of those interviewed claimed that their relationships in these areas had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent'.

With regard to students, these changes were perceived to be partly the consequence of students being different from those of previous times and who were experiencing increasing social pressures of their own. As a result, their expectations were higher and more demanding, particularly with respect to assessment processes and outcomes. Competency-based training had also greatly affected learning climate and processes, and altered the power balance between teachers and students.

In terms of other teachers and trainers, relationships were perceived to be increasingly fewer as a result of being even busier, extra travelling and low morale. They were perceived as having changed because of staff ageing and pressures to meet targets, and more formalised. Increasing casualisation has greatly affected relationships and contributed to a declining team environment in VET.

Relationships with management were being affected by the changing policy context. Competency-based training, training packages and the pressure for management to be continually aware of finances were all contributing to the perceived gulf between teachers/trainers and managers. This divide was accentuated by teachers feeling that managers were becoming less visible, with teachers having to assume more and more responsibility themselves, and managers feeling that teachers did not always comprehend the whole picture and therefore required closer monitoring for accountability and efficiency purposes.

Changes to relationships outside the organisation

One of the hallmarks of the VET sector, as noted earlier, has been its openness to influence from a range of economic, employment and welfare policies of incumbent governments. While these reforms have significantly altered the internal workings of the VET sector institutions, they have also impacted on their external relationships with industry, with unions and other professional bodies, as well as with other registered training organisations. This section presents the findings on these types of relationships.

Changes to relationships with industry

One of the enduring features of the VET sector has been its unique relationship with industry, with the resiliency of this relationship attributable to a number of factors. Firstly, for the majority of teachers and trainers, working in the VET sector is usually the result of a significant career change (Chappell & Melville 1995). Many come to teaching after lengthy periods of time in industry. If they are employed on a part-time or sessional basis as a teacher or trainer, they continue to be employed in industry.

Secondly, teachers' and trainers' work in industry has a strong influence on the ways in which they approach their work of facilitating learning (see for example Mealyea's 1988 study on TAFE teachers). In the trade areas, for instance, strong hierarchical relationships, which were often a part of the teachers' own apprenticeships, can be re-created in efforts to replicate what is normatively viewed as 'good training' (Gleeson 1994, p.7). Other writers have noted that TAFE teachers favour a model of teaching that values mastery of skills by processes of imitation and practice (Lowrie, Smith & Hill 1999, p.12). Teachers also value their role in mentoring students and supporting them in their journey towards becoming a member of an occupational community.

Thirdly, current quality assurance mechanisms require VET teachers and trainers to maintain the currency of their occupational knowledge as well as their knowledge and skills of teaching and learning. 'Return to industry' schemes and fee-for-service work are two examples of mechanisms by which this currency is maintained. These activities constantly reinforce the strong links that VET teachers and trainers have to their occupational identities.

It is therefore not surprising that many teachers and trainers in the focus groups were at pains to state that they had 'always had pretty good relationships with industry', and that little had quantitatively changed in this regard over the past five years. This was particularly highlighted in regional areas where greater familiarity and proximity to local industries allowed the building of close relationships which were often essential to a range of teaching functions, including locating placements for students and sourcing prospective students. Further probing on this matter, however, revealed that there have been *qualitative* shifts in the nature of these relationships.

Teachers and trainers acknowledge that there is now officially a greater emphasis put on relationships with industry. Networking and open lines of communication are seen to be more essential to ensure that the notion of an 'industry-led' training system becomes a reality. In the past, much contact with industry might have taken place in an ad hoc manner, often in response to a perceived 'problem' with an apprentice, or informally at functions such as graduations. Now,

however, contact with industry needs to be more systematic and integrated into teaching practices. In particular, a significant aspect noted in this study is that changes had forced a shift away from contacts with industry in favour of contacts with enterprises, and there is now a need for extensive networks with people within businesses rather than just through industry associations. Links also need to be built with a wider range of industry-related bodies, for example, New Apprenticeship Centres, job networks, recruitment companies, business enterprise centres and regional development boards.

Thus, relationships have become more formalised, where in the process of negotiating training, the scope and quality of relationships has changed. With the implementation of training packages, there is, in many instances, an imperative to negotiate with employers and trainees in relation to location of learning, assessment, recognition of prior learning and the exact nature of the learning pathway the apprentice or trainee will follow. If an enterprise has its own qualified assessors, this necessarily requires a different type of relationship, involving aspects such as developing a shared understanding of the nature of competence and what constitutes 'competency achieved'. Teachers and trainers believe they are now trying harder to address what is happening in industry and, as one teacher noted, in the past 'we told industry what they wanted ... not any more ... they tell us what they want'. Another person stated that teachers and trainers now must 'totally serve it [industry]'. They recognise that change has made them more accountable to industry and, for TAFE teachers in particular, this represents a significant shift in ethos from the philosophy of the Kangan era where the interests of industry were served through the primary objective of meeting the needs of students.

In an environment where active participation in the training process has become the expected norm for industry, teachers and trainers can now find themselves having to deal with disgruntled industry about the demands placed on them for training. They report that they have experienced some resistance from local employer groups, but anticipate that this may lessen over time. Teachers and trainers see themselves in the role of catalysts to effect cultural change within industry, seeking to lead industry into better ways of training, and challenging industry to develop partnerships with providers. They are, however, continually challenged by the apathy of some enterprises *vis-à-vis* formal qualifications and training. Training, particularly in enterprise-based providers, is often still seen as a 'side issue' and removed from core business, thereby creating considerable challenges for trainers. Teachers and trainers also report that they are sometimes required to adopt a mentoring role to industry, articulating the changes that have been brought about as a result of national training reform, explaining training packages, and so on. In some areas (for example, information technology), they see themselves as having to work hard to convince industry that programs are of value, comparing VET to university graduates and raising the profile of TAFE within industry.

Relationships with industry have become problematic, with many teachers and trainers experiencing frustration at the burdensome level of administration associated in working with industry. This increased surveillance (along with its implied subtext that teachers' performance prior to training reforms was not 'correct' or wanted) was an added source of frustration, sometimes further compounded and reinforced by enterprises reportedly rejecting reforms claimed as 'what the industry wanted'.

Relationships with industry have also become intimately bound up with the need for VET organisations to maintain a competitive edge and build niche markets for clients. Relationships with industry therefore have become a tradeable commodity, with competition for clients intense in some industry sectors and with a concomitant effect on the nature and types of relationships that need to be built by teachers and trainers. Relationships have become personal, and reputation is important. Teachers and trainers are now involved in many more workplace visits. Interacting with people more frequently and working on common problems have helped in the building of closer relationships. They acknowledge that their relationships are probably better with the smaller industries (particularly in the information technology area), since the larger ones tend to have their own in-house trainers. They also recognise that they need to be very flexible and responsive in

customising training and in building and maintaining their relationships. Industries expect more, and while the relationships may be healthy, teachers and trainers ‘have to work hard on the relationships to keep the edge, to keep the clientele’.

Where school teachers involved with VET in Schools participated in the focus groups, they offered a different perspective on relationships with industry. Traditionally, they didn’t have strong links with industry, but recognised that they needed to work to develop these links with enterprises rather than with industries. However, building relationships was difficult, and required considerable time and flexibility—‘that’s an area where schools really have to work a heck of a lot more to develop a lot more industry links’.

Responses from interviewees indicated that, while changes in their work roles and relationships with colleagues had been very significant, so too had been changes in their relationships with industry. Nearly three-quarters of interviewees reported that their relationship with industry had changed ‘to some extent’ or ‘a lot’ (table 9).

Table 9: Changes in relationships between teachers/trainers and industry

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (n = 63)
Not at all	4	6.3
Slightly	14	22.2
To some extent	21	33.3
A lot	24	38.1

More than half of the interviewees (55%) reported that they now had more to do with industry than in the past. This increased contact was the direct result of the introduction of training packages and other reforms that necessitated:

... more contact with industry ... need to network, keep up on my own knowledge, what is happening with students on-job; letting industry know what is happening, doing workforce development ...

Seven interviewees emphasised that, in their experience, industry wanted to be more involved, and this required teachers and trainers to be more visible and prepared to venture into new areas. There were ‘new conversations to have’ with industry across a range of issues which previously had been the sole domain of teachers and trainers, including assessment, recognition of prior learning and qualifications. The demise of industry reference groups, and the subsequent involvement of industry groups in determining the competencies to be taught to learners, had fundamentally altered some teachers’ and trainers’ views of industry and the relationships in which they were required (or mandated) to engage. Some teachers and trainers noted that relationships naturally grew stronger as a result of training providers’ commitments to providing certain levels of service to industry (for example, in the form of a certain number of visits to trainees).

However, not all interviewees painted a picture of growing relationships with industry. A significant minority (16%) reported that their relationships with industry were either in decline or were being eroded over time. A number of reasons was given for this decline, including:

- ✧ dissatisfaction of industry with new training arrangements
- ✧ industry not understanding training packages
- ✧ financial constraints restricting the amount of time that teachers and trainers could spend in industry
- ✧ difficulties and tensions around locating placements for students

- ✧ loss of confidence on the part of industry because of the way training packages were being implemented
- ✧ lack of time to spend working and liaising with industry.

As one respondent noted, a number of factors can converge making relationships with industry difficult to sustain:

[Relationships with industry have] fallen away because industry has not been kept informed of changes ... so much restructuring and privatisation ... industry blames us for reduction in services ... more bureaucracy for industry which is not liked ...

Changes to relationships with unions and other professional bodies

Relationships with unions and other professional bodies appeared to be the least problematic of all the external relationships maintained by teachers and trainers. The extent of changes in these relationships differed according to location. In some regions and states, relationships with unions have declined and are claimed to be 'at an all-time low'. When union fees were no longer deducted from pay, this was said to have had an impact on membership. Some respondents believed that the union had little to offer them, and so they do not belong to it. A feeling was that they had lost entitlements, the union had 'sold us out' and they were not getting the support that staff needed to help them in their work. Others considered that the unions did appear to 'understand the issues—a teacher is a teacher is a teacher' and the declining relationship with unions was partly the fault of teachers who did not get involved or had limited opportunity to provide input into the specific issues on which the union was focused.

In other areas, respondents reported that relationships with unions continue to be sound in terms of acquiring up-to-date information and understanding their position. Relationships with the teachers' union tend to be constructive, and may have strengthened over time as the union had become less militant. In general terms, respondents acknowledged that the unions have a role to play and VET staff still need to consult with unions over staffing matters. Strong links between unions and activities undertaken in workplaces require the maintenance of those links as part of professional networks.

With the arrival of private training providers, some TAFE staff dropped out of heavy involvement in professional bodies, for example in hairdressing in one state, because of the potential difficulties in competition. Information technology was specifically mentioned as an area where there has been a growth in relationships with professional bodies.

Only one-fifth of all interviewees reported that relationships with professional bodies and unions had changed 'to some extent' or 'a lot' over the past five years (table 10). For the majority of respondents, relationships with unions and professional bodies were minimal five years ago, and little had changed in this regard. Extended responses to this section of the interview suggest that relationships with unions and professional bodies are not significant features of teachers' and trainers' working lives.

