Unpacking the quality of VET delivery

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About the research

Unpacking the quality of VET delivery

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The quality of delivery in the vocational education and training (VET) sector is critical to Australia's social and economic prosperity, especially in the post-COVID recovery. Research shows that good-quality delivery improves outcomes for students and contributes broader benefits to employers, communities and the economy.

'Delivery' is a broad term, one that extends beyond teaching and learning to the whole student experience – from before enrolment, through to completion and beyond – and involves a range of educational and support services. Notions of delivery quality are further complicated by the different ways in which VET stakeholder groups view the purpose of VET delivery and by the myriad factors that impact on it within and outside registered training organisations (RTOs).

A number of measures are routinely used to evaluate the quality of delivery at national, state and VET provider levels, but there are concerns about the extent to which these measures capture the complexity and diversity of VET delivery contexts, or reflect the important aspects of delivery quality, those that make the difference for students and employers.

This paper draws on the Australian and international literature to explore how the quality of delivery is understood and applied in different contexts and to investigate how it is currently measured. It is the first product of a larger project seeking to determine the views of RTOs and educators on what good-quality delivery involves and how it might be better measured, sustained and improved. The aim is also to capture the ways by which RTOs currently gather, use and value information on the quality of their delivery, taking into account their organisational mission, student characteristics, qualification profile and operating environments.

Key messages

The literature tells us that:

- The VET sector is highly complex and diverse. Thus, what contributes to effective or good-quality delivery in different local contexts needs to be broadly conceived and requires the use of 'fit for purpose' delivery approaches.

- Defining quality and the quality of delivery is not simple and involves gathering and using a wide range of data and information – both quantitative and qualitative – throughout the student life cycle to develop a 'true picture' of quality.

- Quality measures for RTOs reflect the impact delivery has on their clients (students and employers). A balance needs to be struck, however, between meeting immediate needs and developing students' longer-term skills, as well as the personal capabilities that will sustain them through their careers.

- The range of RTOs' contextual factors, organisational foci and missions also means that a 'one size fits all' set of measures of delivery quality may not serve all purposes.

- Critical factors affecting the quality of delivery include the policy and regulatory milieu in which RTOs operate, the quality of training packages and their ability to translate them readily into training programs, the types of students they service, the availability of teachers and trainers, the quality of

leadership and culture in RTOs, and the effectiveness of initial and continuing professional development in maintaining and building the quality of RTO workforces.

These issues and challenges have been identified in the literature for some time and require strategic and comprehensive interventions to shift the tenor of the quality delivery debate in VET.

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Introduction

This paper is the first publication from a project focused on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices in the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia: what we understand these to be and how they are measured by VET providers. Based on a review of relevant literature, it is a precursor to extensive consultations with registered training organisations (RTOs) from the public, private, community and enterprise-based segments of the VET sector.

The research is highly relevant in that it is complementary to the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment's (DESE) current focus on skills reform; that is, 'raising the quality of training', particularly its investigation into two aspects of quality delivery, these being excellence in registered training organisations (RTOs) and the development of a VET workforce quality strategy. The review by DESE is part of the Australian Government's response to the Joyce, Braithwaite and ASQA Rapid reviews, discussed below. The Commonwealth and its jurisdictional partners are also looking at ways to reform regulatory practices and are trialling new approaches for developing and implementing training packages.

In relation to both aspects of DESE's investigation, and to provide the basis for extensive consultations with VET stakeholders, the department has developed two issues papers (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020a, 2020b), which are supplemented by a series of surveys focused on RTO quality and standards, and VET workforce quality. The consultation process also allows respondents to share good teaching practice stories. Other relevant surveys from DESE sought information about the VET experiences of students who have undertaken training in the last five years.

This project will also complement recent initiatives by the national VET regulator – the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) – to support greater self-assurance by VET providers. It builds on a body of work by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on quality indicators (see, for example, Misko 2017; Griffin 2017; Karmel et al. 2013) and extensive research by NCVER and others into the quality of VET teaching (see, for example, Wheelahan & Moodie 2011; Smith & Yasakawa 2017; Misko, Guthrie & Waters 2021). The 2021 study by Misko, Guthrie and Waters recommends further investigation into the quality measures used by VET providers to evaluate the quality of teaching, especially when factors not directly related to quality are implicated.

Definitional considerations

The term 'delivery' is used throughout this paper to encompass teaching, learning and assessment, and student support practices, as well as the broader support frameworks, learning cultures and environments in which delivery takes place. In line with the earlier work of Wheelahan and Moodie (2011), the term 'teacher' is used to represent all practitioners involved in the teaching, training and assessment of VET courses and qualifications, including, but not limited to educators, trainers, assessors, lecturers, workplace trainers, curriculum design and development specialists, and language, literacy and numeracy teachers, all of whom may be working in sessional, casual, contract, part-time or permanent roles.

We also recognise that leaders and managers in RTOs and a range of support staff within them are major contributors to the quality of delivery in VET, as is organisational culture.

An important point of clarification is that the concept of quality in delivery is often conflated with the concept of quality assurance. For the purposes of this project, we are taking the view expressed by Harvey (2007) and others that the quality of delivery is fundamentally concerned with the nature of teaching, learning and assessment and the services associated with that focus. Quality assurance, on the other hand, is concerned with 'convincing others about the adequacy of the processes of learning' (Harvey 2007, p.13).

Harvey provides a number of dimensions of quality, which we examine in more detail later in the paper. These include 'value for money' and 'fit for purpose' perspectives, as opposed to 'exceptional', 'transformational' and 'perfection' views of quality. While conceptualised for higher education, they also apply in VET and can assist in explaining how different stakeholder groups perceive, measure and value the quality of delivery according to their interest and involvement in the sector (see page 13).

About this paper

The focus of the project is on providers, particularly RTOs, because they are ultimately responsible for: interpreting and applying quality standards in everyday delivery; gathering evidence about the quality of delivery to report to external bodies and customers (regulators, government agencies, students, employers, local communities and others); and questioning how the quality of all facets of the student life cycle and experience can be improved.

This paper reports on findings from an extensive literature review to establish the context for the consultation stage of the project, the outcomes of which will be contained in the final report. The aim of this paper is to refresh the debate on quality in VET and to highlight the many issues and challenges that impact on the quality of delivery in practice. We also investigate the recommendations made by VET experts and commentators for improvements to the system with the potential to inform future directions for the sector.

The discussions are intentionally brief synopses of the key issues and concerns relevant to the quality of delivery in VET from our experience, from the literature and from the numerous reviews of the sector. The paper concludes with a summary of insights gathered from the literature and a range of interim conclusions to inform the consultation stage of the project.

Background and context

Prior to the consultation and survey work presently being conducted by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, a series of national reviews of VET were undertaken that both inform this work and provide relevant background to this discussion on quality. They include:

- the 2018 Braithwaite review: All eyes on quality: Review of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011', led by Professor Valerie Braithwaite

- the 2019 Joyce review: Strengthening skills: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system, by the Hon. Steven Joyce

- the 2020 Rapid review of ASQA: Rapid review of the Australian Skills Quality Authority regulatory practices and processes, undertaken by mpconsulting.

The findings of these reviews are summarised below. In addition, a number of reviews were also undertaken at jurisdictional level, two of which have recently been completed: the Macklin Review in Victoria (Macklin 2020) and Gonski and Shergold's review in New South Wales (Gonski & Shergold 2021). We note that the issues raised in these respective reports are relevant to the quality debate, especially to delivery, as is the work on future skills and training needs conducted by Allen, Teodoro and Manley (2017) under the auspices of the Australian Industry Skills Committee.

