

Victorian TAFE  
*Association*



Response

VET Training Products for the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century  
Consultation Paper  
February 2009

Victorian TAFE Association  
Level 3, 478 Albert Street  
East Melbourne, Victoria, Australia  
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**VICTORIAN TAFE ASSOCIATION RESPONSE**  
**VET TRAINING PRODUCTS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
**CONSULTATION PAPER FEBRUARY 2009**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) supports a national industry led VET system and commends the National Quality Council/COAG Joint Steering Committee for initiating this consultation as part of the development of a draft policy framework for VET Training Products for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The key messages to be read from the discussion below are:

1. The current definition of competence needs to be reviewed to relax the requirement for specification of competency to relate only to workplace performance.
2. A broader view of competence including elements of foundation skills, personal attributes and capabilities and ongoing cognitive development is worthy of exploration.
3. VTA supports the provision of explicit knowledge based and preparatory units to support life-long learning, the human capital agenda and changing market demands.
4. Specifying the required contexts for assessment at the unit of competency level could provide better transparency of outcomes to employers and improve access for diverse learners.
5. More flexible packaging of units in the National Training Packages could facilitate the creation of more diverse qualifications as well as clearly defined, articulated and promoted pathways from existing qualifications.
6. Diversity of qualifications may also be assisted by the creation of a national bank of industry endorsed units of competency together with specific nationally endorsed qualifications or skills clusters, and industry regulatory/licensing/industrial requirements within the existing qualifications arrangements.
7. Training Package assessment outcomes will be strengthened with more meaningful and relevant guidance on assessment requirements in units of competence irrespective of whether the units of competence require direct workplace experience.
8. The format of the Training Packages can be improved by eliminating unnecessarily repetitious language in the descriptors of units of competency particularly between the range statement, evidence guide and required skills and knowledge.
9. The Training Package outcomes will be strengthened by ensuring performance criteria clearly align to the entire unit of competence and not to elements alone.
10. VTA supports the exploration of a formal credit system for the tertiary sector.

## INTRODUCTION

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Quality Council/COAG Joint Steering Committee Consultation Paper 'VET Training Products for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'.

As we move past the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and weather the effects of the international economic downturn, it is timely to reflect on VET Training Products including Training Packages, VET qualifications, accredited courses, credit systems and recognition arrangements and their place in the Human Capital Agenda. VTA commends the work of the Joint Steering Committee.

VTA members, including four multi-sector Universities and fourteen stand-alone public TAFE Institutes, deliver training, assessment, advisory and consultancy services to employers, governments, community organisations and individuals nationally and internationally. They are well placed to respond to the Consultation Paper.

This response is made in the context of COAG's policy direction for VET to reform training products, services, information systems and regulation to meet a more demand and client driven training system and is cognisant of VET research, international VET benchmarks and Governments' policy directions.

VTA members may respond individually to the discussion paper to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations.

## DEFINING AND DEVELOPING COMPETENCY

The current definition of competence needs to be reviewed in the light of:

- contemporary research about the nature of work and organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and skills deepening (NCVER and Monash University as examples).
- the OECD Review of Australian VET<sup>1</sup>.
- Governments' policy directions arising from the COAG Reform Agenda.
- Australian Government policy directions arising from the Bradley Review into Higher Education including empowering the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council "to improve the articulation and connectivity between the university and VET sectors to enable competency-based and merit-based systems to become more student-focused"<sup>2</sup>.

Improved articulation and connectivity between the university and VET sector will not be achieved without a common understanding of the equivalence of qualifications – an issue raised specifically in the current AQF Council project *Developing and Implementing a Common Terminology for Credit Transfer and Articulation*.

A significant barrier to achieving cross-sectoral recognition of the equivalence of qualifications is that the current definition of competency is focussed on workplace performance and occupational outcomes. VTA accepts the arguments put in the NCVER publication *Competence and competency based training: What the literature*

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, Australia, Paris, November 2008, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/11/41631383.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Speech by the Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon. Julia Gillard, Big Skills Conference, March 5, 2009

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says' that competency is a broader concept than the ability to perform workplace tasks.