Table 10: Changes in relationships between teachers/trainers and unions/professional bodies

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (n = 62)
Not at all	27	43.5
Slightly	22	35.5
To some extent	7	11.3
A lot	6	9.7

Six interviewees commented on changes in their own personal views of the union, noting that, for them, the union had lost some of its impact in terms of representing their interests. One respondent noted an increasing reluctance to involve the unions because of a lack of job security and the belief that 'getting the unions involved would not be looked upon favorably at contract renewal time'. Three other respondents asserted that 'the union had lost its clout', was 'not able to deliver' on issues such as student numbers, and that it 'was no longer an effective force in the workplace'. Less than 5% of respondents reported joining, or had a continuous relationship with a relevant professional body or a union in the past five years.

A small minority of respondents (less than 10%) reflected that they had more dealings with unions in relation to organising learning in the workplace but, that these relationships, while sometimes productive and 'less combative', could also be strained a times. Similarly, one respondent noted that professional bodies had become a competitor in the provision of training, while another noted that professional bodies were paying greater attention to training issues and therefore relationships were growing in this area.

Changes to relationships between registered training organisations

Currently, the distinctive characteristic of relationships between registered training organisations is competition, especially between TAFE institutes. It was interesting that some believed that there is a more cooperative attitude between private training providers, probably because of their smaller size and thus decreased threat. Some small training organisations believed they had good relationships with other training organisations, citing the referral of students between these organisations as evidence of healthy collaboration. Conversely, however, in one state there was a perception that TAFE 'stands alone', which resulted in strained relationships between TAFE and some private training providers.

Competition can determine linkages between registered training organisations. Certainly, registered training organisations are very conscious of what their competitors are doing. They are now far more aware about who is providing training in the marketplace, what they offer, costs and other 'intelligence'. This was not previously an issue, as they didn't have to worry about such issues when 'you didn't have that pressure'. Some are very wary of building stronger relationships because of bad past experiences:

... we have had some run-ins with some fairly dodgy RTOs [registered training organisations] and that makes it difficult when they're out there contacting your clients and collecting information and making things very difficult.

Some respondents believed that, while there used to be a significant amount of competition, the VET sector may now be moving into a new phase, characterised more by strategic alliances and partnerships. What is noticeable is that partnerships are more likely to be organised with interstate institutions, as many TAFE institutes in particular are now looking increasingly to national and international markets than to local markets, and in any case, it is less threatening to build alliances

further away than in one's own local area. It appears that, increasingly, providers are prepared to form alliances—for the benefit of clients—with any registered training organisation, especially if they have the requisite expertise—'basically ... we're all there to survive'.

One interesting overlapping feature of public and private relations is that, in many cases, TAFE's part-time teachers obtain work with private providers because there is insufficient work with TAFE. This situation leads to some interesting information passing back and forth about quality of provision, organisational culture and other matters.

In the school sector, competition is not as much of an issue, since school students normally select a school because of its environment. Schools form links with TAFE institutions to enable students to progress, as schools do not offer as wide a range of programs as TAFE institutes.

During the interviews respondents reported that relationships with other registered training organisations had altered quite significantly in almost 60% of cases (table 11). Just over 40% of respondents who reported some change in relationships believed this had resulted in limited or less contact with their colleagues in other organisations over the past five years.

Table 11: Changes in relationships with other registered training organisations

Extent of change	Frequency of responses	Percentage of interviewees (n = 64)
Not at all	11	17.2
Slightly	15	23.4
To some extent	15	23.4
A lot	23	35.9

Competition was consistently reported as a barrier to greater collaboration across registered training organisations, with several respondents stating that relationships had become 'strained', 'contradictory' and 'dog eat dog', with 'lecturer/personal relationships still there, but professionally not seen to be working with them'. This was labelled a 'sad change' by one respondent, as it has resulted in a breaking-down of previous relationships between training providers and service providers:

... service deliverers are now also RTOs ... in competition with us ... we face dilemmas about promoting their services ... competition does not encourage collaboration ... sad change ...

A couple of interviewees intimated that collaboration existed, but it was largely restricted to private registered training organisations collaborating with each other, or TAFE colleges establishing partnerships amongst themselves.

However, there was a significant minority of interviewees (one-quarter) who echoed the thoughts of a number of focus group participants, in which the emergence of new collaborative relationships was highlighted. The introduction of VET in Schools had provided one respondent with opportunities to forge collaborative relationships with schools. Some respondents noted that reductions in funding had 'forced' collaborative partnerships, as registered training organisations developed tenders together to provide training. Some of these relationships transcended state boundaries:

... [it's been a] dramatic change – close relationship with an interstate provider to set up a similar approach in [another] state ...

The realities of the pressure for responsiveness to industry have opened up new ways of working which realistically acknowledge the limitations of the competitive environment in which providers operate:

More contact with other RTOs ... have to network to find other people who have skills and knowledge to use and work with ... relationship is friendlier ... realising that we are all in the same boat ... [the] key word is support ... prepared to support each other to a limited extent.

One respondent also acknowledged the complexities of the competitive environment and the apparent wariness with which registered training organisations sometimes approached the whole issue of working with other organisations:

... now greater competition, more care, caution needed now [a] competitive environment ...
more complicated ... casual teachers may work in another RTOs – [raises issues of] copyright,
conflict of interest ...

Summary

Not only have relationships within organisations altered over the past five years, but so also have those outside. This section has explored focus groups' and interviewees' perspectives on these relationship changes with industry, with unions and professional bodies, and with other registered training organisations.

The VET sector has traditionally enjoyed a unique relationship with industry. However, VET practitioners were seeing a qualitative shift in the nature this relationship. There was now a much greater emphasis on building lines of communication and networks, and the nature of training reform had forced a move away from contacts with industry per se and its associations, and more to contacts with enterprises and individuals. This included a far wider range of industry-related bodies. Relationships had become more formalised, negotiated and administrative. Teachers and trainers had become more concerned than before with reputation, accountability and flexibility. At the same time, they believed that industries were becoming more disgruntled about and resistant to the demands being placed upon them with regard to training. Almost three-quarters of interviewees recorded that their relationship with industry had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent', and not all believed their relationships with industry were growing, with nearly one-fifth reporting decline or erosion over this time.

Relationships with unions and professional bodies had changed the least—only one-fifth of interviewees reported they had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent'. For most, links with these bodies had been minimal five years ago and had remained that way. While generally acknowledging the role such bodies could play, many had, for example, left their union over this time for various reasons. This area of their relationships was the least significant in the working lives of these teachers and trainers. Less than 5% of those interviewed reported joining or having a continuous relationship with a union or professional body in the past five years.

Respondents generally reported closer relationships between private providers than between public and private ones in this climate of intense competition. All providers are much more concerned with what competitors are doing, a situation which fosters a wariness of other training providers. Some noted that strategic alliances and partnerships tended to grow more organically with interstate organisations than with those in local areas, as the former were less threatening and built wider markets. An interesting feature is the overlapping of part-time and casual practitioners in more than one provider, especially when such overlapping occurred between public and private providers, leading to knowledge and skills passing back and forth. Another interesting and new development in the past five years has been the burgeoning relationship between VET and the school sector. Almost six in ten interviewees reported that relationships with other providers had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent'.

The overall message from these interviews is that many teachers and trainers have developed a sophisticated and mature approach to the question of how best to establish and maintain relationships with other organisations. Support and networking is possible, but clearly these activities are bound by competitive and commercial realities.

Personal reactions to change

The previous sections of this report have highlighted VET practitioners' perceptions of the key drivers of the changes experienced over the past five years. The nature and extent of changes across their work roles have been examined along with an analysis of a number of key relationships. This section of the report turns to an analysis of the personal reactions to these changes, using data collected from the interview phase of the study.

Extent of change in the work context of VET practitioners

Table 12 presents a combined summary of the extent of the changes reported by the interviewees on various aspects of their working life over the past five years.

Table 12: Extent of change reported by interviewees on six aspects of their working life

Changes to:	Not at all % (n)	Slightly % (n)	To some extent % (n)	A lot % (n)	Total % (N)
Work responsibilities	4.7 (3)	9.4 (6)	21.9 (14)	64.1 (41)	100 (64)
Relationships with industry	6.3 (4)	22.2 (14)	33.3 (21)	38.1 (24)	100 (63)
Relationships with other teachers/colleagues within program area or organisation	21.9 (14)	14.1 (9)	31.3 (20)	32.8 (21)	100 (64)
Relationships with students/ trainees	17.2 (11)	21.9 (14)	29.7 (19)	31.3 (20)	100 (64)
Relationships with other registered training organisations	17.2 (11)	23.4 (15)	23.4 (15)	35.9 (23)	100 (64)
Relationships with unions & other professional bodies	43.5 (27)	35.5 (22)	11.3 (7)	9.7 (6)	100 (62)

By far the greatest change reported was in their work responsibilities. Eighty-six per cent claimed that this aspect of their working life had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent' (with a large 63% saying 'a lot'). A previous section has reported on the impact of these changes. The next aspect was their relationships with industry, with 71% claiming significant change. This is not unexpected and is in keeping with policy directions which have emphasised a shifting relationship and involvement with industry in the provision of VET as a key outcome. Changing relationships with colleagues and students/trainees are represented as a significant, but less felt focus for change. Relationships with other registered training organisations and relationships with unions and other professional bodies are the areas where change was felt the least by these interview respondents.

Statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 9.17$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.027$) vis-a-vis changes in work responsibilities were found between the types of training provider employing teachers and trainers (table 13). With changes to work responsibilities, more staff in public providers (97%) recorded the degree of change to be 'a lot' or 'to some extent' than those in private providers (71%). In addition, table 14 reveals that statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 8.62$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.034$) also occurred regarding changes in relationships with students between the types of training provider. In this

instance, 67% of staff in private providers compared with 54% of those in public providers reported this degree of change. Thus, the felt impact of change was evidently stronger in work responsibilities for public providers even though their relationships with students changed to a lesser extent than in the case of private providers.

Table 13: Change to work responsibilities by type of training provider

Type of organisation	Change to work responsibilities				Total
	Not at all	Slightly	To some extent	A lot	
Private RTO	3	4	3	14	24
Public RTO	-	1	9	25	35
Total	3	5	12	39	59

Table 14: Change to relationships with students by type of training provider

Type of organisation	Change to relationships with students				Total
	Not at all	Slightly	To some extent	A lot	
Private RTO	7	1	7	9	24
Public RTO	4	12	8	11	35
Total	11	13	15	20	59

That VET staff within public institutions should feel that their work responsibilities had changed markedly more than their counterparts in private providers would accord with the literature on training reform. In all probability the national training reforms were brought about, at least in part, to effect substantial change in the TAFE sector. It was intended that these public institutions, in the climate of growing competition and an increasingly industry-led framework, become more responsive and flexible than they had previously been perceived to be.