The Braithwaite review

The Braithwaite review found that the VET regulatory framework at the time was making it difficult for the Australian Skills Quality Authority and other regulatory agencies to appropriately regulate the sector, in particular to respond rapidly and effectively to serious non-compliance by RTOs, a situation that was harming students, employers and the sector's reputation. Braithwaite recommended that regulatory agencies improve their access to real-time data and deepen the quality of regulatory conversations, 'rather than creating a wide range of new formal powers' to address the problems (Braithwaite 2018, p.7). Braithwaite also recommended that ASQA transfer its focus from mandating external quality standards to encouraging RTOs to develop and monitor their own internal standards and to continuously reflect on how they can improve their performance.

Despite the recommendation from the Braithwaite review for RTOs to self-monitor according to self-set standards, we note that, in addition to the three regulatory bodies (ASQA nationally, Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority [VRQA] and the Training Accreditation Council [TAC] in Western Australia), government-funded VET can also be 'regulated' at the jurisdictional level, with state and territory governments having the ability to implement processes to monitor and regulate the quality of the provision they fund. Where RTOs operate across jurisdictions, they can be regulated both by ASQA and those from whom they receive funding. In addition, gaining and retaining CRICOS registration may involve specific requirements, while particular industry bodies may also have conditions for VET graduates to gain professional recognition, licences and certifications. All this can make things complicated for RTOs and add to compliance burden.

Concerns were raised by RTOs consulted by Braithwaite about this burden of compliance, the inconsistency of audits and auditors, difficulties making sense of ASQA's regulatory approach and a disconnect between this approach and what they thought was important for regulation of the sector: the quality of teaching and learning. The review recommended raising the quality of teaching by developing teachers' expertise in pedagogy, industry knowledge and assessment, as well as in the requirements

associated with training packages and accredited courses. According to Brathwaite (2018, p.66), 'Quality training depends on the quality of teachers'. They:

> need to cover a broad range of bases of excellence. It is extraordinary that they do not have a career path where increasing levels of skill and excellence are recognised and rewarded, as they are in other educational settings (p.99).

To overcome this limitation, the review recommended introducing a 'master assessor' role for VET teachers who have achieved the highest standards in all dimensions of teaching; however, this recommendation has not been adopted.

The Joyce review

The Joyce review (2019) was led by the Hon. Steven Joyce, Chair of the Skills Expert Panel and formerly New Zealand Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment. Its final report, *Strengthening skills: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system*, made recommendations in six priority areas: strengthening quality assurance; speeding up qualification development; simpler funding and skills matching; better careers information; clearer secondary school pathways; and greater access for disadvantaged Australians.

One of the most substantial concerns raised by respondents to the Joyce review were the 'continuing variations in quality between [VET] providers, and concerns about the relationship between the regulator and providers' (Joyce 2019, p.27). The overall cost of compliance for providers, especially smaller ones, and the perceived variability by ASQA's auditors in their treatment of providers were also seen as issues. Some respondents were concerned that ASQA auditors had 'an excessive focus on minor issues', which, in the end, do not impact significantly on the quality of teaching and learning (Joyce 2019, p.36). This concern was also acknowledged by ASQA (2019, p.5): 'Stakeholder feedback indicated many providers believe ASQA's regulatory activity is too focused on administrative requirements and procedures rather than ensuring quality teaching and outcomes for students, resulting in a high level of regulatory burden'.

Joyce (2019) also found that the number, breadth and diversity of providers in VET[1] is a significant challenge to quality across the sector, with poor-quality delivery by some having caused serious reputational damage and confidence to the sector over past years. In response, Joyce, like Braithwaite, called for a strengthening of VET's quality assurance systems and endorsed the rapid acceleration of reforms to strengthen the role of ASQA. Joyce (2019, p.27) also identified a number of additional major issues and challenges in the VET system, including a 'cumbersome qualifications system', a 'complicated and inconsistent' funding system, a lack of clear information for new entrants to VET, unclear secondary school pathways into VET, and access issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and second chance learners.

Joyce reported mixed responses from respondents on how well the traditional performance measures used by RTOs (such as student satisfaction, completion rates and employment outcomes) accurately determine the quality of delivery. Some believed they are good indicators of provider performance, while others suggested they are not. This ambivalence suggests that ASQA's quality assurance and compliance approach may not have been getting to the real 'essence of quality', and especially the quality of delivery.

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1   According to Joyce (2019), there were approximately 4300 RTOs in Australia in 2019, of which 75% were private providers.

The Rapid review of ASQA

The Rapid review of ASQA, which followed the Joyce review, concluded there is a lack of clarity about how the quality of delivery in VET is, and should be, measured. This lack of clarity makes it 'hard to get a deep understanding of the quality of a provider's training delivery and the student experience' (mpconsulting 2020, p.26). Indeed: 'Many stakeholders highlighted the need for regulation to focus on quality, outcomes and excellence. However, there was little consensus about how this should be measured either by providers or by ASQA' (p.25).

The Rapid review recommended that ASQA increase its focus on the quality of delivery, including developing a shared understanding of what 'quality' delivery looks like[2] in practice and how this can be better reflected in outcome-focused standards. In addition, the review found that the publicly available information aimed at helping students and employers determine with some certainty the quality of a qualification they wish to enrol in is limited.

All three reviews – Braithwaite, Joyce and the Rapid review of ASQA – endorsed a shift in regulatory approach from an input-compliance focus to greater self-assurance by providers.

A self-assurance approach is used by the national higher education regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and is described by Brathwaite (2018) as 'meta regulation'. In practice, this means that universities and higher education providers have their own internal regulatory practices and processes for continuous quality improvement (including the use of benchmarking and peer review) to meet the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.[3] TEQSA's role is to regulate their regulatory systems. The Higher Education Standards Framework, which also applies to VET providers offering higher education qualifications, places significant emphasis on effective self-assurance and collaborative partnerships between the regulator and those being regulated.

Significant work is currently underway in response to these reviews. The Commonwealth, state and territory governments are leading a consultation process with VET stakeholders to progress the Quality Reforms set out in the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, while ASQA, under its 'Regulatory strategy 2020–2022', is focused on implementing recommendations made in the Rapid review (mpconsulting 2020), including changing its regulatory approach to supporting RTOs to build self-assurance capability.[4]

More recent changes affecting Australian VET

Since the publication of the three reviews above, the National Skills Commission has been established to provide high-quality advice on the performance of Australia's VET system, especially in relation to developing average price benchmarks and pricing for VET programs. The greatest disruption to the sector, however, has been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which up-ended the operations of RTOs and necessitated a rapid shift to online, blended and flexible delivery. One positive outcome from this experience has been a heightened degree of cooperation and collaboration between RTOs, although not universally or necessarily across provider types.

A less positive outcome appears to be significant variation in the quality of online learning and assessment processes and resources across providers in their scramble to support students to continue

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2   Earlier, the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) called for a better understanding of what adequate quality teaching looks like and stronger requirements for teachers to deliver training (ACIL Allen, 2013).
3   Under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*.
4   As outlined in 'Approach to compliance' (ASQA 2021a) and 'Regulatory risk framework' (ASQA 2021b).

their studies during COVID-19 restrictions. This prompted a strategic review of online learning in VET by ASQA, including a recent survey of providers to obtain a better understanding of the challenges they faced, with the aim of informing future regulatory guidance. Concerns were also raised by Waugh and Circelli (2021) about how well online delivery integrates with work-based learning and supports young and disadvantaged learners in economic downturns such as that caused by COVID-19.

