

Continuing professional development for a diverse VET practitioner workforce

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About the research

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Vocational education and training (VET) practitioners play a critical role in skilling Australia's workforce. The need to ensure that both their teaching practices and industry skills and knowledge remain current has never been more paramount, especially when faced with rapidly changing industrial, technological and economic environments.

This occasional paper synthesises the literature relating to continuing professional development (CPD) for VET practitioners, with a focus on identifying the elements impacting on their ongoing learning. It looks further afield to international examples and to CPD in other professions. These examples, while quite different from vocational education and training, provide insight into whether CPD for VET practitioners is ahead of or behind other professions in their approach to ongoing skilling for the workplace.

Key messages

The authors highlight a number of the enduring issues affecting continuing professional development for VET practitioners, including:

- The VET workforce and the organisations that employ them are varied. VET practitioners come from a range of backgrounds, are employed under various conditions (part-time, casual or on a contract basis) and have significantly diverse career paths when compared with the schooling or university sectors. This diversity means that no single approach to continuing professional development for VET practitioners can meet the needs of every industry, organisation, teacher or trainer.
- A challenge for VET practitioners is ensuring their currency of skills in both educational expertise and industry practices. Continuing professional development for VET practitioners needs to take into account the duality of the role.
- Continuing professional development for VET practitioners is largely institutionally specific, rather than nationally systemic. Some proponents have argued for the establishment of a professional association for the VET sector, which could register VET practitioners, track professional development and be the organisation publicly accountable for the quality of VET delivery.
- VET practitioners are currently required to have a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in order to deliver training packages. There are concerns that this qualification in isolation does not adequately prepare VET practitioners for the variety of teaching and assessment scenarios they will encounter. More readily accessible and recognised continuing professional development could complement the minimum qualification by providing additional training as practitioners' responsibilities change.

There is an obligation for registered training organisations (RTOs) to ensure that their VET practitioners meet the requirements for teachers and assessors, as outlined in the Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015. Clause 1.16 specifically stipulates a requirement that 'trainers and assessors undertake professional development in the fields of the knowledge and practice of vocational training, learning and assessment including competency based training and assessment'. There is insufficient evidence collected and collated on how this is done. Any assessments gathered during field audits do not make judgements on the value or adequacy of this training, and RTOs are only measured as

being compliant or non-compliant. The school system, by contrast, requires teachers to undertake a certain number of CPD hours per year to remain registered.

The study underlines the paucity of current data on the VET practitioner workforce and the lack of focused attention on this aspect of supporting quality across the national VET system. The last significant VET workforce review was undertaken by the Productivity Commission in 2011. A recurring national survey conducted at least every five years would provide a better informed picture of VET practitioners, including their qualifications, employment status and any professional development undertaken. An appropriately designed survey could serve as a tool to assess if, and how, VET practitioners are gaining access to CPD in accord with the regulatory standard. The importance of quality in training and assessment means this information should be just as relevant and critical as other national VET collections.

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Introduction

Purpose and scope of the paper

The purpose of this occasional paper is to provide a synthesis of recent developments in the field of continuing professional development (CPD) in order to identify those elements likely to be of most value in supporting vocational education and training (VET) practitioners' ongoing industry and pedagogical learning. This review is shaped by three key research questions:

- What current processes and practices of continuing professional development, including the maintenance of industry currency, are most relevant to VET practitioners, including those from other professions and internationally?
- What are the key factors that motivate professionals to undertake continuing education?
- To what extent does the current Certificate IV in Training and Assessment provide a foundation for the kinds of continuing professional development needed to produce adaptive and innovative VET practitioners in Australia?

Using related search terms and major academic databases, the literature relevant to the three questions, with an emphasis on journals and reports, was comprehensively surveyed. From this review it was apparent that there have been few advances over the past decade or so in the research underpinning VET trainers' CPD. Thus, to gain a deeper insight, international examples of CPD, as well as examples from other professions, were examined to identify these elements of good practice potentially transferable to the Australian VET sector. Investigations in other areas provide an indication of whether CPD for VET practitioners is ahead, on par or behind that of other professions.

Background

In a rapidly changing and sometimes volatile economic and industrial environment (Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand 2016; World Economic Forum 2016; Hajkovicz et al. 2016), international competitiveness is increasingly premised on the capacity of industry, and hence the workforce, to respond promptly to changing conditions and to forecast what might lie ahead. In such dynamic conditions, the role of vocational education and training has become increasingly significant.

In Australia, there have been calls for a deepening of skills and a lift in productivity to enable industry to successfully adapt to change and maintain the country's competitive advantage (Skills Australia 2010a). Underpinning the productivity of the VET sector is the capability of the trainers and teachers in the sector and their ability to support, mentor and train students to ensure they have the skills and expertise desired by industry. A major VET employer, TAFE NSW (2016), claims that it 'nurtures the capabilities and development of its ... staff to help them meet the training challenges of a rapidly changing, globalised economy'.

Volmari, Helakorpi and Frimodt (2009) identified a range of factors impacting on contemporary VET teachers, including pedagogic, technological, labour market and socio-cultural influences. Skills Australia (2010b, p.9) pointed out the pervasive influence of

new technology, noting that 'new digital multimedia tools, collaborative technologies and social networking forums are dissolving the boundaries between informal and institution-based learning and driving demands for flexible services from both learners and practitioners'.

The 'rapid and uncertain' changes and the need for 'new and high skills' detected by Béduwé et al. (2009) have placed new demands on VET practitioners to ensure that their vocational skills keep pace with what is happening in the industries for which they train workers (Andersson & Köpsén 2015). In this paper, the focus is on the teaching occupation – the VET practitioner, which, as Mlotkowski and Guthrie (2010) pointed out, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) differentiates from the VET professional. According to this differentiation, the former are mainly responsible for the development, delivery and assessment of courses and modules, while the latter provide leadership, planning and administrative support (Mlotkowski & Guthrie 2010, p.15). This neat division of labour is increasingly problematic, however. One of the issues that arises in any consideration of professional development for VET practitioners is the expansion of the VET practitioner's role from 'development, delivery and assessment' to encompass administrative and leadership responsibilities (Misko 2015). As Wheelahan (2010, p.6), noted, even within the practitioner role, VET teachers 'must be prepared to teach programs that vary widely in level and type, in a variety of institutional, workplace and community contexts to students with extremely diverse learning needs'.

These developments imply that the teaching role in VET continues to be a significant one, and VET practitioners need to ensure they not only maintain industry currency in a dynamic environment, but also that they adapt their pedagogy to suit a variety of teaching situations and expectations. Submissions to a 2010 Productivity Commission investigation into the VET workforce were strongly in support of the notion of this 'duality' (for example, Australian Council for Private Education and Training 2010; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010). The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2010, p.3) called for a 'national professional development strategy' that would encompass both elements. Guthrie (2010, p.12) concluded that 'one of the professional development issues that emerges time and time again is getting the balance right between maintaining vocational currency and fostering the skills to improve teaching, learning and assessment practices'. The implications are that effective professional development approaches are likely to require a range of understandings of the different circumstances of the practitioner role, and of the practitioners themselves.

The VET practitioner profile

This paper encompasses the range of VET practitioners identified by Wheelahan and Moodie (2010) as 'teachers' – those designated as teachers, trainers, lecturers, tutors, assessors, workplace assessors and/or trainers, VET workplace consultants, those who develop and deliver courses, modules and learning and assessment materials. These practitioners are diverse: as argued by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (2010, p.10): 'the different backgrounds, the variety of skills and prior experiences people bring to the VET sector, and the careers paths they are on are typically much more varied than is the case in the schools and university sectors'.

Emerging demands on practitioners, and the diversity of the workforce, calls for a rethink of traditional approaches to CPD.

It is difficult to obtain a clear profile of VET practitioners in Australia, with a lack of figures available for the private sector. In one attempt, Mlotkowski and Guthrie (2010), drawing on 2005 data, found 677 000 VET practitioners in total, comprising 61 800 in TAFE (state and territory public providers), and 615 800 in 'all other organisations' (most of which are likely to be private registered training organisations). This observation is supported by the Productivity Commission (2011, p.xxxiv), which also noted the lack of 'robust figures' on VET workforce numbers, but referred to 'reliable data' indicating that TAFE (technical and further education) institutes employed 73 000 'VET professionals and general staff', and less reliable data indicating that non-TAFE employees of all kinds numbered about 150 000. A recurring national survey of the VET workforce would enable a clearer picture of the individuals who make up this workforce and the skills and qualifications they bring to it.

Irrespective of the actual number of 'practitioners', the nature of the VET workforce also has implications for professional development processes and practices. The Productivity Commission (2011, p.xxxv) found that about half of the VET workforce comprised trainers and assessors 'who, as "dual professionals", have the capacity to operate in both educational and industry environments'. The commission also identified a number of features of the workforce, including that around one-third of non-TAFE trainers and assessors are employed part-time, with more in the TAFE sector; a high proportion of casual employees; multiple-job holding; a higher proportion of older VET workers than in the labour market generally; no typical pathway into the sector; a variety of employment arrangements; and high internal job mobility (2011, p.31). The commission also found that VET workers were 'committed to their careers in the sector', with only seven per cent intending to leave the sector within the next 12 months (2011, p.31).

The imperative of CPD in VET

In the face of ongoing industry and workplace change, continuing professional development for Australian VET practitioners continues to increase in importance. However, the emerging range of demands being made upon those practitioners and the diversity of both the workforce and the types of registered training organisations (RTOs) call for a rethink of traditional approaches to CPD, which currently tend to be reactive and centred around standards, accountability and efficiency, rather than being proactive and focused on developing the sorts of skills and characteristics required of an adaptive and modernised workforce (Webster-Wright 2009).

One feature of CPD that distinguishes it from entry-level training is that practitioners are more likely to be aware of the need to improve their knowledge and practice (Cervero 2001). Cervero (2001, p.26) emphasised that the challenge is to take advantage of that awareness and 'find ways to better integrate continuing education, both in its content and educational design, into the ongoing individual and collective practice of professionals'.

Taking account of the diversity of the sector and the external influences on it, each of the three sections that follow provides the key findings from the examination of literature on the three research questions noted earlier. The paper concludes with a number of responses to the research questions and identifies areas for further research.



Current processes and practices

This section is concerned with the first research question, and is therefore structured around the general approaches to CPD for VET practitioners advanced in the literature. We first examine the situation in Australia and then look at international approaches, followed by a discussion of attempts to maintain industry currency. The section concludes with a review of CPD policies and practices in other professions, with a view to identifying any aspects that might be relevant to vocational education and training. Pedagogical issues are largely discussed later in this paper, in the context of the third research question, specifically, the adequacy of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment for CPD purposes.

Research findings generally indicate that short-term approaches to CPD do not promote the development of new and innovative practices.

General approaches to CPD in VET

A key requirement in the essential standards for the registration of training providers in the Australian Quality Training Framework is for trainers to have relevant vocational competence and to engage in continual development of this competence in order to meet industry change (Australian Skills Quality Authority 2016a). The Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015 further stipulate that trainers and assessors must have 'current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided, and current knowledge and skills in vocational training and learning that inform their training and assessment' (Australian Skills Quality Authority 2016b, p.1). However, there is considerable variation in how this requirement for 'professional development' is interpreted and met in the Australian VET sector.

