

**Parliament of Victoria
Education and Training Committee**

Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning

Submission from the Victorian TAFE Association

Preamble

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) is the peak employer body for the public providers of TAFE in Victoria. The members include all of Victoria's TAFE Institutes and four multi-sector Universities. Our purpose is to actively engage in developing, supporting and advocating policies and practices that progress and sustain the future of TAFE in Victoria. As such, the VTA is well qualified to contribute to the current Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning.

Victoria's TAFE providers have total operating revenues in excess of \$1.1 billion annually and employ in approximately 10,200 staff¹. In 2006 they provided vocational education and training (VET) to more than 355,000 Victorians with 22.9% being in the age range 15-19 years and a further 16.8% in the age range 20-24 years. As well, Victorian TAFE providers are actively engaged throughout the State in partnerships with schools (government and non-government) and enterprises to provide vocational education and training and contribute to addressing skills shortages in Victoria's workforce and advance the economic prosperity of the State. Under the COAG Agenda TAFE is clearly seen as a possible vehicle for micro-economic reform.

Distinctions between the education sectors have become increasingly blurred. This is particularly the case with secondary, TAFE/VET and Higher Education where overlap occurs at the boundaries. Teachers in Victorian secondary schools are actively involved in planning and delivering VET programs principally at years 11 and 12 within VCE and VCAL programs. TAFE Institutes are also registered to provide VCE and VCAL qualifications. There is further blurring between TAFE/VET and industry where enterprises are also registered training organisations (RTOs). Where private RTOs access public funding, distinctions become even more blurred.

While the Inquiry does not explicitly include TAFE/VET teachers, nor are they excluded. It makes sense in the light of the COAG Agenda and VET's contributions to Victoria that the Inquiry would adopt a broad approach to its terms of reference and consider the needs of VET teachers.

Terms of Reference for Inquiry

The Parliament of Victoria has referred to the Education and Training Committee a reference for inquiry, consideration and on effective strategies for teacher professional learning. This submission relates to the following four Terms of Reference:

- a. the relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise;
- b. which factors will support high quality professional learning for teachers, including learning methods and environments for the development of professional knowledge, and the pedagogy relevant to professional development of teachers;

¹ Source: TAFE Selected Measures 2006 - OTTE

- d. determining how best practice in ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities; and
- e. examining the potential for greater cross-sectoral links between industry, training institutions and schools in the delivery of ongoing professional learning for teachers.

In relation to national trends regarding ongoing professional learning for teachers and reports on innovative initiatives, the VTA commends the work done by the National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER) and the work undertaken by Dr. John Mitchell and Associates (<http://www.jma.com.au>).

The professional learning needs of TAFE/VET teachers

There are problems in supporting the professional learning needs of VET teachers that apply equally to VET teachers teaching in secondary schools, TAFE institutions and private RTOs. Within secondary schools VET occurs typically at years 11 and 12 but increasing attention is being given to the enhanced school retention levels that may be linked to VET being available at years 9 and 10 and earlier.

The same degree of professional pedagogical practice should be required in VET as in other streams of teaching.

1. School/Organisation based Teacher Capability Framework

Good practice suggests that Schools/TAFE organisations each need to provide an overall capability framework as a road map for teacher professional development within that School/TAFE. This framework needs to take into account workforce planning forecasts and the individual teacher capabilities required to enable achievement of the VET strategic plan of the School/TAFE provider. It also includes the generic skills of teaching and learning that are implied across the VET system. Each teacher needs an Individual Learning and Development Plan prepared alongside their Performance Plan in the context of their Position Description and other strategic plans. This Learning and Development Plan should also take account of career aspirations. Supervisors of teachers need to be held accountable and measured against their commitment to the long term development of their staff to ensure teacher release, backfill and follow up of learning and development experiences as well as opportunities to integrate and try out new VET learning.

As an example, Wodonga TAFE conducted a series of research tasks to determine what makes an effective TAFE teacher. As a result of this research Wodonga TAFE has commenced the development of a 'Teacher Capability Framework' as part of the Wodonga Institute of TAFE 'Workforce Capability Framework' that includes capabilities of Leaders and Specialist Support Staff. The 'Teacher Capability Framework' describes the expected capabilities of a teacher and also sets those capabilities into a framework of the life cycle of a teacher.

To put this plainly a beginning TAFE teacher will need a number of basic skills or competencies to effectively make the transition from being a skilled professional in a particular discipline or field of work to being a teacher of that discipline. This stage is complicated by the nature of employment of the teacher. More often than not, the beginning TAFE teacher is employed at a time fraction that is less than full time and the attainment of the skills necessary to be an effective teacher is undertaken in a climate of mixed modes of employment and employment relationships with the TAFE Institute and other employers relating to their professional discipline.

For example, consider the case of a beginning teacher in landscape gardening. This person may have 6 hours of paid teaching work as a casual teacher, may be running their own business and may also be undertaking professional development to gain a Vocational Education and Training teaching qualification. In this instance the Wodonga TAFE Teacher Capability Framework can provide a road map of the

competencies expected to be attained, the time frame for attainment and the support that the beginning teacher can expect from the TAFE Institute.