Indeed, the pandemic has refocused attention on the importance of VET to Australia's post-COVID-19 recovery, especially in upskilling or reskilling displaced workers to meet the seismic shifts and shortages in the labour market. It has also provided opportunities for the sector to rethink the critical issues and challenges that have affected the quality of delivery for some time, including the suitability of competency-based training (CBT), as presently conceived as a model for education and training (Guthrie & Jones 2018) and how well we understand and support high-quality delivery. Indeed, work funded by the Australian Industry Skills Committee (Allen, Teodoro & Manley 2017, p.24) has drawn attention to:

- *Issues with VET pedagogy*, in which 'teaching styles, education approaches, and questions relating to the role of the educator continue to be present'. The committee notes that systems that 'enable knowledge exchange and two-way learning within education and training settings are increasingly being preferred' due to the growth in standardised curricula and assessment over decades, which has resulted in the abilities and capacity of educators and trainers not being fully utilised or encouraged, or in some cases lacking.

- *The use of 'fluid education',* which enables education and learning to move away from 'traditional settings' towards increasingly informal settings through the proliferation of digital and offline platforms (Allen, Teodoro & Manley 2017, p.25). These are designed to match people with resources and are based on 'collaborative spaces, curated content, peer-to-peer learning, and reputation metrics, and are rapidly increasing and diversifying available choices for working learners' (Allen, Teodoro & Manley 2017, p.25).

Both of these trends are challenging traditional approaches to VET quality systems and its approaches to curriculum development and delivery.

The changing face of VET is also evident in the growing role of micro-credentials in VET, as more and more students choose 'subject bundles' (mostly to meet related to regulatory, licencing or upskilling requirements), delivered by the private sector on a fee-for service basis, over courses and qualifications (Palmer 2021).

Issues with ratings of provider quality

The difficulties that students and employers continue to have when choosing a VET qualification and determining the quality of a provider, reported by Joyce (2019, p.21) and others, prompt questions about how effectively the quality of delivery is measured and relayed to stakeholders.[5] Joyce argued for a provider-ranking system, based on the quality of educational provision and management, as currently in use in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

In Australia, information about the quality of RTOs is often not readily available for those wishing to access information about provider quality. However, there are exceptions, such as the Smart and Skilled

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5   And we have seen, this is a focus in a range of national and state-based initiatives for improving careers information, notably, the establishment of the National Careers Institute and, more recently, Careers NSW, proposed by Gonski & Shergold's (2021) review of NSW VET.

program in New South Wales.[6] Often quality ratings for RTOs draw on NCVER's annual student outcome surveys, which are, at best, an 'average' of results at the provider, state and national levels. In addition, they may represent a lag in the data and can conceal both excellent and poor delivery at a local level and may not take into account the myriad factors that can impact on delivery, particularly in larger RTOs with a diverse profile of students, offerings and sites of delivery. A lag in data means that the more immediate issues related to the quality of delivery are not captured in time or are potentially lost.

Larger providers in particular tend to have a broad range of discipline areas and approaches to delivery, in addition to culturally diverse student and staff profiles and a number of campus locations. This multi-factor context means that quality outcomes (and perhaps even the nature of quality delivery itself) can differ according to each 'local' context. For example, some discipline areas in larger RTOs may appear to have stronger quality outcomes than those that cater for student groups exhibiting poorer performance than the wider student population (Karmel et al. 2013), such as those with learning difficulties.

Judgments about the quality of delivery can be less complex for smaller RTOs with a more limited (and often more closely related) scope and delivery approaches. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that the regulatory treatment of RTOs presently does not, but should, differentiate between providers that are effectively self-assuring teaching delivery and those that are not. In Victoria, for example, Macklin (2021) argues for a lighter-touch regulatory approach for trusted providers. A more focused rating approach could build greater credibility with students and industry and be more informative for them but is almost certain to be significantly more onerous for RTOs, depending on how it is designed.

However, while student outcome and satisfaction data are very useful, especially at a system level, they can be unreliable when there are thousands of small providers (Karmel 2021, p.5) and when there are statistically, 'insufficient observations to provide a robust estimate of performance'. In addition, the characteristics of students are important factors in outcome and satisfaction scores and are not taken into account when data are compiled (Karmel 2021, p.5).

This highlights that a 'one size fits all' approach to measuring delivery quality and comparing outcomes across all contexts does not accommodate the diversity of VET and the sheer numbers of very small and larger RTOs operating within it. Our initial thinking suggests that it may be better to consider ranking or rating discipline areas rather than institutions overall, particularly where RTOs are larger and have diverse profiles. Overall ratings may be fine for smaller providers with a more focused profile.

Another important point to highlight when determining the quality of delivery is the difference between 'outputs' and 'outcomes' in VET. Of the two, outcome measures (for example, the knowledge, skills and other personal attributes students develop and use) can be more powerful because they attempt to reflect a real consequence and the impact of the delivery process. Output data such as qualification completion rates, on the other hand, need to be contextualised to be well understood and, as we discuss below, are capable of being manipulated to give a false picture of 'quality'.

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6   NSW has recently implemented a provider-ranking system under the NSW Smart and Skilled Quality Framework. The Smart and Skilled website provides a rating of each provider's performance against a set of performance indicators, based on best practice. Information about individual RTOs holding Smart and Skilled contracts can be accessed here.

What is quality in VET delivery and how is it perceived?

Quality, like beauty, is a relative concept, one that is context-related and very much in the eye of the beholder. In VET, some see the quality of delivery primarily in terms of outcomes, others as a property of the delivery process, and yet others in terms of value for money or return on their investment in the system.

As outlined earlier, Harvey (2007) conceptualises varying explanations of the quality concept in higher education, which can be useful in clarifying what quality means. According to Harvey, quality can be understood as something special or excellent (the 'exceptional' view); something consistently good (the 'perfection' or consistency view); something that fulfils a customer's requirements or an organisation's mission or aims (the 'fitness for purpose' view); something that provides a return on investment (the 'value for money' view) or as a process of change that adds real value to students (the 'transformational' view). Explanations of each definition are provided in appendix A.

These views can apply singly or in combination at different levels in a system; for example, in VET they could be applied at a system, RTO, program or business unit, or teaching team or individual teacher level. All perspectives are 'right', in that they express valid expectations of what quality delivery primarily means to an interest group, which, in the VET context, includes government, regulators, employers and industry, VET providers and students (Griffin 2017). Their expectations, as discussed below, can be quite different.

Governments, for example, as significant funders of VET, are mostly concerned that VET will meet the skills needs of the workforce, thereby increasing productivity and economic growth, and that providers are accountable for spending public funds wisely and effectively (a value for money perspective). Regulators are concerned that students will achieve the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to do a job and that the sector's reputation is maintained. They do this through the national Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 (an 'exceptional' view). The quality of delivery for both of these stakeholder groups is only one facet of quality, albeit a very important one, in any overall judgment they make about the quality of an RTO, and of VET in general.

For RTOs, quality in delivery can be understood from a management view – optimising quality through organisational and funding processes – and from a customer view – optimising teaching and learning experiences for students and industry (Cedefop 2009). Leaders and managers are rightly concerned with the quality of delivery in maintaining and enhancing their RTO's reputation and viability, meeting institutional goals and targets ('exceptional' or 'fitness for purpose' points of view) and improving outcomes for their clients (students and employers).

While these concerns will be a focus of teachers also, those committed to high-quality delivery are more likely to be concerned with creating meaningful learning experiences for students and helping them to achieve their desired personal outcomes (a 'transformational' view, which includes concepts of personal enhancement and empowerment, not merely outcomes). Teachers are also concerned with improving delivery over time through continuous improvement (the exceptional and fitness-for-purpose view).

