

Research messages 2009



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH



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Australian vocational education and training

Research messages 2009

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors/project teams and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or state and territory governments

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Highlights for 2009

Highlights for 2009

Francesca Beddie, Anna Payton

Introduction

In 2009 Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system, in common with so many other areas of public policy and the economy, was preoccupied by the effects of the global economic downturn and, like other sectors, sought to reposition itself to deal with the economic fallout, while anticipating its role in the recovery (see Richard Sweet's paper *A competent recovery? Economic downturn and Australia's vocational education and training system* located in the VET system section).

Yet, as we look back over the year and review NCVER's publications, many written before the financial crisis, we see that the dominant issues are tenacious, whatever the economic climate. Fundamentally, they revolve around the role of VET in meeting skill needs, the quality of training and the costs of providing it, as well as the connection between skills, productivity and social wellbeing.

Two newer issues have arisen out of the *Review of Australian higher education* (<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx>), also known as the Bradley Review, and the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) targets for education and training. The latter have put the spotlight on the complexity of measuring outcomes and the necessity for solid data. The Bradley Review has provoked much thinking about the mission of vocational education and training and, more broadly, its nexus with the university sector.

Internally, NCVER was keen to understand the level of impact of its research. With its mission of being Australia's leading provider of high-quality, independent information on vocational education and training in mind, NCVER developed a model—tested in four case studies—to assess the impact of its research. Our analysis found that the research does influence policy and practice and also assists in building knowledge and capacity in the sector (John Stanwick, Jo Hargreaves and Francesca Beddie, *Assessing the impact of NCVER's research*). An additional outcome of this project was the development of guidelines for collecting data, which can be used in future attempts to measure impact.

Highlights from the work produced by NCVER staff or commissioned from external researchers are presented below. This essay is structured around the five themes NCVER uses to organise its work, although using these themes for this purpose does not constitute a perfect classification tool, since much of the research tackles more than one theme. Where this is the case, the location of the report summary in this compilation is cross-referenced.

In all, there were 42 reports and eight conference papers published. Statistical publications and synthesis pieces, such as *At a glance*, are not included in this book but, where they are mentioned, a URL is given.

Industry and employers

Employers rely on Australia's VET sector to provide people with the necessary, up-to-date skills to make their businesses productive. Work published last year covered employers' use of the VET system, investment in training and skill shortages.

Competency-based training (CBT) introduced in the late 1980s remains a foundation for Australia's VET system and the main avenue through which industry voices its training requirements (John Stanwick, *Employer engagement with the vocational education and training system in Australia*). While largely satisfied with training, employers claim that improvements can be made, especially in ensuring the relevance of skills taught (Toni Rittie and Tomi Awodeyi, *Employers' views on improving the vocational education and training system*). This feedback has prompted a rethink of competency-based training, along with many of the issues associated with it. Hugh Guthrie's literature review *Competence and competency-based training: What the literature says*, located in the Teaching and learning section, suggests that the notion of competence needs to be broadened.

The cost of training is not straightforward. For the individual, it entails not only direct payments of fees and equipment but also opportunity costs. For employers, investment in training is driven primarily by business needs, including the demand for skills. A team of NCVET researchers (Lisa Nechvoglod, Tom Karmel and John Saunders) in their paper, *The cost of training apprentices*, argued that a model which reduced the cost to employers merited investigation. One consequence of the downturn has been increased government incentives for taking on and retaining apprentices.

Skills shortages did not disappear, despite the poorer economic conditions and, given the prospect of a swift return to activity in the resource sector, remain a significant concern in many industries. Tom Karmel (*Global skills crunch: A case of dog eat dog?*) argues that it is the business cycle much more than demography that will affect demand for skills, while in another paper with Davinia Blomberg, Karmel points to the challenges the VET sector faces in providing the higher qualifications that industries need, for example, in the community service and health sector (*Workforce planning for the community services and health industry*).

Students and individuals

Learners are at the heart of the training system. Research published in 2009 focused on particular groups, particularly those at risk and those marginalised from the workforce, in line with governments' focus on social inclusion and increasing the productivity of all people.

Several researchers, including three recipients of the new researcher awards, investigated what is needed to ensure that Indigenous learners have success in the vocational education system, and beyond in the workforce. Kristine Giddy, Jessica Lopez and Anne Redman produced a set of guidelines for brokering good employment outcomes (*Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models*). Many of their findings are relevant for other groups who may need help in finding a sustainable job. Michael Dockery ventured into new territory by attempting to measure the notion of cultural attachment (*Cultural dimensions of Indigenous participation in education and training*) and his findings suggest there is not necessarily a trade-off between maintaining Indigenous culture and achieving good results in the VET system.

Analysis that looks at opposite ends of the working life, namely, young people and older learners, was published last year. In November, NCVET hosted the national research forum, *Young people: Finding their way in a new era*, the key finding of which is that choice matters and alternative pathways do provide options for young people who are otherwise at risk of long-term disengagement from the workforce (<www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/opinionpieces/op_3.html>). Chris Ryan and Mathias Sinning, on the other hand, used the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey, undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, to look at older workers (*Literacy and numeracy skills and their use by the Australian workforce*). Their findings suggest that the lower participation of older workers in education and training is not linked to the nature of the job but is probably attributable to other factors, such as the opportunities for training and the limited time available to recoup a return on the training investment. Their work in this area continues.

The Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia is also conducting a multi-year project into low-paid workers. Natalie Skinner's publication, *Work–life issues and participation in education and training*, used data from the Centre's 2009 national survey, the Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI), the survey that year including questions about vocational education and training. Skinner's research found that training outside the workplace resulted in significantly higher work–life conflict for employees in low-paid occupations.

To help improve productivity, governments are working to ensure that disadvantaged people have opportunities to enter the workforce through the provision of training. Tom Karmel, Kevin Mark and Nhi Nguyen looked at the training aspects of welfare to work initiatives and whether VET improves the employment prospects for people who receive welfare payments (*Welfare to work: Does vocational education and training make a difference?*). Their strong conclusion was that the completion of certificate III and above did significantly help in finding a job.

The work Leesa Wheelahan and colleagues undertook on higher education in TAFE in a report of the same name is also relevant here. Their project found that the applied orientation of higher education courses in TAFE, as well as the learner support offered, could assist in increasing the proportion of the Australian population with a degree, in particular those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

Teaching and learning

Understanding how learners learn best is critical to the success of the training system. NCVER devoted considerable resources to this in 2009, including the commissioning of two pieces on innovation in teaching and learning. The authors (Jane Figgis and Yvonne Hillier) then tested their findings with practitioners (*Taking 'innovation' on the road*). The conclusion from this exercise is that embedding innovation in VET requires a commitment from organisations, and not merely fresh ideas from individual teachers.

Several novice researchers tackled aspects of their teaching practice. Annie Priest looked at higher-level qualifications and the need for a mix of applied and complex knowledge in the curriculum at this level (*Getting the knowledge–skills mix right in high-level vocational education and training qualifications*), while Mary Cushnahan revisited the question of employability skills and the need for greater professional development for teachers asked to teach these (*Beyond Mayer: Learning from delivering and assessing generic employability competencies*). For his part Mark Mossuto considered a specific teaching methodology in his consideration of the use of problem-based learning in a business faculty (*Problem-solving learning: Student engagement, learning and contextualised problem-solving*).

Last year saw the publication of the final pieces of work funded under the Adult Literacy Research Program. Jo Balatti, Stephen Black and Ian Falk looked at literacy and numeracy initiatives in the financial, health and justice sectors, which drew on the collaborative approaches of networks and partnerships (*A new social capital paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, policy and pedagogy*). They conclude that a greater emphasis on partnerships between adult literacy and numeracy providers and those working to improve these skills in other sectors is warranted. Kate Perkins undertook a review of the body of work conducted under the program (*Adult literacy and numeracy: Research and future strategy*). Her review found that the impact of the research would have been enhanced had it been conducted within a clearly articulated policy framework.

VET system

The split between higher education and VET is not straightforward. Karmel reflected on the differences between the two sectors at the LH Martin Institute conference (*Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia*) and in an opinion piece in *Campus Review* (<www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/opinionpieces/op_10.html>). In these he argues that there is scope for VET to make its mark on the more applied professions and associate professions such as nursing, accounting, marketing and business.

Employers need a training system that is both responsive and nimble. At the beginning of 2009 it was believed that this could be achieved through 'market design', that is, state encouragement of greater competition and contestability in the training arena. The pressures of the downturn, along with the contentious nature of the debate, deflected action on market design; nevertheless, the question of how best to ensure the efficient operation of training providers persists. The essays collected in *Competition in the training market*, first presented at a roundtable in Canberra in 2009 were commissioned to inform the debate. While they present differing views about the role of government in the training market, all agree that the consumers, that is employers and individuals, of training deserve to have the best available information about their options. This discussion is likely to be enlivened by examining the way Web 2.0 technologies can engage learners.

Ongoing sectoral reform has kept the pressure on VET providers to maintain their edge. At the TAFE institute level, work by Josie Misko and Sian Halliday-Wynes reveals how institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency (*Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency*). The report, which also highlights the importance of strong leadership if TAFE institutes are to succeed, argues that the main impetus for these evaluations is compliance with government funding and regulatory requirements.

Michele Simons and colleagues examined the career pathways available to various groups of VET employees, including teachers, general staff and educational managers (*Careers in vocational education and training: What are they really like?*). The researchers posit that the creation and maintenance of working environments that meet the aspirations of staff will be a key determinant of future successful workforce development strategies.

The downturn in the economy prompted a sharper focus on the sector's role in skilling people to take their place in the labour market. At a roundtable in July, senior policy-makers and researchers identified some fundamental challenges facing the VET system (*A competent recovery? Economic downturn and Australia's vocational education and training system*). The downturn has highlighted the importance of the VET system being able to adapt to both structural and cyclical shifts in the economy and suggests the need to rethink the industry-specific focus that has marked training provision over the last ten or so years.

In terms of apprenticeship and traineeship activity and the downturn in the economy, work last year revealed that the impact of the downturn was mixed. Because of their reliance on employers and their close link to the economic cycle, apprenticeships, according to Tom Karmel and Josie Misko, suffered, although traineeships travelled well (*Apprenticeships and traineeships in the downturn*). These researchers suggest that during downturns governments should focus more on implementing policies which encourage apprenticeship commencements and less on completion rates. This, in turn, will help to reduce future skills shortages when the economy strengthens.