The current definition should be modified to relax the requirement for specification of competency to relate only to workplace performance. VTA would consider the alternative of specifying industry endorsed workplace performance based standards to provide the necessary flexibility to meet industries vocational education and training needs. Maintaining Australia's skills base will be challenged in the immediate future as the global financial crisis impacts on employment and unemployment in Australia. Skills built through apprenticeship and traineeship programs cannot be lost and retrenched workers also need the opportunity to upgrade their existing skills or pursue new skilled occupations. Learners without access to a workplace related to their training should not be disadvantaged from completing a qualification. The ability to demonstrate competence in environments other than the workplace should not be discounted.

Occupational competency also needs to explicitly include:

- technological fluency,
- skills for lifelong learning, and
- foundational knowledge (language, literacy and numeracy).

To embrace a broader view of *competency*, personal attributes should be factored into the definition. VTA acknowledges this is not a simple task and the issue of objectively assessing personal attributes was a feature of the debate to integrate employability skills into Training Packages. The lessons learned from the integration of employability skills into Training Packages can be drawn on to include elements of competence relating to personal attributes and capabilities.

The suggestion to broaden the view of *competency* to include ongoing cognitive development drew mixed responses from VTA members. Some VTA respondents believe this should occur across all AQF qualifications, and others commenting this is relevant to higher level qualifications where pathways to further learning are required. Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications need to be supported by more emphasis on underpinning knowledge, the demonstration of which can be assessed and reported as part of the competency assessment.

VTA looks forward to contributing to discussions regarding the inclusion of elements of personal attributes, capabilities and ongoing cognitive development into the definition of *competency* as an extension of this project and based on the outcomes of these current consultations.

## **VET QUALIFICATIONS**

VTA supports the provision of explicit knowledge based and preparatory units to support life-long learning, the human capital agenda and changing market demands.

Australia aspires to being a knowledge based economy and the workforce needs access to education and training that will equip them for that future including the capacity to progress along career paths, diversify career paths and transition through the tertiary sector.

Explicit preparatory/enabling units within VET qualifications will better equip individuals with broadly based skills and knowledge and support COAG's goals to

build skills in language, literacy (including ICT), numeracy, learning skills and self-management.

Knowledge based units are vital to the achievement of the agenda to deepen the skills levels of the workforce and to meet targets to grow the proportion of the workforce holding higher level VET and undergraduate qualifications. A qualification package based on developing the whole person will better equip Australians for work internationally and to compete locally and provide transferability as they move between career options.

Specifying the required contexts for assessment could provide better transparency of outcomes to employers and improve access for diverse learners. VTA members suggest this should occur at the unit of competence level though some units may not require the same level of specificity as others, particularly where the demand is for skill sets and not necessarily for a full qualification. However, this comment is tempered by the need to consider that making the context explicit might be problematic when competencies may be imported into a range of Training Packages and care must be taken to ensure the learning and assessment opportunities are not consequently unduly narrow.

VTA supports enabling more diverse qualifications to be created to meet changing Australian labour market requirements. It is advantageous to have transferability of skills into a range of occupations. More flexible packaging of units in the National Training Packages could facilitate the creation of more diverse qualifications as well as clearly defined, articulated and promoted pathways from existing qualifications. Diversity may also be assisted by the creation of a national bank of industry endorsed units of competency together with specific nationally endorsed qualifications or skills clusters, and industry regulatory/licensing/industrial requirements within the existing qualifications arrangements.

The VET system would benefit from some overarching mechanism that allowed courses from various sources to be described (and maybe measured) in a consistent way such as occurs with the Qualifications Navigator (formally Credit Matrix) or this may occur in reviewing and improving the AQF. It is important that the English as a Second Language framework, Certificate of General Education for Adults and their equivalents in other states are included in the system. There is a case to be made for language, literacy and numeracy courses to be regarded as *enabling* rather than *vocational* and structured to be included in vocational qualifications as needed by a student cohort.

