



SUPPORTING VET PROVIDERS in building capability for the future

Quality is the key: Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment

by John Mitchell, Clive Chappell, Andrea Bateman and Susan Roy

Quality is the key issue in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training. Ultimately, most parties—including practitioners, government and clients—want quality in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment. Providers also need to be increasingly flexible and responsive in meeting the multiple demands of industry, individual employers and learners.

A changing environment

The environment in which VET operates is changing, increasing the need for VET practitioners to extend existing skills and develop new skills in teaching, learning and assessment. Environmental change factors include government policy, skill shortages, new technology in industry, changes in the structure of work, the needs of youth and mature-aged workers, competition between providers, and the expectations of industry and the community.

In this challenging environment, critical issues which address the needs of industry clients and individual learners include:

- meeting the increasing demand for the customisation and personalisation of training services
- developing a deeper understanding of individuals' learning styles and preferences
- providing effective services for learner groups who may need extra support, such as those studying in the online learning environment, or those who are disadvantaged
- understanding the many different ways learning can occur in workplaces
- developing partnerships between external teachers and enterprise-based managers and trainers.

Key findings about practitioner skills

VET practitioners need skills and resources in order to:

- implement and use training packages effectively. Despite their widespread availability in the sector for many years, many VET practitioners lack expertise in this area
- take advantage of the new digital technologies which become available each year
- provide effective support for learning which occurs in the workplace.

The way in which practitioners design learning programs and resources needs to recognise and accommodate different types of learning, such as formal and informal learning. Enhanced skills are also needed to provide necessary assessment services; for example, conducting assessment in the workplace, providing a recognition process, and assessing generic skills.

As vocational education and training shifts from being supply-driven to demand-driven, our research suggests that a notional 'new practitioner' is emerging who will satisfy the increasing expectations of both industry clients and individual students. This new VET practitioner combines the knowledge of sound educational practice on the one hand and contemporary business strategies on the other.

Research activity 3: Analysing critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment

The research consortium, *Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future*, comprises researchers from the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work at the University of South Australia, the Centre Undertaking Research in Vocational Education at the Canberra Institute of Technology, and the Australian Centre for Organisational, Vocational and Adult Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. Managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), it aims to investigate how training organisations will respond to future changes in VET provision.

Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future

CONSORTIUM RESEARCH PROGRAM



SUPPORTING VET PROVIDERS in building capability for the future

This mix of frameworks is understandable, given that VET practitioners are being encouraged to work more closely with industry and enterprises.

To address the idiosyncratic demands of each enterprise client and individual student, VET practitioners need a raft of new skills. In fact, these skills are so varied that many practitioners need to be able to draw on the specialist skills and knowledge of colleagues and partners by working in teams or partnering arrangements. New skills are required by all staff, including full- and part-time teaching staff, support staff and the VET sector's managers and leaders.

Given the breadth of this range of new skills, practitioners will need to use a variety of different ways to develop them. Work-based learning that takes into account new thinking about adult learning and learning organisations provides a proven methodology for skill building. This can involve coaching, mentoring, industry release, work shadowing, participating in networks and communities of practice, and professional conversations—which can occur as part of work or may take place in the networks to which practitioners belong.

Key findings about innovation

There is a need for a variety of approaches which will provide innovative teaching, learning and assessment practices to suit the learning needs of individuals as well as the needs of enterprises and industry.

- For *individual practitioners*, critical success factors for innovation in teaching and learning include adopting new work roles such as learning manager, facilitator, mediator, broker or strategist.
- For *VET organisations*, critical success factors include developing a culture that is responsive and flexible and encourages diverse thinking and individual initiative.
- For the *VET system*, critical success factors affecting innovation include changes to policy and regulatory and administrative systems to better support innovative practices, and better facilitate organisational and practitioner development.

Strategies to promote good practice range from issuing publications of case studies, to supporting staff who are skilled in dissemination, through to a range of staff development activities. Staff development may be either formal and structured or informal and unstructured, or a mixture of the two styles.

Implications for policy and practice

Our research shows that governments across Australia, England and Scotland agree that a vibrant, high-quality VET sector is needed. Governments are also more aware that improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices is essential if the sector is to respond to its new challenges.

In order to balance this international finding, we undertook two other research tasks in Australia—a study of networks in the Australian VET sector and the preparation of 15 case studies of good practice in VET. This research confirmed that Australian VET practitioners are focused on improving the quality of VET provision and outcomes in the same manner as their international counterparts. Networks focus on a wide range of different issues and vocational areas and represent an important way for practitioners to share information, knowledge and their experiences and expertise to improve practice.

Quality is not achieved by chance. VET practitioners need to have the time, space and support to develop innovative and high-quality strategies which will improve teaching, learning and assessment throughout the sector.

This overview is based on the research report: *Quality is the key: Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training*. Visit <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1710.html>> for copies of the report and supporting documents. An overview of the consortium's research findings is available at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1827.html>>.