In reviewing literature on approaches to CPD for VET practitioners in Australia, Saunders (2012, p.185) concluded that the majority of programs were event-focused, rolled out 'just in time' to respond to policy revisions, underpinned by assumptions that there are gaps in skills or knowledge, and that learning and change occur as a result of such programs. She also noted the prevalence of short-term funding for CPD activities and suggested that research findings generally indicate that short-term approaches do not promote the development of new and innovative practices. Saunders (2012) summarised the major features of educational change with implications for CPD, proposing that change is:

- a process, not an event
- made by individuals first, then by organisations
- a personal experience and evokes emotional and behavioural responses based on individual thoughts and feelings
- takes time.

Saunders (2012, p.188) undertook a review of the Concerns Based Adoption Model, which aims to provide a 'framework for guiding the design, construction and implementation of professional development programs' in education. Despite some caveats relating to a lack of data on such aspects as individual motivation, Saunders found that the model provides a basis for understanding the change process. However, the model appears to be more useful after CPD has been undertaken rather than as a planning instrument.

Submissions to the Productivity Commission review of the VET workforce (2011, p.282) advocated for action at a national level to create a more systematic approach to CPD for VET practitioners in three different ways:

- professional standards or a capability framework
- a national workforce development plan
- initiatives to enhance the professionalism and status of VET workers, including a registration scheme.

The commission (2011, p.283) noted that the proposed standards and frameworks were 'designed to describe the knowledge, skills and abilities (capabilities) needed in different roles within a workforce, provide a common and consistent language to describe those capabilities, contribute to high quality service delivery, and inform PD activities'.

A 'workforce development plan', on the other hand, would incorporate:

quality data on the characteristics of the VET workforce, a suite of qualifications reflecting the diversity of the sector, auditing to ensure that those qualifications are delivered by competent providers, intelligence on current and emerging capability needs of the workforce, and strategies to encourage PD and fill capability gaps.

(Productivity Commission 2011, p.283)

The commission believed that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment could be enriched to more completely provide a capability framework for the VET practitioner workforce, but that the intentions of a national VET workforce development plan could be better met through a range of individual initiatives, including at RTO level.

Smith et al. (2009) had earlier proposed a VET workforce development strategy for the service industries at national, RTO and individual levels. At the national level, they identified a number of challenges:

- lack of consensus in relation to the size and composition of the VET workforce
- lack of a national structure for VET practitioner CPD
- no specification of teaching/training qualifications apart from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which, they said, was not held in high regard
- limited policy advocacy for VET practitioners
- little political will to improve VET teaching.

In their report, Smith et al. (2009, p.97) proposed a CPD framework, which included new units of competency, 'Develop and maintain industry engagement' and 'Develop and maintain pedagogical engagement', as part of the Diploma in Training and Assessment. Other suggestions at the national level included:

- an industry CPD framework be established which allocates points for different activities, is managed at RTO level and enables VET practitioners to qualify at 'certified' or 'master' level
- the industry body be responsible for brokering professional development activities on an annual basis to meet particular issues as they emerge

- the industry body encourage CPD at RTO level by endorsing RTO development activities, funding demonstration CPD projects etc.
- the industry body develop online teacher/trainer networks to complement online assessor networks (Smith et al. 2009, p.49).

Smith et al. (2009) called for a reconceptualisation of the ways in which industry engagement could be fostered and maintained, and for the benchmarking of pedagogical engagement across RTOs.

Denning (2016) undertook surveys with staff of a regional TAFE institute in South Australia using two instruments developed from research undertaken by JMAanalytics – VETCAT[©] (designed to measure teaching skills) and CURCAT[©] (designed to measure usage of strategies to maintain industry currency). The intention was to identify gaps in VET practitioners' skills and strategies and lead to the provision of professional learning opportunities as a 'demonstrated response to the skills gaps identified'. However, this is a remedial model of CPD, one at odds with the long-term approach advocated by Seezink and Poell (2010, p.457):

If teachers are to learn about their new roles and tasks, it is important to not only concentrate on the behavioral aspect of teaching, but also establish a long-term change in teachers' belief systems, values, intentions, and individual action theories underlying their teaching practice.

In three key messages Harris, Clayton and Chappell (2007, p.1) summed up the research to that time about how VET organisations could best build capability:

- Strategies that build capability focus on the needs of both the individual and the organisation.
- Building provider capability requires a strategic focus.
- Over-regulation at a variety of levels can constrain organisational capability and flexibility.

One of the main CPD-related messages was that 'providers need to re-emphasise and re-focus on teaching, learning and assessment as core business' (Harris, Clayton & Chappell 2007, p.1).

The Victorian-based TAFE Development Centre¹ (2010), in its submission to the Productivity Commission, proposed the development of a workforce development plan for 'specific cohorts within the VET sector appropriate to their current job function and level'. The centre explained that it categorised VET practitioners in three ways: 'new entrant', 'accomplished practitioner' or 'educational leader'. For CPD purposes, the TAFE Development Centre (2010, p.6) advocated for:

- a state-based strategy to allow for the specific requirements of each component of the workforce to meet the specific industry and strategic government needs

¹ Now known as the VET Development Centre.

- professional competency standards for teachers at each level (for example, new entrant, accomplished practitioner or educational leader), depending on their vocational area of delivery expertise
- a requirement for a specific number of mandated hours of professional practice to maintain educational as well as vocational currency
- programs linked to professional practice that accrue 'credit' points that can be used against accredited training programs or to maintain professional currency
- sector-wide funding support directed to employers to ensure a coordinated approach to workforce development in the VET sector.

The last was seen as a shared responsibility of government (for the public sector), employers and employees.

In summary, the key elements of these proposals for CPD are: different competency standards for different levels of expertise or for different roles; a mandated number of CPD hours for both industry and educational currency; accrual of points for CPD activities; and shared government, employer and practitioner funding for CPD.

In a somewhat similar approach, Innovation & Business Skills Australia (IBSA; 2013) developed 'The VET practitioner capability framework', which comprises: three levels that reflect the expertise and responsibility required of VET practitioners; four domains that describe the specialist skills required of VET practitioners; and six skill areas that address the more generic work skills required for VET practitioner job roles.

The four domains of IBSA's (2013) capability framework are: 'systems and compliance', 'teaching', 'industry and community collaboration', and 'assessment'. Each domain has four areas of capability as shown in table 1.

This capability framework is aimed at RTOs and is designed to 'assess' the capabilities of individual VET practitioners, so from a CPD point of view it requires the development of strategies to ensure the capabilities are addressed at each of the three levels of practitioner (first, second, third). The framework's introduction indicates that when IBSA asked VET practitioners how they would like to use the framework, 'they strongly preferred a professional development support approach, rather than the provision of yet more qualifications' (Innovation & Business Skills Australia 2013, p.5). The challenge is to develop a professional development approach that addresses the complexity of the areas of capability within the four domains, particularly at the practitioner second and third levels. Anecdotal evidence indicates this was an issue for the TAFE Development Centre in Victoria in its categorisation of VET practitioners, as described above.

Table 1 Domains and areas of capability in the IBSA VET practitioner capability framework

Teaching	Theory Design Facilitation Evaluation
Assessment	Theory Products Processes Validation
Industry and community collaboration	Engagement Networks Vocational competence Workforce development
Systems and compliance	System standards System stakeholders Products Processes

Source: Innovation & Business Skills Australia (2013, p.8)

The state-funded VET Development Centre in Victoria provides non-formal training for the VET workforce as well as customised delivery, consultancy, management and strategic support services (VET Development Centre 2016). Although Victorian-focused, the centre also makes its services available to all VET providers in Australia. Other state-based approaches to CPD in Australia include Velg Training, a Queensland-based private company that organises professional development events and offers a consultancy service and a newsletter to members. An example of an initiative that has implications for CPD in both industry currency and pedagogical expertise is TAFE Queensland's establishment of the Centre for Applied Research and Innovation, which it calls Redspace (TAFE Queensland 2016). The new centre offers consulting services to industry, including support for innovation in educational delivery.

Amongst TAFE providers, TAFE Western (2016) in NSW claimed that it facilitated 'ongoing self-improvement for each teacher and strives to create a beneficial and relevant commitment to learning', where the priorities include encompassing a part-time teacher education program to comply with RTO requirements, including assessor qualifications; and a full-time teacher education program concerned with training package requirements for assessor qualifications. Examples of professional development courses included 'Online learning', 'Quality customer relationships' and 'Facilitation skills'.

In reviewing current VET practitioner development in Australia, Rasmussen (2016, p.ii) noted the lack of national strategy for VET teacher capability-building or for continuing professional development, as well as 'no national approach or documented framework that articulates and measures engagement in a teacher's ongoing professional learning against their vocational competency, currency, pedagogical skills and knowledge'. Following a benchmarking tour in Europe, Rasmussen (2016, pp.ii–iii) made five recommendations for improving the quality, capability and status of the Australian VET teacher workforce:

- Raise the level of the minimum qualification beyond a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, with additional requirements to raise the quality of VET practice.
- Establish a set of nationally recognised VET learning and teaching standards. These standards must identify the levels of capability required to develop quality assessments, resources, and training and assessment strategies for a broad range of student cohorts.

There is widespread agreement that CPD is vital for maintaining industry currency and pedagogical expertise.

- Develop a national strategy to upskill the existing workforce of VET teachers so that they can meet the new requirements of training packages and the Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015.
- RTOs to establish their own systems to advance the skills of their VET teachers beyond any minimum base-level teaching qualification and find solutions to bridge gaps in relation to industry currency, industry experience and vocational competence.
- Improve the integration of VET provision across the whole education sector, ensuring the same priority for initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, and emphasising the importance of subject/industry currency.

As valid as these recommendations may be, implementing them in the VET sector, with its significant diversity of providers, teachers and trainers, and employment conditions, is a major challenge.

Summary

This review of current CPD processes and practices for VET practitioners in Australia has highlighted:

- widespread agreement that CPD is vital for maintaining industry currency and pedagogical expertise
- the diversity of the workforce and the sector
- the lack of a national CPD strategy
- proposals for both state-based and industry-based approaches
- the need for a long-term approach to CPD, not one-off initiatives
- that CPD is concerned with both the organisation and the individual.

The questions arising from the review include:

- Should CPD cater for different levels of practitioner expertise and experience?
- Should there be national standards for learning and teaching in VET?
- What should be the role of RTOs, employers and individual practitioners in initiating CPD and financially supporting it?

Reports from other parts of the world indicate that authorities and educators are grappling with similar questions about the CPD processes and practices for VET practitioners.

International developments in CPD for VET practitioners

Béduwé et al. (2009, p.22) identified a number of key drivers bringing change and uncertainty to Europe, including global economic development; the high costs of living, labour and production in most developed nations; shrinking and ageing populations in almost all 28 European Union (EU) member states; and migration flows. The authors proposed VET as one of the policy mechanisms for responding to such changes, but also noted that dynamic economic and social environments call for the optimisation of VET through improved learning and 'better synergy between teaching and practice' (p.50).