Consumers of VET at RTO level (students, employers, community organisations and others) are also vitally interested in the quality of delivery. Students want to know that the education and training they undertake at a particular RTO will be of high enough quality to assist them to secure a job and to set them up for a career and/or continue onto further education and/or achieve other ambitions (exceptional, transformation and value-for-money view). They also want to know whether their course

will be organised and run efficiently and that their educational experiences will be as promised (Harvey 2007).

Employers want employees and VET graduates to be well-trained and 'job-ready' with the skills, knowledge and attributes they need for immediate work, as well as having the capabilities and attributes needed to adapt, develop and innovate as workplaces rapidly change (a fitness-for-purpose and value-for-money perspective).

This raises significant tensions in VET about the extent to which delivery should meet immediate skill needs and also the skills and capabilities students need to succeed in the longer-term (21st century employability or 'soft' skills). Quality judgments can be too concerned with what is immediately and readily measured and less focused on the longer-term value of general educational and personal growth.

The differences in conceptions of quality mean that a common definition across all of VET's interest groups is near to impossible to achieve in all contexts and circumstances (Cedefop 2009). The common ground appears to be that good-quality VET provides learners with the skills and capabilities they need (Griffin 2017).

Why are agreed definitions of the quality of delivery important?

According to the Tertiary Education Quality Assurance Agency (2017, p.1), one important prerequisite for quality assurance is being able to define the characteristics of 'quality' being sought. This is not to conflate the notions of quality assurance and the quality of delivery but to highlight the importance of understanding what is to be measured, which, in this case, is teaching and learning and the associated practices and services that contribute to the student experience. Another important prerequisite highlighted by TEQSA is having 'someone (or some process) that is competent' to make sound judgments about the attainment of quality (TEQSA 2017, p.1).

However, defining quality and the characteristics of quality delivery is not simple and involves balancing a set of so-called 'objective measures' on the one hand and qualitative measures and 'professional judgments' on the other. In essence, it demands the collection, collation and weighting of multiple sets of information and data to enable a 'true picture' of delivery quality to be developed.

In addition, the characteristics of good- and high-quality VET delivery can be difficult to determine because delivery is affected by numerous contextual factors. We discuss these factors later in this paper, and will be exploring them during the consultations, but highlight them here to demonstrate the difficulties in finding agreement on the outputs and outcomes of VET delivery.

Further, as noted earlier, not all of VET's stakeholders have sufficient experience and knowledge of the sector to make fair judgments about delivery quality, or even to make the right training choices. This can lead to unrealistic expectations of quality by employers and students alike, as well as disappointment and frustration with what is actually delivered. The expectation of 'work-ready' graduates is an example. As Guthrie (2009) wrote, all workplaces are contextually different, which means that being 'competent' in a specific workplace can take some time to develop. Expectations of what constitutes work-readiness can be very different as well and are often unrealistic.

The timing and context of quality judgments can be important too; for example, a student may dislike a particular learning experience during or just after their studies and consider it of poor quality, but may appreciate its transformative value much later down the track. So, *when* judgements about quality are made is also important.

This raises further questions about whose voices do, or should, have most value when judging the quality of delivery in VET and when and over what term should these judgements be made? This is important because judgments of the quality of delivery have an influence on what information is collected by providers to measure quality and how that information is interpreted and used in VET policy and practice.

Some, such as Harris (2015), argued that the system is weighted too much on industry views and not enough on those of professional teachers and delivery experts, which impacts on the quality of delivery.

🖥️ What does good delivery in VET look like?

A body of literature has investigated the delivery practices that work best for different VET student groups, although this field is under-researched (Cedefop 2015; Lucas, Spencer & Claxton 2012) when compared with other education sectors. We find some agreement in the literature that, when done well, good VET delivery combines the underpinning knowledge and skills of an industry discipline with the 'live' knowledge that students bring from their work and/or life experiences (Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning 2013), using pedagogic approaches that engage students in meaningful learning activities at sufficiently challenging levels (Harper 2013). It can be characterised as having three distinct and interlinking features:

- *A learner-centred approach*:[7] which focuses on the needs and learning styles of learners and facilitates rather than directs learning

- *Workplace relevance*: where teachers have good links with industry, are knowledgeable about the latest work practices and are able to contextualise learning, regardless of the context

- *Flexibility and innovation in translating training packages (and other VET qualifications and programs) into meaningful learning experiences*: with a focus on customised and integrated learning and assessment strategies (ANTA 2003) and developing 'future-focused' 21st century skills and capabilities (including digital skills), as well as those needed in the here and now (Guthrie & Jones 2018; Australian Industry Group 2021).

The literature reports that student-centred practices are one hallmark of good teaching. Research in Europe suggests strong correlations with high levels of student achievement, especially when teaching methods use group work and authentic and interactive learning tasks such as project, problem- and enquiry-based learning (Cedefop 2015). In contrast, competency-based training tends to encourage teacher-centred pedagogy (Brennan, McFadden & Law 2001).[8]

To a casual observer, high-quality delivery in VET may appear easy to achieve. In practice, however, it involves the 'tactical orchestration of classroom talk, activities, challenges, groupings, environments, available resources, role models and so on', and the successful 'blending' of delivery methods to suit an industry discipline, types of students, the subject being taught, the resources available and the desired vocational outcomes (Lucas, Spencer & Claxton 2012, p.22).

To teach well, VET teachers draw on a range of interrelated practices (industry, pedagogic, institutional and labour market employment practices); the academic and social practices of students (Smith & Yasukawa 2017, p.22); disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge; and their personal qualities, experiences, intuitions, hunches and dispositions (Loo 2018). Success depends largely on how well teachers: understand how people learn; identify learning needs; design and develop learning programs; facilitate learning (at work, in the classroom, online, etc.); and address learning difficulties (Hodge & Ollis 2014, p.22), and also on:

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7   A learner-centred approach is understood to be responsive to learner interests and needs and to slowly increase their ability to be independent learners, who are less reliant on teacher-led learning. It places an emphasis on learner outcomes, communication skills and capability for learning (Cedefop 2015).

8   Teacher-centred pedagogy is described as teachers transferring information, often curriculum-bound, to students in structured ways (Cox & Prestridge 2020), whereas student-centred pedagogies involve students discovering and creating knowledge with teachers and peers.

the manner in which the learning outcomes are formulated and organised; the manner in which teachers work together to plan the local curriculum; past experiences and culture of teachers; the degree of autonomy that … training organisations have to determine the local curriculum; the amount of time, the resources and learning environments, and learning materials available.

(Cedefop 2015, p.7)

Thus, according to Harris (2015, p.14), in addition to good planning, high-quality VET delivery involves a solid understanding of:

- how the system works

- learning styles and theories

- curriculum design and evaluation

- training packages (and other course documentation) and how to interpret and use them effectively

- learner and local employer needs

- different pedagogies, which engage students in meaningful learning experiences

- local and system rules and regulations, and how to assess without defaulting to 'ticks and flicks on standard checklists'.

Workplace learning, an important dimension of good-quality delivery, requires a keen understanding of contemporary workplaces and the skills students need to succeed in them, such as adaptability, analytical, digital, industry and collaboration skills (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2021). Developing these skills and personal attributes often depends more on how the curriculum is taught than the content within it and also on how well the learning at an RTO is integrated with the workplace, which in turn depends on the effectiveness of communication between teachers and workplace supervisors (Clayton et al. 2015).

The many attributes, skills and capabilities good VET teachers possess have been captured in the literature over an extended period of time (for example, McGraw & Peoples 1996; Corben & Thomson 2001; Guthrie 2010; Clayton et al. 2013; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011; Harris 2015; Smith & Yasukawa 2017; Smith 2019; Misko, Guthrie & Waters 2021), in professional capability frameworks and standards for teachers, and in different industrial agreements for VET teachers in the states and territories, which we examine later in this paper. Studies of pedagogies that work well for disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET students provide invaluable insights into good and high-quality delivery practices, as well as the attributes of good teachers (for example, Bowman & Callan 2012; Guenther et al. 2017).