Last year's survey of apprentice and trainee destinations highlighted the favourable employment outcomes for apprentices and trainees during a period of strong economic growth (<www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2138.html>). However, after a second survey in 2010, greater understanding of the impact of poorer economic conditions on apprenticeships or traineeships will be possible.

Work by Erica Smith and colleagues which took a close look at traineeships identified the factors that constitute a good traineeship (*High-quality traineeships: Identifying what works*). These researchers suggest a number of policy measures for employers, industry groups and training providers to improve the practice and image of traineeships. These measures are not linked to increased funding incentives, which the authors assert, controversially, are not the main driver for employers' initial or continued participation in traineeships.

VET in context

Increasing the skill levels of the Australian workforce through the diversification of learning pathways continues to be a pressing issue for policy-makers in the tertiary education sector. However, Roger Harris and colleagues offer a word of warning here, based on their examination of trends in Europe (*New directions in European vocational education and training policy and practice: Lessons for Australia*). Their research found that more entry points at the post-secondary level will not necessarily lead to increased participation in higher-level study at universities, unless the issue of VET's appeal as a pathway to university is addressed alongside curriculum reform.

One way forward may be to adopt a similar model to the foundation degree offered in the United Kingdom's further education sector—equivalent to the Australian VET sector. This is a proposition advanced by Robin Shreeve in his paper *Some ideas from England: A practitioner's perspective*. Broadly, foundation degrees are similar to the advanced diplomas already offered by the VET sector, although different in that they offer a clear, guaranteed articulation pathway into a related bachelor degree.

Industry and employers

Employer engagement with the vocational education and training system in Australia

John Stanwick

This paper, commissioned by the United Kingdom's Commission for Employment and Skills, reviews the literature on how employers engage with the vocational education and training (VET) system in Australia.

The main conclusion that can be reached is that the major form of engagement is through using competencies as the building block of the training system. Competencies were introduced in the VET sector in the late 1980s and focus on the outcomes of training. Competencies are described through the skills and tasks specified by industry. This development of competencies is effected through training packages, which are developed by industry skills councils.

Engagement of employers has also been encouraged by promoting competition in the training market. The idea is that providers need to be more responsive to the needs of employers. The best example of this is the 'user choice' program, under which employers choose the training provider which delivers the off-the-job component of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVET Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

Employer engagement with the vocational education and training system in Australia can be found on NCVET's website <<http://www.ncvet.edu.au/publications/2135.html>>

Understanding vocational education and training, productivity and workforce participation: An issues paper

Justine Evesson, Tanya Bretherton, John Buchanan, Mike Rafferty, Gillian Considine

This paper arises from the first year of a three-year program of research looking at the role of vocational education and training (VET) in improving productivity and workforce participation among the lower skilled. Two industries—meat processing and early childhood education and care—are being used to understand the issues.

The paper develops a framework for use in the field work to be conducted in the next phase of the program. It argues that four domains shape workforce development:

- ◆ the core services and/or products of interest
- ◆ the context of deployment and development of labour
- ◆ the flows/pools of potential workers and learners
- ◆ the formal system of vocational education and training.

Understanding each of these domains will lead to a better comprehension of the relationship between employers, workers, potential workers and VET.

In addition, the paper reports the results of some preliminary interviews to identify challenges in workforce development in the two industries being studied. It finds the following.

- ◆ In the childcare industry, labour shortages and skills shortages are the main issues impinging on workforce development. These are driven by low wages, low existing qualification levels and the negative perception of the industry as a prospective career. The mixed purpose of the childcare industry (care versus education) is also identified as a major issue.
- ◆ In the meat processing industry, the main challenges in workforce development are production volatility (mostly caused by seasonal factors), diverse customer preferences, and high labour turnover. The growing influence of intermediaries (for example, migration agents, employment brokers and trainers) is also an issue for workforce development.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Understanding vocational education and training, productivity and workforce participation: An issues paper can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2154.html>>

Employers' views on improving the vocational education and training system

Toni Rittie, Tomi Awodeyi

Vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role in providing employees with the skills they require to be effective in the modern workplace and contribute to Australia's economic growth. But how well does the VET system meet the needs of employers?

This study examines employers' views on the three ways they can engage with the VET system: by having vocational qualifications as a job requirement; employing apprentices and trainees; and using nationally recognised training. In particular, the authors focus on employers' suggestions for improvement to the VET system and, for those employers who are dissatisfied with the system, their reasons for dissatisfaction.

Key messages

- ◇ Employers are generally satisfied with the VET system. Across the three types of engagement with the VET system, the level of satisfaction ranged between 77% and 83%.
- ◇ Those dissatisfied with the VET system point to the relevance of skills taught: that training is too general and not specific enough, and there is insufficient focus on practical skills for employees.
- ◇ Employers' suggestions for improving the VET system revolve around providing more practical skills and experience, tailoring training to specific industries, increasing flexibility in training provision, improving access to training in regional areas, and increasing government funding.

The challenge is to use these findings to improve the VET system, noting that the level of satisfaction among employers is very high.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Statistical Program; see page 72 for details.

Employers' views on improving the vocational education and training system can be found on NCVET's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2178.html>>

Reasons for training: Why Australian employers train their workers

Andrew Smith, Eddie Oczkowski, Mark Hill

Irrespective of whether a country's economy is prospering or experiencing a downturn, employers can benefit from a skilled workforce able to respond to changing economic circumstances. Training their workers is one means of building such a workforce.

But what influences the decisions by employers to train their workers? This report examines this question through a statistical analysis of data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2005 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System. The authors look at the decisions made by employers in relation to four different types of training: vocational qualifications; the employment of apprentices and trainees; nationally recognised training; and unaccredited training.

Key messages

- ◆ The need for skills, whether specific to a particular job or general skills upgrading, is a pivotal driver of vocational training by employers. Compliance with regulation is also a factor.
- ◆ The study isolated three factors that powerfully influence decisions about training: the overall importance of training to the organisation; the level of workforce skills in the organisation; and recruitment difficulties.
- ◆ Training is being integrated with other human resource objectives in some organisations. In light of this, training providers need to take a more business-oriented approach with the organisations.

The authors argue that decisions about training are quite complex, and therefore governments need to be wary of one-dimensional approaches—such as training levies—to increasing employer investment in training.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

*Reasons for training: Why Australian employers
train their workers*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2147.html>>

The cost of training apprentices

Lisa Nechvoglod, Tom Karmel, John Saunders

Apprenticeships are the time-honoured model for training tradespeople. While there has been some increase in trade apprentices in recent years, there have been parallel concerns that this may not be sufficient to offset current skills shortages, as well as build sufficient stock for future demand. In this context, the report examines the costs that both employers and apprentices incur for undertaking training in the plumbing and electrical industries.

The importance of understanding costs is fundamental. Employers will not take on apprentices if the cost is too high, and prospective apprentices will not undertake an apprenticeship if the future benefits (increased wages) do not outweigh the immediate costs to them (mostly the opportunity cost of alternative jobs).

This report is based on data from six case studies of actual electrical and plumbing apprentices. Although the number of case studies is small, the clarity of the results suggests that they have real salience.

Key messages

- ◇ The apprenticeship model involves a substantial financial commitment from employers. The numbers currently involved in training apprentices attests to apprentices' value to employers.
- ◇ The highest costs to employers are for supervision, as apprentice wages are more or less equal to their productivity.
- ◇ The effect of government incentives on employers' decisions to train apprentices is minimal, as they do not represent a significant discount to employers.
- ◇ Apprentices also incur costs, based on the loss of potential wages (opportunity cost). The opportunity cost is very sensitive to the alternative wage available to the apprentice.
- ◇ Apprenticeships are more attractive to young people (because of lower opportunity costs) and will be unattractive to older people, unless the premium paid to qualified tradespeople is substantial.

The authors argue that the high cost of apprenticeships will constrain the numbers of employers willing to take on apprentices, especially in a downturn. Therefore, it is worth considering a model which reduces the cost to employers by making more use of institution-based training, so that apprentices require less supervision and are more productive in the workplace. Such a model may not reduce costs overall but would transfer costs from employers to governments and prospective apprentices.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVET Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

The cost of training apprentices
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2129.html>>

The demand for training

Tom Karmel, Mark Cully

This paper was presented in Sydney in September 2008 at a seminar conducted by Skills Australia and the Academy of Social Sciences.

This paper examines the demand for training. It concentrates on the factors that affect individual and employer demand and points out that accredited vocational education and training (VET) needs to be considered in the context of extensive use of non-accredited and on-the-job training.

Key messages

- ◇ The demand for training by individuals depends on the premium attached to skill, as well as the costs of the training, which may be split into direct costs—such as tuition fees—and the indirect opportunity costs.
- ◇ The demand for training by employers is driven by the need to acquire skilled labour (in the case of apprenticeships), and by business needs in most other cases.
- ◇ The demand for training by employers is variable across industries and tends to be much higher for large organisations than for small enterprises. The demand for unaccredited training is also much larger than the demand for accredited training.
- ◇ The distortion to the prices that individuals pay for training caused by government intervention means that governments do have to steer the provision of training places. Here, they should be guided by labour market signals, in particular, by vacancies, unemployment and wage rates.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Statistical Program; see page 72 for details.

The demand for training
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2124.html>>

Global skills crunch: A case of dog eat dog?

Tom Karmel

This paper was presented to a meeting of the Wellington Exchange, an international group of higher education officials, in December 2008.

One of the topics of the meeting was the issue of possible skills shortages emerging as a result of demographic trends, with the ageing of the population of developed countries. The session consisted of this paper as a discussion opener, followed up by commentary by Sue Richardson (Australia), Constantine Curris (United States), and Herb O'Heron (Canada).

The conference organisers had set the scene with a series of questions:

The global skills crunch: A case of dog eat dog?

- ◇ Are we facing a demographic time bomb?
- ◇ How are countries addressing skills needs through higher education?
- ◇ Can we meet the needs of the labour market and emerging industries?