The Teacher Capability Framework while providing the road map for beginning teachers is also designed to provide a professional development framework for teachers as they move beyond their first experiences as teachers. The framework has identified the expected capabilities of teachers at the various stages of their careers and can prepare them for a move into a senior and/or management role.

VTA suggests the Inquiry consults the work of John Mitchell & Associates (<http://www.jma.com.au>). The principles of a Workforce Capability Framework as outlined could be contextualised to any educational setting.

2. Supporting the ongoing industrial learning of VET teachers?

Teachers must continually engage in professional learning to maintain their teaching expertise. There is an expectation that a VET teacher must continually develop their skills and knowledge in:

- their professional discipline (eg carpenter, scientist)
- pedagogy and androgogy
- the teaching environment (whether TAFE, primary, secondary, higher education or otherwise)
- the quality and knowledge systems they operate within
- the technical skills to teach in an environment of high level IT skills²
- managing change in a dynamic environment

Teachers of VET are required to hold the required trainer/and or assessor qualifications (or their equivalent) and vocational qualifications and experience (AQTF 2007 Essential Standard 1.4).

This is a particularly acute problem given that new teachers coming into the system will teach for 10-15 years longer than has been the case in the past. In Victoria, and indeed across Australia, the ageing teacher workforce is a critical issue for the ongoing relationship between professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise. How do Schools/TAFE provide professional learning support that enables teachers to maintain currency of their industrial and professional practice? This problem clearly needs new thinking. Is the key to be found in a multi-faceted approach that includes funding for industry placements; support for partnerships with enterprises that are able to 'exchange' staff between periods of teaching and industrial practice? What are the opportunities to strengthen cross-sectoral links through formalised professional development practices between TAFE and secondary schools? In the VET in Schools area alone secondary schools could make better use of the vocational expertise in TAFE institutes in the development of their teaching staff to work in VET in Schools programs. Likewise there is strong potential for teachers from secondary schools to work with their TAFE colleagues to develop TAFE teachers' pedagogical skills, particularly the skills in dealing with younger students and students with learning difficulties and class room behaviour issues.

Generating learning opportunities for teachers in industry, to retain the currency and relevance of their knowledge as applied in work settings is a particularly significant challenge for the TAFE sector. In an environment where delivery and content of VET needs to be directed more and more by industry stakeholders, programs that enable teacher release, secondment, assignment, projects etc in industry, for which industry may not necessarily have to pay, will assist Schools and TAFE to maintain contemporary

² This point is becoming critical as students are now entering vocational education streams with higher level IT skills than their teachers.

relevance and responsiveness. Unfortunately this kind of release is costly, particularly for regional Schools/TAFE Institutes where back filling such teachers may not only be expensive but also difficult when replacement teachers are not readily available.

In response to this challenge the Victorian Government took the lead nationally in the establishment of the TAFE Development Centre which specifically addresses workforce development issues for TAFE staff. It is suggested that the Inquiry familiarise itself with the work of the Centre.

The VTA suggests:

- **The Inquiry strongly recommends that the initial preparation and ongoing professional learning of VET teachers be supported to the same level as that of school teachers.**

3. Professional learning for school teachers that contribute to improved outcomes for the VET sector.

The lack of knowledge of VET, TAFE institutions and VET pedagogy is one of the important factors that contributes to the poor image of VET and its lack of attraction for school leavers. Applied learning/practical pedagogies and VET should be available to all secondary school students.

Therefore the VTA suggests that:

- **Learning about how VET and applied learning pedagogies should be compulsory core components in at least all secondary teacher training programs. Formal professional learning programs in VET and applied learning should be compulsory for all current secondary teachers.**
- **Teacher training institutions (all universities?) should be required to include VET practice and applied learning in their teacher training and development programs. To do this, they should be required to employ staff with appropriate expertise and to customize their courses appropriately – it is not acceptable to teach curriculum studies to a group of VET teachers by telling these learners about secondary curriculum practice and expecting them to make the connections.**

Conclusion

The role of teacher in the VET context is complex. A teacher is expected to maintain their professional competence in a vocational competence and they are also expected to develop the pedagogical (or andragogical) skills to undertake the science of teaching. They are also to work in a regulated teaching environment. This is not just the world of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQTF), it is the administrative requirements of the quality system that need to be understood. The teacher may not be working in a traditional classroom teaching environment, they could be working in an industrial setting using a range of flexible learning strategies and technologies.

Any professional development framework for VET teachers to learn the required skills needs to provide the time and resources to:

- the beginning teacher (as the learner)
- the coordinators of teaching programs
- the coaches and mentors to the teacher
- the back filling teacher who stands in for the learner.

Planned professional development for teachers in the VET sector, underpinned by significant financial contributions by the State Government, is essential to the achievement of Growing Victoria Together, Moving Forward the Blueprint for Schools and Maintaining the Advantage – Skilled Victorians.

The same degree of professional pedagogical practice should be required in VET as in other streams of teaching.

Virginia Simmons
Chair Education Standing Committee
CEO Council
Victorian TAFE Association
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Glossary

TAFE	Providers of Technical and Further Education
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTA	Victorian TAFE Association