These and other studies indicate that good teachers share a passion for teaching and learning, a commitment to professional renewal and to 'doing what it takes' to overcome barriers to learning. They also demonstrate strong empathy, care and respect for students and an ability to build and sustain trusting relationships with them and employers. Importantly, they continually reflect on and evaluate how their teaching impacts on student learning. According to students interviewed by Smith and Yasukawa (2017, pp.13–14) good VET teachers:

> displayed patience, respect for students and their individuality, and were able to deal comfortably with cultural diversity and students with learning difficulties … paced the learning and provided some individualisation for students … [and made] you want to learn.

A study of language, numeracy and literacy (LLN) teachers found that their teaching practices were shaped and reshaped by their beliefs about teaching, the theories that inform them, their interests in the field and, most of all, their relationships with students (Widin, Yasukawa & Chodkiewicz 2012). This affirms Hattie's (2015) view that teaching methods are probably less critical to the success of students than the attributes, beliefs and conceptions of the teachers using them.

This raises questions about how well we really understand the complexity of VET teaching and what it takes to be good teacher. This information is important to the development of the VET workforce quality strategy, currently led by the Commonwealth, in collaboration with the states and territories, which is investing in resources to support the development of 'good teachers' and quality delivery.

Factors impacting on the quality of delivery

One reason for this complexity is the large number of external and internal factors impacting on teachers and the quality of their work. In the bigger picture, these include:

- the perceived lower status of VET (due to perceptions of a lower-achieving and lower socioeconomic student body)

- VET policy, goals and directions (which components of VET should be doing what and how)

- where the decision-making power lies (Is it industry, large enterprises, small businesses, politicians, bureaucrats, employers or students or all?)

- the sector's position and scope (placement between secondary and higher education and how much it overlaps each sector)

- the CBT model (with the advantages and challenges it brings)

- declining VET funding (Hurley & Van Dyke 2019)

- the ageing VET workforce, with high levels of casualisation (Smith 2019; Knight, White & Granfield 2020)

- the design and development of training packages

- a lack of agreement on the capabilities and attributes needed by teachers and trainers and the level of qualification they should hold (Guthrie & Jones 2018; Guthrie 2010).

Relatedly, a major challenge to the quality of delivery is the need for teachers, as dual professionals, to maintain both their vocational currency and their teaching expertise (Clayton et al. 2013).

At a local level, the factors impacting on teaching are attributed to:

- RTO policy settings, politics and employment, and cultural settings, including the capabilities and attitudes of RTO leaders and managers

- the availability of continuing professional development (CPD) for other staff involved in delivery

- a provider's relationships with local employers and industries

- the quality of an RTO's administrative and student support functions

- the type and location of delivery and assessment

- course design and duration

- types of students and entry standards

- funding formulae at provider level.

Stakeholders also highlight heavy teacher workloads (related to compliance with national standards), especially in online learning (Cox & Prestridge 2020), and difficulties attracting industry professionals into VET teaching roles as significant challenges (Misko, Guthrie & Waters 2021).

While VET teachers do their best to work within these constraints to meet the needs of providers, students and employers, and, under the circumstances, acquit themselves admirably, they clearly face significant challenges, many of which lie outside their influence and control but affect the quality of what they can realistically achieve. Indeed, this point was made some time ago in an AISC publication (Allen, Teodoro & Manley 2017).

Teaching qualifications and teacher development

Many VET experts attribute the variable quality in VET teaching, at least in part, to the poor design and delivery of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE), especially in relation to assessment (Joyce 2019; Smith 2019; Guthrie & Jones 2018; Guthrie & Clayton 2018; Harris 2015; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). Concerns also extend to the appropriateness of a certificate IV level qualification for the VET teaching profession and, perhaps more importantly, the lack of systemic and strategic approaches to high-quality CPD for teachers once they achieve the certificate IV. As Guthrie (2009) reminds us, the original certificate IV (then the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training) was developed to certify workplace trainers and assessors only and was not intended to be a 'surrogate qualification' for all VET teachers. Prior to its introduction, teachers in the TAFE (technical and further education) system were supported to attain university-level teaching qualifications, but this was also at a time when VET, more or less, meant TAFE.

Some people consider that the Certificate IV TAE is a suitable entry-level qualification, although believe that it requires a greater focus on pedagogy, educational theory and practice, use of applied training methods (in particular, Smith 2019), and diversity and inclusiveness (Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). Others suggest that new teachers need more support from experienced teachers and educational experts once they have completed the certificate IV through mentoring programs and other institutional strategies (Guthrie & Jones 2018). Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) recommended that teachers and trainers need specialised qualifications to suit their specific circumstances and level of responsibility for teaching, training and assessment; for example, an industry trainer might need different skills, knowledge and experience from a teacher responsible for curriculum development or educational leadership.

Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021), however, found a reluctance among stakeholders for more changes to the certificate IV qualification due to the costs and negativity associated with on-going requirements for teachers to upgrade their certificate IV (Guthrie & Every 2013; Ho & Court 2020). We also note that a wider range of qualifications, including those at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) 5 and above, are now accepted as the qualifications required for initial VET teachers to practise. Some industrial awards, especially in the public VET sector,[9] require the attainment of progressively higher-level qualifications at or above AQF 5 for progression and promotion.

The discussion highlights the importance of ongoing learning and development for teachers, from induction and throughout their teaching career. According to Schubert (2016), the most favoured approaches are, in order of highest survey ranking: ongoing and structured CPD; mentoring; industry experience; teaching experience; and peer-to-peer support. Less highly rated, but still significant,

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9   Such as the Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Agreement 2018 and industrial agreements in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and for Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory (Misko, Guthrie & Waters 2021).

approaches include teachers undertaking formal teaching qualifications; observations of other teachers; and participation in communities of practice (CoPs). We know the value of learning communities in enabling teachers to learn with and from each other to improve delivery (Mitchell et al. 2006; Guthrie 2010), but perhaps more emphasis could be placed on the collective attributes of teaching teams, both within providers and across the system.

How do we judge the quality of delivery?

In this section we discuss how VET providers and others currently measure, monitor and improve the quality of delivery. This generally involves gathering and analysing quantitative data, along with the use of professional judgments and other more qualitative information from a variety of sources.

The 'conventional' measures

The most familiar and conventional indicators of quality in VET delivery include student data on enrolment numbers, as well as progression, completion and attrition rates, student and employer feedback and satisfaction rates (through NCVER's student outcomes and employer use and views surveys, for example[10]); other jurisdictional or provider-level surveys; employment outcomes; and levels of teacher satisfaction and engagement with industry (Stevens & Deschepper 2018).

Inaccuracies in measuring overall quality and the quality of delivery can arise, however, when conventional indicators are mostly quantitative and do not capture the less tangible, but important, features of good delivery, those that cannot be meaningfully reduced to numbers. In addition, these quantitative measures can also be inaccurate when the information collected is statistically unreliable (for example, when sample sizes are small, poor or biased, as highlighted earlier).

In these cases, an indicator, or a collection of conventional indicators, might not represent what occurs in practice; for example:

- high completion rates of a course may be interpreted as the result of high-quality delivery when in reality they reflect low standards of assessment or unethical 'tick and flick' behaviours by providers (Karmel et al. 2013)

- a focus on measuring employment outcomes can be problematic if VET students do not get a job quickly and in the timeframe of the data collection, have difficulty finding employment in areas where jobs are scarce or continue on to further education

- if the indicator fails to consider the characteristics of a particular student group (Misko 2017)

- using qualification completions as an indicator of quality is similarly problematic when students only wish to complete a limited number of competencies or when they drop out for reasons other than those related to the quality of their education.