In a review of VET teacher training and development in Europe, Parsons et al. (2009, p.67) made two distinctions, although these are not as pronounced in Australia. First, they distinguished between teachers in 'IVET' – responsible for initial vocational education and training – and those in 'CVET' – continuing vocational education and training, for learners already in employment – although they acknowledged considerable overlap. Their other distinction was between 'teachers' and 'trainers'. The former included individuals 'operating in wholly or partly vocational learning contexts in upper-secondary education, as well as others classified variously at a national level as tutors, instructors, demonstrators, assessors, and training advisers within education provider context' (p.67). 'Trainers', on the other hand, 'operate almost wholly in workplace learning, including where the delivery takes place as off-the-job training, and most commonly for CVET' (p.67).

Parsons et al. (2009, p.104) observed that the VET teaching and training professions were changing dramatically, but that the extent of the change varied greatly across the European Union, reflecting 'different legacies' of professionalisation and levels of maturity in the modernisation of VET. They concluded that endogenous change was likely to result in new roles at the 'sub-professional' level because of a 'remixing' of functions related to the delivery of initial VET and continuing VET. According to the authors, this can be interpreted as:

deskilling the professional role of teachers or trainers, but may also focus on, or include, role developments aimed at increasing the quality of teaching by bringing in support roles to enable practitioners to focus on the professional dimension of their work. (p.104)

They saw endogenous change as emanating from new VET structures, new legislation, enhanced quality assurance requirements, and the impact of technology on VET delivery and management. Parsons et al. (2009, p.104) noted that typically 'endogenous change may involve either job enlargement or job enrichment'.

From their survey of the 28 European Union member states, Parsons et al. (2009, p.132) concluded that nearly half had a CPD requirement for VET practitioners, but that there was 'very little evidence of what this requirement produces'. The authors explained that, for initial VET teachers and tutors, the majority of this CPD focused on voluntary participation for self-development, with the most common themes being 'enhanced pedagogical training, team working, leadership, enhanced/updated subject knowledge, and preparation for advancement and on wider nonspecific professional skills' (p.95). CPD delivery was most commonly through a combination of workplace-based provision by a training provider and a mixture of short-course and postgraduate-level qualifications.

Parsons et al. (2009) found CPD provisions for continuing VET in Europe much less extensive, with priority in some countries given to those engaged in initial VET teaching. There was also limited CPD for enterprise trainers, with some tension between governments supporting CPD in public VET institutions and a policy of encouraging competitiveness in industry. Across the VET sector in Europe they also noted the emergence of peer learning and communities of practice approaches in the 'reprofessionalisation' of VET teachers.

One example of peer support comes from Scotland's education union, the Educational Institute of Scotland. With government support they introduced union learning representatives, whose role was to engage or re-engage further education lecturers in CPD,

As in Australia, CPD for VET practitioners in Europe appears to be highly valued in policy, and spasmodic in practice.

identify CPD opportunities and work with stakeholders to develop appropriate programs (Alexandrou 2009). In this case CPD was seen in terms of organised 'events'.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop) and the European Commission (2014, p.4) proposed guidelines for CPD for a quite different VET practitioner group: in-industry trainers, sometimes known as enterprise trainers:

- Trainers are lifelong learners: recognise their identity and work; support their lifelong learning.
- Companies' support is crucial for trainers' CPD: raise awareness of the benefits and get companies on board in supporting training and trainers.
- Trainers' competence development benefits from a systematic approach: define what trainers need, provide training and learning opportunities, recognise competences.
- Supporting trainers in companies is a shared responsibility: ensure effective cooperation and coordination.
- Competent trainers in companies matter: make them part of a broader agenda and use all available funds and programmes.

Cedefop and the European Commission (2014, p.5) suggested that a 'systematic approach' had three main elements: competence standards with an accompanying qualification; the provision of flexible and relevant training; and 'opportunities to get competences validated and recognised'. The examples cited included: in Germany, 'Certified vocational pedagogues', which was not mandatory, but provided an opportunity for trainers to upgrade their qualifications at two levels; and in Belgium, a trainer competence framework as the basis for the training of trainers (mostly skilled workers moving into training in their own occupation) in five core competences, with two further, optional, levels of competence.

As in Australia, continuing professional development for VET practitioners in Europe appears to be highly valued in policy, and spasmodic in practice. The features identified (Cedefop 2013) across European Union (EU) countries include:

- A distinction was made between teachers responsible for initial and continuing vocational education and training, with more resources for CPD in initial VET.
- There were marked differences across EU countries, dependent on the status of the VET 'profession' and the extent of modernisation of VET systems in those countries.
- An increase was identified in the number of support roles for VET teaching, which is claimed to help VET practitioners concentrate on their 'professional' role.
- Almost half of the 28 EU countries required VET practitioners to undertake CPD, but in initial VET this was mostly voluntary.
- Most CPD in initial VET was through a combination of workplace-based provision and a mix of short-course and postgraduate studies.
- Some countries had a more systematic approach to CPD, including competence standards, provision of flexible training and recognition of competences through certification.

In the United Kingdom in 2006, the government introduced a policy to professionalise the further education workforce. It required further education teachers, trainers, tutors and

lecturers to undertake at least 30 hours of CPD per year, pro-rata for fractional and sessional staff, with a minimum of six hours (Villeneuve-Smith, West & Bhinder 2009). Providers were required to have systems in place to ensure the 30 hours was completed and recorded. Various not-for-profit organisations which had received UK Government funding to provide CPD for the further education sector in the late 2000s, such as the Learning and Skills Network, and Lifelong Learning UK, closed down when government funding ceased.

One of the most prominent organisations in England during this period was the Institute for Learning (IfL), which began in 2002 as a voluntary professional membership body for teachers and trainers in the post-compulsory education and training sector. It gained new status between 2007 and 2012 when it became the regulatory body for (mainly) further education teachers in England, requiring compulsory membership and adherence to the 30 hours requirement for CPD. The Institute for Learning faded when the legislation changed in 2012 to revoke the membership compulsion, to be replaced by the Society for Education and Training. Further details on this organisation are presented later in this paper (in the section on professionalisation of the VET workforce – the new UK approach is particularly relevant to any discussion of the need for a professional institute).

Summary

The research into the experiences of European Union countries shows that, even with an organisation dedicated to promoting CPD in VET across the network – Cedefop – and agreement across all countries that professional development is essential for VET practitioners, implementation is patchy. Even in those countries with a mandatory requirement, practitioner attitudes vary, and the monitoring of outcomes appears to be unsatisfactory. Researchers speculated that the differing approaches and understandings at national level were due to different stages of sophistication of the modernisation of VET provision across countries. In addition, practitioners in initial and continuing VET are differentiated, with greater CPD support for the former; there is also ambivalence about who should support the professional development of enterprise trainers.

The questions for Australian VET practitioner CPD arising from this review include:

- Is CPD for those teaching in initial vocational education and training more important than for those who are retraining workers or who are employed as in-industry trainers?
- Should the outcomes of CPD be monitored for individuals, and if so, how might that best be done?
- Are there different levels of sophistication and understandings of modern VET in Australia, which have implications for how VET is perceived and supported across different jurisdictions?
- Is there a role in Australian VET for a nationwide CPD agency?

Developments across Europe appear to have pedagogical skills as their focus, although the duality of the VET professional role is acknowledged in research reports. In Australia, however, the maintenance of industry currency has been a topic as much debated as the need for an appropriate educational qualification.

Industry currency

As so-called 'dual professionals' (Productivity Commission 2011), VET practitioners in Australia have an obligation to maintain their capacity to operate in both educational and industry environments. The Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015 specify that trainers and assessors require 'current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided'. The credibility of the trainers and RTOs, and the integrity of the national Australian Quality Training Framework, largely depends on how closely that requirement is met (Clayton et al. 2013). Particularly for those whose daily working environment is the classroom or simulated work environment, maintaining industry currency may be a major challenge.

Industry currency has been defined as 'the maintenance of a trainer's vocational technical skills and knowledge, enabling the trainer to deliver and assess vocational training relevant to current industry practices' (VOCEDplus 2016). The extent of the currency required can be influenced by industry-related factors, such as technological innovation; changing legislation and regulatory requirements; changes to industry practice; new and emerging skills and specialisations; and the degradation of technical skills through lack of use (Western Australia Training Accreditation Council 2016). Clayton et al. (2013) reported that the term, 'industry currency', was not widely used in the trades or VET environment, with the preferred terms being 'professional competence' and 'industry relevance'. The Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015 use the term 'Industry engagement'.

Irrespective of the terminology, Wheelahan and Moodie (2010, p.24), found that approaches to maintaining industry currency for VET practitioners were ad hoc and varied in effectiveness. They noted difficulties in identifying and arranging relevant industry placements, as well as financial and logistical impediments for institutions to releasing teachers for such purposes. Nor was it always clear what the VET practitioners should actually do while on release to industry. The authors advocated that, rather than employing teachers with current industry skills or casuals from industry, a more sustainable approach would be to implement CPD programs that supported teachers to maintain and extend their industry currency.

Wheelahan and Moodie (2010, p.25) proposed three options to enable VET practitioners to meet the requirement for industry currency:

- Augmented status quo: a shared responsibility between individual teachers and RTOs.
- A scheme for VET teachers' industry projects: to include industry currency in state workforce development strategies for VET practitioners.
- A fund for VET teachers' industry projects: a funding stream for industry release for VET teachers to conduct projects as part of an industry placement. Teachers would 'develop new curriculum resources, lesson plans, teaching and learning materials or associated pedagogic materials; or undertake a project to develop training for the workplace that would support enterprise objectives and contribute to innovation'.

In their investigation of industry currency among Queensland VET practitioners, Toze and Tierney (2010) found a wide variety of understandings about the concept itself and how the requirement might be met.

In their discussion paper, Toze and Tierney (2010, p.24) suggested that maintenance of industry currency ‘is still driven by compliance rather than improving teaching and learning practice’, and that it was more difficult to stay up to date with technical skills than with industry knowledge. Through their research, Toze and Tierney (2010, p.8) identified a range of activities aimed at maintaining industry currency: industry placement

- concurrent employment in industry and the RTO
- industry and professional association membership
- attending conferences, professional workshops and industry-specific development programs
- attending professional development activities run by industry skills alliances
- researching best and new practice and general research
- subscribing to professional journals and publications
- applying for sponsored corporate teaching awards and scholarships
- networking with industry mentors, employers and other trainers
- talking to students about practices and job roles in their workplaces
- undertaking industry specialist visits, industry site visits and study tours
- undertaking specific training courses in new equipment or skill sets
- work shadowing
- fulfilling industry licensing or regulatory requirements.