This paper argues that these are not a set of issues about which we need to be alarmist. There is little evidence of impending skills shortages, although it certainly will be the case that the ageing of the population will impact on the structure of the economy. While the labour market of the future will favour the highly skilled, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of the workforce with a degree, and graduate salaries have been increasing at a very modest rate. We have observed increasing proportions of graduates in a whole range of occupations. In any case, over and above the market mechanisms that act against the emergence of skills shortages, there are various mechanisms that can ameliorate an inadequate number of graduates: increases in labour force participation rates of graduates, a reduction in the number of high Year 12 achievers who do not go to university, an increase in the number of overseas students, and skilled migration.

This is not to say that there will be no skills shortages in specific areas and that we should not be at all concerned about the issue. We need to monitor relative wages and starting salaries, and pay particular attention to those degrees which are considered to be particularly critical (for example, medical specialists). We also need to be aware that the business cycle can have a much more dramatic effect on the demand for skills than demographic trends.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVET Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

Global skills crunch: A case of dog eat dog?
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncvet.edu.au/publications/2107.html>>

Workforce planning for the community services and health industry

Tom Karmel, Davinia Blomberg

Due to skill shortages in vocationally trained and professionally trained occupations, workforce planning for the community services and health industry is critical. The authors of this paper argue that any workforce planning must consider the institutional features of the industry and the many ways in which people acquire and use their skills. The paper therefore aims to provide a picture of the occupations in the community services and health industry and to show how the workforce obtains the required skills. The paper also considers how well the outputs of the public vocational education and training (VET) system map to this industry.

Key messages

- ◆ Planning for the industry should concentrate on the occupations that are specific to community services and health, with greater consideration given to higher-skilled occupations.
- ◆ Community services and health VET courses are well targeted, with most graduates finding employment within the community services and health industry.
- ◆ The qualification levels of community services and health workers have increased substantially over the last decade:
 - Degrees have taken over from diplomas for a range of occupations, such as health service managers and chiropractors.
 - Diploma and advanced diploma training has replaced certificate-level training for associate professional and 'alternative' health workers.
 - There has been an increase in credentials among the lower-skilled occupations, such as personal carers and childcare workers.

The study identifies two main implications related to the movement towards higher qualifications amongst workers. Firstly, there is a challenge for the industry to ensure that higher credentials lead to higher skill levels and not just better credentialled workers; secondly, there is a challenge for the VET sector to promote the value of its training for associate professional level community services and health occupations, and thus not let universities take over this training.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVET Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

Workforce planning for the community services and health industry can be found on NCVET's website <<http://www.ncvet.edu.au/publications/2143.html>>

Students and individuals

Students' suggestions for improving their vocational education and training experience

Josie Misko, Suellen Priest

The overall satisfaction of students with their training is used as a major indicator of the quality of training delivered in the vocational education and training (VET) system. It is derived from the Student Outcomes Survey, which has been run since the mid-1990s.

At the end of the survey respondents are asked for: *Your suggestions for improvement—do you have any suggestions for improving the training shown on the front of the form?* This information is fed back to the institutions that have provided the training. In this report, the authors provide the first national analysis of these verbatim suggestions.

They find that the bulk of the suggestions relate to eight domains:

- ◇ course relevance and design
- ◇ staff attributes and behaviours
- ◇ teaching and learning practices
- ◇ access to courses, facilities and services
- ◇ assessment practices
- ◇ learning resources, equipment and materials
- ◇ initial information provision
- ◇ administration and learning support services.

While there is some crossover with the training questions in the Student Outcomes Survey, the suggestions are wider in their coverage. This raises the issue of whether we should think about broadening the Student Outcomes Survey questionnaire, noting that this would have resource implications. The authors raise the possibility of whether an automated tool along the lines of CeQuery, used in the higher education sector, could be built. Whatever the results of these considerations, we should not lose sight of the fact that the verbatim comments provide the colour that can never be achieved through standard closed survey questions.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Statistical Program; see page 72 for details.

Students' suggestions for improving their vocational education and training experience can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2202.html>>

Work–life issues and participation in education and training

Natalie Skinner

The factors that influence the participation of low-skilled and low-paid workers in vocational education and training (VET) are the focus of a major research project, *Low-paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower-paid workers over the life cycle*, being undertaken by the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia.

Using data from the 2009 Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI), this report examines how work–life pressures influence the capacity and motivation of individuals to engage in education and training. The Australian Work and Life Index is an annual national survey of nearly 3000 employed persons and is representative of the Australian working population.

Future reports from the project will bring together the quantitative data in this report with the material from the qualitative components of the study, including interviews with low-paid workers in the aged care, food processing and retail industries.

Key findings

- ◆ Undertaking some form of training outside the workplace does result in a significantly higher work–life conflict for employees in low-paid occupations.
- ◆ Women in higher-paid occupations were particularly likely to experience a work–life penalty for their participation in education and training, relative to their male counterparts.
- ◆ Men in low-paid occupations are those most likely to be disengaged from current and future participation in education and training.
- ◆ Only a minority of employees anticipate undertaking a university-level qualification, with the majority expecting to do a VET course or other type of qualification.
- ◆ The most common reasons cited for not participating in education or training remain time and cost, despite most employees indicating that their employer would provide some support and that the outcomes would have employment benefits.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Work–life issues and participation in education and training can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2216.html>>

Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models

Kristine Giddy, Jessica Lopez, Anne Redman

One of the priorities of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda is to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The government recently announced significant reforms to employment services to ensure that more Indigenous Australians have the skills needed to get and keep a job.

It is therefore timely to examine the characteristics of employment service organisations that lead to sustainable employment for Indigenous Australians. Based on a selection of good-practice examples, this research has identified seven essential factors required for employment service organisations to achieve the best outcomes for their clients:

- ◆ having strong vision and understanding the importance of monitoring targets
- ◆ responding to the employment market
- ◆ maintaining strong relationships with community and business
- ◆ offering 'job related' and culturally appropriate training
- ◆ collaborating with Indigenous leaders and the community
- ◆ providing holistic support
- ◆ ensuring strong staff commitment.

A further four factors are identified as desirable:

- ◆ tailoring available funding to suit individual needs
- ◆ providing employment opportunities through internal enterprise
- ◆ learning from other organisations
- ◆ having alternative sources of funding.

This research provides a set of clear examples and principles for other employment service organisations, both Indigenous-owned and others, to build their own capacity to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job-seekers. These are summarised in a separate guide, which can be downloaded from the NCVET website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2125.html>>.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models can be found on NCVET's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2127.html>>

Cultural dimensions of Indigenous participation in education and training

Alfred Michael Dockery

It has been well documented that Indigenous Australians experience marked disadvantages across all dimensions of socio-economic wellbeing when compared with the life circumstances enjoyed by non-Indigenous Australians. This includes poorer educational outcomes, employment and economic status.

Central to this is the tension between the objectives of strengthening Indigenous cultural attachment and maintenance of elements of traditional lifestyles on the one hand and the objectives of achieving equity in mainstream social and economic indicators on the other.

This study examines the role of traditional Indigenous culture in shaping Indigenous Australians' engagement with education and training. It provides an important innovation to the existing literature by explicitly attempting to measure 'cultural attachment' and to model its relationships with socio-economic outcomes.

Key messages

- ◆ In non-remote areas, cultural attachment is complementary with both educational attainment and participation in vocational education and training.
- ◆ Whether individuals are living in remote or non-remote Australia, we can reject the view that there is a trade-off between maintenance of Indigenous culture and achievement in education and training.
- ◆ There is evidence both of education and training being pursued to enhance objectives relating to cultural maintenance, and of cultural attachment itself having an enabling effect on Indigenous people.
- ◆ However, those living in remote and very remote Australia are clearly disadvantaged in terms of their access to education and training, and this disproportionately affects Indigenous Australians with stronger attachment to their traditional culture.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Cultural dimensions of Indigenous participation in education and training can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2174.html>>

Early vocational education and training programs for young Aboriginal learners: Perceptions of practitioners and young people

Regan Harding

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without any research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own work-based research project.

Regan Harding participated in the 2008 community of practice. Regan is a Youth Project Officer at North Coast TAFE and is involved in North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships. Her research investigates the perceptions of students and school and technical and further education (TAFE) staff involved in the VTracks program.

VTracks is a program for Year 8 to Year 10 Aboriginal school students, the aim of the program being to increase the visibility and availability of VET. The program provides opportunities for students to explore different vocational areas and identify pathways into further education and employment. It emphasises cross-cultural orientation and the involvement of education and community networks. New South Wales's North Coast TAFE and North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships implemented this program in 2008.

The study comprised a survey of students and focus group interviews with students and school and TAFE staff, and was intended to guide strategies to increase the retention and engagement of young Aboriginal learners in education, training or employment.

Key messages

- ◇ VTracks is seen very positively by students, and school and TAFE staff.
- ◇ The challenges seen by study participants revolve around funding and resource issues. Participants see a need for more Aboriginal Education Workers, role models, cultural activities, assistance with transport, and curriculum and pastoral support.
- ◇ The author points to the need to sustain longer-term strategies and to move programs such as VTracks to the mainstream.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Early vocational education and training programs for young Aboriginal learners: Perceptions of practitioners and young people can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2196.html>>

The female 'tradie': Challenging employment perceptions in non-traditional trades for women

Fiona Shewring

One of the main research objectives of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is to build the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector. To assist this objective, NCVER has developed a program whereby new researchers are sponsored to attend its annual 'No Frills' conference. Four new researchers were supported to attend the 2008 conference in Launceston. One of these awards went to Fiona Shewring. This paper is based on her presentation at the conference.

The manual trades is an area where women are substantially under-represented. Despite many government initiatives over the past 30 years to open up the manual trades to women, discrimination and negative stereotypes about the ability of women to work in areas such as building and construction, boiler-making, fitting and machining, and painting and decorating have persisted.

This paper describes the experiences of 16 women who participated in training in trades not considered traditional for women at Illawarra Institute in New South Wales.

Key messages

- ◇ While it is difficult to accurately gauge the number of women in the manual trades, the number is very small, probably less than 2%.
- ◇ Employers continue to hold negative stereotypes about the ability of women to work in the manual trades.
- ◇ Women who have successfully gained employment in the manual trades tend to come from families where parents or siblings are already tradespeople.
- ◇ Strategies for encouraging women into the manual trades include: introductory and pre-apprenticeship courses, preferably involving work experience; clustering female students; and support from teachers in opening up job opportunities.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

The female 'tradie': Challenging employment perceptions in non-traditional trades for women can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2100.html>>

Job requirements and lifelong learning for older workers

Chris Ryan, Mathias Sinning

Australia's ageing population has prompted a policy focus on keeping older workers in the workforce longer. Of relevance to this is how older workers maintain and update their skills through participation in further education and training. The lower participation of older workers in training has been well documented. Reasons suggested for this have included fewer opportunities provided by employers and less time to recoup a return on the investment in training. A further factor may be whether or not there is a real need to upskill in order to stay in the labour force.