The private providers, many of which had actually began their training lives during the training reforms of the 1990s, would not have been required to change their practices as much as the public institutions which had well-established and traditional ways of working. Moreover, the finding that public providers altered their relationships with students less than those in private providers is also in line with anecdotal evidence. There has continued to be considerable debate over how much TAFE staff have actually changed their teaching–learning practices, particularly given that many TAFE staff have long considered themselves to be more concerned with education than training and, despite the reforms, are still vitally concerned with the educational welfare of their students. Furthermore, TAFE still undertakes the major bulk of work in preparing entrants for the traditional trades, and the staff claim, have long been used to working with competency-based approaches.

No significant differences were found in the extent of change in the other areas of change listed in table 12 across the different industry groups nor across the different positions (manager, teacher/trainer, industry training advisory body employee) occupied by respondents.

The interviewees were asked an open-ended question on what three changes had exerted the greatest impact on their own work over the *past* five years. Their ranked responses are summarised in table 15, with the last column indicating their overall ranking.

Training packages are clearly having a marked impact on teachers' work, along with innovations relating to the use of technology, the introduction of competency-based training, and flexible delivery. All of these innovations lie at the very heart of pedagogical practice and have been shown in other research to make significant demands on teachers and trainers (see for example, Simons 2001; Schofield, Walsh & Melville 2001; Smith et al. 1997). Teachers and trainers have also keenly felt the changing policy environment, particularly in relation to competition, funding, user choice

and relations with industry, along with the impact of restructuring and shifting work conditions within their own organisations—arguably in response to these external forces.

Table 15: VET practitioners’ rankings on changes having the greatest impact on their own work over the past five years

Changes having greatest impact on their work*	Rank 1 (n)	Rank 2 (n)	Rank 3 (n)	Total points**
Training packages	8	12	5	53
Competition	5	6	1	28
Changes to funding	5	4	1	24
Technology	2	5	7	23
Competency-based training	5	1	5	22
Flexible delivery	5	1	5	22
Shifting government policies	4	3	3	21
User choice	5	1	2	19
Restructuring	3	5		19
Working with industry	2	4	2	16
Changed personal circumstances	3	2	3	16
Changed working conditions	1	3	5	14
Changes to student population	2	3	1	13
Shift to national perspective	3	2		13
Changes to pedagogical practices	2	2	2	12
Increased administration	3			9
Assessment	1	2	2	9
Increased demands to remain up to date	1	2	1	8
Changes to staffing levels		1	5	7
Becoming a registered training organisation	2		1	7
Increased accountability	1	1	1	6
VET in Schools		2	1	5
Geographical relocation	1		2	5

Note: * Respondents could rank up to three responses (total number of respondents for this question = 59).
 ** The numbers in the last column are the total number of points allocated to each item based on rankings attributed by respondents, where rank 1 = 3 points, rank 2 = 2 points and rank 3 = 1 point.

They were also asked to anticipate what changes will have the greatest impact on their own work over the *next* five years (table 16).

Technology, the competitive environment and flexible delivery were ranked as the areas most likely to have an impact on the teachers’ and trainers’ own work in the next five years. Collectively, these three areas reinforce the importance of the competitive environment in the minds of respondents, and the (potential) ways in which technology, applied through increases and expansion in the use of flexible delivery technology, might be used to lever further advantage in the marketplace.

Table 16: VET practitioners' rankings of changes expected to have the greatest impact on their own work in the next five years

Greatest impact in the next five years*	Rank 1 (n)	Rank 2 (n)	Rank 3 (n)	Total points**
Technology	10	8	11	57
Competitive environment	12	3	4	46
Flexible delivery	5	9	7	40
Training packages	7	3	5	32
Changes to funding	5	4	3	26
Understanding changes to VET	4	5	1	23
Changing roles/work of teachers and trainers	3	3	5	20
Changes to government policies	2	5		16
Keeping up with/meeting industry needs	2	2	3	13
Organisational restructuring	2	2		10
Developing partnerships/opportunities to grow business	1	3	1	10
Understanding dilemmas in teachers'/trainers work	2	1		8
Compliance/audit/quality assessment requirements	2		1	7
Changed personal circumstances		2	1	5
School based apprenticeships/traineeships	1	1		5
Changing nature of staff in organisations			4	4
Maintaining RTO status in enterprise		2		4
Managing change	1			3
International/off-shore education	1			3
Management skills	1			3
Declining quality of training		1	1	3
Time to do staff development		1	1	3
Up-skilling staff		1	1	3
HR management		1		2
Tension between education and training		1		2
TAFE becoming an assessment-only RTO		1		2
Becoming less dependent on government funds		1		2
Reduced resources			1	1
State bureaucracies			1	1
Impact of globalisation			1	1
Offering training at flexible times			1	1
Assessment in workplaces			1	1

Notes: * Respondents could rank up to three responses (total number of respondents for this question = 59).

** The numbers in the last column are the total number of points allocated to each item based on rankings attributed by respondents, where rank 1 = 3 points, rank 2 = 2 points and rank 3 = 1 point.

Further analyses of these data revealed several interesting differences between respondents from public and private training providers (table 17) and between teachers/trainers and managers (table 18).

Table 17 highlights some of the differences between the operating environments of public and private training providers. While interviewees from both public and private training providers believe that technology and the competitive environment will have significant impact on their work over the next five years, rankings of the most important impacts from respondents operating in private training providers are more focused on the external operating environment in which they might find themselves, such as funding changes, understanding changes to VET and keeping up with industry needs. On the other hand, staff from public training providers appear to be more concerned about pedagogical changes, such as the impact of flexible delivery and training packages and their concomitant effects on the roles and work of teachers and trainers, than their colleagues

operating from private training providers. There is another hint (as in tables 13 and 14) that the primary interests of private providers here relate more to keeping afloat in their competitive environment and being responsive to external pressures, while those of public staff relate more to pedagogical practice and the effects of change on their work and responsibilities.

Table 17: VET practitioners' rankings of areas most likely to impact on their work, by public and private training providers

Area of impact on their work	Ranking of importance by staff in public providers	Ranking of importance by staff in private providers
Flexible delivery	1	6
Competitive environment	= 2	2
Technology	= 2	1
Training packages	4	8
Changing roles/work of teachers/trainers	5	= 9
Changes to funding	6	3
Organisational restructuring	= 7	
Understanding changes to VET	= 7	4
Changing government policies	= 9	7
Understanding dilemmas of teachers'/trainers' work	= 9	
Compliance/audit/quality assessment requirements	10	= 9
Keeping up with/meeting industry needs		5

Note: = indicates that the areas of impact have the same ranking.

Interviewees occupying management roles noted that changes in funding were more likely to have an impact on their work than did teachers and trainers (table 18).

Table 18: VET practitioners' rankings of areas most likely to impact on work, by their position

Area of impact on their work	Ranking of importance by teachers and trainers	Ranking of importance by those in management roles
Competitive environment	1	3
Technology	2	1
Flexible delivery	3	4
Training packages	4	5
Changing roles/work of teachers /trainers	5	
Understanding changes to VET	6	8
Changes to funding	7	2
Organisational restructuring	8	
Changing government policies	9	7
Changing nature of staff in organisations	= 10	
Compliance/audit/quality assessment requirements	= 10	
Management skills	= 10	
Developing partnerships/opportunities to grow business		6
Keeping up with/meeting industry needs		9
Understanding dilemmas of teachers'/trainers' work		10

Note: = indicates that the areas of impact have the same ranking.

The competitive environment and technology also feature prominently on managers' rankings of potential impacts on their work, as does the importance of developing partnerships and opportunities to increase the business. Teachers did not rank the latter as one of their top ten issues. Notably, managers did include the understanding of dilemmas faced by teachers/trainers as an issue

that could impact on their work in the next five years, potentially matching teachers'/trainers' concerns about their changing work and roles (ranked fifth in the areas of impact on their work).

Reactions of VET practitioners to changes in their work context

Given the quite substantial change to the work contexts of these VET practitioners, the interviewees were asked how they felt about the changes to their work over the past five years. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 was 'very negative', 5 was 'neutral' and 10 was 'very positive', they were to rate their feelings. The results are summarised in table 19.

Table 19: VET practitioners' ratings of their feelings about changes to their work over the past five years

Rating—feeling about changes	Frequency	Percentage
0 (very negative)	2	3.2
1	-	-
2	3	4.8
3	6	9.7
4	4	6.5
5 (neutral)	9	14.5
6	3	4.8
7	9	14.5
8	15	24.2
9	9	14.5
10 (very positive)	2	3.2
Total	62	100.0

These VET practitioners generally reported themselves to be more positive than negative about the changes they had experienced. If 0 to 4 is interpreted as negative, and 6 to 10 as positive, then 61% of these interviewees were positive compared with 24% who were negative about the changes that had occurred within this timeframe.

A strongly significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 13.25$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.001$) was found between overall ratings of feelings towards change and the type of provider, with staff in public institutions feeling far more negative towards the changes than their counterparts in private training organisations (table 20). Remarkably, all those reporting negative feelings were from public providers (39% of all respondents from these institutions); conversely, 75% of the private respondents had positive feelings towards the changes in their work, by contrast with only 48% of public respondents. (No significant relationships were found in the overall ratings of feelings towards change by industry group or by the type of position held by the interviewees.)

Table 20: VET practitioners' feelings towards change, by type of training provider

Type of training provider	Negative feelings toward change (Rating = 0 – 4)	Neutral (Rating = 5)	Positive feelings toward change (Rating = 6 – 10)	Total respondents
Private provider	-	6	18	24
Public provider	13	3	16	32
Total	13	9	34	56

Apart from their feelings towards change, interviewees were also asked about the *sense of control* they felt they had in managing the changes to their work over the past five years. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 was ‘no control at all’, 5 was ‘some control’ and 10 was ‘entire control’, they rated their judgments on control. The results are summarised in table 21.

Table 21: VET practitioners’ ratings on their sense of control in managing changes to their work over the past five years

Rating—sense of control	Frequency	Percentage
0 (no sense of control)	7	11.1
1	1	1.6
2	4	6.3
3	4	6.3
4	6	9.5
5 (some control)	2	3.2
6	7	11.1
7	13	20.6
8	11	17.5
9	4	6.3
10 (total control)	4	6.3
Total	63	100.0

Again, a majority of these VET practitioners judged they had reasonable control over changes to their work. Eleven per cent reported that they felt they had no control at all, while another 24% reported minimal control (ratings 1 to 4). However, while 6% boldly declared complete control over changes, a sizable proportion (56%) settled for relatively high ratings of 6 to 9.

A significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 8.06$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.018$) was found between the position held by respondents and their sense of control over the changes they had experienced (table 22). Perhaps not surprisingly, those holding some managing role reported feeling that they were more in control in relation to the changes, than did teachers and trainers. While 74% of those in managing roles recorded a positive sense of control (that is, ratings of 6 to 10), only 48% of teachers/trainers did so. (There were no significant differences in respondents’ sense of control by their type of provider or their industry area.)