In regard to industry placements, teachers in ‘practical’ industries such as construction favoured block placements of two weeks or more, whereas those in service industries preferred single days intermittently across a year (Toze & Tierney 2010). It was noted that it was sometimes difficult to find mutually convenient times for training providers and enterprises, and that VET practitioners without strong industry networks often had trouble finding placements. Some TAFE managers were not convinced that self-employment or working in a family business contributed to industry currency requirements, citing concerns about possible conflict of interest and lack of exposure to new ideas and practices.

Among the barriers to maintaining industry currency identified by Toze and Tierney (2010, p.14-15) were:

- *Limited access to industry currency activities:* TAFE trainers may not have the same release time to industry as teachers; contingent staff may have fewer opportunities; RTO managers may assume casual and part-time staff have ready access.
- *Limited contact between trainers, students and employers:* siloing of functions within large RTOs promoted this.
- *Limited opportunities for meaningful industry experience:* difficult in some industries to schedule ‘productive’ work experience.
- *Limited engagement with industry:* differences of opinion on when engagement should occur, for example, trainers proactive in negotiating with industry, or set release times.

In maintaining industry currency, ...any audit processes would need to take into account the context, location and type of work that trainers and assessors were involved in'.

- *Expectations of RTO managers that trainers would take on part-time industry employment:* growing expectation from managers that trainers would maintain industry currency, often on top of a full-time teaching load.
- *Attitudes that undervalue the importance of industry currency:* concern that when some trainers identified themselves as education professionals, they became less interested in industry currency; and some practitioners are too far removed from industry and unaware of current practices.

Toze and Tierney (2010) also noted that VET teachers in schools sometimes had trouble maintaining industry currency because they lack the contacts and may also find it hard to convince school administrators of the importance of industry release. The two authors concluded that industry currency is:

not a specific activity that only occurs at certain times, although this is often the way it is recorded in staff profiles. Trainers can be constantly adding to their knowledge and skills base through a range of activities, interactions and information they receive through their daily work.

(p.17)

In another major study of industry currency, Clayton et al. (2013) looked at the strategies used in seven sectors: plumbing, hairdressing, printing, science, engineering, human resources and the health professions. They found that employers in plumbing, hairdressing and printing acknowledged the difficulties of keeping up to date with technological developments, new regulatory requirements and changing client demands, but said they trusted RTOs to employ trainers with industry currency. The preferred ways of keeping current in those three industries were attending trade events, reading industry magazines, undertaking online research, and engaging in industry networks, along with product manufacturer/vendor training. RTO auditors, however, questioned the value of industry events and online research, and wanted to see evidence that ongoing industry learning informed teaching practice. Clayton et al. (2013, p.8) concluded that 'a "one size fits all" approach ... would seem to be inappropriate and any audit processes would need to take into account the context, location and type of work that trainers and assessors were involved in'.

In the knowledge-based industry sectors, Clayton et al. (2013) found that maintaining employee currency was linked to the extent to which organisations valued such activities. Employers supportive of ongoing training had established processes, strategic planning and flexibility to allow for 'just in time' learning, and rewarded those who consistently updated their skills, and sometimes acted against those who did not. The workplace was identified as the ideal location for maintaining currency, and in small-to-medium organisations, learning tended to be a collaborative activity. Updating for VET practitioners was, however, more ad hoc in these industries, and there were indications that not all trainers and assessors accepted responsibility for maintaining their currency.

Clayton et al. (2013, p.9) made a number of recommendations for improving the currency of VET practitioners, including:

- greater clarity of the term 'industry currency'
- targeted funding for professional development

- ongoing support for individuals responsible for implementing innovations in training packages
- collaborative, informal and incidental learning in the workplace as a basis for such upskilling
- peer-supported learning and project-based work to help develop new skills.

Clayton et al. (2013, p.37) also called for a 'systemic framework for continuing professional development and access to training in key technical areas, together with some innovative organisational thinking about the provision of developmental opportunities for trainers'.

Smith et al. (2009) undertook research into VET practitioner development, including maintaining industry currency, in an industry with the highest number of employees in Australia – services. The service industries include retail, tourism and hospitality, hairdressing, fitness and floristry, and have a majority of part-time, female, younger workers.

From their research Smith et al. (2009) found that 93% of RTOs claimed that more than half of their staff had industry experience in all of the areas in which they taught, and 92% said that they met industry currency requirements. Fifty-eight per cent indicated that 'currency' meant within the past two years. VET practitioners surveyed in the service industries achieved currency mainly through: working in the industry (85%), attending seminars or conferences (77%), and industry placements (37%). The authors found that in the hair and beauty, and tourism, hospitality and events sectors, the preferred profile was for industry experience within the last five years, and a minimum of a week per year working in industry. In retail, and sport and recreation, VET practitioners were expected to have part-time employment in order to maintain currency.

The Smith et al. research (2009) found different strategies in different industry sectors for maintaining currency, citing examples such as a head teacher in floristry facilitating access to industry events and work opportunities and an educational manager in hairdressing bringing in outside trainers to keep students and teachers up to date. In a private RTO where hospitality was taught, the focus of staff development was on industry relationships rather than pedagogy, with trainers offering financial support and time off to obtain qualifications. The authors commented:

Participants in the private RTO hairdressing felt on balance that industry experience and currency were irreplaceable since they provided the 'insider knowledge' about the day-to-day activities and trends in the salons themselves. These participants were unenthused by the prospect of higher pedagogical qualifications. (p.70)

Smith et al. (2009) found that the specific nature of the industry largely determined the balance between updating industry skills and educational qualifications, but across all industries there was support for both skills and knowledge to be developed as part of professional development.

In summing up their findings, Smith et al. (2009) argued that, although industry currency was highly regarded by all the research informants, strategies for achieving that goal were not well developed. They suggested that working part-time in an industry, short 'unfocused' industry placements, study tours, seminars, networking and master classes were unlikely to

'The specific nature of the industry largely determined the balance between updating industry skills and educational qualifications.'

RTO auditors reportedly wanted to see evidence that exposure to industry led to changes within training programs.

be sufficient. Some teacher resistance to industry currency was observed, which the authors attributed to the practitioners' nervousness about their self-perceived level of expertise. Smith et al. (2009, p.88) concluded that VET practitioners 'need constant development in two areas: industry engagement and pedagogical engagement. The word "engagement" is deliberately used, rather than "expertise", "skills" or "currency", to signify the breadth of the requirement'.

After analysing submissions on industry currency for VET practitioners, the Productivity Commission (2011, p.246) concluded:

Industry currency is not well-researched or understood. Although currency is often equated with industry release, or work in industry, maintenance of currency can occur through a variety of activities. There is evidence of currency gaps in the current workforce, particularly among those who have worked full-time in the VET sector for more than 10 years. Professional development systems need to identify and address these gaps.

Summary

The picture of approaches to industry currency that emerges is one of considerable variation in understandings of the meaning of the term and of what is regarded as acceptable in meeting requirements. In some instances, currency was determined by the recency of industry experience, sometimes by expectations of part-time industry employment alongside casual training employment, and on occasions even on top of a full-time training role. It is also clear that the nature of the occupation or industry influences the sorts of activities possible, as do other elements such as accessibility for industry placements or creating meaningful placements.

Among training organisations and VET practitioners, exposure to industry was often seen as sufficient to maintaining currency, whereas RTO auditors working with the Standards for Registered Training Organisations reportedly wanted to see evidence that such exposure led to changes in training programs. There was considerable difference in what was regarded as an appropriate length of time in an industry placement, and again the type of industry influenced possible arrangements. As might be expected, larger training organisations were more likely to have a systematic approach to maintaining currency, but only if management was committed to it; sometimes the trainers in such organisations were seen as too distant from the trainees or the industry.

Across industries there is a commitment to the importance of industry currency as part of teaching in VET, but efforts among RTOs and VET practitioners to maintain it with any consistency appear to fall short of that required by the training authority. There are some good reasons for this, such as the difficulty of releasing teaching staff for these purposes and arranging appropriate industry secondments. On the other hand, some efforts appear to be aimed at merely meeting the requirement rather than keeping up to date with practice and knowledge, and some RTOs seem to expect practitioners will maintain their currency, often in their own time. There is great variation in how the requirement is met.

There are differences among the sorts of placements that are possible and desirable in different industries, and some practitioners without close industry links, such as school VET teachers and literacy teachers, may have difficulty accessing suitable placements.

The questions for Australian VET arising from this review of research into the maintenance of industry currency include:

- Who should be responsible for ensuring VET practitioners remain up to date in their industries – the RTO, an industry body, the individual, or a combination?
- What sorts of activities should be regarded as helping to maintain industry currency, and should these differ among industries?
- Should practitioners have to show how an ‘industry currency’ activity has impacted on their teaching practice; if so, how might this be monitored?
- Should there be the same benchmark for every industry for what is meant by ‘recency’ of industry experience and for the number of hours of ‘engagement’ in approved CPD activities?

The lack of a consistent approach, but a general consensus in favour of maintaining industry currency, as well as developing pedagogical expertise, has seen interest in various quarters in establishing some framework or mechanism that might include oversight of CPD for VET practitioners. This has led to proposals for professionalising the VET workforce, including a possible mandatory CPD component.

Professionalisation of VET workforce

The issue of professionalising the VET workforce is an ongoing debate in Europe, as well as in Australia, and has implications for CPD. Given the diversity of their work experience and educational backgrounds, their pathways into VET, and the diversity of learners and VET qualifications, it is more difficult to categorise VET practitioners in the same way as school teachers, or arguably even teachers in higher education. In fact, Derrick (2013) argued against using the terms ‘profession’, ‘professional’ and ‘professionalism’ in regard to further education teacher development in the UK because, he claimed, they are highly contested terms politically, understood by different people in different ways, and are elitist. Nevertheless, the identification of a VET practitioner as a ‘professional’ has implications for the way in which CPD might be mediated and recognised.

In the UK, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has developed ‘professional standards’ for the further education and skills sector. The aim of the professional standards, according to Rasmussen (2016, p.11), whose research examines the Education and Training Foundation initiative, is to ‘support teachers and trainers to maintain and improve standards of teaching and outcomes for learners’. The Education and Training Foundation makes the following key point about professional standards:

The dual professionalism of Education and Training teachers and trainers is a core concept at the heart of these Professional Standards. Teachers and trainers should know and be able to apply teaching skills that are appropriate to diverse contexts and types of learners, as well as give their learners the benefit of expert subject knowledge and skills. (Education and Training Foundation 2014, p.8)

Rasmussen (2016, p.11) further reported that the professional standards are:

intended to be aspirational and:

- Set out clear expectations of effective practice in education and training against which teachers and trainers can compare, affirm and celebrate their own practice
- Enable teachers and trainers to identify areas for their own professional development in a consistent and systematic way
- Provide a national reference point that organisations can use to support the development of their staff and so improve learning experiences and outcomes for learners
- Support initial teacher training and staff development and enhance their teaching.