As Karmel (2021, p.5) noted, a student can only judge the quality of a training course after having done it, and typically they will only undertake the course once.

Other measures of the quality of delivery

Other less commonly used quality indicators include:

- requests from employers to employ students, graduates or prevocational apprentices and trainees

- nominations for awards or commendations for practice

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10 Highlighting the issue that these and other survey data, unless used quickly, may represent lag data of limited relevance and applicability, as noted earlier in this paper.

- qualifications of teaching staff (proportion with Certificate IV TAE and those with degrees or diplomas in teaching/training) (Karmel et al. 2013)

- level of staff satisfaction and motivation levels (including 'organisational health' surveys and research, noted above)

- teacher–student ratios

- duration of courses

- the level of personal support and resources available for students (for example, library, literacy and numeracy support, careers advice and personal counselling)

- the availability of work placement/experience for students and

- staff participation in CPD.

General measures of delivery efficiency and effectiveness, such as financial targets for courses and employee satisfaction (Misko 2017), and annual state-based and national training awards for provider and individual teacher quality are also used. Phillips KPA (2006) also suggested measures of delivery quality include an index of learner engagement and of learners' and graduates' perception of the quality of teaching and self-assessment of learning outcomes (cited in Karmel et al. 2013). Another way to evaluate the quality of teaching is direct observation of the teaching by 'someone competent to evaluate its quality' (Moodie 2001, p.7).

Towards a more comprehensive approach to measuring the quality of delivery

As far as we can ascertain, a comprehensive approach to measuring the quality of delivery can involve five broad approaches:

- External accreditation and assessment, for example, checking the professional competence of students by external parties such as occurs in the licenced trades and as recommended by Karmel (2021)[11]

- Auditing:
  - internal auditing (checking and collecting evidence of educational outcomes and processes and student experiences against provider goals and objectives) as part of continuous improvement (quality assurance) processes
  - external auditing (checking against the Standards for RTOs [2015] by ASQA and state-based regulatory bodies, where applicable, or through the use of relevant ISO standards)

- Stakeholder feedback gathered at a variety of levels through:
  - surveys (student and employer),
  - student exit interviews or surveys
  - complaint registers
  - institutional, course and program-level evaluations, including organisational health reviews

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11 In relation to accrediting the quality of an RTO's offerings, a body drawing on the learnings of the former Institute for Trades Skills Excellence (ITSE) proposed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the mid-2000s – but very much more broadly conceived – might provide an approach for accrediting an RTO's delivery in particular vocational fields. A star-rating system formed part of the ITSE model and could involve both industry input and provider or peer benchmarking.

- teacher feedback

- industry and student reference groups and forums

- Benchmarking and peer review, including:

  - expert evaluation, review and advice, using specialist internal or external teams with particular expertise in delivery practice, in judging delivery quality and advising on potential improvements[12]

  - peer review and assessment within RTOs (teachers or teaching teams checking with each other to validate and moderate teaching and assessment activities and resources and providing feedback on teaching practices). This approach includes mentoring by other more experienced or expert teachers

  - providers benchmarking their performance externally with other RTOs, which may include peer review and assessment and the use of jurisdictional or system-wide communities of practice and discipline-based practitioner networks

  - the development of accreditation systems, whereby providers or their delivery of particular programs are sanctioned by a recognised body (for example, the former Institute of Trades Skills Excellence and some professional bodies)

- Professional development:

  - usually guided by RTO goals and objectives and sometimes by professional teacher capability frameworks and professional standards, including practice-based inquiry and research; for example, RTOs and the individual business units or teaching teams within them can be required to develop and report against annual professional development plans and activities as part of required regulatory or quality processes.

Collectively, all of these approaches and their associated indicators operate as 'signs of the presence or absence of certain qualities' and provide insights into the overall quality of a provider or teaching program or course (Blom & Meyers 2003, pp.14–15). Some also feed into broader snapshots of the system's performance at jurisdictional or national levels.

It is clear that a one-size-fits-all approach (for measurements and targets) to measuring the quality of delivery is not appropriate (Clinton et al. 2014). Evidence suggests that 'measuring' requires a contextualised, comprehensive and fit-for-purpose range of measures, indicators and other information, which compares like with like (Misko 2017) and which are contextualised to an RTO's mission and operating environment. This suggests that benchmarking is potentially a good approach.

What about professional standards for VET teachers?

There is some debate in the sector on whether professional teaching standards will assist in raising the quality of delivery in VET. We know from the literature that professional standards can help to define what is most important and valued in a profession and what professionals need to know and do to deliver quality outcomes. Typically, they also provide:

- criteria for assessment such that professionals know what evidence is required to attain a specific status (Harvey 2007)

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12 Such teams were a feature of many VET systems and providers, particularly public ones. Their role was as professional consultants focused on improving practice. However, such a role could be undertaken by registered external organisations judged to have the expertise required to undertake this process.

- 'a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public' (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2011, p.8).

Standards are usually maintained by a professional body (or other organisations) through an accreditation process.

Unlike the higher education and school sectors, VET does not have an extensive body of research on factors contributing to high quality teaching and learning practice. In addition, the VET system has not established national professional standards for teachers or officially 'sanctioned' definitions of teaching (Wheelahan 2010), except for those set out in the Certificate IV TAE. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is the significant challenge associated with capturing and synthesising information about quality given the complexity and diversity of teaching roles, contexts and students across the sector. It might also be argued that these factors contribute to the sector being more diverse and complex, and less well understood by its key stakeholders, than the schools and university sectors.

Furthermore, VET lacks a national professional body for teachers, although an accreditation body for teachers has been set up for the private VET sector by the Independent Tertiary Education Council of Australia (ITECA),[13] and in Tasmania, where TasTAFE teachers are required to register with the Tasmanian Teachers Registration Board (TTRB).

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) argued strongly for a professional association for VET teachers, with the aim of raising capability across the sector, but, while the suggestion was viewed as desirable at the time, it was also seen as potentially problematic (Guthrie & Clayton 2012). Wheelahan and Moodie also proposed a national CPD strategy for teachers, a proposal that has since been echoed by Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021) and others. At the time of writing, the Australian Government is looking to develop a VET workforce quality strategy at a national level.

However, Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021) found that the stakeholders interviewed for their study were not generally in favour of mandating teaching standards or supported a national capability framework for VET; rather, they favour capability frameworks developed and implemented at local levels. They also had mixed views on mandatory registration for teachers but strongly agreed on the need for systematic approaches to teacher preparation, mentoring and CPD. Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021) compared a range of professional capability frameworks and teaching standards in use across Australia, finding similarities in the professional values, knowledge, skills and attitudes across different career stages of VET teachers (which are summarised in appendix B).

The comparison shows that, irrespective of the sector in which teaching occurs, most frameworks incorporate teaching knowledge and practice (including planning, designing, preparing and delivering) and professional engagement and collaboration (with industry, communities and other teachers), which become progressively more complex at various stages of a teacher's career. More recent frameworks include digital literacy skills, entrepreneurship and innovation as key capabilities.

Some of the capability frameworks and teaching standards in use in the VET sector also draw on the school sector's Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Professional Standards for Teachers, although the most commonly used framework is the VET Practitioner Capability Framework, developed in 2013 by Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA). The capabilities in this framework are intended to be 'short and accessible ways' of explaining what good teaching performance looks like –

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13 Through ITECA's College of Vocational Education and Training Professionals.

resembling a toolbox that can be used in a range of ways (IBSA 2013) – and were designed to accommodate differences between the states and territories, industries, the size and complexity of RTOs and the needs of different learner groups.