Table 22: VET practitioners’ ratings on their sense of control in managing changes, by their position

Position held by interviewee	No control (Rating = 0)	Negative sense of control (Rating = 1 - 4)	Positive sense of control (Rating = 6 - 10)	Total
Teacher/trainer	7	8	14	29
Manager role	-	7	20	27
Total				56

The research team was interested to determine what the VET practitioners believed to be the most critical challenges they expected to face over the next seven years. In a recent study (Harris et al. 2001), this same question had been put to a group of 31 key stakeholders in VET. These stakeholders were nationally significant figures in VET staff development and VET policy generally. They had singled out eight challenges during a three-stage Delphi survey. These same challenges were presented to the interviewees in this present study as fixed choices. They were asked to rank these challenges in priority order, where 1 was the most critical challenge they believed VET practitioners would face, 2 was the next most critical challenge and so on. The results from both studies are displayed in table 23.

It is interesting to note that most of these challenges relate directly to compliance with changes already in the workplace. Thus, the key stakeholders are assuming that such challenges will remain current for some years. Furthermore, there is little difference between the two groups—both highly rank competition and keeping up with changes as major challenges—although practitioners noticeably place more importance on understandings of their changing educational work, work in general and their role, than do stakeholders.

Table 23: VET practitioners' rankings of challenges they will face over the next seven years

Challenges facing VET practitioners over the next seven years	Practitioners' rankings (from this study)	Key stakeholders' rankings (Harris et al. 2001)
Operating in a competitive environment	1	1
Understanding dilemmas in educator's work	2	6
Keeping up with/understanding the changes in VET	3	2
Understanding the changing nature of work	4	7
Using technology	5	5
Changing to the role of facilitator	6	8
Flexible delivery	7	3
Understanding/working with training packages	8	4

Assistance in coping with change

Professional development is one important way in which individual staff may seek help in being able to cope with the challenges and changes in their working context. The interviewees were therefore asked to cite one professional development activity they had undertaken over the past five years that they had found *most helpful* in assisting them to respond to changes in their work (table 24).

Table 24: VET practitioners' views on professional development activities over the past five years that had most helped them to cope with changes

Professional development activity	Frequency of responses*	Percentage
Attending training courses	15	19.5
Undertaking/completing tertiary qualifications	9	11.5
Activities specifically focused on changes in VET	8	10.4
Information sharing/networking	8	10.4
Undertaking/completing a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training	7	9.1
Attending conferences	6	7.8
Meetings	4	5.2
Learning through experiences	4	5.2
Computer training	2	2.6
Undertaking/completing other VET qualifications	2	2.6
Self-directed learning	2	2.6
Other**	10	13.0
Total	77	100.1

Note: * Some gave more than one response.

** 'Other' (each one response) included: doing research; training in an online environment; self-reflection; specific project; working on own business; membership of a professional body; return-to-industry program; action learning project; assisting others to get VET qualifications; and none/no activities.

Interviewees reported that a wide range of training programs/courses had assisted them in coping with change. These covered a diverse list of topics, including Myers-Briggs Type Indicator training, counselling skills, Stephen Covey's 'Seven habits of highly effective people', industry updates, quality assurance, managing conflict, management and marketing.

Coupled with this question on a past activity, interviewees were also asked to name one professional development activity they believed would be most beneficial *at this point in time* to assist them further with the changes to their work (table 25).

Table 25: VET practitioners' views on professional development activities considered most helpful at this point in time to cope with changes

Activity/focus of professional development	Frequency of responses*	Percentage
Technology (training to use/upgrade skills)	12	16.4
Formal training in flexible delivery/online delivery	10	13.7
Budgeting/finances	4	5.5
Better understanding of VET system	4	5.5
Further VET qualifications	4	5.5
Workplace assessment/learning	4	5.5
Time management	3	4.1
Working with training packages	3	4.1
Networking	2	4.1
Increasing/maintaining knowledge of industry area	2	4.1
Achieving a work/life balance	2	4.1
How to work with state training authorities	2	4.1
Finishing tertiary studies	2	4.1
Working in a competitive environment	2	4.1
Other**	13	17.8
Not sure/can't think of anything	4	5.5
Total	73	99.8

Note: * Some gave more than one response.

** 'Other' (each one response) included: doing research; re-prioritising roles; negotiating/working with industry; more time to do staff development; coping with stress; user choice; change management; management training; visits to other RTOs; project management; marketing; performance management; and industrial relations.

The two outstanding foci for professional development in this instance were training to use or upgrade skills in technology, and training in flexible (including online) delivery. These were followed by budgeting, understanding the VET system, further VET qualifications and workplace assessment and learning. These responses to perceived needs for professional development align closely with and clearly reinforce answers presented earlier to changes anticipated as having the greatest impact on their work in the near future. These were given in table 16 and highlighted technology, flexible delivery, training packages, funding changes and understanding changes to vocational education and training.

Another source of assistance for coping with changes in their work may come from the management of their organisation. Interviewees reported in an open-ended question on what their management had done to help facilitate change in their organisation. Some respondents were quite blunt in suggesting that their management had made things worse (2%), did nothing (16%) or provided little support (14%) in relation to facilitating the change efforts of their staff. On the other hand, 20% of respondents reported that management had tried to keep staff informed, but this was often difficult due to the rapid pace of change. Ten per cent of respondents were very positive about the support they had received from management, citing a range of activities and initiatives which had been implemented. Just over 17% of VET practitioners were fulsome in their praise of

management, reporting that large-scale change had been initiated in their organisations, that management had taken a 'proactive stance', 'restructured', 'provided infrastructure', 'changed the culture', 'provided autonomy' and 'done a lot of work on leadership ... [so that] all had the opportunity to be involved'. Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported that they had been given access to some form of staff development to assist them in their change efforts, while others reported participating in a range of activities, including the development of teams, industry visits, establishing linkages and having access to consultants as needed.

At a broader level, policy-makers and VET managers have a very significant role to play in the facilitation and implementation of change within the VET sector. Interviewees were therefore asked what advice they would give to policy-makers and VET managers in relation to these changes over the last five years, particularly in relation to the impact of the changes on the work of VET practitioners.

The overwhelming message to policy-makers and managers from one-third of respondents was to 'get out and see what the impact of the changes had been' and 'what exactly you are asking us to do'. These sentiments, expressed in a range of ways, suggest that, apart from debates about the nature of the reforms VET practitioners are being asked to implement, it is the pace of change and the implementation process itself which are critical issues and which have been either overlooked or are not clearly understood. Twenty-three per cent of respondents urged a stopping or slowing of the pace of reforms, with a further 13% suggesting that it is now time for a review of the reforms. Linked to the issues of pace of change and implementation are concerns about the dissemination of information, particularly to industry, and the perception that consultation processes are not inclusive of all stakeholders, particularly teachers and trainers in small business and private training providers. The following quotations provide a 'flavour' of the sentiments expressed by VET practitioners in relation to these issues:

... the pace of change has to slow down ... need to have an on-going program ... industry has to be informed ... this is not TAFE's role ... [someone] needs to inform industry right down to the level of small business ...

Equip people to do their jobs ... provide adequate resources, genuinely listen to concerns re implementation ... ensure pathways to innovation are not blocked ... trust staff ...

At the moment, you have a lot of explaining to do to industry—changes have happened too fast. Consultation has occurred mainly with large enterprises, and small and medium-sized companies have been left out of the picture. Little thought has been given to industry trainees in rural and remote areas—provision of training and adequate assessment mechanisms [are needed] ...

I think that the pace of change is too rapid and we do not have the resources at the operational level to fully implement those changes ... Ability to cope with all of these changes is also determined by fluctuating levels of funding available to us ...

Get real. Get input from industry ... some of the changes are absurd ...

Industry does not want what we are told they want ...

Define and promote benefits for participants and industry ... be aware if changes add too much to the cost of being an RTO ... would reconsider whether doing it or not ... [there needs to be a] balance between quality and cost.

When making policy changes ... make sure ... can follow it down to the practitioner—ensure they have the resources to do the job you want them to do. Policy changes are being made in isolation and in response to matters ... throwing money away if change things before they are settled in ...

These comments underscore the differences in impacts of the training reforms and hint at the need for policy-makers and managers to develop a better understanding of the many different groups of personnel and organisations which comprise the VET system. The comments also imply that

policy-makers should take into account the different ways in which reforms might impact on these different groups, including developing an awareness of the potential for unintended or negative outcomes. Clearly, VET practitioners do not view a 'one size fits all' approach to policy implementation favorably. Issues relating to quality assurance, equality of access to funding for all registered training organisations and aspects of the reforms that some VET practitioners find particularly irksome (for example, 'User choice is a disaster'; 'Get rid of training packages') reflect some of the very real tensions implicit in the working lives of VET practitioners.

Time is another significant issue implied by the comments provided by VET practitioners. Evidence suggests that some re-appraisal of timelines for the implementation of reforms like training packages is needed. This issue of enough time is significant for two reasons. Firstly, for some practitioners the passage of time is an important part of the implementation process. It provides opportunities for experimentation and to test new ideas. It is often a slow process, frequently hindered by issues such as work intensification, management, increased administrative demands and shrinking resources. Real change can only be realised over time. Conversely, the passage of time does nothing to solve the problems that some practitioners are obviously experiencing. Arguably, time can intensify some problems to the point where frustration sets in. This could potentially lead to resistance. Allowing time to pass on the implementation of some of these initiatives without appropriate interventions, including monitoring and review, does not appear to be conducive to achieving the significant changes required by the reforms.

The comments emphasise the individual and highly personalised nature of the change process and provide some evidence that this aspect of the process attracted little understanding in an educational sector where mandated change is the norm. Running through the comments were hints of continued tensions between education and training, quality versus efficiency, professionalism and integrity versus demands of the system:

It is not impossible to mix education and financial constraints ... need to rethink what we are there for ... [we are there for] education, not balancing the cheque book ... professionalism and integrity would be restored if [we were] doing what [we were] meant to be doing ...

Training packages are not about a broad education ...

It is regrettable that the focus in VET has shifted from the students' and trainees' needs (people) to outcomes (results) stressing the number of qualifications generated—useful for government public relations and statistics ...

Summary

This section has analysed personal reactions to the changes to VET practitioners' work. Practitioners' judgements of the extent of changes to various aspects of their working life were summarised along with the issues they believed had exerted the greatest impact on their work over the past five years, and those they envisaged would have the greatest impact over the next five years. Their personal reactions to these changes and the degree of control they judged they had in managing these changes to their work were subsequently highlighted.

The key findings were that:

- ✧ The change with the greatest impact was in their work responsibilities, with 86% reporting that this aspect had changed 'a lot' or 'to some extent' (and a significant proportion of nearly two-thirds claiming 'a lot').
- ✧ VET staff in public training providers noted significantly greater change in work responsibilities than those in private providers.
- ✧ VET staff in private training providers noted significantly greater change in relationships with students/trainees than those in public providers.