The Society for Education and Training, a professional membership organisation within the Education and Training Foundation, manages a program known as Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), a professional status that further education teachers can attain. This status is awarded to practitioners with a diploma-level teaching qualification working in what is known in the UK as the post-16 education and training sector and who demonstrate ongoing commitment to applying and developing the skills and knowledge gained in that initial qualification. According to Rasmussen (2016), further education teachers in the UK are no longer required to hold a formal teaching qualification, and nor is the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status mandatory, but the number of teachers seeking this status is increasing. Furthermore, government audits have revealed 'a clear link between high performing and poor performing colleges based on the number of teachers with QTLS status' (Rasmussen 2016, p.11).

In Australia, there has been discussion in recent years about the need for a professional association for VET practitioners, but no consensus. In 2010, Skills Australia (2010a) floated the idea of a professional body to support the development of VET practitioners in a rapidly changing VET environment. The following year, the Productivity Commission (2011) decided that, although there was no central VET practitioner body to provide 'group status' benefits, existing networks could fill the various roles, and that it could not support the establishment of a national VET organisation. The commission (2011) also reported a lack of agreement about the need for the registration of VET practitioners, but believed that the system of RTO registration and other regulatory frameworks effectively performed the functions of a traditional registration body. Submissions to the Productivity Commission in favour of practitioner registration claimed that such a move would enhance the status of VET teachers and trainers and could incorporate mandatory CPD. However, the commission (2011) perceived registration as a high-cost approach to improving those elements, and argued that it might also create a barrier to entry to VET teaching. It saw the diversity of the VET workforce as another issue:

the identity of many VET trainers and assessors differs significantly from that of school teachers and higher education lecturers. VET workers tend to enter the VET workforce already equipped with a professional identity, and will fall along a spectrum in terms of their readiness to identify as 'teachers'. Not least, practitioners in private providers

and ERTOs tend to eschew the term, preferring to be known as trainers, because
'training' is what industry is looking for. (Productivity Commission 2011, p.287)

Ultimately the commission (2011, p.294) recommended that 'Governments should not endorse or contribute funding to a registration scheme for VET trainers and assessors'.

Nevertheless, the notion of a national association of some sort for VET practitioners has not disappeared, and in the same year as the Productivity Commission released its report, the Victorian TAFE Development Centre commissioned a feasibility study for establishing a national association for VET professionals. The researchers who undertook the study, Clayton and Guthrie (2011), found there was strong support for a national association for VET professionals, particularly to give a more unified voice to the concerns of VET practitioners. There were differing views about what form that association should take, and which VET professionals it might represent. Perhaps just as revealing was the nature of the respondents to the survey, which Clayton and Guthrie (2011, p.5) characterised as 'older, longer serving and more permanent of the VET workforce'. There was a low response from casual and part-time staff, which Clayton and Guthrie (2011, p.5) attributed to the extent of their perceived attachment to the VET sector, 'with some not seeing it as their primary work'. That latter phrase sums up the difficulty of considering VET practitioners as a homogenous group, in the same way, for example, as school teachers are regarded.

Regardless, the persistence of the notion of a national association led to its being canvassed again in 2016 in an Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) discussion paper. The Department of Education and Training (2016, p.11) proposed that:

A VET professional association would contribute to quality assessment outcomes by serving as a conduit for the professional development of assessment skills and a conduit for best practice in the development and use of assessment tools. The association could be responsible for developing VET teacher standards, providing input into the design of TAE [Certificate IV in Training and Assessment] qualifications, supporting the development and delivery of professional development and providing a professional identity for the VET workforce.

The Department of Education and Training presented three possible models for discussion. Model A is based on using existing organisations, including RTOs and professional associations such as existing peak bodies and professional groups, and an accrediting body (all of which currently exist), each with distinct roles. Model B is a stand-alone association, specially created to carry out the multiple functions listed in the quote above, and Model C is an extension of the school teacher registration process to the VET sector. In the discussion paper, the Department of Education and Training (2016, p.14) posed three key questions which no doubt will bring the same diversity of answers as they have in previous discussions on this topic:

- What value would a VET professional association, or associations, add to the VET sector?
- What mechanism would sustain a professional association, for example, membership fees from individuals or RTOs?
- Should VET teacher and trainer membership with a professional association be mandatory or voluntary?

The picture that emerges of CPD of VET practitioners in Australia is a confused one, arguably due to the nature of the field.

The issue of a professional 'institute' of some sort for VET practitioners has maintained its appeal in Australia, but there is no straightforward answer to the question of what jurisdiction such an organisation would have, who would be eligible to join, and the source of the funding.

The picture that emerges of continuing professional development of VET practitioners in Australia is a confused one, arguably due to the nature of the field. What can be gleaned is:

- There is no clear profile of the VET practitioner workforce in Australia, either numerically or by title/role, but part-time and casual employment appear to be a strong feature.
- The VET practitioner workforce is considerably more diverse than the teaching workforce in schools and universities because of the variety of industry and educational backgrounds and career paths of VET teachers and trainers.
- Part-time or casual trainers and assessors working in industry may not identify with the VET practitioner workforce, which has implications for their attitudes towards CPD.
- The notion of the 'dual professional', and hence the need to maintain industry currency and pedagogical skills, seems to be widely accepted.
- The majority of CPD for VET practitioners is event-focused and short-term, and tends to be in response to new policy or to address skill gaps.
- There is no national strategy for CPD to support VET practitioners in maintaining and developing either industry currency or teaching skills.
- All states appear to have some sort of policy about or provision for CPD in VET, but take-up at provider and practitioner level is patchy.
- The governmental requirement that RTOs need to demonstrate that VET practitioners have industry currency and maintain pedagogical expertise appears to be the only mandatory element of CPD.
- There is very little discussion in the literature about whether CPD results in changed approaches to VET practitioners' teaching, and some concern that in Australia it is undertaken to meet an obligation rather than being a genuine attempt to improve practice.

Summary

Although there is strong support across RTOs, industry skills bodies and governments for continuing professional development of VET practitioners, the number of different interest groups, the diversity of the workforce and their employment status, and a variety of approaches at state and RTO levels have meant that to date there has been insufficient will or conviction to establish a more systematic national or even industry-wide approach to CPD in Australia.

The arguments for a national professional association of VET practitioners are mainly based on the perceived need for an organisation to develop a set of VET teacher standards, to manage and monitor CPD, and to provide a concerted voice for VET practitioners in Australia. Opponents of such a development believe that the cost factor may be greater than the return on investment; that the same results can be achieved through a realignment

of existing organisations; and that the nature of the workforce means that many will not identify themselves as 'professional' teachers.

The questions arising from the review of literature on the professionalisation of the VET practitioner workforce include:

- Should all VET practitioners be regarded as 'professionals'?
- What benefits would a national 'institute' for VET practitioners bring to its members?
- Should membership of such an organisation be voluntary or compulsory?
- If a national professional institute were established, what categories of membership would be necessary in order to cope with the variety of teacher and trainer roles and status?

In other professions, keeping up to date is often a requirement for continuing registration or recognition as a practising member of the profession, but there are issues about the extent to which CPD actually has an impact on practice and whether CPD should be voluntary or compulsory.

CPD in other professions

There is a strong tradition of CPD in other professions, although it tends to be known in those circles as continuing professional education (CPE), and is sometimes more specifically linked to the profession, as in continuing legal education (CLE) and continuing medical education (CME). This section draws heavily on international and national examples from the medical, legal and accounting professions to explore what constitutes CPD and how it is recorded.

In an international comparison of approaches to continuing medical education, Peck et al. (2000) reported wide variations, as well many common features, including a credit system for individual practitioners based on hours, and three categories of professional development activities:

- courses, seminars, video presentations etc.
- practice-based activities, such as peer consultation and teaching
- print, computer or web-based materials, sometimes based on a curriculum and assessment.

In countries with mandatory revalidation of medical qualifications, CPD participation was a key criterion. Studies of doctors and chiropractors have found that CPD needs to be hands-on, clinically relevant, up to date and of a high standard in order to effect behavioural change (Eppich et al. 2016; Bolton 2002).

A Canadian study of continuing professional education in health-related professions found that national professional bodies monitored systems of mandatory continuing professional education for family physicians, medical specialists, speech language pathologists and audiologists, all for re-certification purposes (Curran, Kirby & Fleet 2006). Curran, Kirby and Fleet (2006) also found that the nursing profession had moved away from requiring hours of participation or attendance to giving members responsibility for deciding their own learning needs and participating in activities that met those needs. 'Evidence' was in the form of a

personal learning plan that recorded these elements. Similarly, pharmacy had a combination of self-directed continuing professional education and a number of continuing education 'units' (CEUs). Provincial associations monitored compliance, and some required the annual submission of continuing professional education logs etc.

Lee, Reed and Poulos (2010) reported that in Australia, a CPD program in New South Wales required radiographers, radiation therapists and sonographers to accumulate 36 credit points over a three-year cycle to maintain membership of the Australian Institute of Radiography. These points could be 'earned' through participation in various activities, including organised educational programs, self-directed learning and publication of practice-based writing. A survey of members found that structured activities were much preferred to self-directed ones. Radiographers in rural parts of the state claimed that their main constraint in regard to CPD activities was lack of access, while their metropolitan colleagues complained that their main barrier was lack of time. In relation to the mandatory aspect of the Australian Institute of Radiography program, Lee, Reed and Poulos (2010) proposed decreasing the number of CPD credit hours required for part-time and experienced practitioners and suggested that employers and the institute might provide financial support.

Wessels (2007) expressed reservations about continuing professional education for certified practising accountants (CPAs) in the US, despite its being mandatory for them in every state. The problem, according to Wessels (2007, p.366), was that the regulations mainly required *attendance* at an event, so that there was no guarantee that the possible benefits (for example, 'enhanced professional competency, improved knowledge, and protection of the public from incompetent accountants') were being achieved. In Australia, the minimum CPD requirement for certified practising accountants is 20 hours of activities per year, with a total of 120 hours over three years. CPA Australia (2016) gave the following reasons to its members for undertaking CPD, all of which might reasonably apply to a VET practitioner:

[CPD] ensures you continually build the knowledge and skills you need to succeed in the competitive business environment; assists you in achieving your development and career goals; assists you to excel in your role, providing increased value to your organisation and your clients; provides transferable skills for increased employability; and helps to build your reputation as a business leader.

CPD activities for these accountants can include conferences, course, discussion groups, in-house training, university courses, technical/research writing and committee participation, self-study packages, and 'structured reading' (10 hours maximum). Certified practising accountants are required to send a 'CPD Activities Record' to the association with their activities and hours listed. They are entitled to use 'CPA' as a postnominal, and the organisation promotes the qualification in the media as an indication of professional competence. It is also a requirement demanded by employers as a risk-avoidance measure. However, it is a voluntary certification and accountants do not need to be CPA-qualified to practise in Australia.

