Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination

The problem

- ■ Significant shortages of VET teachers, trainers and assessors in Australia

- ■ Problem affects most industries and industry sectors

- ■ Why does this problem exist and what might be done about it?

The research: Phases 1 & 2

- **Phase 1: T**alks with SSOs to help us scope the problem

- **Phase 2:** Interviews with 27 RTOs identified by the SSOs, who sometimes also facilitated the contacts.

- RTOs were from all six Australian states and ACT.: 14 private, 10 public and 3 enterprise.

- RTOs nominated 37 different areas known to them where there were teacher/trainer shortages, but virtually unanimous agreement that there were continuing shortages of trainers, and assessors across almost every industry.

- The RTOs identified the issues in attracting industry experts into VET and possible solutions.

The research: Phase 3

- Phase 3: Survey of VET practitioners, facilitated by utilising the networks of the RTOs we had interviewed.

- 333 anonymous responses

- Most were 40 or older

- Almost 80% had 11 years or more experience in industry

- Most had a combined trainer and assessor role

What we found

- Overall message: becoming a VET practitioner is an ongoing process, not an end in itself.

- It is a journey, not a destination

- Ideally there is a dual professionalism that
    - *sets the VET practitioner role apart and*
    - *enables them to continually interact with industry to meet changing workplace needs and advances*

- Journey typically begins at some point within an earlier career and involves:
    - *Vocational and educational preparation;*
    - *Transition to VET; and*
    - *Continuing practice and updating*

Recruitment: what they told us

- Need for trainers was not always recognised within industry

- Lack of awareness of VET requirements or where to start

- Generally, VET could not match the wages that could be earned in industry.

- Strong attraction to developing the next generation of workers

- Mostly traditional advertising; direct approach and social media increasingly important

Recruitment: continued

- Industry-related outlets considered most appropriate way to promote the notion of a second career —to become 'dual professional'.

- Use of $ incentives to encourage a move into VET was conditionally supported.

- Mandatory requirement for Cert IV TAE prior to employment confounded trecruitment process

- Educationally, Cert IV TAE difficult for some esp in trades; insult to highly trained and senior industry experts.

- Pleas to present reality of the VET practitioner role

Recruitment: Key points

- Important to pay attention to industry experts who display a passion for training and to ensure they know where and how to begin the journey.

- 'When you decide to attract people, it's got to be a seamless, easy process, and you've got to show them what the end result is going to be'.

Transition: What they told us

- Casual and contracted employment options deterrents for industry experts in full-time salaried positions

- Cert IV TAE considered not fit for purpose - too high an emphasis on the processes and procedures in VET

- 'Skills sets' could be used more effectively instead of full Cert IV

- To make a successful transition, newcomers needed

    - a passion for teaching and be practically prepared

    - to be prepared for a range of student abilities and motivations.

    - to be aware of the demands of a heavy workload, compliance requirements and working unpaid out of hours.

Transition: Continued

■ Three ways to ease the transition :

  1. Proactive management and ongoing peer support and mentoring

  2. A more 'hands on' and extended experience of Cert IV TAE, with supervised practice

  3. Careful introduction and reinforcement of ASQA compliance requirements.

■ Cert IV TAE not so much a 'stumbling block' but an imposed requirement, which had to be met in order to move into VET.

■ Highest approval of Cert IV TAE was understanding VET systems, not teaching and learning.

Transition: Key points

- Transition from industry to VET is a vital stage of journey - encounter reality of new role.

- Particularly true for those with little previous training experience

- Nature and extent of support received during transition at this stage may determine effectiveness as a VET practitioner, and also whether they remain in VET.

Retaining & updating

- Some VET practitioners found demands overwhelming and different from their expectations.

- Many were prepared to overlook drawbacks because of satisfaction from teaching role.

- In some parts of VET, lack of a career pathway was a disincentive to stay

- Continual upgrading of Cert IV TAE imposed a burden on practitioners and RTOs

- Higher industry salaries countered by: work-life balance, supportive culture, teaching satisfaction, and maintaining strong links with industry

Retaining & updating: Key points

- Those coming direct from industry may feel pull of previous workplace and feeling of 'belonging' they had there

- So, being prepared for what to expect before taking up VET role is part of answer, but new 'community of practice' needs to be developed

Recruitment - Recommendations

- Continually promote concept of VET practitioner as career option

- Maximise promotion through industry networks, events, publications etc.

- Identify likely career points in each industry

- Highlight reasons why industry experts might consider career change: giving back to industry/preparing next generation, creating a different work-life balance, transfer of existing teaching/mentoring skills, possibility of salary negotiation

- Give industry experts a realistic picture of what is required and what it means to be a VET practitioner

Recruitment – Recommendations continued
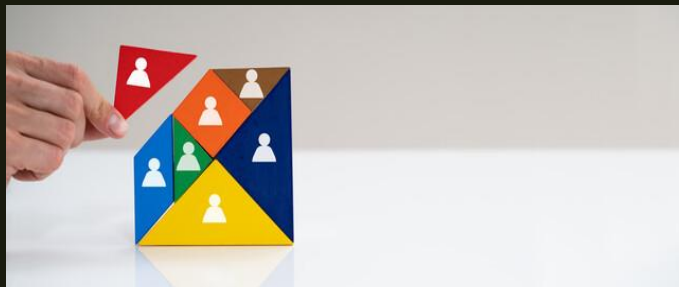
- Provide 'bite size' supervised advance opportunities to enable aspiring VET practitioners to experience the role

- Identify industry experts with a passion for training

- Build robust two-way relationships with RTOs, so industry experts can trial a VET practitioner training role; work part-time in training while maintaining their industry role

- Enable VET practitioners and industry experts to access periods of secondment in each other's 'workplaces'.

Recruitment – Recommendations continued

- Initiate industry-led programs to facilitate the entry of selected industry experts into VET

- Trial a program of financial incentives to attract experts in selected industries into the training role, with a 'bond' period.

- Set rigorous selection criteria for such initiatives

- Establish a national register of VET practitioners

  as a central enquiry point

Transition - Recommendations

- Ensure requirements and expectations are clear from outset

- Develop a flow chart that defines VET practitioner requirements and expectations and shows pathways

- Develop promotional materials, including through social and other visual media, which realistically demonstrate how VET practitioner's work

- Provide a range of options for working towards a mandatory training/teaching qualification

Transition – Recommendations continued

- Acknowledge presenter skills set as appropriate for unsupervised delivery within specified limits

- Provide more opportunities for advance or concurrent classroom and online teaching practice

- Develop a clear RPL process for industry experts already in a training or mentoring role.

- Provide systematic orientation and support, including peer support & feedback

Retaining & updating - Recommendations
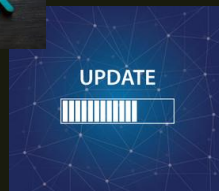
- Maintain or build a supportive culture,

- Take professional development seriously, with joint industry, RTO and VET practitioner responsibility

- Consider ways of providing career progression

- Promote the notion of a dual professional, including supporting ongoing industry and pedagogical currency - boundary crossing

Broader matters

- Exploration of new models of industry and VET engagement

- Development of a fit-for-purpose educational qualification

- Establishment of a professional association for VET practitioners.

In a nutshell

- Exploit career points and individual passion

- Sell benefits beyond salary

- Smooth the path: more options to 'try before you buy' and for learning to teach

- Look after new VET practitioners, esp those new to training

- Support constant 'boundary crossing' between VET and industry

- Promote the uniqueness of the 'dual practitioner'