- ✧ Training packages, competition and changes to funding have had the greatest impact on practitioners' work over the past five years, followed by technology, competency-based training and flexible delivery.
- ✧ Technology, competition and flexible delivery are anticipated to have the greatest impact on practitioners' work over the next five years, followed by training packages, changes to funding and understanding changes to VET.
- ✧ Staff from private providers are more focused on the external environment (for example, funding, understanding changes to VET and meeting industry needs), while staff from public providers are more focused on pedagogical practice (for example, flexible delivery, training packages and their effects on the roles and work of teachers and trainers).
- ✧ Those in managing roles were more focused on funding changes and developing partnerships/opportunities to increase their business than teachers/trainers, who in turn, were more focused on their changing roles and work, and organisational restructuring.
- ✧ VET practitioners were more positive than negative about changes they had experienced in their work context, with 61% of the practitioners judged to be positive and 24% negative (15% were neutral).
- ✧ Practitioners in public providers were significantly more negative towards these changes to work than their counterparts in private providers.
- ✧ A majority of practitioners gauged they had had reasonable control over changes to their work over the past five years—11% reported no control, 24% minimal control, 3% some control, 56% major control and 6% complete control.
- ✧ Those in a managing role reported feeling more in control over the changes they had experienced than did teachers and trainers.
- ✧ Compared with key stakeholders' views from a study two years' previously, VET practitioners have similar perspectives—both highly rank competition and keeping up with changes as major challenges—although practitioners noticeably place more importance on understandings of their changing educational work, work in general and their role.

In coping with these changes in their work context, practitioners have, in the past five years, undertaken a range of professional development activities, specifically: attending training courses; undertaking tertiary qualifications; and information sharing and networking. In terms of professional development that would be most helpful now, they named training in use of technology and training in flexible (and online) delivery as their two most pressing areas. There were diverse views on the extent to which their management had been supportive in helping them to cope with these changes.

The scope and nature of the reforms that VET practitioners have been asked to implement are not simply a matter of substituting one set of pedagogical practices for others. Changes to the VET system have required changes to practitioners' skill and knowledge sets, their beliefs and values, and their ways of working. This has required a quantitatively different form of change process from that which might be used to foster the adoption of a single teaching innovation, such as a new instructional strategy. These findings, like others (for example, Mulcahy 1996; Mulcahy & James 1999; Simons 2001), illustrate the important place that VET practitioners hold in the policy-making and implementation processes. Attempts to 'teacher proof' the system ignore the reality of the change process, which can include resistance, conflict and action to co-opt changes to meet alternative outcomes. Put simply, the political actions of those central to the change process—that is, the VET practitioners—are crucial in shaping the outcomes of any change process. In the context of this study, these practitioners seem to be alerting policy-makers and managers to their perceptions of the very real issues and concerns they are facing in their daily working lives.

Conclusions: Understanding the changing roles of the VET practitioners

The outcomes from this study illuminate the extent and nature of the changes faced by VET practitioners. There were indications throughout this study that VET teachers' and trainers' work has grown in complexity and scope. In many instances, teachers and trainers are being exposed to new information and sometimes contradictory demands which have dramatically affected their working lives. How VET practitioners reflect upon, carry out and feel about their work has altered significantly in response to the shifting context in which they work and the demands placed upon the sector by a range of key stakeholders, including governments, industry and students.

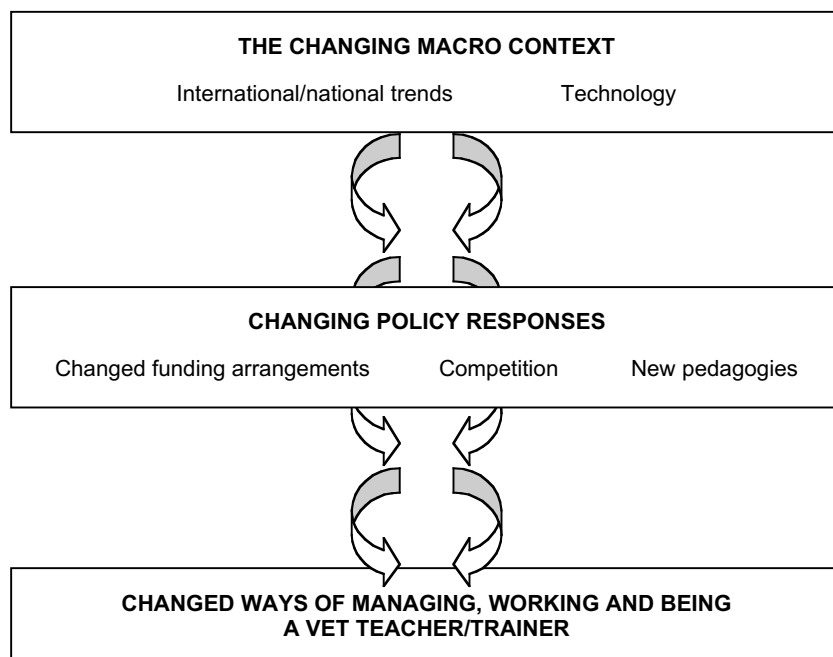
This section provides a synthesis of the key findings of the study. It returns to the research questions posed for this project and uses these as a framework for presenting the key themes and issues which have emerged from the data. The implications of the findings of the study are subsequently explored.

Critical factors generating changes to work in the VET sector

As far as the teachers and trainers who participated in this study are concerned, the critical factors which have generated change in teachers' and trainers' work are largely external to the organisations in which they are employed. Macro-level drivers of international and national trends and the creation of new technologies have given rise to a variety of government responses in the form of new policy frameworks and implementation strategies. In the VET sector these government responses are manifested by changing industry demands and the emergence of new ways of conceptualising the role of vocational education and training in effectively and efficiently meeting larger national policy imperatives. These changes in policy direction have radically altered the ways in which VET teachers and trainers are managed and work (see figure 1).

However, changes in the VET sector have not proceeded in any linear or orderly fashion. One of the key themes from this study has been the differential impact of the various drivers for change on VET organisations and individual teachers and trainers. In reality, each participant has been exposed to and experienced, in many different ways, the forces for change and has reacted along a continuum of responses, from outright resistance to developing radically new ways of viewing their role and their work as VET practitioners across a range of functions, including their work and their relationships with students, industry, other colleagues, other training providers and the professional bodies and unions to which they are affiliated.

Figure 1: The changing context of VET practitioners' work



Teachers and trainers from both public and private training providers were cognisant of the wider external factors impacting on their work and they were able to identify three interrelated factors they considered to be the most critical drivers of the changes being experienced. Government policy was named as having the most marked influence on their work, regardless of their place of employment. In the minds of the participants in this study, changes to government policies were clearly linked to changing curriculum and pedagogical practices. Secondly, the expectations of industry and the broader community, with particular reference to industry involvement in VET policy development, were perceived to be another significant driver of change.

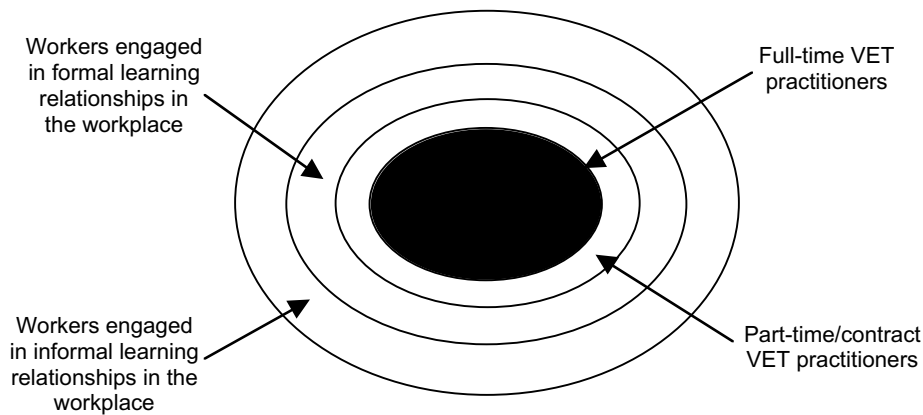
The third most critical factor was the financing of VET. Government policies, in response to the changing nature of modern cultures (expressed in terms such as globalisation, individualism, post-modernism, consumerism and the rise of economic rationalism), have powerfully influenced crucial and valued elements of vocational education and training, including the role of industry in training and the financing of the VET sector. At its core, change in the VET sector is being driven by changing values, values which embrace the free market, competition, new ways of organising VET teachers' and trainers' work, and shifting relationships with industry. These new values are compelling teachers and trainers to consider new ways of thinking about their work and their professional identities.

Extent of changes experienced by VET practitioners

Changes to the nature of the VET workforce

Data from the study point to significant shifts in the ways in which the VET workforce is recruited and encouraged to grow and develop by means of career pathways. The current VET workforce is characterised by its diversity. Several groups of practitioners can be identified, each differentiated primarily by three key factors—function, qualification and affiliation. Location also plays its part, although it is becoming increasingly less of a distinguishing feature. The current situation is represented by figure 2.

Figure 2: Conceptualising the VET workforce



In the centre are the practitioners with a full-time VET role—teachers, trainers and managers. They are located in TAFE institutes, private providers and the larger enterprises, although their work may take them outside their organisations. They have responsibility for managing delivery and assessment processes, as well as for developing materials and online learning, and taking the lead in entrepreneurial activity. In most instances, they possess higher education qualifications—from diplomas to postgraduate degrees in teaching, education, human resource development or management. Based on reports from this study, this is a numerically shrinking group, signifying both benefits and losses for those staff remaining.

In the second circle are those with a part-time role in VET, or increasingly, several part-time roles, even across more than one provider. They are found mainly in industry, schools and as part-time staff in TAFE institutes, with the role of teaching and assessing vocational education and training. They typically hold credentials in assessment and workplace training, and a proportion is currently in the process of upgrading their certificates to higher education degrees in anticipation of full-time positions. Respondents in this study clearly believe that these groups of workers now comprise the bulk of the VET workforce. Their employment status, however, does not lessen the demands placed upon them in terms of the work they are expected to undertake.

The third category comprises workers in industry who assist in a small way with vocational education and training in their organisation. They are involved primarily with the core business of their organisation, but help others to learn in apprenticeships and traineeships, often with assessment processes. They may be involved in some way with an external provider, but work within their organisation. They may have a training credential such as a ‘train the trainer’ course of some form.

The fourth group includes those in industry who are full-time workers in the core business of their enterprise, but who, in the course of their regular work, informally help others learn in the workplace. The learners under their care may be in formal programs, such as apprenticeships and traineeships, but are often likely to be fellow workers who need assistance on the job. For this group of VET practitioners, work and learning are inextricably intertwined. They are skilled, experienced and qualified in their work discipline, but may well have no formal training qualification. This group has largely developed an interest in helping others on the job.

The diagram connotes a dynamic interrelationship between the concentric circles. As contexts and situations change, individuals move between the circles. All of these groups of practitioners have a significant role to play in a sector in which the workplace as a learning environment is valued and where an emphasis on industry-relevant qualifications and on increasing the quality and quantum of VET qualifications through the application of flexible policy frameworks which validate multiple learning pathways is a core value.