The legal profession in Australia also maintains a strong mandatory continuing professional education program, although this operates on a state basis rather than nationally and is vital to remaining registered – without registration lawyers cannot practise. As an example, New South Wales law practitioners must accumulate 10 CPD units per year, which is a

statutory condition 'imposed' on those practising law in that state, requiring compliance with the Legal Profession Uniform Continuing Professional Development (Solicitors) Rules 2015 (New South Wales Law Society 2016). Like the certified practising accountants, legal practitioners in New South Wales have to keep a record of CPD activities, using a list similar to that for certified practising accountants. In this case, every hour of conference attendance earns one credit point, and legal practitioners can claim one CPD unit for every 1000 words of 'research, preparation or editing of an article published or published Law Reports', with a maximum of five units. Practitioners must include at least one CPD unit every year in each of the following fields: Ethics and professional responsibility, Practice management and business skills, Professional skills, and Substantive law; that is, a mix of legal knowledge and professional practice topics. As with most other mandatory schemes, self-reporting is the norm, but is subject to audit, and attendance is regarded as sufficient to meet the CPD requirements.

All jurisdictions in Australia require practising school teachers to undertake professional development as a prerequisite for continuing professional registration. For example, from 2017, the Queensland College of Teachers (2016) requires its members to undertake a minimum of 20 hours CPD per year, which must be balanced across two areas: employer/school-directed and supported professional development; and teacher-identified professional development. The CPD is related to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, but teachers employed for fewer than 20 days annually do not need to meet the professional development requirement. On the other hand, there is no official CPD requirement for higher education lecturers, but most Australian universities encourage teaching staff to complete an in-house pedagogical qualification, often at graduate certificate level; updating their professional knowledge comes through undertaking research in their discipline.

Summary

Some professions have a strong tradition of CPD oversight by professional associations, which often specify completion of professional development requirements for re-certification or continuing certification purposes, sometimes with government oversight. For practising school teachers in Australia, state and territory government agencies regulate professional re-registration, which also includes mandatory CPD.

In these professions, CPD is often 'measured' by the number of hours of participation or by points for certain activities. In most cases, attendance at a professional development activity is sufficient to meet requirements, and a wide range of activities is accepted, including courses, teaching, researching and writing, technology-based programs and reading professional journals. Self-reporting is the norm, but provision for a random audit usually exists.

The professions included in the discussion above are more homogeneous than the VET practitioner workforce, and a university degree is usually the minimum qualification required. In many of these professions, it is likely that a culture of CPD has developed; that is, an understanding by the practitioners that they will be required to undertake CPD after entry. Whether it is also a culture of learning is another matter.

The issue of whether CPD should be mandatory or voluntary is an important one, because it goes to the heart of what motivates workers to undertake professional development, which

Across non-teaching professions, there is a strong tradition of professional associations often specifying completion of professional development requirements for re-certification purposes.

is the focus of the second research question in this synthesis of literature, and is discussed in the next section.

The questions for VET arising from this review of research about CPD in what are commonly known as 'the professions', including school teaching, include:

- Is the full range of CPD activities regarded as acceptable in the professions, appropriate and realistic for VET practitioners?
- Should CPD reporting require a statement about the impact of such activities on an individual's VET practice?
- To what extent is there a culture of CPD among VET practitioners or in RTOs?



Motivation

VET practitioners' engagement with CPD requires a balance of personal agency and affordances, a duality that Billett (2001) terms 'co-participation' in relation to workplace learning. In CPD, however, the affordances may be imposed rather than simply being what Billett calls 'invitational'. For example, Parsons et al. (2009) noted that several European Union countries required post-qualification training in industry, with Estonia, for instance, making it compulsory for vocational teachers to undertake enterprise-based training for at least two months every three years. Incentives for VET practitioners in EU countries to undertake CPD fell into two categories. In one, practising teachers had to complete specified CPD programs, which usually led to higher qualifications, in order to be promoted or receive higher pay. This approach tended to be based on a shared-cost model between government and employee. A related approach was based on the accumulation of CPD points, awarded for participation in specified programs, resulting in promotion or salary increases. In Hungary, completion of PD resulted in achieving higher pay a year sooner, while non-participation meant adding an extra year. As mentioned later in this paper (see the section on the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment), some TAFE systems in Australia in the past have offered a salary increase to VET teachers on the completion of an appropriate undergraduate degree, but the introduction of that certificate as a minimum qualification has seen that incentive disappear, or that option is no longer as strongly supported.

In the other category of CPD operating in the EU identified by Parsons et al. (2009), only a loose association existed between incentives and undertaking CPD, including non-mandatory regulatory requirements to 'stay qualified' and promotion of CPD as the result of provider audits and quality assurance. They found weaker participation in CPD among teachers in non-public VET providers, while much CPD in VET seemed to be at the discretion of the teacher. In a Lithuanian example, initial VET teachers had an entitlement of five CPD days per year, which they could use with different providers as they wished, and in Hungary, government teachers of all kinds were required to undertake 120 hours of CPD within a seven-year period, with the government paying 80% of the costs. Parsons et al. (2009) noted, however, a lack of motivation for CPD in EU member states, regardless of whether the provision was voluntary or compulsory; that is, the level of personal agency was low. In a Slovenian study of VET teachers, Krečič, Perše and Grmek (2015, p.77) also found that vocational teachers were 'not very active creators of their own professional development'.

Much of the discussion about the extent of VET practitioners' engagement with CPD in Australia relates to barriers and compliance. For example, Harris et al. (2001) found that the main barriers, ranked in order of importance, were:

- lack of time
- lack of management support or expertise
- ageing VET workforce/resistance to change
- organisational cultures not supportive of staff development
- lack of general funding
- national or organisational lack of vision

A lack of motivation was noted for continuing professional development in EU member states, regardless of whether the provision was voluntary or compulsory.

- VET workforce casualisation/contracts
- lack of funding for staff development.

Lowrie, Smith and Hill (1999, p.90, cited in Harris et al. 2001, p.45) identified factors such as career stage; the nature of initial teacher training; preferred way of learning; industry area; employment status; and course availability and timing as influences on the extent of individual engagement with CPD. Altana (2007, p.48) listed access to and the cost of professional development; organisational culture; geographical barriers; and teacher workload.

As a specific example of teacher 'resistance' to CPD, Martin (2012) reported instances of TAFE teachers in Western Australia subverting college regulations because they considered the requirements unrealistic or because of inadequate resources or a perceived heavy workload. In one example, Martin (2012, p.128) found that 'although college policies and systems require teaching staff to develop their technical skills and integrate technology in learning programs, the teachers reported that they continued to employ minimalistic computer-assisted learning practices'.

In a Queensland example based on a professional development model known as TROPIC ('Teachers reflecting on practice in contexts'), Balatti et al. (2010, p.6) reported mixed results from the process, with shortage of time a major factor affecting the extent of involvement of both teachers and leaders, highlighting:

It became evident very quickly that if TROPIC were to survive, it had to embed itself in the organisation by connecting with a range of existing systems, programs and practices. It could not exist independently of other formal or informal organisational entities.

One of the issues that arose was the extent to which teacher participation in the program should be mandatory or voluntary, an issue that continues to be significant in continuing professional development.

Mandatory vs voluntary

In a review of the development of mandatory continuing professional education (MCPE), Brennan (2014) observed that it had developed in many US states from the 1970s, mainly in relation to the relicensing of professionals, allowing them to continue to practise, and that states had legislated to enforce the mandatory option. In Australia, however, from its introduction in the mid-1980s until very recently, mandatory continuing professional education was mostly implemented by professional associations, not governments. Brennan (2014) also noted that, whether voluntary or mandatory, the focus has been entirely on the individual practitioner.

Among the arguments for voluntary participation in continuing professional education are that it is an individual's 'professional' responsibility; that learning cannot be 'coerced'; and that professionals are self-motivated adults who can identify their own learning needs for their own practice (Brennan 2014). It is also claimed that voluntary continuing professional education allows practitioners to reach their highest level of competence, whereas mandatory is seen as encouraging the counting of credits rather than learning, and is 'remedial'.

Proponents of mandatory CPD argued, however, that the ‘remedial’ aspect was positive, because mandatory continuing professional development forced ‘laggards’ (those who were perceived to be most in need of new learning) to continue their education (Brennan 2014). ‘MCPE advocates accepted that there was a causal relationship between education and competence’, argued Brennan (2013, p.307), but their opponents replied that there was no research evidence to that effect. This criticism was also based on the most common method of ‘measuring’ mandatory continuing professional education: accumulating credit points for attendance, without any validation of the learning and ultimately of any impact on practice.

Brennan (2014) reported that mandatory continuing professional education also had a wider agenda: demonstrating to ‘profession watchers’ that the profession was accountable. He concluded that professional associations in Australia finally chose the mandatory option because of criticisms – ‘real or imaginary’ – and the apparent failure of voluntary participation in continuing professional education, explaining:

The professional associations were concerned to make a single, simple decision that in the short term would give the appearance that they were taking a positive, measurable response to perceived problems, knowing perhaps that their solution was not perfect but that it would produce results. (Brennan 2014, p.309)

In a review of the mandatory vs voluntary debate in relation to CPD for radiographers, Field concluded (2004, p.8) that ‘in the absence of good evidence, until the overall impact of CPE can be proven conclusively, it is premature to argue that mandatory CPE has a positive impact on professional performance’. Nevertheless, from 2010, medical radiation was one of 14 health-related professions the Australian Government incorporated into a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, in which mandatory CPD is one of the six standards established by the national boards of those professions under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Brennan 2014). The agency uses the following definition of CPD:

Continuing professional development (CPD) is how health practitioners maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge, expertise and competence, and develop the personal and professional qualities required throughout their professional lives.

The National Health Practitioner Law (as established in each state) requires those boards to develop registration standards for CPD for registered health practitioners. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (2016) explains that:

health practitioners who are engaged in any form of practice are required to participate regularly in CPD that is relevant to their scope of practice in order to maintain, develop, update and enhance their knowledge, skills and performance to help them deliver appropriate and safe care.

However, a 2015 review of CPD practices across most of the professions that come under the agency ‘was inconclusive in recommending particular structures of CPD or minimum numbers of hours’, with the result that the national boards opted to maintain their professions’ existing approaches to CPD (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency 2016). Some professions also retained ‘profession-specific requirements that remain

relevant to and/or embedded in professional practices' (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency 2016).

One example of the revised CPD requirements is from the psychology profession, where the board requires psychologists to:

1. Have a written learning plan that includes identified CPD goals based on objective self-assessment, and a plan for achieving your goals that includes proposed activities, timeframes and expected outcomes. You should review your CPD plan regularly - at least annually – and update and revise it as required.
2. Between 1 December and 30 November each year undertake 10 hours of peer consultation plus 20 hours of any other CPD activities in accordance with your CPD plan.
3. Keep a CPD portfolio including your CPD plan, CPD and peer consultation logs, evidence of attendance where applicable, and written reflection (journal or log of oral reflection with peers/mentor).