The IBSA Capability Framework now appears to be somewhat dated, however. Stakeholders interviewed by Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021) suggested that more knowledge of pedagogy and cultural knowledge and understanding could be included, along with methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and programs, and the use of technologies in delivery. This finding concurs with Hattie's (2015) premise that the ability to interpret the impact of their teaching on students is a major skill of effective teachers. Stakeholders would also like to see more emphasis on overall corporate and ethical professionalism in the framework.

In our work so far, we have found other frameworks, including the VET Teaching Capability Framework, developed by the LH Martin Institute (Schubert 2016), and a range of guidelines and principles for teaching not mentioned in Misko, Guthrie and Waters's work. These include teaching disadvantaged students (Bowman & Callan 2012) and teaching using online and blended models of delivery (Griffin & Mihelic 2019). State-based agreements for public VET systems and providers and individual RTOs also have position descriptions for teachers, which outline the expected duties, capabilities and attributes of teachers and managers.

International approaches

In England, the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training (2014) are maintained by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), which is also responsible for CPD and operating a voluntary membership body for teachers – the Society for Education and Training. Quality is monitored by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) against the Education Inspection Framework (2019) by inspectors who make graded judgements of a college's performance, using a four-point scale based on: the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management.

In the United States, the national association for public community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), implemented a Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) to assist colleges to measure their performance in terms of outcomes for students. The performance measures cover student progress and outcomes, and workforce, economic and community development factors (Misko 2017).

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) operates an external evaluation and review process, which assesses and rates the quality of VET providers (Joyce 2019). Providers are also required to undertake regular self-assessment against a series of main performance indicators, known as tertiary education indicators (TEIs). These are described by NZQA as 'common points of reference for what "good" can look like in education and training' (2017).

In Finland, VET providers must participate in external evaluations, as well as undertake self-evaluation, but have the freedom to determine the performance indicators most suitable to their provision, use of public funding and quality-management approach (Cedefop 2019). While Finland does not have national

standards for teachers, the skills and knowledge to be held by teachers are specified in the curriculum for VET teacher education. Interestingly, from 2020, a fixed portion of funding granted to VET providers will be based on feedback from learners.[14]

What stands out in this brief scan is the strategic and coordinated approach these countries adopt to attain and maintain quality in delivery across their VET systems. Most specify the characteristics of high-quality (or excellent) teaching practice and what teachers need to know and do to achieve it. In England, for example:

> [Further education] teachers and trainers are reflective and enquiring practitioners who think critically about their own educational assumptions, values and practice in the context of a changing contemporary and educational world. They draw on relevant research as part of evidence-based practice. They act with honesty and integrity to maintain high standards of ethics and professional behaviour in support of learners and their expectations. Teachers and trainers are 'dual professionals'; they are both subject and/or vocational specialists and experts in teaching and learning. They are committed to maintaining and developing their expertise in both aspects of their role to ensure the best outcomes for their learners.(Education and Training Foundation 2014, p.1)

The attributes of teachers play an important role in the standards in England, for example: 'Inspire, motivate and raise aspirations of learners through your enthusiasm and knowledge' and, 'Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn' (Education and Training Foundation 2014, p.2). In Wales, the professional standards framework for further education teachers and work-based learning practitioners presents a dynamic model of professionalism, one that applies interrelated values, knowledge, skills and capacities in practice to attain a vision of high-quality teaching (figure 1).

Figure 1 Model of professionalism for further education teachers in Wales
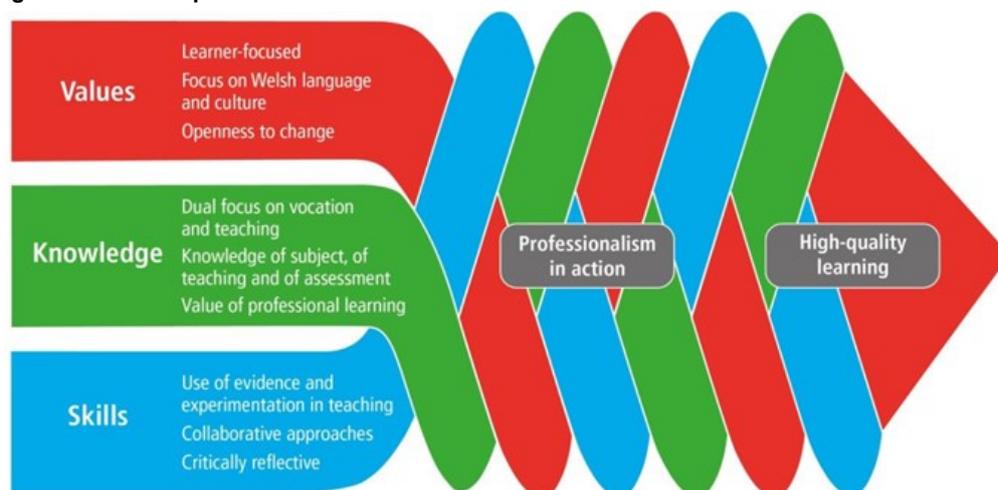
Source: Welsh Government (2017).

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14 Feedback is collected through a centrally designed questionnaire, which learners answer twice: at the beginning of their studies and again at the end. The questions focus on how well teaching facilities and learning environments support studies; the support and guidance they received; the opportunities they had to study and learn in the workplace; equity between learners and workers at the workplace; gaining entrepreneurial competence; and reflection on their readiness for working life and further studies (Cedefop 2015).

The United States similarly articulates a vision for teachers based on high-quality (outstanding) practice in the publication, *What teachers should know and be able to do*:

> The standards for accomplished teaching encompass both the habits of mind needed by outstanding teachers — their knowledge, strategies, grasp of subject matter and understanding of developing kids — and also their skills, the technical 'habits of practice' that accomplished professionals in every field of practice have honed and developed. Knowing and doing are the hallmarks of deep professional achievement. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2020, p.5)

While written for schoolteachers, these standards are based on five core propositions:

- First: teachers are committed to students and their learning

- Second: teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students

- Third: teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning

- Fourth: teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience

- Fifth: teachers are members of learning communities (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2020, p.1).

We are not proposing that standards developed in other countries are suitable for Australian VET teachers but we wish to highlight the national vision in comparable countries for high-quality (excellent, outstanding and accomplished) delivery and the emphasis on the performance of teachers – not merely their attributes and 'tick-box' capabilities. The Welsh example in particular (figure 1) gives a sense of the 'lived experience' and complexity of high-quality teaching (Lester 2014). The national visions stand in contrast to the many different interpretations of good teaching in VET that currently exist in Australia which, while reflecting the large number and range of VET providers, students and employers they serve, do not provide an agreed vision of excellence to which they could aspire.

Given that the quality of delivery in VET is a national issue, and questions about consistency persist, it seems timely to consider a more coherent national approach, one that supports teachers, providers, regulators and others to envisage, describe, practise and evaluate high-quality delivery. If national professional standards for VET teachers are considered as part of this approach, they will need to be flexible enough to apply to many different contexts, teaching roles and delivery approaches without jeopardising quality or the creativity of teachers.

Misko, Guthrie and Waters (2021) proposed a national capability framework with a 'core and options' approach, which can be contextualised to local circumstances to address some of these issues. This is based on the idea that there will always be a solid body of agreed capabilities constituting the core of high-quality delivery, but there will be circumstances where options are needed to reflect local or particular needs.