The structure of the emerging workforce in VET was viewed by the practitioners in this study in a number of ways. They appreciated the flexibility inherent to the workforce, acknowledging that this offered greater opportunities to individuals, while also providing organisations with greater leverage to tailor their workforce to their current and emerging needs. However, a widespread lack of security in ongoing employment within the VET sector was reported for an increasing number of staff, a situation which was considered by many to be problematic. Pressures from casualisation of the workforce were manifested in two main ways. Firstly, TAFE staff in particular felt pressured to engage in more revenue-generating activities as a means of securing casual and contract staff. Secondly, casualisation was also viewed negatively in that the practice of appointing casual staff affected succession planning and the future staff profiles in organisations. This was particularly so where there were gaps in parts of the workforce structure. A permanent workforce was essential to ensure that staff were able to attain the levels of expertise and experience which would enable them to progress into management roles.

Significant changes to staffing profiles affected other human resource issues, including recruitment and career development. The findings from this study suggest that, in some program areas, TAFE is finding it difficult to recruit staff, particularly where there are large discrepancies in remuneration for their work in industry compared with their likely remuneration as a teacher or trainer. Evidence from respondents also suggested that, while private training providers benefit from greater flexibility in terms of the levels of remuneration they can offer VET staff, this might negatively affect public providers who are then forced to recruit from a dwindling pool of applicants.

Notions of career ‘opportunities’ seem to be replacing previous conceptions of ordered and hierarchical career pathways for VET teachers and trainers. ‘Pathways’ appear to be recognisable more in hindsight, as teachers and trainers take up opportunities to move from position to position. For example, an hourly paid instructor loosely coupled to a program area might, in time, move to more central roles which entail contract or full-time work. This movement may not be linear and can vary significantly in terms of time spent in various positions. Opportunities for such movement can be affected by a range of factors, including increased competition for positions, personal circumstances and preferences, and growing demand for specific (often higher-level) qualifications.

Progression into management positions also appears to be problematic. Issues raised in this study suggest that some positions, such as that of ‘head teacher’ or equivalent, have become more difficult as incumbents find themselves in demanding roles which require considerable skill in juggling the twin demands of management and educational leadership for which they may not feel adequately prepared. The often short-term and piecemeal nature of these roles can create significant pressures for teachers and trainers as they move in and out of these roles. While staff working in private training providers seemed more at ease with the often short-term and contract nature of their work (accepting this as a routine part of the ‘business cycle’), they also expressed the view that recruitment of management from outside the organisation was preferred to the notion of ‘promotion from within’ which has traditionally been the norm in public training providers.

The data from this study, therefore, point to different and emerging ways of becoming and being a VET teacher/trainer. While many may start their working lives in the VET sector in contract or part-time roles, there are many different opportunities which teachers and trainers may take up in order to construct a career pathway for themselves. Old notions of pathways from teaching to management are breaking down, largely due to the way in which such pathways are being constructed but due also to the perceived high demands that such roles place on individuals. Increasingly, it would appear that teachers and trainers are being asked to make a choice between teaching and management, with the choice in part shaped by the opportunities that exist in their place of employment.

Changes to the work roles and responsibilities of VET teachers and trainers

Data relating to changes to work responsibilities indicated that this is the area where change was felt most acutely by VET practitioners, particularly in terms of role expansion, diversification and balance, resulting in role tension and considerable ambivalence in relation to their feelings about these changes and their perceptions of their place within the VET sector. The new work roles of the VET teachers and trainers can be explained in terms of role expansion, role diversification, role balance and role tension.

Role expansion

VET teachers and trainers experienced 'role expansion' through additions to their existing workloads. Practitioners are now required to work in different contexts, and to have a stronger 'outward focus'. They work in such places as institutes, schools and a great variety of workplaces. They need to build industry links, and develop relationships with a range of specialist service providers (for example, New Apprenticeship Centres). A substantial emphasis on vocational outcomes has resulted in teachers and trainers developing skills in career advising and work placements.

Role expansion has also meant that more time and energy are spent on management functions now devolved to teachers and trainers. Teachers and trainers take greater responsibility for a number of administrative functions, including managing budgets, and are required to be more focused on financial issues than previously. They have to be more aware of funding opportunities, costs of training and the need to generate income. These changes have been especially significant for more senior teachers who have been given the added responsibility of overseeing the work of their colleagues to ensure compliance with increasingly stringent accountability requirements.

Teachers perceive that their passion for teaching is being eroded by administrative issues, whereby teachers are being paid to do paperwork instead of interacting with students. This phenomenon of role expansion has become more evident with the contraction in the numbers of permanent staff and the increasing preference for part-time and contract staff. This results in a concomitant increase in work functions associated with recruitment, staff planning and industry relations.

Lack of educational materials has also created difficulties, putting extra pressure on existing staff to assist, train and mentor new staff. The more experienced staff acknowledged that sessional staff possess the requisite content knowledge, but lack specific institution and system knowledge. Experienced staff are obliged to spend considerable time explaining new delivery systems and accountability requirements. Additional tasks such as these create significant amounts of 'incidental' work for the shrinking core of permanent staff.

Role diversification

Role diversification is a result of the broadening of work responsibilities, and for VET practitioners whose roles have diversified, the effect appears to have been even more dramatic than role expansion. Role diversification of VET teachers and trainers is underpinned by a growing rhetoric about facilitation, and training students how to learn. The ability to deliver a fixed amount of content is no longer the critical factor. Rather, training is now concerned with developing a self-paced, self-reliant, independent learner. Many practitioners now facilitate rather than undertake 'traditional' face-to-face teaching roles. There has been a shift in emphasis away from 'pouring information into students' towards facilitating learning. There are increased demands for VET practitioners to be effective communicators, to have relevant and up-to-date content knowledge and to have the knowledge and skills for classroom, workplace and online delivery and assessment.

Developments in the use of online technology have required teachers and trainers to adjust to the demands of increased training and assessment online, with demands for 24-hour access a perceived reality for most teachers. Expectations of clients have changed, as they now demand immediate responses, and, as a result of competition, providers are always considering how to provide 'bigger

and better' services, how to provide more than the minimum requirements, working out the best way to provide training, keeping up to date with the requirements of industry, and maintaining a watchful eye on their competitors.

Teachers are not only expected to be more open to different teaching methodologies, they are also expected to apply them across a range of geographical locales and are expected to spend greater time working in industry, in particular, monitoring the progress of learners in workplaces. Teachers and trainers are often working with industry personnel who are not necessarily committed to the training agenda and who are having difficulty with the demands placed on them for workplace assessments. Teachers and trainers are also increasingly expected to take on roles of educational designers, or to work collaboratively with specialists to create materials for online delivery and for use in workplaces.

Role balance

Expansion and diversification of work responsibilities have in turn led to changes in role balance for VET practitioners. Teachers and trainers perceive that there has been a shift in emphasis from processes of learning to an increased emphasis on assessment. There is more pressure on staff when determining whether a student has achieved competency or not. Previously there was little emphasis on validity and demonstrable outcomes, but now these are strongly highlighted. This is particularly problematic at diploma and advanced diploma levels where the proving of competence takes a long time on the job (due to the nature of competence being verified at these levels). Time and cost of assessments is an issue, as assessments often need to be signed off by a number of people, all of whom need to share the same understanding of competency.

An accompanying shift has been a decreasing emphasis on teachers and trainers as creators of curriculum, and an increasing focus on them as receivers and interpreters of the wishes of industry within received training frameworks, which in Australia, take the form of training packages. It could be claimed that interpretation of these training frameworks requires teachers and trainers to have expertise in learning theory and curriculum development and also possess content knowledge. However, in a context where resources are scarce and outcomes paramount, teachers are often faced with dilemmas whereby integrity of training is compromised by lack of resources.

Role tension

Role tension may therefore occur as a consequence of these changing or differing expectations of teachers' or trainers' work roles. This tension is felt in a number of ways. As we have seen, practitioners claim that there has been a major shift in VET work roles. Issues relating to funding have been influential in redirecting efforts away from vocational education and training—the job they were employed to do—into other areas. The reduced emphasis on education and training has become a significant cause for concern for some teachers who increasingly warn about the quality of education and training in the changed environment. These concerns have been further fuelled by significant changes in the types of educational qualifications that teachers and trainers are required to have. In Australia, the de facto qualification has become a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Many practitioners believe that acceptance of this qualification as the benchmark is not conducive to 'lifting professionalism', another contributing factor to tensions surrounding the status and functions of teachers and trainers.

The nature of the student population and the relationships between students and teachers and trainers have also changed, creating considerable tension for practitioners. Students, now positioned as consumers and clients, are seen to be more assertive, holding higher expectations and wanting 'value for money'. Students also have increasingly complex lives, and therefore a greater range of factors affecting their capacity to learn/study. Student numbers have also increased, as have student demands on teachers' time—for assistance in understanding, for example, competency-based assessment. While full-time staff numbers rarely increase, numbers of part-time staff do; this

means that full-time staff now have more of a management role—which leaves little time for educational work.

Calls for greater accountability within a more competitive environment have heightened tensions as far as the legal responsibilities of teachers and trainers are concerned. Some practitioners perceive that the burden of accountability is not carried equally across all teachers and trainers, particularly in relation to part-time and sessional staff. Teachers and trainers are also increasingly aware of their competitors and are constantly called upon to appraise and justify their work in order to maintain a competitive edge.

Teachers and trainers also keenly feel tension in their changed relationships with their colleagues and changing working conditions. While some report an increased focus on teamwork and closer working relationships, others claim increased isolation, with fewer opportunities to meet with like-minded colleagues. Increased pressure to deal with issues relating to budgets, performance and competitors leaves little time and energy to invest in networking and informal learning with colleagues. Changes to industrial relations, including the introduction of enterprise bargaining, have led to perceptions of an erosion of working conditions, with concomitant falls in morale and job satisfaction.

Public versus private training providers

One of the most important findings from this study is the significant difference in the extent of change to work roles and responsibilities experienced by staff in public and private training providers. This difference is not unexpected and can be explained, in part, by the historical antecedents of the change process in public VET institutions. Prior to 1974, the technical education sector (as TAFE was then known) was poorly resourced and usually defined by what it was not—that is, not the school nor the higher education sector (Goozee 1995, p.8). The sector lacked the clarity of purpose that seemed to fall naturally to the school and higher education sectors.

The Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974) provided a clear mandate and a philosophical basis for the work of the TAFE sector which was to remain unchallenged until the early reforms of the 1990s. This report elaborated the view that the primary purpose of technical education was to meet the ‘needs of the individual person who wishes, within the limits of his [sic] capacity, to develop his [sic] capacity to the best advantage of himself [sic] and the community, including industry and commerce’ (Goozee 1995, p.23). This philosophy, reinforced through the growth of tertiary teacher training programs for TAFE staff through the 1970s and 1980s, stressed the importance of the individual’s needs over those of industry (Peoples 1994, p.3). It also embodied a broad notion of technical training that emphasised technical as well as social and educational goals (Schofield 1994, p.60).

The Kangan Report was also significant because it signalled a shift in power from industry to the growing ranks of professional educators who subsequently filled TAFE colleges (Schofield 1994, p.64). While TAFE teachers gained significant control in areas such as curriculum development, TAFE still encouraged the participation of industry in curriculum development processes, such as course monitoring and needs analyses (Blachford 1986).