The first report from this research program looked at the relationship between individuals' literacy and numeracy skills and their use in the workplace, and paid particular attention to older workers. This second report investigates whether this relationship between skill level and skill use affects the propensity to undertake further education and training, especially for older workers.

Key findings

- ◇ Across all age groups, workers who report that their jobs are demanding, relative to their skills, are more likely to participate in further education and training. This finding suggests that, in addition to individual characteristics, features of the job also influence who undertakes training.
- ◇ Participation in further education and training is lower for older workers compared with younger workers, although they still show higher participation as relative skills use increases. The decline in participation for older workers is much stronger among workers with relatively low levels of education.

The first report from this program of research, which looks at the relationship between skill level and job requirements, is available from the NCVET website. An overview that summarises the findings from these two reports is also available.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

*Job requirements and lifelong learning
for older workers*
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2186.html>>

Linking flexible delivery and community development: The Wugularr story

Stuart Anderson

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports an academic scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners are sponsored to undertake university study at honours', master's or doctorate level.

Stuart Anderson received an academic scholarship in 2008 to assist with his Master's of Education at Charles Darwin University. Stuart is a Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator in Alcohol and Other Drugs, Youth Work at Charles Darwin University. His research investigates the flexible delivery of VET in Wugularr, a remote Indigenous community near Katherine in the Northern Territory.

As part of its core business, Charles Darwin University offers a range of VET training programs to Wugularr. One of these programs is the Sunrise Health Service's youth worker training program.

This paper evaluates the program from the community's perspective. The lessons learned, which are applicable to the wider VET sector, are also identified.

Key messages

- ◆ Overall, the participants were happy with the teaching and learning provided by the university but were less satisfied with its approach to engaging their community in the process.
- ◆ Building a relationship with the community is vital to improving VET practice in remote communities. This can be achieved by:
 - customising approaches to delivery and assessment so they recognise community languages and support community-oriented activities
 - incorporating digital technologies in teaching and learning
 - understanding that the cultural and family priorities of participants and building their trust tend to come before VET training in the community
 - being in it for the long haul and teaching skills not only applicable to their current workplace but also to the future.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Linking flexible delivery and community development: The Wugularr story can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2177.html>>

Literacy and numeracy skills and their use by the Australian workforce

Chris Ryan, Mathias Sinning

Against the backdrop of an ageing population, the focus of keeping older workers in the workforce has remained current, even though Australia has moved from an economic boom time into a downturn. One set of issues is the relationship between the skills of older workers and the skill requirements of jobs available to them. Of particular concern would be evidence of mismatch, since skills not used implies that our investment in education and training is not as effective as it should be. Furthermore, the challenge of keeping older workers in the labour force will be difficult to meet if the skill requirements of jobs exceed the skills of the workers.

This paper summarises the findings from two projects conducted in the first year of a three-year program of research. The first project looked at the relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and their use in the workplace. The analysis allows us to see whether workers in certain age groups are mismatched to their jobs, based on their literacy and numeracy skills. The second project investigated whether the relationship between skill level and skill use affects the propensity to undertake further education and training.

Key findings

- ◇ Older workers make as much use of their literacy and numeracy skills at work as younger workers. Skill mismatch is not a problem that affects older any more than younger workers.
- ◇ Workers who report that their jobs are demanding relative to their skills are more likely to participate in further education and training.
- ◇ Participation in further education and training is lower for older workers compared with younger workers, although they still show higher participation if their jobs are demanding relative to skills.

These findings suggest that older workers do not appear to be moving into less demanding 'transition' jobs in preparation for retirement. Lower participation of older workers in education and training is therefore not because they are in less demanding jobs, but is likely to be due to other factors such as fewer opportunities for training provided by employers or less time to recoup a return on investment in training.

Readers interested in further details of the analyses are pointed to the two full reports *Skill matches to job requirements* and *Job requirements and lifelong learning for older workers*, available from the NCVET website.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Literacy and numeracy skills and their use by the Australian workforce can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2184.html>>

Skill matches to job requirements

Chris Ryan, Mathias Sinning

Australia's ageing population has resulted in a policy focus on keeping older workers in the workforce for longer. One set of issues is the relationship between the skills of older workers and the skill requirements of jobs available to them. There are several implications of a mismatch between skill level and skill requirements. Older workers with skills that are not being used could be put to better use. On the flip side, if the skills of older workers are not high enough to meet the requirements of their jobs, it would be difficult to encourage them to stay in the labour market longer. If this is the case, could increased participation in training by older workers help them to fulfil the requirements of their jobs, and hence encourage them to stay longer?

This report looks at the relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and their use in the workplace, paying particular attention to older workers. The analysis allows us to see whether workers in certain age groups are mismatched to their jobs, based on the literacy and numeracy skills they have.

Key findings

- ◆ Across all age groups, workers with higher literacy and numeracy skills work in jobs that make more use of their skills compared with workers with lower skills.
- ◆ Older workers make as much use of their literacy and numeracy skills at work as younger workers. Skill mismatch does not seem to be a problem that affects older workers any more than their younger counterparts. This suggests that older workers do not appear to be moving into less demanding 'transition' jobs in preparation for retirement.

A second report from this program of research, which looks at how the relationship between skill level and job requirement affects the propensity to undertake further education and training, is available from the NCVET website. An overview that summarises the findings from these two reports is also available.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Skill matches to job requirements
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2185.html>>

Skills planning for industry growth: A case study of the Katherine arts industry

Catherine Curry

One of the main research objectives of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is to build the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector. To assist this objective, NCVER has developed a program whereby new researchers are sponsored to attend its annual 'No Frills' conference. Four new researchers were supported to attend the 2008 conference in Launceston. One of these awards went to Catherine Curry. This paper is based on her presentation at the conference.

The cultural industries have the potential to contribute in significant ways to income-generation and to the sustainability of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Successful Indigenous arts and crafts industries in the regions have been shown to reduce the flow of migration to the cities by offering jobs and business prospects at a local level.

To this end, the Department of Employment, Education and Training in the Northern Territory commissioned a skills audit of the local cultural industries in the Katherine region.

The paper describes the skills audit process and offers some suggestions for the use of skills audits in similar contexts.

Key messages

- ◆ The cultural industries in the Katherine region are rich and diverse and, with the development of the proposed Katherine Cultural Precinct, have the potential to benefit the local community, both economically and socially.
- ◆ The skills audit showed that the skill sets of arts practitioners were strong, but that high-level managers will be required to support the development of the Katherine Cultural Precinct. Business skills, which are currently lacking in the community, will also be required to run a multipurpose cultural centre.
- ◆ A detailed training and employment plan should be developed as a matter of priority to meet the gaps identified by the skills audit.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Skills planning for industry growth: A case study of the Katherine arts industry can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2098.html>>

Welfare to work: Does vocational education and training make a difference?

Tom Karmel, Kevin Mark, Nhi Nguyen

One of the most important social policy pushes in recent years has been to encourage individuals in the receipt of welfare payments to take up paid work. Welfare to Work initiatives have focused on four particular groups:

- ◇ parents of children aged between 6 and 15 years; these recipients will be required to seek part-time work if their youngest child has reached the age of 6 years
- ◇ mature-aged recipients aged between 50 and 64 years
- ◇ people with disabilities who can work part-time; this group will be required to seek part-time work
- ◇ the long-term unemployed.

An important aspect of this policy is the role that training plays in enabling individuals from these groups to obtain paid employment. In particular, it might be expected that vocational education and training (VET), with its emphasis on providing a 'second chance', would play an important role. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has recently published two reports on this: *The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work* by John Guenther, Ian Falk and Allan Arnott and *Complex not simple: The vocational education and training pathway from welfare to work* by Kate Barnett and John Spoehr. Both have focused on how VET can be delivered effectively to these groups.

The purpose of this paper, *Welfare to work: Does vocational education and training make a difference?* by Tom Karmel, Kevin Mark and Nhi Nguyen, looks at the more fundamental issue of whether VET does improve the employment prospects of the groups in question. It exploits data from the Student Outcomes Survey to construct samples that proxy the first three of the welfare groups listed above and models the post-training employment outcomes.

Key messages

- ◇ The completion of certificate III and above significantly improves employment prospects.
- ◇ The partial completion of a qualification or the completion of a certificate I or II is not likely to assist employment prospects.
- ◇ The impact of training is dependent on the underlying chances of employment of individuals. If they are reasonably high, then training is less likely to have an impact.

The conclusion is that VET can make a difference, but not any VET, and not for all individuals.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Statistical Program; see page 72 for details.

Welfare to work: Does vocational education and training make a difference? can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2105.html>>

Higher education in TAFE

Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett, Ann Kelly

As at June 2009, ten technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia are able to offer degree qualifications. The presence of such 'mixed sector' institutions is relatively recent in Australia, the consequence being that we do not yet know a great deal about this type of higher education or about how it may be reshaping boundaries in the tertiary education sector. This project sought to capture different perspectives about the nature of this provision.

This report is the culmination of desktop research and interviews with staff from state offices of higher education, senior managers at dual-sector universities, TAFE institutes that offer higher education and some that do not, and teachers and students across six states. It also considers several implications arising from the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008).

Key messages

- ◇ While numbers of higher education students in TAFE are small, these may well increase as governments strive to both meet their equity objectives and boost the proportion of the Australian population with a degree.
- ◇ A distinctive, although not unique, feature of higher education courses in TAFE is their applied orientation.
- ◇ Some of the TAFE institutes offering higher education see themselves developing as polytechnics, while others view their offering of higher education qualifications as an extension of their role as vocational education and training (VET) providers.
- ◇ Mixed-sector TAFE institutes aim to help their students negotiate the boundaries between VET and higher education qualifications and adapt to learning in university, including through the provision of greater learning support.
- ◇ Institutional and industrial relations structures are impeding growth of higher education in TAFE institutes.
- ◇ Almost every person consulted in the project raised the issue of TAFE's profile and its perceived lower status compared with universities.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Higher education in TAFE
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>

Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper

Gavin Moodie, Leesa Wheelahan, Stephen Billett, Ann Kelly

Although the development of 'mixed-sector' institutions is relatively recent in Australia, this provision is expected to increase as the boundaries between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education become increasingly blurred. This has prompted the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to commission Gavin Moodie and his colleagues to investigate the provision of higher education awards within technical and further education (TAFE) institutes.