(Psychology Board of Australia 2016)

Another example comes from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, which requires members to complete a minimum of 20 hours of CPD per year, with additional hours for specialisations; for example, a registered nurse who is also a midwife needs to undertake 40 hours. The eligible activities include: tertiary, vocational and other accredited courses (related to the practice context), including by distance education, conferences, forums, seminars and symposia, short courses, workshops, seminars and discussion groups through a professional group or organisation who may issue a certificate of compliance/completion; mandatory learning activities in the workplace in the area of practice; self-directed learning; and any other structured learning activities not covered above (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia 2016). The individual member records eligible activities, and is required to produce them if subjected to a CPD audit by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) encourages its members to undertake professional development by offering the incentive of becoming a 'Certified Professional' by completing a minimum of 30 points of professional development per year and 120 points over three years (Australian Library and Information Association 2016). After one year's compliance, librarians and library technicians are eligible to upgrade to ALIA Certified Professional membership, and use the postnominals AALIA (CP) or ALIATec (CP) respectively. After three years compliance they can apply for a certificate and listing on the ALIA website. Members are required to submit their professional development records annually to their employer or directly to the association. There is also the option of Distinguished Certified Professional membership, awarded for 'ongoing commitment to professional development' through membership of the scheme for at least five years, as well as supporting statements from referees.

A CPD example relevant to VET provision comes from the Australian Community Workers Association (2016), which requires its members to undertake 20 hours CPD annually, with acceptable activities including: attending workshops, seminars or conferences; making

presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences; attending formal or informal training courses; participating in workplace training; writing peer-reviewed or published work; listening to webinars or podcasts related to best practice in community services; and study or perusal of publications, including research articles and textbooks. The association endorses, and in some instances provides, CPD training, for which it allocates points that equate to hours. The Australian Community Workers Association claims that it attempts to provide CPD opportunities nationwide, including in regional and remote locations. Members are required to retain evidence of participation in CPD activities to meet the annual 20 hours target and to provide this to the association on demand, requesting such evidence from five per cent of its members every two years.

Summary

For those professions with CPD requirements, the examples above indicate that most professional associations have imposed some form of mandatory CPD on their members, particularly for membership and accreditation purposes. For some of these organisations, CPD is not only about upgrading skills and knowledge – it is also about having a professional image.

Those against mandatory CPD for professionals claim that participation in CPD is an individual responsibility and that professionals should take responsibility for their own professional development. They also assert that there is little evidence of the impact most CPD has on practice. Making CPD mandatory may also discriminate against rural and remote practitioners and those on shift work. Proponents of mandatory CPD believe it is the only way to force reluctant professionals to update, which not only improves individual performance but enhances the quality of the whole profession.

Among the questions arising from the synthesis of literature about motivation for CPD are:

- Is it feasible to introduce mandatory CPD for all VET practitioners?
- If it is feasible, how would it best be administered, for example, by an industry body, by a government agency, or through RTOs?
- Should any special CPD consideration be given to VET practitioners in special circumstances, for example, in rural areas or on shift work?
- Would the introduction of mandatory CPD enhance the status of VET teaching as a profession? To what extent is this an important objective?
- What incentives other than compulsion might be effective in motivating VET practitioners to undertake CPD?

A major difference between practitioners in 'the professions' and VET practitioners is the dual nature of the latter's role. Whereas CPD in the professions is focused on updating practitioners' skills and knowledge in their professional areas, VET practitioners are required to have both industry currency AND educational expertise. In Australia, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment has evolved as the minimum qualification for training or teaching in VET, although there has been considerable debate about the adequacy of that certificate as preparation for teaching in VET. The following section provides a synthesis of the various views, along with conclusions about the efficacy of the qualification as a basis for ongoing professional development.

Where CPD in other professions is focused on updating practitioners' skills and knowledge in their professional areas, VET practitioners are required to have both industry currency AND educational expertise.

The Cert. IV TAE was a minimum qualification, but it quickly became the industry standard which meant that a university-based qualification was not a requirement to teach in the VET sector.



Certificate IV in Training and Assessment: history, purpose, possibility

The delivery and assessment of vocational education and training to Australian workers and learners was and is the domain of VET teachers, trainers, facilitators and workplace assessors, that is, VET practitioners. How these educators are trained for their important role has been the subject of much consideration, with multiple reports on the suitability of their initial education and training and industry experience. VET practitioner preparation had previously been the domain of higher education and was based upon the tested model of secondary teacher preparation (Robertson 2008). With the impetus provided by the Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974), the thinking of the then Commonwealth Minister of Education, John Dawkins (1988), and the establishment of a National Training Board (1992), reforms swept through the vocational education sector, with the ousting of teacher-shaped curriculum and the introduction of industry-shaped curriculum in the form of training packages and competency-based training delivery and assessment. Alongside this development was the later introduction of delivery of training by registered training organisations in an open market. The use of the competency-based model for VET practitioner preparation was also introduced, and the Certificate IV Assessment and Workplace Training and its successor the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (Cert. IV TAA) became the base qualification for teaching in the VET sector from 1998 to 2006 (Simon & Smith 2008).

After subsequent reviews of the VET qualification for those delivering training packages, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) was developed. This certificate was endorsed in 2011 as the entry-level qualification for VET teaching and training (Guthrie 2012). The revitalisation of the qualification was considered a response to the need to raise the quality of training and to re-emphasise the apparent need for RTOs not to lose their focus on workplace learning (Clayton 2009). The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment was (and is) mandatory for those delivering training packages (Robertson 2008). It was intended to be a minimum qualification, but it quickly became the industry standard, which meant that a university-based qualification was no longer a requirement to teach in the VET sector.

In order to consider the third research question in this synthesis of literature, 'To what extent does the current Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in Australia provide a foundation for the kinds of continuing professional development needed to produce adaptive and innovative VET practitioners?', the section below presents various perspectives on that qualification's suitability for those purposes.

Certificate IV Training and Assessment – the journey and the discourse

Simons and Smith (2008) investigated the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and its successor, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA), in the

context of registered training organisations and explored the extent to which the enacted curricula met VET teacher understandings of learners and the process of learning. Noting that the certificate IV derivations were the base-level qualification required by VET teachers to deliver training packages in Australia, Simons and Smith (2008) asserted that overall the quality of delivery was not high and the content problematic. In particular, there were omissions and inconsistencies in the teaching about learning, and learning strategies.

Simons and Smith (2008, p.34) found that no elements of the competencies BSZ404A – ‘Training in small groups’, and BSZ407A – ‘Deliver training sessions’, had requirements to understand learning theories. Further, that ‘while it was clear that learners were depicted as diverse, there was less evidence, however, of practical approaches to dealing with the diversity that was described’. The authors suggested that the impact of the newer TAA certificate in addressing the deficiencies of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training was small. They found that although the alignment of units from the old to new certificate IV was poor, a large amount of recognition of prior learning was allowed, which meant existing teachers would miss essential material. Further, it was noted that even in the new version (TAA) there was a lack of attention to the ‘unique demands associated with facilitating learning within particular industries ... in ways that embrace the diversity of learners in VET’ (Simons & Smith 2008, p.39). Hence, the new version (TAA) lost ‘the chance to improve the quality of teaching’ (Simons & Smith 2008, p.37) in VET.

Down, De Luca and Galloway (2009) researched the experience of 150 VET practitioners in undertaking the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. They stated that:

The Certificate IV in TAA was introduced as an essential strategy in ensuring that VET teaching and training practitioners understood their roles and possessed the necessary capabilities to design, deliver and assess programs which meet their students’ needs and prepared them for the skill and knowledge requirements for specific roles within their chosen industry setting.

(p.2)

The responses by participants in this research project indicated that:

- Classes included a wide difference in participants’ positions on what constitutes learning, and, consequently, classroom experience was not adequate.
- The pedagogical expertise of trainers was questionable.
- Those who received a qualification through individual recognition of prior learning were the most critical and least satisfied. They reported that they ‘hadn’t learned much, or worse still, anything’ (Down, De Luca & Galloway 2009, p.9). Those who received the qualification through group RPL reported a more satisfactory experience, which was based upon the quality of their experience in engaging with like practitioners. (Down, De Luca and Galloway 2009, p.9)

To the question, ‘What did you learn by undertaking this qualification?’, a large number of the respondents replied negatively, with the authors commenting that:

this is worrying insofar as it either indicates that the Certificate IV in TAA is not living up to the expectations which the VET system has of it, or that the program followed by these participants did not result in an enriching experience.

(Down, De Luca &Galloway 2009, p.9)

Clayton et al. (2010, p.7) reported on the experiences of 56 new graduates of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA). The report's goal 'was to ascertain the extent to which the certificate four in training and assessment added value to [participants'] skills in training and assessment'. Generally, satisfaction with the content was considered high. Nevertheless, most participants indicated that they had expected to learn more about teaching and how to teach. They displayed disappointment over not covering topics such as: 'specific teaching strategies, including assessment; a greater understanding of how students learn – the psychology associated with learning; and schools and learner feedback, learner engagement and classroom management strategies' (Clayton et al. 2010, p.7). Participants identified that the content was delivered within short timeframes and that this limited their understanding. The research noted that, despite limitations, the Certificate in Training and Assessment gave participants some survival skills for working in VET – planning, delivering and evaluating training programs. Yet, 'they considered themselves less well-prepared to manage the needs of diverse learners, to undertake assessment, to utilise training packages, or manage classroom issues (Clayton et al. 2010, p.8).

These researchers suggested that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) provided essential skills for new practitioners with some experience of training, but highlighted the need for the VET industry to:

- give time and space for these program participants to practise and apply their teaching and assessment skills
- have a structure that was flexible and catered to the diversity of responsibilities of VET practitioners
- have an expectation of continual professional development embedded in the program – mentoring, coaching, and supervised practice
- in response to issues raised about the quality of the teachers and trainers delivering the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA), ensure that they be appropriately experienced and qualified as teachers (Clayton et al. 2010).

In their final report into the quality of teaching in VET, and in response to the third iteration of certificate IV level training for VET practitioners, Wheelahan and Moodie (2011, p.41) argued that 'the Certificate IV [TAE] could only ever be an entry qualification, and that teachers and trainers would be required to undertake further development as their career progressed'. The following quote is indicative of the thinking around the potential of the certificate IV to develop adaptive and innovative VET practitioners:

It is highly improbable that a core VET workforce with full responsibility for teaching, training and assessing that does not have qualifications at higher levels than a certificate IV will be able to achieve VET's goals, which will be increasingly characterised by innovation, diversity and complexity.

(Wheelahan & Moodie 2011, p.42)

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) came to this conclusion after comparing the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) descriptors for Level 4 to Level 8 qualifications and

synthesised these with the literature that connects the qualifications of school teachers to positive student outcomes.

It could be said that the drive to revitalise the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) through its replacement, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE), was a response to Harris et al.'s (2007, p.2) assertion that, 'VET organisations need to be more flexible and clever'. The key, the authors argued, related to building capacity, particularly around teaching, and responsiveness to organisational clients:

[VET] providers need to re-emphasise and re-focus on teaching, learning and assessment as core business [and as] capable providers create organisational climates that encourage innovation and foster individual/team autonomy and responsibility.