A diversity of views was received regarding the appropriateness of the current guidelines for accredited courses in terms of the capacity of Registered Training Organisations to meet the needs of diverse learners and enterprises having regard to national recognition. While most agreed the current guidelines are appropriate, it was noted that industry's needs are not being met when there are lengthy delays in the implementation of reviews/changes to the Training Packages. The benefits of workplace assessment are acknowledged but the learner base is diverse and extremely large and not confined to workplace based learning alone. Those learners unable to access work-based learning opportunities, for example apprentices and trainees being laid-off in the current economic downturn, must be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in simulated workplaces, practice firms and the like.

The Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon. Julia Gillard in a speech to the Big Skills Conference (5 March 2009) stated that 'there must be an emphasis on the

development of pathways and qualifications of greater depth, breadth and rigor – all the way from foundation and entry-level courses through to artisan and highly specialised skills and she has commissioned the Australian Qualifications Framework Council ‘to improve the articulation and connectivity between the university and VET sectors to enable competency-based and merit-based systems to become more student-focused.’ A review of the AQF is implicit in this commission. In responding to the VET for the 21st Century Consultation Paper, members particularly commented on the need to differentiate more clearly between AQF 4, 5 and 6 qualifications.

## **TRAINING PACKAGES – STRUCTURE AND CONTENT**

Fundamental to the structure and content of Training Packages is the definition of *competency*. VTA re-emphasises the need to explore supplementing the definition of *competency* to include elements relating to foundation skills, personal attributes and capabilities, and ongoing cognitive development. The following comments are made in the context of that view.

VTA agrees that assessment outcomes will be strengthened with more meaningful and relevant guidance on assessment requirements in units of competence irrespective of whether the units of competence require direct workplace experience.

The format of the Training Packages can be improved by eliminating unnecessarily repetitious language in the descriptors of units of competency particularly between the range statement, evidence guide and required skills and knowledge.

A streamlined approach may also include a review of the format of performance criteria and elements. Performance criteria in units of competence relate to occupational competence in a context that the skills and knowledge are part of a holistic package of skills and knowledge, to enable workplace participation and contribute to workplace productivity. The current structure of a unit of competency with performance criteria aligned to elements can have the effect of fragmenting the workplace skills and knowledge. VTA suggests the performance criteria clearly align to the entire unit of competence and not to elements alone. Changes to the structure and format of Training Packages could be implemented in the normal course of review and endorsement and reinforced with professional development for industry based and RTO based trainers/teachers.

Some VTA members believe that the word *Packages* is not understood and suggestions were made to change the name to include reference to the word *Qualifications* or *Training and Assessment Package*. Other respondents were of the view that the current nomenclature has a level of universal currency nationally; that industry and the VET sector understand that *Training Packages* represent national industry endorsed VET qualifications. Emphasis should be on improving the structure and content rather than changing the name.

## **CREDIT SYSTEMS AND RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENTS**

VTA supports the exploration of a formal credit system for the tertiary sector. Fundamental to these discussions is a paradigm shift in VET and Higher Education whereby both sectors believe in the equivalence of various qualifications and consistently apply national standards of recognition and credit. The work of the Victorian Regulation and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) in relation to the Qualifications Navigator (formally Credit Matrix) is noted in the VET Training

Products for the 21st Century Consultation Paper and VTA commends that work to the National Quality Council/COAG Joint Steering Committee.

Differing views were expressed by VTA members with some suggesting a formal credit system would occur at the VET qualification level while an alternative view is that this should occur within the revised Australian Qualifications Framework. No responses suggested a formal credit system would apply at a unit of competency level. Implementing formal credit arrangements across the Australian Qualifications Framework will facilitate a transition to seamless pathways between schools, VET and Higher Education.

VTA notes the current consultation process for Stage 2 of the AQF Council project 'Developing and Implementing a Common Terminology for Credit Transfer and Articulation'. VTA suggests the National Quality Council/COAG Joint Steering Committee provides the stakeholder responses to this Consultation Paper to the AQFC to inform their review.

David Williams  
Executive Director  
Victorian TAFE Association  
3/478 Albert Street  
EAST MELBOURNE  
dwilliams@vta.vic.edu.au