As part of this investigation, this paper has been released with the intention of provoking discussion—readers are invited to respond directly to the authors by 1 June 2009.

The paper reviews how comparable vocational institutions in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand provide short-cycle higher education as part of their designated roles. It also considers several implications arising from the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education.

The research raises several issues about the emerging character of the interface between higher education and VET:

- ◆ Will new types of TAFE institutes emerge?
- ◆ Will there be new networked arrangements between VET and higher education providers?
- ◆ Will the strengths of the current systems be preserved?

It also argues that, to be consistent with international classifications, Australian diplomas and advanced diplomas should be considered higher education in level, although almost all are offered according to nationally prescribed VET requirements. Furthermore, the provision of diplomas and advanced diplomas in VET is under pressure at the same time as the boundaries between the sectors are becoming more fluid. It may be that the degree qualification increasingly replaces diplomas as the point of negotiation between the sectors.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2139.html>>

What's wrong with a career in hospitality? An examination of student choice

Simon Hamm

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, where VET practitioners without research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own work-based research project. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor, and NCVER publishes their research results.

Simon Hamm participated in the 2008 Community of Practice program. Simon is a teacher in Event Management at William Angliss TAFE. His research explores why, despite more labour market demand for skills in hospitality, students prefer a career in events management to hospitality. He also investigates factors influencing decision-making.

The study comprised interviews with event management and hospitality students to examine the different influences on students when choosing their particular career path.

Key messages

- ◇ Students reported working conditions, such as long hours and poor pay, as deterring them from a career in hospitality.
- ◇ Because they often rely on information from parents and friends rather than on those with greater knowledge about the sector, students had unrealistic expectations about the job status and pay of the events industry.

The author points to a greater role for employers in informing students about their industries and the career opportunities available to them.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

*What's wrong with a career in hospitality?
An examination of student choice*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2217.html>>

Teaching and learning

Competence and competency-based training: What the literature says

Hugh Guthrie

This literature review was commissioned by the National Quality Council as part of a joint initiative with the Council of Australian Governments to examine the framework underpinning the national training system.

It provides an historical account of the development of competency-based training (CBT) in Australia and summarises the issues arising from a number of reviews conducted on elements of the national training system. It also explores the variety of ways in which competence is conceived both in Australia and overseas.

The literature suggests that:

- ◇ competence can be conceptualised in two broad ways. One takes a view that competence is a personal construct, while the other grounds competence in the context of an occupation and even a particular workplace. It suggests that a balance needs to be struck between these two constructs
- ◇ support for CBT and training packages remains strong, but that attention needs to be given to the quality of both delivery and assessment. The literature also suggests that training packages could be better understood and used, and that some refining of the underpinning concepts, processes and products is required
- ◇ the professionalism of vocational education and training (VET) teachers and trainers needs to be re-emphasised and enhanced. The literature also suggests that perhaps it is time to revisit the nature and level of training for VET's professional staff.

Note: NCVER consultancy work with funding from TVET Australia; see page 72 for details.

*Competence and competency-based training:
What the literature says*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2153.html>>

Getting the knowledge–skills mix right in high-level vocational education and training qualifications

Annie Priest

One of the main research objectives of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is to build the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector. To assist this objective, NCVER has developed a program whereby new researchers are sponsored to attend its annual 'No Frills' conference. Four new researchers were supported to attend this year's conference in Launceston. One of these awards went to Annie Priest. This paper is based on her presentation at the conference.

Vocational education and trade qualifications on a par with university graduate certificates and graduate diplomas are a relatively recent addition to the VET sector's stable of offerings. They have emerged as industry demands workers with more than just technical skills and more than just theoretical knowledge.

This paper uses the Vocational Graduate Certificate and the Vocational Graduate Diploma in Educational Design in a Queensland technical and further education (TAFE) institute to examine how the 'traditional' knowledge and theory associated with higher-level qualifications can be accommodated within the framework of competency-based training and assessment. The paper raises some interesting, and provocative, questions about the status and value of these qualifications by comparison with their university counterparts.

Key messages

- ◆ Universities have been traditionally viewed as providing a theoretical education as a precursor to training for employment, while the VET sector is perceived as offering a practical, work-based education.
- ◆ The advent of higher-level vocational qualifications equivalent to some university postgraduate qualifications raises the issue of the inclusion of theoretical knowledge in the competency-based format of the vocational qualification.
- ◆ Getting the mix of applied and complex knowledge in higher-level VET qualifications is one of the big challenges of the curriculum development process. Careful attention to the language used in the competencies can ensure that the higher-order thinking and theoretical (underpinning) knowledge is successfully embedded in the qualification.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Getting the knowledge–skills mix right in high-level vocational education and training qualifications can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2099.html>>

Taking 'innovation' on the road

Jane Figgis, Yvonne Hillier

Both Jane Figgis and Yvonne Hillier recently completed research reports for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on trends in teaching and learning in vocational education and training (VET). Figgis focused on Australian initiatives within providers, while Hillier took a broader and international view. This work was the basis for a series of workshops in five jurisdictions.

This present report not only consolidates the perspectives of their earlier work but also develops the substantial common ground. Thus, it has become an additional stage in the research and offers a number of clear messages:

- ◆ Changing practice is neither a quick nor painless process. Moreover, an innovation does not have to be entirely new, just new to the team or institution attempting to implement it.
- ◆ Key to changing practice is accessing fresh ideas, which are often passed on through networks. However, those wanting to 'innovate' need to convince other colleagues of the need for change.
- ◆ Recasting practice and rethinking assumptions need to take account of deeply held values and experience. The most effective change may not be through radical reform, but through incremental improvements.
- ◆ Developing an organisational culture which encourages mainstream practitioners to reflect habitually on what they are doing and take action are what is needed, not a focus on 'star innovators'. Providing the resources to enable this is also important.

Those interested in this work are pointed to *Regenerating the Australian landscape of professional VET practice: Practitioner-driven changes to teaching and learning* by Jane Figgis and *Innovation in teaching and learning in vocational education and training: International perspectives* (a report and a podcast) by Yvonne Hillier.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Taking 'innovation' on the road
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2182.html>>

Beyond Mayer: Learning from delivering and assessing generic employability competencies

Mary Cushman

One of the main research objectives of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is to build the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector. To assist this objective, NCVER has developed a program whereby new researchers are sponsored to attend its annual 'No Frills' conference. Four new researchers were supported to attend the 2008 conference in Launceston. One of these awards went to Mary Cushman. This paper is based on her presentation at the conference.

In Australia in the early 1990s—and throughout the world—generic employability skills were identified as crucial attributes to enable successful participation in the labour market. In 1992 with the publication of the Mayer report, the first wave of these employability skills—called key competencies by Mayer—appeared on the Australian education landscape. These key competencies and their successor, employability skills, have become integral components of training packages within the VET sector.

Over the years, the effectiveness of generic employability skills has been the topic of much heated debate, with many commentators arguing that they are being neglected in the training system. This paper contributes to that discussion by offering some insights into how trainers understand generic employability competencies and how they approach the delivery and assessment of these skills.

Key messages

- ◆ A great deal of conflicting commentary and advice characterises the content and implementation of generic employability skills.
- ◆ Teachers in technical and further education (TAFE) institutes and workplace trainers experience difficulties understanding and teaching the generic employability skills embedded in industry training packages.
- ◆ Some teachers of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment—the mandatory qualification for teachers assessing in training packages—also have difficulty understanding the scope and content of generic employability skills.

Cushman argues that it is neither reasonable nor appropriate for the interpretation of generic skills to be left to trainers. Furthermore, a national strategy must be developed that is clear, concise, comprehensive and, most importantly, implementable.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Beyond Mayer: Learning from delivering and assessing generic employability competencies can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2097.html>>

Adult literacy and numeracy: Research and future strategy

Kate Perkins

From 2002 to 2006 the Australian Government funded the Adult Literacy Research Program (ALRP), which was managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

NCVER commissioned two projects to reflect on the research undertaken through the program. The first, the Adult Literacy Resource, brings together the key messages in a 'wiki' for practitioners (<<http://www.adultliteracyresource.edu.au>>). The wiki is designed to get adult language, literacy and numeracy practitioners thinking about how they can apply the key messages from the research in their work.

As a companion piece to the Adult Literacy Resource, this report by Kate Perkins highlights how the research contributed to the adult language, literacy and numeracy sector through its primary focus on the needs of practitioners and individuals. The report draws attention to the gaps in the body of knowledge of literacy and numeracy issues. The place of literacy and numeracy within the current policy focus on social inclusion and skills reform is also highlighted.

Key messages

- ◇ A clearly articulated policy framework is needed to provide a vision for adult literacy and numeracy skills development for the future.
- ◇ Although there are a number of successful adult literacy and numeracy skills development programs in place, as well as a wealth of information to draw on, a lack of strategic planning has led to a fragmented approach and inconsistencies in the development and delivery of programs.
- ◇ Strategies are needed to raise awareness among key decision-makers to ensure that adult literacy and numeracy is seen as a mainstream concern and not merely an issue for a minority of people. This may entail the adoption of simpler concepts and terminology, and a move from talking about literacy and numeracy to discussing core or foundation skills.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Program; see page 72 for details.

*Adult literacy and numeracy:
Research and future strategy*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2162.html>>

A new social capital paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, policy and pedagogy

Jo Balatti, Stephen Black, Ian Falk

The purpose of this project was to produce guidelines on how to deliver adult literacy and numeracy education and training using a social capital approach. In this context, 'social capital' refers to the networks that operate during resourcing, course design, recruitment, teaching and evaluation. The study focused on three specific sectors—health, finance and justice. The study found that the numbers and types of networks or partnerships that currently exist between adult literacy and numeracy providers and organisations in these sectors vary considerably. The under-representation of public education and training providers in these partnerships was a consistent feature of the study.