The training reforms which have been implemented since the early 1990s have acted to seriously undermine and, arguably, reverse the philosophy and mandate established for the TAFE sector as part of the Kangan reforms. At the core of these reforms was the goal of realigning the relationship between TAFE and industry, and consequently, the relationships between TAFE teachers and their industry. The introduction of competition with the creation of an open training market added further impetus to the need for change in TAFE institutes if they were to remain competitive with the large numbers of private providers entering the market.

In this context, it is not remarkable that TAFE teachers would judge that the extent of the changes they had experienced over the last five years as substantial. Conversely, private providers, many of

whom actually began their training lives during the training reforms of the 1990s, would not have been required to change their practices to the same extent as the public institutions which had well-established ways of working, circumscribed by conventions related to their status as public entities.

The finding that public providers had altered their relationships with students to a lesser extent than private providers also accords with anecdotal evidence. There has continued to be considerable debate over how much TAFE staff have actually changed their teaching–learning practices. For example, TAFE still has the major role in preparing people for the traditional trades, where, staff claim, competency-based approaches are certainly not new.

VET practitioners’ attitudes to change

On the basis of the data collected for this study, it is clear that VET teachers and trainers experience the process of change at an individual level. The highly personal nature of the change process is of great significance, but individual perspectives can be lost in processes aimed to bring about system-wide change. The scope and nature of the changes being experienced by the teachers and trainers impact not only on the externalities of their daily work; teachers and trainers are also being challenged to re-evaluate their norms, habits, beliefs and values in a number of areas, most notably in what constitutes ‘good’ practice in their work as VET practitioners. In this context, how teachers feel about the ways in which they experience change, and the ways in which change is being managed within their workplaces is significant.

While the majority of teachers and trainers expressed positive feelings about the changes they were experiencing, a significant minority (24%) did not. Moreover, this negativity was more prevalent amongst VET practitioners working in public training providers. In addition, fewer teachers than managers were positive about the sense of control they felt over the changes. Clearly there are many respondents who are enthusiastic about the changes they are being asked to make and generally feel a sense of control over their work.

Factors affecting the implementation of change

In the previous section the post-Kangan TAFE context was described. This context was influential in shaping how practitioners in the public VET system have responded to change. However, other factors which may be affecting teachers’ and trainers’ reactions to the changes being experienced should be considered. These are:

- ✧ the degree to which teachers and trainers feel a sense of ownership over the implementation processes they are being asked to follow
- ✧ the ways in which decision-making is occurring at the local level
- ✧ the extent to which teachers and trainers feel they have the support of their colleagues, managers and other senior staff in implementing change
- ✧ their access to information about the implementation of the changes they are being required to make
- ✧ teachers’ and trainers’ knowledge and understanding of the reforms
- ✧ their previous experiences in implementing reforms
- ✧ their previous work history and experiences in their workplaces and industry, particularly in relation to implementing change
- ✧ teachers’ and trainers’ perceptions of the suitability of the systems provided to them in support of the changes

- ◇ opportunities for professional development and access to resources to support implementation of reforms.

Data collected during the focus group discussions for this study indicate that all of these factors are present to varying degrees in teachers' and trainers' workplaces and are playing a role in shaping attitudes towards change. Two further issues are also worthy of consideration in this context.

Firstly, given the extensive and pervasive nature of the changes impacting on the VET sector, it should not be surprising that some VET practitioners express concerns about the mandated nature of some changes. VET practitioners view themselves as autonomous professionals and may greet mandated change with mixed feelings that simply do not disappear over time.

Evidence from the focus groups underscores a number of the continuing tensions that teachers and trainers feel in relation to opposing issues, such as education versus training, general versus vocational, learning versus assessment, public good versus for-profit motives etc. Teachers and trainers cannot be viewed as 'neutral conduits' (Dawson 1996, p.60) through which change can flow unhindered. They have their own interests to protect and promote, and the politics of change are important. It is also important not to assume that teachers' and trainers' reactions to change remain constant over time. Feelings and reactions are likely to wax and wane over time as they experience the full impact of the demands, limitations and opportunities imparted by the training reforms.

Secondly, the data from this study suggest that, while some VET practitioners feel they have a degree of autonomy and control over their work and are able to respond to emerging needs, other teachers and trainers may not. The immediate question is: Why is this the case? A number of reasons are possible. The almost total absence of teachers and trainers from the policy-making process (particularly in the early days of training reforms in the 1990s) has resulted in teachers and trainers feeling disempowered and therefore unable or unwilling to engage in the change process. Furthermore, there may be significant structural impediments within specific training organisations whereby teachers and trainers are discouraged from becoming engaged more fully in decision-making and change processes.

It could also be that the over-emphasis on the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as the pre-eminent qualification for VET staff is also a contributing factor. The key issue centres on the degree to which the certificate (along with work and decision-making structures) reinforces an overly 'technical' view of teachers and trainers who are required to deliver and maintain training services, rather than one of teachers as professionals who are reflexive, critical and who transform the VET system through their work.

Implications of the research findings

This study has analysed perceived changes, and personal reactions to the changes in the daily working lives of VET practitioners. The scope and nature of the reforms that VET practitioners have been asked to implement have required a lot more of practitioners than the mere substitution of one set of pedagogical practices for others, or the adoption of different behaviours in response to a specific number of structural changes which have been 'rolled out' over time. The change process has been multi-faceted, fast-paced and unrelenting. Certain aspects of VET practitioners' working lives have undergone radical change, most notably their work responsibilities and key relationships with industry, colleagues, students and other training organisations. These changes have also elicited a strong emotional reaction from the VET practitioners who participated in this study. That extensive change experienced within the VET sector should be met with strong emotional responses from practitioners is not remarkable. What is crucially important to consider, however, is that these feelings are unlikely to disappear over time unless they are specifically addressed. Arguably, in the short-to-medium term, there is a danger that these negative feelings may be transformed into

resistance—in all probability to the detriment of teachers’ and trainers’ relationships, particularly those with their students and the industry in which they work.

Another key message from this research is that context matters when it relates to the task of managing change processes. Changes to the VET sector have impacted in different ways across different contexts within the sector. The data hint at some fundamental differences between public and private VET providers in terms of the impact of the changing policy on the daily working lives of practitioners and the responses of individuals to the changes demanded by these policies. Policy frameworks and implementation strategies need to be sensitive to the nature and scope of change required for the different contexts in which VET now takes place.

The size and complexity of the VET sector demand a rethinking of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to policy implementation. This is important for three reasons. Maintaining this approach means that opportunities to evaluate the change process or its outcomes across different contexts are missed. Secondly, governments, policy-makers and other stakeholders remain under the illusion that policy changes have been acceptable and will ultimately deliver the required outcomes. Finally, ignoring the real work that teachers and trainers undertake in realising training reforms in different contexts may mean that they never receive the recognition or reward for their efforts that they deserve. This is not a smart or equitable outcome for all stakeholders.

These findings, like others (for example, Mulcahy 1996; Mulcahy & James 1999; Simons 2001), illustrate the important role that VET practitioners have in bringing about fundamental changes to the VET sector for the purpose of meeting specified government objectives. Ignoring the concerns of VET practitioners will jeopardise the change process, since these people are crucial to determining the outcome. The practitioners in this study are implicitly alerting policy-makers and managers to their perceptions of the very real issues and concerns faced in their daily working lives.

The findings of this study have implications for a number of key groups in the VET sector. Those involved in the shaping and management of change in the sector are introduced to the complex world of VET practitioners and the challenges they face in implementing these reforms in their place of work and within their industries.

The policy–practice nexus is not a neatly articulated and defined concept; rather, it is a ‘work in progress’ evolving in the light of teachers’ and trainers’ accumulated experiences and efforts in implementing reform. This has implications for how policy-makers might think about and plan for change, particularly in relation to expectations of what can be managed, and the impact of reforms not only on teachers’ and trainers’ work, but also on their relationships and their professional identities. Focusing on change from the perspective of those implementing it—that is, the human dimension of the change process—may be useful for both identifying overlapping points of policy and practice and informing the processes for facilitating change.

This study may also act as a trigger for policy-makers to reconsider the role of VET practitioners and their place in the policy-making process. Teachers and trainers may be viewed as passive recipients of change or as active agents of change. How they are viewed will have flow-on effects, such as their participation in decision-making in the sector and the type of professional development and support they might need. This study also reiterates the need for appropriate structural supports, to facilitate access to a wide range of staff development activities and planning processes to support VET practitioners in their work.

For teachers and trainers, this study provides some insights into the lived realities of their working lives. It clearly illustrates some of the changes they have experienced and how these changes have been experienced. The outcomes from this study suggest that educational reforms of the nature and scope that practitioners have been required to accommodate are complex and can create considerable dilemmas for individuals as they attempt to assess the implications of change for themselves, their workplaces, their students and their industry.

VET practitioners play a critical role in shaping outcomes for the clients (students, enterprises, industry) of the VET system. It cannot be assumed that all teachers and trainers across all sectors are equally able to develop the autonomy and power and access the resources they need for playing a proactive role in dealing with and shaping the reforms they are being asked to implement. Teachers and trainers can only act as change agents insofar as the working environments, management structures and policy settings are attentive to both the personal and process aspects of change, and view change as an intensely individual process rather than as a depersonalised event that just 'happens' to teachers and trainers. In this context it is important that organisations and managers act as an integrated force to develop systems and functions which match teachers' and trainers' new ways of working.