Any form of teaching standards or capability frameworks will need to promote teaching as a dynamic socio-cultural practice, one that necessitates ongoing development rather than the achievement of a specified capability at a certain point in time (as a toolbox approach to individual attributes, skills and capabilities tends to do). It must also take into account the many contextual factors that impact on teaching quality, the complexity of teachers' work and the importance of 'teaching teams' alongside individual teaching efforts.

Insights and interim conclusions

We set out in this paper to question how delivery is understood in VET and how its quality might be better measured. The literature review has highlighted inconsistencies in conceptions of quality delivery across stakeholder groups and raises further questions about what good VET delivery really looks like in practice – and how we can recognise it as being of a high quality. These questions are critically important to RTOs for a number of reasons: judging the 'health' of their teaching, learning and assessment performance; finding ways to improve delivery; promoting the quality of their delivery to their key stakeholders; and supporting teachers to continuously improve the quality of their practice.

In short, they need both an internal and external focus when identifying, reflecting on and describing delivery quality. Yet, there is a considerable tension between this view and the need to be seen as 'compliant' in terms of meeting their regulatory or contractual obligations. Not surprisingly, we conclude that, on the basis of this review of the available literature and other resources, measuring and judging the quality of VET delivery is not easy and there are no straightforward or immediate solutions. If there were, it is likely we would already have adopted and be using them. The trouble is that quality is a nebulous concept, with many dimensions. When applied to delivery in VET, we know it is best judged when 'like is compared with like'.

There is clearly no one right way to deliver, and its quality is impacted by many external, local and institutional factors. We also know that good-quality delivery can be characterised as student-centred, industry-relevant and addressing the need for students' short- and longer-term 21st century skills and capabilities. Yet the literature is also telling us that much of the focus on judging the quality of delivery in VET tends to be short-term and directed to immediate work-ready skills, with less emphasis on an investment in the longer-term skills, capabilities and attributes – those needed for life and sustainable employment. Nor are the ongoing development needs of VET's teachers and trainers being substantively addressed to ensure the longer-term health of the sector.

All these factors create a tension between how good delivery is perceived and judged by different stakeholder groups, with the outcomes of delivery represented most forcefully through assessment measurements and other overt data rather than through other less tangible, but possibly more important, qualities and measures of good delivery. The quality of the delivery process can also be overlooked in this outcomes-focused approach.

The literature universally agrees that the most important aspects of teaching are not always captured by commonly used quality indicators or in the data collected by external regimes, including surveys. The outputs and outcomes of delivery can be indicators of quality but can be adversely affected by manipulation of those outcomes, and equally by varying stakeholder interests and views. The literature also highlights a recent change in tone, with concerns about the importance of digital, employability and soft skills gaining a greater impetus (for example, Australian Industry Group 2021) which, in turn, may have an effect on how quality of delivery is judged and measured in the future. Thus, judging and measuring delivery quality is a highly complex process, affected by inputs to, and the contexts surrounding, delivery.

Judgments of quality are affected by what is measured and what is not – and the latter tends to be the less visible aspects that cannot be readily described, measured or quantified, except by those experienced in good-quality delivery (that is, they are capable of making expert professional judgments). The judgment process itself encompasses 'measuring a point' along a continuum of teaching expertise and practice. We need to better understand this continuum, what realistically constitutes good

teaching practice along it and how quality assurance systems can better support these delivery practices, including new and innovative approaches. These often do not fit into predetermined standards and conventional practice and can sit awkwardly with aspects of rigidly applied approaches to competency-based delivery and assessment.

In summary, this paper highlights the need for more substantive and collective agreement on what really constitutes good delivery in VET and which data and other information will better contribute to making valid, fair and comprehensive judgments of delivery quality. We also need a better understanding of the factors that limit quality delivery and its ongoing improvement, especially continuing professional development.

What's next?

The next phase of this project will attempt to explore these issues further through extensive interviews with RTOs of all types and locations and their representative bodies,[15] and with selected VET and tertiary education quality experts. We also plan to draw on insights gained by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's extensive work presently underway.

Our aim is to identify the approaches RTOs are currently taking to judging and measuring quality and to highlight examples of good practice in delivery practice and its measurement and the internal and external factors impacting on quality in several case studies. We also hope to examine the approaches RTOs take to improving delivery quality in the context of their RTO type, size, student cohorts and scope of delivery etc.

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15 For example, TAFE Directors Australia, Victorian TAFE Association, Enterprise Registered Training Organisation Association, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, Community Colleges Australia and Adult and Community Education Victoria.

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Appendix A: Definitions of quality

Quality	Definition
Exceptional or as excellence	A traditional concept linked to the idea of 'excellence', usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed. There are three variations: exclusivity, exceeding high standards (excellence) through benchmarks, and ensuring minimum standards.
Perfection (or consistency)	Focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality is explained as conformance to specification and the interrelated ideas of 'zero defects and getting things right first time'.
Fitness for purpose	Judges quality in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or (in education) institution-defined to reflect institutional mission (or course objectives). It offers two alternative priorities for specifying purpose: 1) meeting customer specifications and 2) meeting an institution's mission and purpose.
Value for money	Assesses quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure. At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to the funders. Increasingly, students are also considering their own investment in higher education in value-for-money terms.
Transformation	Sees quality as a process of change, in which education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer.

Source: Harvey (2007).

Appendix B: Common features in capability frameworks in Australia

	Professional knowledge and practice	Engagement and collaboration	Quality processes and compliance	Creating inclusive and safe learning environment	Digital literacy	Continuous professional development	Entrepreneur-ship and innovation	General skills	Professional values
Australian Professional Standards for Teaching	Professional knowledge and professional practice	Professional engagement				Professional learning, vocational competency			
TAFENSW Professional Standards for Teachers	Professional knowledge and professional practice knowledge	Professional engagement							
Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA)	Teaching and assessment	Industry and community collaboration	Systems and compliance					General skills and behaviours	Ethics
Griffith University Learning and Teaching Capabilities Framework	Understand knowledge and design learning and assessment resources	Contribute to teaching teams	Policies and procedures	Creating and facilitating a culture for learning and a respectful and safe environment for student learning	Optimising digital technologies	Reflection, evaluation and scholarly inquiry			Values and respectful relationships
Danielson's Framework for Teaching	Planning, knowledge and instruction		Compliance and responsibilities	Context classroom environment		Professional learning and engaging with others, reflective practice			
TAFESA VET Educator Capability Framework	Teaching and assessment validation	Industry and community engagement	Quality and compliance		Digital technologies			General skills and behaviours	
TasTAFE Educator Capability Framework	Teaching, design and facilitate valid and reliable assessments	Industry and community engagement		Inclusive student experience conducive to learning	Digital literacy	Leadership and learning pathways			
North Metropolitan TAFE VET Practitioner Capability Framework	Teaching and assessment	Industry and community engagement, industry competence	Systems and compliance					General skills and behaviours	Values
Charles Darwin University VET Educator Capability Framework	Learn, teach, assess	Industry and community engagement	Quality assurance and continuous improvement				Entrepreneurship and innovation		

	Professional knowledge and practice	**Engagement and collaboration**	**Quality processes and compliance**	**Creating inclusive and safe learning environment**	**Digital literacy**	**Continuous professional development**	**Entrepreneurship and innovation**	**General skills**	**Professional values**
TAFE Qld Educator Capability Framework	Learning, teaching and assessment	Engagement	Quality and compliance	Inclusive practice	Technology for learning	Leadership	Innovation		Core values
Chisholm Educator Excellence Framework	Design professional practices and assessment	Engagement and feedback	Continuous improvement	Supportive environment for different delivery modes		Continuing professional development and lifelong learning			

Source: Misko, Guthrie & Waters (2021).

Note: the frameworks and standards are colour-coded - black for those pertaining to VET, red for universities and blue for schools.