Key messages

The authors argue:

- ◆ A national and collaboratively developed adult literacy and numeracy policy, embracing social inclusion and social capital, is needed, as it is this which underpins the partnerships necessary for delivering effective adult literacy and numeracy education and training. Whole-of-government approaches to adult literacy and numeracy development are therefore more likely to result in effective policy.
- ◆ Effective partnerships require philosophical compatibility and common understandings of goals and indicators of progress.
- ◆ Teaching based on a social capital perspective encourages individual learners to draw on and develop networks that can help improve their learning.
- ◆ In contrast to burgeoning personal financial literacy programs, government promotion of partnership initiatives between adult literacy and numeracy providers and the health and justice sectors is lacking.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Program; see page 72 for details.

*A new social paradigm for adult literacy:
Partnerships, policy and pedagogy*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2170.html>>

Innovation in teaching and learning in vocational education and training: International perspectives

Yvonne Hillier

Teaching and learning is the core business of vocational education and training (VET) providers. Finding ways to improve these practices is at the heart of a high-quality VET system. That is why in late 2007 the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) commissioned two authors to examine the characteristics, and find examples, of innovative teaching and learning practice in Australia and in Europe.

This is the international paper, written by Yvonne Hillier, whose approach was to draw on information available from websites and other literature, as well as from personal contacts and experience. It is not written to provide solutions. Rather, it aims to open our minds and thinking to other possibilities, drawn mainly from the United Kingdom and Europe, which may still need to be contextualised to work effectively in Australia.

What follows, along with Jane Figgis's study of developments in Australia, was designed to inform a series of workshops across the country, where NCVER heard how practitioners can best use this research, and gathered further contributions to our knowledge of good teaching and learning in VET.

Key messages

- ◆ It is important for practitioners to be able to step back from their 'daily grind' to think about what, and how, they can do things differently. They need to be supported to test new approaches in a culture of active experimentation.
- ◆ Networks and centres of excellence are very important in promoting better teaching and learning. Technologies can be used to support networks of practitioners and resource banks to foster better professional practice and help practitioners exchange ideas and resources.
- ◆ New technologies and the workplace can also be used to support learning. Brokerage and partnership arrangements are particularly important in supporting effective work-based learning and better engagement between providers and employers.
- ◆ Collaboration across educational sectors can be beneficial. The creation of 'foundation degrees' in the United Kingdom provides a way of developing employment-focused awards involving both further and higher education and employers.

Those interested in this work should also read *Regenerating the Australian landscape of professional VET practice: Practitioner-driven changes to teaching and learning* by Jane Figgis, available at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2136.html>>.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Innovation in teaching and learning in vocational education and training: International perspectives can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2137.html>>

Regenerating the Australian landscape of professional VET practice: Practitioner-driven changes to teaching and learning

Jane Figgis

Teaching and learning is the core business of vocational education and training (VET) providers. That is why in late 2007 the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) commissioned two authors to examine the characteristics, and find examples, of innovative teaching and learning practice in Australia and in Europe.

This is the Australian report, written by Jane Figgis, whose approach was to talk to managers and practitioners and get close to their field of endeavour. These people were keen to be involved because they concurred with NCVER's aim of initiating a conversation about their profession. This group of people were also keen to see good ideas translated into practice and to encourage the spread of good practice.

What follows, along with Yvonne Hillier's separate study of developments in the United Kingdom and Europe, formed the basis of a series of workshops across the country, where NCVER heard how practitioners can best use this research, and gathered further contributions to our knowledge of good teaching and learning in VET.

Key messages

- ◆ Six trends in contemporary practice deserve further consideration: using authentic learning tasks as the basis for learning; encouraging peer learning; applying e-learning technologies; using the workplace as the primary site for learning and skill development; personalising learning; and devolving support for teaching and learning so that it is close to the practitioner.
- ◆ Practitioners who actively think about changing their practice generally possess four characteristics. They are: reflective; responsive to and respectful of learners; closely engaged with local enterprises; and reach out to learn from and share their own knowledge with other practitioners.
- ◆ Networks can help practitioners to foster better professional practice and help them exchange ideas and resources.

The companion study by Yvonne Hillier can be found at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2137.html>>.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Regenerating the Australian landscape of professional VET practice: Practitioner-driven changes to teaching and learning can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2136.html>>

Recognising non-formal and informal learning: Participant insights and perspectives

Larry Smith, Berwyn Clayton

Recognition of the skills acquired through non-formal or informal learning is important for a number of reasons. Individuals gain a feeling of worth and self-confidence, which encourages them to continue to upgrade their skills and knowledge, often leading to formal qualifications and improved employment outcomes. The process of recognition of prior learning (RPL) also ensures that knowledge and skills already held do not need to be repeated.

While recognition of prior learning is seen as an integral and valued component of the learning pathway and in many cases a critical catalyst to accessing formal education, both practitioners and learners have criticised recognition of prior learning for being difficult to access and implement.

There have been many studies into the nature, value and uptake of recognition of prior learning. To date there has been only a limited exploration of the experiences of people who have sought to have the skills they acquired through non-formal or informal learning recognised.

By offering interesting insights from the perspective of candidates who have presented themselves for recognition of prior learning, this report fills the gap. It covers how they become aware of their options and the factors that encourage or inhibit access to recognition of their skills and knowledge.

Key messages

- ◇ The language associated with the recognition of prior learning process discourages people from taking advantage of it. Training institutions and systems should undertake a rigorous audit of the language used in the recognition of prior learning process and in the associated documentation, ensuring significant input from present and past candidates.
- ◇ Training institutions should ensure that mentors and assessors used in the recognition of prior learning have high-level interpersonal skills, are strongly supportive of the recognition pathway, and have high credibility in their field.
- ◇ There is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that encouraging candidates to reflect on their learning, which should lie at the heart of the recognition of prior learning process, significantly improves their confidence and contributes to successful future learning.
- ◇ Many people remain unaware that recognition of non-formal learning is an option for them. 'Word of mouth' has been the most powerful mechanism for promotion, but there is a need for clear information regarding recognition of prior learning to be provided to individuals as early as possible.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Recognising non-formal and informal learning: Participant insights and perspectives
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2084.html>>

Problem-based learning: Student engagement, learning and contextualised problem-solving

Mark Mossuto

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a Community of Practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without any research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own work-based research project. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor, and NCVER publishes their research results.

Mark Mossuto participated in the 2008 Community of Practice. Mark is a Senior Educator and Teaching and Learning Coordinator in the Business College at RMIT University. His research investigates the level of student engagement with problem-based learning, a teaching method where students learn through solving real-life situations or problems. RMIT University in Melbourne adopted this teaching approach for the advertising and public relations programs offered by the Business TAFE School in 2007 and 2008.

Through the use of a survey and interviews with students, this project sought to examine whether engagement, questioning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced using the problem-based learning approach.

Key messages

- ◇ Overall, students reported that the problem-based learning approach was beneficial to their engagement with learning.
- ◇ The success factors integral to this approach include the quality of the teacher, the student's willingness to participate, and industry support of the program.

The author also provides guidelines for assisting teachers adopting a problem-based learning approach and makes some suggestions on how problem-based learning can be used for the delivery of training packages.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Problem-based learning: Student engagement, learning and contextualised problem-solving can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2198.html>>

Practitioner experiences and expectations with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104): A discussion of the issues

Berwyn Clayton

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104) has become the standard teaching qualification in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. Therefore the extent to which it provides competency in training and assessment, arguably the key element of being an effective teacher, is a fundamental issue. Berwyn Clayton is investigating the extent to which practitioners believe that this certificate provides an effective foundation for the delivery and assessment of training in the VET environment.

Through interviews and surveys with teachers, trainers and registered training organisation managers, this project is designed to explore individual practitioner experiences and expectations upon completion of the TAA40104 qualification, after approximately a six-month period of application in the field and then, approximately 12 months after completion, a final reflection.

This background paper provides a history of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and reviews the limited research on this qualification. The paper also outlines some of the key issues surrounding TAA40104, such as uneven quality, inconsistencies in delivery and the perceived inability to meet the skills and knowledge needs of trainers in workplaces or teachers in institutional settings. These issues provide the impetus for a review of TAA40104 being undertaken by the skills council, Innovation & Business Skills Australia (IBSA).

A key message emerging from this background paper is that the position of TAA40104 as the key qualification for VET practitioners is under pressure. This is highlighted by the availability of other relevant qualifications now available to practitioners and by industry concerns about assessment approaches and assessment decision-making.

The project is due for completion in late 2010.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Practitioner experiences and expectations with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104): A discussion of the issues can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2183.html>>

VET system

Apprenticeships and traineeships in the downturn

Tom Karmel, Josie Misko

The purpose of this paper is to describe what we know about apprenticeships and traineeships, with a view to assessing the likely impact of the current economic downturn on them.

Key messages

- ◇ There is considerable evidence that the downturn has hit apprenticeships, although there appears to be a lesser effect on traineeships.
- ◇ In terms of what matters, we argue that it is commencements rather than completions that need attention.
- ◇ Policies need to distinguish between apprentices and trainees and take account of the very different circumstances that apply at the occupation level.
- ◇ It is important in the debate to remember the genesis of traineeships—the high levels of unemployment in the 1980s. They were primarily seen as a way of reducing unemployment, rather than a skilling strategy. This may be particularly pertinent to disadvantaged groups for which traineeships may be especially important.

Note: NCVER consultancy work funded through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; see page 72 for details.

Apprenticeships and traineeships in the downturn
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2197.html>>

High-quality traineeships: Identifying what works

Erica Smith, Paul Comyn, Ros Brennan, Andy Smith

Introduced to Australia in the mid-1980s, traineeships have adapted the model of apprenticeships—combining work with on-the-job learning and formal training—to a wide range of occupations.

The aim of this research was not to evaluate or comment on the general value or suitability of Australian traineeships. The researchers set out to identify high-quality practices in traineeships through interviews with stakeholders involved in the traineeship system and through case studies in six industry areas—cleaning, childcare, construction, retail, finance and insurance and meat processing.

The report suggests a number of policy measures that could improve both the practice and image of traineeships. As an ideal, the high-quality features set a target for which to aim. A good practice guide has been developed from the research to assist employers and the vocational education and training sector to meet this target.