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Appendix A: Organisations sending participants to the focus groups

- 1 Adelaide focus group, Wednesday 4 April 2001,
University of South Australia, Underdale Campus
 - ✧ Aboriginal Education, Douglas Mawson Institute, Port Adelaide campus
 - ✧ Telecommunications, Onkaparinga Institute, O'Halloran Hill campus
 - ✧ Electrical Engineering, Regency Institute, Regency campus
 - ✧ Performing Arts, Adelaide Institute, Roma Mitchell Arts Education Centre
 - ✧ Hair and Beauty, Torrens Valley Institute, Gilles Plains campus
 - ✧ Information Technology, Douglas Mawson Institute, Panorama campus
 - ✧ Technology Centre for Technical and Visual Communication, Douglas Mawson Institute, Croydon campus
 - ✧ Centre for Tourism and International Languages, Adelaide Institute, Currie Street campus
 - ✧ Regency Hotel School, Regency Institute, Regency campus
 - ✧ Transport Engineering, Onkaparinga Institute, O'Halloran Hill campus
 - ✧ Windsor Gardens Vocational College
 - ✧ Hamilton Adult Campus
 - ✧ Regency Training and Consultancy Services, Regency Institute, Regency campus
 - ✧ TAFE Business Services

- 2 Toowoomba focus group, Monday 9 April 2001,
Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Bridge Street campus
 - ✧ Ag-Data Australia
 - ✧ Downs Group Training
 - ✧ Business Success Group
 - ✧ Agricultural Risk Management Services Pty Ltd
 - ✧ Toowoomba Coaching and Business College
 - ✧ YWCA
 - ✧ Horticulture, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
 - ✧ Community Services, Childcare, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
 - ✧ Beauty Therapy, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
 - ✧ Commercial Cookery, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
 - ✧ Agriculture, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Warwick campus

- ❖ Agriculture, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
- ❖ Engineering (Mechanical trades), Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus
- ❖ Information Technology, Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba campus

3 Brisbane focus group, Monday 9 April 2001, Southbank Institute of TAFE

- ❖ Russo Corporate Training Services
- ❖ National Safety Council of Australia Ltd
- ❖ Hospitality Training Association Inc.
- ❖ Jocelyn Smith Training
- ❖ Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre
- ❖ Retail Industry Training of Australia
- ❖ Valued Training
- ❖ National Security Training Academy
- ❖ Corskill
- ❖ Civil Train
- ❖ Coles Supermarkets
- ❖ Conrad Jupiter's Casino
- ❖ Tourism College of Australia
- ❖ Building Industry Group Apprentice Training
- ❖ Pharmacy Guild Training
- ❖ Transed Pty Ltd
- ❖ Nudgee College, Vocational Education
- ❖ National On-site Training

4 Sydney focus group, Monday 9 April 2001, Meadowbank Institute of TAFE

- ❖ Adult Basic Education, Illawarra Institute, Wollongong campus
- ❖ Hairdressing, Hunter Institute, Gosford campus
- ❖ Telecommunications, Call Centres, Sydney Institute, Ultimo campus
- ❖ Hospitality, Bakery, Sydney Institute, East Sydney campus
- ❖ Community Services, Hunter Institute, Central Coast campus
- ❖ Tourism and Hospitality, Hunter Institute, Hamilton campus
- ❖ Automotive, South Western Sydney Institute, Wetherill campus
- ❖ Textiles, Clothing and Footwear, Sydney Institute, Ultimo campus
- ❖ Information Technology, Northern Sydney Institute, North Sydney campus
- ❖ Engineering, South Western Institute, Granville campus
- ❖ Horticulture and Environmental Practice, Hunter Institute, Central Coast campus

- ✧ Nursing, Northern Sydney Institute, Meadowbank campus
- ✧ Retail Management, Sydney Institute, Ultimo campus
- ✧ Advertising and Marketing, Northern Sydney Institute, Meadowbank campus

5 Melbourne focus group, Wednesday 18 April 2001,
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Swanston Street Campus

- ✧ Adult Multicultural Education Services
- ✧ Accounting Education Australia Pty Ltd
- ✧ Aged Care Consultants
- ✧ BHP
- ✧ Ford Motor Company
- ✧ Hospitality Training Victoria Pty Ltd
- ✧ Melbourne Institute of Finance and Management
- ✧ Spherion Education Pty Ltd
- ✧ Hotel Sofitel
- ✧ Infocall.Com Training Pty Ltd
- ✧ 5 Star Training Resources
- ✧ Admin Training Company
- ✧ Australian College of Hair Design and Beauty
- ✧ Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- ✧ ABMT Textiles Pty Ltd
- ✧ Airconditioning and Mechanical Contractors Assoc of Victoria Ltd
- ✧ ACTH Management

6 Mt Gambier focus group, Monday 14 May 2001,
South East Institute of TAFE

Private

- ✧ Logging Investigation and Training Association Inc.
- ✧ Training and Licensing Centre
- ✧ Rural Industry Skills Training (RIST)
- ✧ CITS Training Australia
- ✧ Green Triangle
- ✧ Carter Holt Harvey

Public

- ✧ Aboriginal Education
- ✧ Community Services
- ✧ Business Studies
- ✧ Mechanical Engineering

- ✧ Electrical
- ✧ Automotive
- ✧ Dairy
- ✧ Vocational Preparation
- ✧ Horticulture
- ✧ Tourism
- ✧ Commercial Cookery
- ✧ Hospitality

7 Dubbo focus group, Thursday 17 May 2001,
Western Institute of TAFE, Dubbo Campus

Public (Western Institute of TAFE, Dubbo Campus)

- ✧ Access
- ✧ Construction and Transport
- ✧ Metal Fabrication and Welding
- ✧ Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- ✧ Information Technology
- ✧ Welfare
- ✧ Beauty
- ✧ Primary Industry

Private

- ✧ Wool Industry Training Australia
- ✧ Access Group Training
- ✧ Orana Education Centre

8 Wodonga focus group, Friday 18 May 2001,
Wodonga Institute of TAFE

- ✧ Business and Information Technology, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ International, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Shearer Training Group
- ✧ Marg Bradbury's Beauty Clinic and Training Centre
- ✧ Health, Social and Community Studies, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Open Learning Centre, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ National Industrial Skills Training Centre, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Training Design and Resource Development, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Apprentices-Trainees-Employment Ltd
- ✧ Department of Education and Training, Albury District
- ✧ Engineering and Manufacturing

- ✧ Agriculture and Horticulture, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Science, Food and Technology, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Electrotechnology, Wodonga TAFE
- ✧ Architectural and Timber Studies, Wodonga TAFE

9 Canberra focus group, Monday 28 May 2001, Canberra Institute of TAFE

- ✧ Canberra Institute of TAFE (n=10)
- ✧ Capital Careers
- ✧ Australian Federal Police
- ✧ Retail and Office Training Centre
- ✧ Dickson College
- ✧ Quest

10 Queensland teleconference, Friday 8 June 2001

- ✧ Downs Group Training
- ✧ Agricultural Risk Management Services
- ✧ Toowoomba Coaching and Business College
- ✧ Ag-Data Australia
- ✧ Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre
- ✧ National Security Training Academy
- ✧ Tourism College of Australia

Appendix B:

Protocol for the focus groups

[Welcome, introductions, overview of the process, timing, audiotape]

Recruitment and career pathways of vocational education and training professionals

- ✧ How were you recruited to the sector? (Prior education, training, work experience required)
What work did you undertake when you first entered the sector? What career pathways have evolved for you over the time you have been in the sector?
- ✧ How have recruitment strategies, career pathways and employment conditions changed over the past five years?
- ✧ What factors have influenced the changes you have observed over the past five years?

Teachers'/trainers' work

- ✧ How does your work today differ from this list? In what ways (scope, location, complexity etc.)
- ✧ What factors have influenced the changes you have observed over the past five years?

Workplaces

- ✧ How have your relationships with:
 - ◆ students/employees (trainees/apprentices)
 - ◆ your colleagues (other teachers/trainers you work with)
 - ◆ senior managementchanged over the past five years?
- ✧ What factors have influenced the changes you have observed over the past five years?

Wider networks/broad issues

- ✧ How have your relationships with the industries you work with changed over the past five years?
What has been the impact of these changes on your role?
- ✧ How have the relationships between unions/other professional bodies (for example ACPET) and teachers/trainers changed over the past five years? What has been the impact of these changes on your role?
- ✧ How has the relationship between registered training organisations changed over the past five years? What has been the impact of these changes on your role?
- ✧ How have the role and status of vocational education and training changed over the past five years? What factors have influenced these changes? What has been the impact of these changes on your role?
- ✧ Are there any other influences that have impacted on the role of the vocational education and training professionals in the past five years?

- ✧ What are the most important factors that have influenced the changes you have experienced as vocational education and training professionals in the past five years?

Understanding of the concept of ‘vocational education and training professional’

- ✧ What does the term ‘vocational education training professional’ mean to you?

(Prompts: The term VET professional has only been recently used in the vocational education and training sector. To whom does this term apply (assessors, workplace trainers, others)? What distinguishes the work of a vocational education and training professional from other people who teach/train/work in the sector? What factors do you think have contributed to the development and use of this term?)

Appendix C: Interview schedule

During the past few months, we have been conducting focus groups with people from a range of RTOs on the factors that are generating changes to the work of people in the VET sector. The information obtained from these focus groups was of a general nature and we are now conducting a number of focused interviews with staff in a range of RTOs to examine the extent and impact of these changes on your work in the VET sector.

- From your perspective, how much change have you experienced in the following areas over the past five years?

Please rate the extent of change using the following scale, then explain how this change has affected your work. Provide 'evidence' of what your work was like FIVE YEARS AGO and what it is like NOW.

A lot	To some extent	Slightly	Not at all
4	3	2	1

Changes to your work responsibilities	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

Changes to relationships with students/trainees	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

Changes to relationships with other teachers/trainers within your program area/organisation	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

Changes to relationships with industry	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

Changes to relationships with other RTOs	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

Changes to relationships with unions and other professional bodies	4	3	2	1
FIVE YEARS AGO:				
NOW:				

2. On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 = very negative and 10 = very positive), how do you feel about the changes to your work over the past five years?
3. On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 = no control at all and 10 = entire control), how much control do you think you have had in managing the changes to your work over the past five years?
4. What three changes have had the greatest impact on your work over the past five years? Please rank these in order of importance:
5. What do you think have been the main drivers of the changes you have experienced over the past five years?
6. In a recent study, we asked a group of key stakeholders in VET to identify the most critical challenges that VET practitioners generally will face over the next seven years. We'd like you to rank these challenges in priority order where 1 = the most critical challenge you believe VET practitioners must face, 2 = the next most critical challenge etc.

Changing to the role of facilitator

Understanding dilemmas in educator's work (e.g. industry needs versus education)

Using technology

Understanding the changing nature of work

Operating in a competitive environment

Keeping up with/understanding the changes in VET

Understanding/working with Training Packages

Flexible delivery

7. What three changes will have the greatest impact on **your work** over the **next** five years? Please rank these in order of importance:
8. What single professional development activity you have undertaken over the past five years has been **the most helpful** in assisting you to respond to the changes to your work?
9. What single professional development activity do you think would be most beneficial **at this point in time** to **assist you further** with the changes to your work?
10. Apart from professional development, what has management done to help facilitate change in your organisation?
11. What advice would you give to policy makers and VET managers in relation to the changes that have been implemented in the VET sector over the last five years, particularly in relation to the impact of these changes on the work of VET practitioners?
12. Background data
 - i. Type of organisation:
 - Private RTO?
 - TAFE?
 - Enterprise-based RTO?
 - Community-based RTO?
 - Group Training Company?
 - Other?
 - ii. Title of position you currently hold?
 - Title of position you held **five** years ago?
 - Title of position you held **ten** years ago:
 - iii. Your length of service in the VET sector (years)

iv. What modes of delivery do you predominantly work with:

Predominantly on-line?

Predominantly classroom based?

Predominantly workplace-based?

A combination of the above (please specify)?

v. Your employment status:

Permanent full-time?

Permanent part-time?

Contract full-time?

Contract part-time?

Sessional/HPI?

Interviewer to complete: Locality of interviewee?

Gender of interviewee?

Reforms to Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector have had a significant impact on practitioners' work in public and private providers. This study analyses practitioners' perceptions of, and reactions to, the changes. The scope of these changes has been substantial and has required shifts to practitioners' habits, norms, skills and knowledge.

While the greatest changes have been increased work responsibilities and shifts in relations with industry in particular, a key theme is the varied impact the changes have on VET organisations and practitioners.

NCVER is an independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training.

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