High-quality traineeships were found to be those where:

- 1 Trainees attain a sense of worth and occupational identity, and where a pathway to higher qualifications and career progression is provided.
- 2 Employers obtain a competitive edge and are better able to attract and retain staff.
- 3 The content of the training (as codified in training packages and the associated resources) is current and industry-relevant, and complemented by high-quality, current learning resources prepared by teachers and trainers with good industry knowledge. There is a focus on underpinning knowledge as well as skills.
- 4 There is a well-designed and -delivered off-the-job component as well as on-the-job learning.
- 5 The training provider has close and constructive engagement with the employer and with the trainee.
- 6 There is a strong commitment on the part of the employer towards traineeships, including supportive supervisory staff and a suitable learning environment.
- 7 Intermediaries, such as group training organisations, provide the information and support that employers and trainees need to sustain a good working relationship.

The authors assert that funding incentives are not the main driver for either initial or continued participation in traineeships. Many employers participate even when no subsidies are available because they are convinced of the benefits.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

High-quality traineeships: Identifying what works
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2191.html>>

An overview of vocational education and training in Australia and its links to the labour market

Brian Knight, Peter Mlotkowski

Understanding Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system can be daunting for observers. This paper, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, was therefore prepared for the research team undertaking the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Learning for Jobs VET Policy Review that visited Australia in April 2008.

This report is intended to make the VET system and its inner workings more comprehensible to observers. The authors have also included some critical commentary on various aspects of the system—strengths, weaknesses and possible alternative approaches. This draws on the extensive body of research and statistical information on VET that the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has published, along with information from other agencies, particularly the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Since this report was prepared in early 2008 there have been a number of significant developments, including:

- ◇ the deterioration in Australia's medium-term economic outlook in the wake of the world financial crisis. One would hazard that skills shortages will not feature so obviously among current issues over the next year or two
- ◇ the release of the *Review of Australian higher education: Final report*. If its recommendations are implemented, then the structure of the tertiary education sector will change significantly
- ◇ the establishment of Skills Australia, a body to advise on Australia's current, emerging and future workforce skills needs and workforce development needs
- ◇ an increasing emphasis on competition and contestability. Notable here is the initiative in Victoria to build a VET system based on individual entitlements, which can be exercised at whatever provider the student chooses
- ◇ a move from an ostensibly input-focused federal system to one focused on results, meaning that states and territories now have greater certainty of funding and flexibility in how they achieve their agreed service delivery outcomes
- ◇ through the Productivity and Participation COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Working Group, the establishment of long-term training targets
- ◇ increased investment in the VET system, including expansion of training places through the Productivity Places Program, the introduction of trade training centres in schools and targeted infrastructure to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the sector.

While this report has not incorporated these developments, and more recent statistics have become available, the information and the key messages it contains are still relevant.

Note: NCVER consultancy work funded through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; see page 72 for details.

An overview of vocational education and training in Australia and its links to the labour market can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2117.html>>

Assessing the impact of NCVER's research

John Stanwick, Jo Hargreaves, Francesca Beddie

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has undertaken this project to examine whether its research has an impact in the vocational education and training (VET) sector and, if so, the nature of the impact.

This was not a straightforward exercise. There are challenges associated with defining what is meant by impact, with connecting the outcomes of research to policy and practice, and with identifying measures which will provide robust but not unrealistic levels of evidence.

This project also developed a model to help in assessing the impact of NCVER's research and in identifying practices that will further enhance the influence that research has on policy and practice. The model allows for identification of impact across four categories: knowledge production, capacity building, informing policy and informing practice.

Key messages

- ◆ The case studies provided a positive assessment of NCVER's research impact, with examples of impact in each of the four categories.
- ◆ Bibliometric analysis is useful, but does not capture every aspect of research impact.
- ◆ Dissemination is key to research impact, suggesting that NCVER's emphasis on this aspect of research is appropriate. Harnessing researchers in this endeavour is worth considering.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Assessing the impact of NCVER's research
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2152.html>>

Competition in the training market

Editors: Tom Karmel, Francesca Beddie, Susan Dawe

'Competition' and 'contestability' are now part of the vocational education and training (VET) lexicon. But do we know what they mean? Do choice and competition lead to better outcomes? Does a less-than-perfect training market justify the intervention of central planners? What do students and employers need to make sensible decisions about training? What rules and institutions give the best outcomes; that is, what should the 'market design' look like?

These are important questions but, despite the fact that the fifth of the current five national research priorities is *Enabling VET providers to compete effectively: by identifying the barriers VET providers face to operating effectively in a competitive environment*, the specific issue of competition did not whet the appetite of researchers bidding for grants funded by the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program. Perhaps this is because market design in VET is an area still shrouded in fog.

To assist in lifting the fog, in late 2008, NCVER commissioned six people to write essays about competition in the Australian training market. Most were from outside the VET sector. In order to ensure their ideas were tied into current concerns within VET, NCVER went on to invite six insiders to respond to the essays. The results from both groups are contained in this volume.

The participants in this exercise do not entirely agree with each other. But there is general acknowledgement that the risks associated with the state determining the supply and demand for training mean that governments cannot retreat from the training market. However, the role of the state, relative to that of individuals and employers, is contentious.

A leitmotif in this volume is the critical role of information. Irrespective of whether we believe in planning, training supply or allowing the consumers (individuals and businesses) to dictate provision, high-quality information is needed.

I hope these essays and the responses to them make a useful contribution to the debate about market design in the VET sector.

Note: This publication was produced through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program; see page 72 for details.

Competition in the training market
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2150.html>>

How a 'tertiary education' sector impacts on the way NCVER thinks about research and statistics

Sandra Pattison, Jo Hargreaves

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) was asked by TAFE Directors Australia to consider, in a discussion paper for their conference held on the Gold Coast in September 2009, how a 'tertiary education' sector impacts on the way we think about research and statistics.

It has been apparent for some time that it makes little sense to consider vocational and higher education research issues in isolation. A research and information base covering the whole of the tertiary education sector would better reflect the realities of the system and provide a more coherent platform for policy. In addition, an integrated approach to statistical collections is desirable, taking into account the need for a common core set of standards and a unique student identifier to assist in the coherence of data.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVER Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

How a 'tertiary education' sector impacts on the way NCVER thinks about research and statistics can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2200.html>>

A competent recovery? Economic downturn and Australia's vocational education and training system

Richard Sweet

This paper reflects on some of the challenges for the vocational education and training (VET) sector in responding to the current economic crisis and ensuring that it is well placed to meet the demands of the recovery phase. It is the result of a roundtable organised by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) at Parliament House, Canberra, held on 30 July 2009.

The forum participants identified a number of groups particularly affected by an economic downturn. As well as those made redundant, new entrants to the labour market—notably young people and recent migrants—and those who are generally disadvantaged in the labour market are particularly vulnerable. The apprenticeship system, because of its reliance on employers offering apprenticeships, is also directly affected.

Key messages

- ◇ In terms of youth, there is overwhelming agreement on the importance of education and training in the downturn, and this is driven by short-term considerations—the need to keep young people usefully engaged—and long-term considerations—the need to have skilled people in the future.
- ◇ The downturn puts the spotlight on a number of tensions within VET:
 - the role of institution-based training relative to workplace training, noting that apprenticeships come under pressure if there are insufficient numbers offered by employers. There are clearly different views on this, with some questioning the absolute preoccupation with the apprenticeship model, and those affirming its superiority
 - the type of education and training that should be promoted; in particular, there is much support for vocational education which is more broadly based, as distinct from the narrow industry focus of current training packages. We also need to be mindful of the need to ensure that students are engaged in their training, particularly the least academic, who will be most affected by the downturn
 - the funding structures, which make it difficult to develop new models. New governance and funding models may be required to create fluidity between the sectors and with fewer institutional barriers.

Note: This publication was produced through the NCVER Core Research Program; see page 72 for details.

A competent recovery? Economic downturn and Australia's vocational education and training system can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2193.html>>

Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency

Josie Misko, Sian Halliday-Wynes

This paper investigates how technical and further education (TAFE) institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency. This issue is pertinent because TAFE institutes are increasingly expected to operate in an environment of high public accountability, greater fiscal restraint and expanded competition for government funding. Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) suggestions for the implementation of ongoing market reform in the vocational education and training (VET) system will require institutes to further focus on effectiveness and efficiency.

The authors interviewed nine TAFE institute directors and 59 of their senior and middle managers in South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. A support document of institute-specific case studies accompanies this paper. See <www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2169.html>.

Key messages

- ◆ Externally imposed requirements for funding accountability and regulatory compliance are the main drivers of institute processes and systems for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness and efficiency. This applies both to institutes within centralised governance arrangements and to those in devolved governance systems.
- ◆ Regardless of governance structures, strong managerial leadership is critical to the evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency.
- ◆ TAFE institutes engage with employers and industry bodies to better understand training demand, but employers do not always speak with one voice.
- ◆ TAFE institutes have a general understanding of their markets and business. This may help them to survive in a more competitive environment, but they will require more robust systems for working out the cost-efficiency of their operations.

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Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency can be found on NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2169.html>>

Measuring educational outcomes: Vocational education and training

Tom Karmel

This paper was presented to the NatStats08 conference *Working together for an informed Australian society* in November 2008.

The vocational education and training (VET) sector has a long tradition of measuring and reporting outcomes. The public face of this is the *Annual national report of the Australian vocational education and training system* published (and tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament) since 1994. The reporting framework has undergone a number of changes corresponding to revision in high-level strategies developed by the former Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).¹ This, however, is about to change. The catalyst for a radical examination of the reporting framework is the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) reform agenda. This reform agenda is shaking up the funding relationships between the Commonwealth and the states and will place increasing reliance on measuring and reporting outcomes as distinct from focusing on the resources used (that is, inputs).

In this paper, I provide a history of performance measurement for the VET sector, beginning with the creation of the Australian National Training Authority and ending with what we know of the current reforms. As well as describing the various measures, I discuss the challenges that are thrown up by indicators. I conclude with my suggestions for indicators for the vocational education and training system.

¹ In 2005 the Australian National Training Authority was abolished and its functions assumed by the Department of Education, Science and Training (now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations).

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*Measuring educational outcomes:
Vocational education and training*
can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2128.html>>

Careers in vocational education and training: What are they really like?

Michele Simons, Roger Harris, Val Pudney, Berwyn Clayton

Little is known about the vocational education and training (VET) workforce. In particular, little is known about the nature of careers and career pathways in VET. This is an issue, given the age of the current VET workforce.

This study examines the nature of career pathways for various groups of VET employees, including teachers, general staff and educational managers. It did this principally through a survey of nearly 1100 staff from 43 public and private providers.

While the project is a first step in reconceptualising careers and developing new and better employment arrangements, other work remains to be done. This includes developing useful typologies of those who work in the sector, as well as how their careers begin and develop, and how they work and want to work.

Key messages

- ◆ Careers in VET are characterised by high levels of mobility, with VET staff largely focused on two outcomes—job satisfaction and security of employment.
- ◆ Because staff strongly value job satisfaction and the esteem and support of their colleagues and managers, VET leaders and managers need to create working environments that meet the aspirations of staff. This will be a key determinant of successful workforce development strategies in the future.
- ◆ Current professional development in the sector is not even handed. Staff in management positions are best served by existing arrangements. Teachers and general staff are less well accommodated by the available mechanisms.

The study is part of a program of research examining the factors which affect and help build the capability of VET providers. Readers interested in other components of the research program on building VET provider capability, of which this report is a component, should visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au>. Reports of particular interest will be those by Callan et al. (2007) on leadership (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1802.html>), Smith and Hawke (2008) on human resource management (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2041.html>) and Hawke (2008) on workforce development (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2049.html>).

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*Careers in vocational education and training:
What are they really like?*
can be found on NCVER's website
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2114.html>

VET in context

Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia

Tom Karmel

The split between higher education and vocational education and training (VET) in Australia is not clean, with the majority of universities registered to provide VET courses and a number of technical and further education (TAFE) institutes offering degrees.

This paper discusses a number of aspects of this education sector: the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which describes the qualifications offered by the three education sectors (schools, higher education and VET); the student characteristics of the higher education and VET sectors; a characterisation of higher education and VET providers; and student movement between the two sectors.

Key messages

- ◇ Many education providers operate in both the higher education and VET sectors and many have links with providers in the other sector.
- ◇ There are clear differences between the two sectors in terms of approach (competency-based for VET, skills and underpinning knowledge for higher education), and accreditation, governance and funding arrangements.
- ◇ Higher education and VET differ in terms of student characteristics. The higher education sector is more concentrated among school leavers, while VET is a sector for all ages and has much better coverage of rural and regional areas, and of equity groups.
- ◇ The numbers of students transferring between the two sectors are substantial but are relatively small compared with the numbers following traditional pathways of school to TAFE or higher education.

In contemplating closer integration between higher education and VET, I sound some words of warning. First, it would be a mistake to let the university way of doing things take over. The VET sector has many advantages, especially for those who have poor educational backgrounds. Second, bigger is not necessarily better. Finally, any integration needs to build on the VET sector not weaken it. For example, it would be unwise to integrate diplomas with higher education and leave only certificates to the VET sector. It would be better to make use of VET's wide coverage to teach diplomas and the early years of some degrees.

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Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncvet.edu.au/publications/2115.html>>

The contribution of vocational education and training to Australia's skills base

Tom Karmel

The vocational education and training (VET) sector is not as well understood as the school and university sectors. People understand that it is about giving individuals skills for work and for meeting the skill requirements of business. But many fail to realise that it is very broad and goes far beyond the traditional trades. Indeed, change to management and commerce is the largest area of activity within VET.

The link between the VET sector and the labour market also needs to be considered; it is too easy to simplify the relationship between training and the workforce. For example, while most graduates of trade training work in the trades, this is the exception rather than the rule, since most VET graduates work in occupations other than the field in which they trained. This means that the bulk of VET, while vocational, is of a generic nature, with the skills being used in a wide range of occupations. In addition, we know that skills are also learned on the job. The looseness in the relationship between training and work can also be seen in the spread of qualifications held by people in a particular occupation and the changes in these patterns over time. The paper also points out that not all qualifications are valued equally by the labour market. For example, a certificate III/IV in architecture and building commands a considerable premium relative to other fields. Similarly, high-level qualifications are not valued in some occupations. A transport worker or a plant operator does not need a degree to get a job in their field.

The paper ends with some thoughts on the implications of the current downturn on training. We need to worry about possible skills shortages emerging when the economy moves into a recovery phase. However, this is more an issue for the trades than for most other occupations. A number of reasons can be offered here: trade employment is very cyclical; trade training takes a long time; and apprentices (mostly young men) are the main source of entry into trades. Other occupations are better placed because the link between training and the occupation is looser and the recruitment pool is much larger.

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The contribution of vocational education and training to Australia's skills base can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2151.html>>

Australia and India: Facing the twenty-first century skills challenge

Francesca Beddie

The governments of India and Australia are working to enhance cooperation on training, at both official and industry level. As part of the exchange of ideas, Francesca Beddie, General Manager, Research, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, visited India in August 2009 at the invitation of the Australia–India Council. This paper is an expanded version of the speech she delivered at the second Global Skills Summit organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce.

Australia and India are very different countries in terms of population, income per capita, major industries and economic sectors, yet they share features of relevance to the development of skills in the twenty-first century. Like Australia, India is a federation with responsibility for education and training shared between the national and state governments. In both countries, distance is a factor for many industries, including the training sector. Although higher education is of considerable importance and highly valued in Australia and India, future gains in productivity will also depend on developing the supply of trained workers with intermediate-level knowledge and skills. This will lead not only to demand for whole vocational qualifications but also part-qualifications or skill sets.

Key messages

- ◆ Further exchanges at the national government level could explore issues of mutual interest in the following:
 - the development of qualifications frameworks suited to a global labour market
 - the engagement of industry in a national training system
 - the necessity for training that is both suitable to the learner and delivers high-quality outcomes.
- ◆ There is scope to think more about cooperation on flexible delivery models that harness both technology and strong teaching skills.
- ◆ At this stage in the development of the Indian system, cooperation at the provider level is likely to be most fruitful at the level of vocational teacher education.

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*Australia and India: Facing the
twenty-first century skills challenge*
can be found on NCVET's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2201.html>>

New directions in European vocational education and training policy and practice: Lessons for Australia

Roger Harris, Michele Simons, Katie Maher

While Australia can be justifiably proud of its vocational education and training (VET) system, it is always worth considering what is going on internationally. Europe, in particular, has been modernising its education and training systems to make them more competitive and to help create additional and better jobs. This has involved reform across several areas, including competitiveness, social cohesion and the structure of qualifications frameworks. Many of these issues are very familiar to us.

This work has been informed by people reflecting on policy developments during a period of substantial change. Many commented on the impact and pace of reform, recognising that, while it would be nice to 'slow things down', there is a strong sense of reform having made positive impacts.

Key messages

- ◆ Developing common standards for quality and for qualifications frameworks is an important issue.
- ◆ Changes in the labour market are impacting on education. One tension lies in the challenge of balancing educational aims and labour market needs.
- ◆ The number of learners moving between VET and higher education in either direction is still relatively small. One of the significant challenges for Australia is to ensure seamless pathways between the sectors and to build a system of educational choice.
- ◆ Australia could pay more attention to the validation of learning through experience, where, in addition to the outcome, an emphasis is placed on the learner's ability to engage in the learning process. This would inform debate over the meaning of competence.
- ◆ The qualifications, professional development and wellbeing of VET teachers are central issues for European policy-makers, but have not been addressed in any substantial way in Australia. In addition, the centrality of teachers and trainers to reform in Europe is in sharp contrast to the experience of VET teachers and trainers in Australia.

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New directions in European vocational education and training policy and practice: Lessons for Australia can be found on NCVER's website
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Some ideas from England: A practitioner's perspective

Robin Shreeve

Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system is well regarded internationally, in particular for its competency-based training and flexible delivery. Yet we can also learn from the experiences in other countries.

In March 2009, NCVER invited Robin Shreeve, Principal and Chief Executive of City of Westminster College in the United Kingdom (UK), to present at a seminar on developments in vocational education and training in the UK, where VET is known as the skills or further education (FE) sector.

This paper provides Shreeve's views on the UK system and his insights into lessons for Australia.

Key messages

- ◇ The English and Australian systems, while sharing some similarities, have distinct differences socially, economically and politically.
- ◇ One of the biggest differences between Australian technical and further education (TAFE) institutes and English FE colleges is the student profile. In the UK over 40% of students use FE colleges as the primary pathway to gain university entrance rather than as direct preparation for a job.
- ◇ Foundation degrees in the UK (equivalent to the first two years of a bachelor degree) are largely delivered by FE colleges and offer a 'cross over' level qualification between VET and higher education. This model is worth considering in Australia if we are to increase articulation into higher education.
- ◇ Course success rates are used as a key performance measure for FE colleges. Used appropriately, they emphasise learner achievement and clearly affect institutions' behaviour.

Those interested in this work should also read *New directions in European VET policy and practice: Lessons for Australia* by Roger Harris, Michele Simons and Katie Maher (forthcoming).

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Some ideas from England: A practitioner's perspective can be found on NCVER's website
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2161.html>>

What is 'social capital' and how can vocational education and training help develop it?

Suellen Priest

Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system aims to give students practical skills and competencies. Recent research shows that in addition to these skills, VET students are also developing social capital through their training.

Social capital in this context comprises the networks, shared values and understandings between people, that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together.

This paper draws on several studies commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and discusses the link between social capital and vocational education and training.

Key messages

- ◇ Students are building social capital by developing new networks, and gaining confidence and self-esteem through the respect they receive from their teachers and classmates. This has helped some students, in particular marginalised young people, to find work and interact more easily with those around them.
- ◇ While many students are gaining social capital outcomes incidentally, VET instructors can provide additional opportunities for their students by encouraging them to interact and work collaboratively and inviting people from potentially useful networks to co-teach or participate in the training.
- ◇ VET providers can build social capital by developing partnerships with communities, schools and employers.

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What is 'social capital' and how can vocational education and training help develop it?
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◆ **NCVER Core Research Program**

NCVER's inhouse research and evaluation program undertakes projects which are strategic to the vocational education and training sector. These projects are developed and conducted by NCVER's research staff and are funded by NCVER.

◆ **NCVER consultancy work**

Through its commercial arm, NCVER provides professional research, development and implementation services to Australian and international clients. These projects are funded by the client and some of these are made publicly available with client approval.

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