(Harris et al. 2007, p.1)

Both of these points can be interpreted in such a way as to relate directly to the business of teaching and learning. Other workforces have had to cope with constant change in order to remain economically viable (Tyler, Dymock & Henderson 2016) and major changes are evident in the manner in which VET practitioners enact their engagement with client organisations and their students. The classroom is no longer the penultimate training venue: the workplace has taken on greater emphasis (Billett et al. 2015). Harris et al. (2007, p.1) stated that '[VET] providers are now more client focused, responsive and productive and have committed hard-working and innovative people working in them'. Their research identified that there is an ever-increasing demand for training personnel to customise and personalise training to a variety of different learner groups using a variety of new technologies. This pressure has, according to Harris et al. (2007), forced training organisations to lose their focus on the core business of teaching and training. The authors called for responses to ensure the development of teaching skills, a deeper understanding of learning and the application of sound assessment principles.

Harris et al. (2007) also highlighted the need for building organisational capability and encouraging innovation within VET training organisations – innovation that capitalises on the workforce's talent, allows for experimentation, mistakes, and degrees of autonomy that enable such innovation. The matching of VET practitioners' learning needs to innovative practices was seen as a possible success factor.

Smith and Grace (2011), using data from a workforce development project for VET practitioners, offered new material in relation to the ongoing debate about the appropriate levels of qualification for these teachers and trainers. The authors' data suggested that the number of VET practitioners who held a pedagogical qualification was lower than the number of VET practitioners who held industry/discipline qualifications. For example, in the service industries, of 120 industry/discipline qualifications, 79.5% of participants held either the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training or the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) qualification, and 5.7% held a university pedagogical qualification. By comparison, other sectors that engage in educating and training others require higher-level qualifications. For instance, teaching in schools requires a degree or an AQF level 7 pedagogical qualification; early childhood requires at least a diploma (AQF level 5) qualification, with increasing industry expectations for a degree-level qualification

The classroom is no longer the penultimate training venue. The workplace has taken on greater emphasis.

(Margetts 2014). More and more, universities are requiring their lecturers to have or acquire a graduate certificate (AQF level 8) pedagogical qualification (Ginns, Kitay & Prosser 2008).

Smith and Grace (2011, p.15) asked the question: 'What could be some reasons why the VET sector [was] willing to accept ... under-qualification for vocational educators?' The literature identified a number of answers: early dissatisfaction with the available university qualifications in the early 1990s (Guthrie 2010); industry belief that non-permanent staff in the sector did not require a university degree (Smith & Keating 2003); and that VET courses needed to be such that teachers could not influence or change what industry considered as appropriate curricula (Simons & Smith 2008). In addition, there appeared to be some political intervention of an indeterminate nature – 'odd circumstances' (Simons & Smith 2008). This led to the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and its more recent derivations being accepted as the mandated qualification for teaching in the VET sector. It also appears that some in the VET sector were successful in pushing the perspective that it was better at training for its own sector than the higher education sector was (Smith & Grace 2011).

Only TAFE colleges had called for higher education qualifications prior to 2002, with pay increments attached to the completion of a suitable degree (now revised, with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment becoming the mandatory qualification to teach training packages). Smith and Grace (2011, p.205) noted: 'there is no firm evidence available on the proportion of non-TAFE RTOs which require or encourage their vocational educators to have more than a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment'.

As noted in a preceding section, the Productivity Commission research report of 2011, *Vocational education and training workforce*, identified VET practitioners as professionals with dual responsibilities to industry and education sectors. In the report's terms of reference, Item 3, 'The structure of [the] workforce and its consequent efficiency and effectiveness' (Productivity Commission 2011, p.8), was a focal point, particularly:

the adequacy of support for high-quality professional practice, including consideration of practitioner qualifications and standards for VET practitioners across sectors; [and] the current and potential impact of workforce development activities within the VET sector on the capability and capacity of the VET workforce, including a workforce development plan. (Productivity Commission 2011, p.9)

The commission focused on seeking to ensure that the VET workforce's capacity to deliver was catered for. Their position being that, in order to meet the future demands on the VET sector for specific skills flowing from an ageing population; the requirements associated with economic growth and structural change, which necessitate deeper skill sets; new skills, including sustainability skills; and coping with business and industry cycles and dealing with policy targets, for example, delivery to more diverse and challenging student populations, VET needed to ensure a particular level of capacity and capability in its workforce. As highlighted, this capability is related to what the commission noted as dual professional identity – VET practitioners should have work experience and the teaching expertise and qualifications to teach in the classroom, the workshop, or online. Hence, trainers and assessors should hold the qualification that is equal to the one they are teaching – a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) or equivalent (or be supervised by someone while training in the certificate IV) – and demonstrate industry currency; they should also

continue to develop their capability. These requirements are 'sanctionable by deregistration' as they are embodied in the Australian Quality Training Framework. In relation to the TAFE sector, the commission noted that only 40% of VET practitioners held the necessary minimum educational qualification, with 'No corresponding estimate ... available for the non-TAFE sector, but the figure is likely to be higher' (Productivity Commission 2011, p.43).

The Productivity Commission's report (2011) also noted another level of qualification below that of the certificate IV – Assessor Skill Sets. IBSA had developed these skill sets to meet industry requirements following the perception that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) was not catering for the skills needs of enterprise and workplace trainers (Innovation & Business Skills Australia 2007, p.1). These skill sets were for 'workplace trainers and assessors working under the supervision of someone who holds the Cert IV' (Productivity Commission 2011, p.308). What is evident here are the other responsibilities required of the VET practitioner – supervisory responsibilities. The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) holder has to apply the professional competency of staff supervision to those who have not yet completed this qualification, but who teach or assess industry competencies. The nature and extent of this supervision is not controlled or monitored. The supervisory capability of somebody with a certificate IV level qualification is a further point of question.

The Productivity Commission's report did question the appropriate minimum qualification for VET trainers and assessors, noting for example the shortcomings of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA), as identified by Innovation & Business Skills Australia. Essentially, the report made a judgment on the question of whether there is a relationship between teaching qualifications and student achievement. The commission believed that the data they possessed did not necessarily indicate that the VET workforce was performing inadequately with an AQF 4 level qualification, although it did add a caveat – that 'the Commission ... does not believe that it has the requisite knowledge to make recommendations in this area' (Productivity Commission 2011, p.308). Nevertheless, their finding was:

On balance, the Commission concludes that the Certificate IV in TAA, when well taught, is an appropriate minimum qualification for the development of essential foundation competencies for VET practitioners and dedicated trainers and assessors working within Enterprise Registered Training Organisations. The Assessor Skill Set is an appropriate minimum for practitioners in assessment-only roles. Relevant Skill Sets represent an appropriate minimum for workplace trainers and assessors working under supervision. Industry experts, working under supervision, should be encouraged, but not required, to obtain a Skill Set relevant to their role.

(Productivity Commission 2011, p.L1)

As the Australian VET system utilises competency standards, an understanding of competencies, their place in particular industries and the interpretation of units of competencies in Australian training packages are of high importance. Vocational practitioners arguably need to deploy their knowledge and skills in the interpretation of the units of competency that relate to a particular industry training package. When Hodge (2014, p.3) investigated this process with 30 VET practitioners, he noted that the

'The difficulties that practitioners have in interpreting competencies may be due to limitations in initial training and education, as well as few opportunities to engage in continuing training education focused on interpretation.'

interpretation of competency appeared as a 'highly sophisticated skill'. His research demonstrated practitioners as experiencing difficulties in interpreting competencies. Further, 'most practitioners also described limited strategies of interpretation' (Hodge 2014, p.7). For example, 'We were just kind of expected to know. So, I picked it up as I went along', and 'Fourteen of the participants thought it took them "about a year" to get comfortable with the process of 'unpacking' competencies' (p.24).

Congruent with the discussion thus far, Hodge (2014, p.7) also made the claim that:

the difficulties that practitioners have in interpreting competencies may be due to limitations in initial training and education, as well as few opportunities to engage in continuing training education focused on interpretation.

This in itself raises questions about practitioners graduating from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) with understandings of concepts associated with competencies that promote inconsistent application. Hodge's findings are consistent with the claims from two notable NCVET reports (Mitchell et al. 2006; Clayton et al. 2010), which questioned whether earlier iterations of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) prepared graduates for complex tasks.

The competencies of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) require that trainers and teachers should be able 'to read, analyse and interpret competencies, understand the structure of competencies', and deploy a 'methodology relating to analysing and using competencies for a range of applications and purposes to meet the needs of a diverse range of VET clients' (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2012, p.285). The research raises questions about whether or not these outcomes are reflected in graduates' ability to deploy the mentioned competencies. Perhaps the nuanced work of reading, analysing and interpreting competency texts is more appropriately developed at a higher AQF level than at present, or it may be that these abilities should only be assessed upon completion of a practicum in which interpretation and application are practised (Hodge 2014).

The discussion paper produced by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training (2016) on the quality of assessment in vocational education and training was timely, in that it raised concerns that some RTOs and their standard of assessment for competencies within particular industry training packages have been found to be inadequate. Concerns about assessment being 'too easy' provoked the claim that some practitioners were not assessing holistically, highlighting the potential for incompetent graduates. These data suggest the potential for an impact on public confidence in nationally recognised training, one that requires attention. The Department of Education and Training cited the emphasis placed by COAG and the earlier industry skills councils on the requirement that trainers and assessors in VET have the capability to assess appropriately. To this end, the Skills Ministers in 2015 called for, amongst other reforms, processes to ensure that VET teachers and trainers provide the strongest training in high-quality assessment to ensure that those who teach VET skills are highly competent professionals with high-quality contemporary skills in assessment (Department of Education and Training 2016).

The area for reform, therefore, relates to how to strengthen the skills of the VET teachers/trainers and assessors, which logically appears to be related to the strength of the current Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) and its earlier iterations. This is the

point at which VET practitioners are introduced to and engage with the principles and processes of valid and reliable assessment. The suggestion that the level IV qualification is not adequate in its coverage of assessment theory and practice is a critical and reasonable issue for consideration. While the Department of Education and Training suggests that a low regulatory response is preferred, the reforms proposed in the discussion paper encompass the introduction of legislation, more standards, more sanctions, more penalties and qualification cancellation, to name a few (Department of Education and Training 2016). This would appear to be a regulatory and heavy-handed proposition.

The paper offers a series of questions for discussion, ranging from whether only VET practitioners should deliver Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) qualifications, to whether VET trainers and assessors should hold a university or high-level VET qualifications. Other pertinent discussion questions included extending existing competencies and skills sets relating to assessment. One major suggestion was the establishment of a VET professional association, which, among other responsibilities, would oversee professional development programs, establish capability frameworks and register VET practitioners, although it would seem that a more reasonable role for such an organisation might be to ensure that VET practitioners possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with appropriate assessment practices, and that they engage rigorously with this content and their professional skills area. The discussion paper also made reference to the Training and Assessment Working Group, established to inform the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, and it is interesting to note that the membership list published in this discussion paper (p.33) contains no representatives from the higher education sector. This would suggest that a higher education response to the issues is regarded as less important than industry and VET responses.

The review given above, albeit limited, suggests that the current process for producing capability and capacity in VET practitioners' knowledge and skills is questionable. The ability of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) and its equivalents appears to be inadequate for meeting, over a sustained period of time, the articulated understandings relating to assessment, competency interpretation, learner and learning diversity and pedagogical theory and practice, as well as to the supervisory tasks of the position.

As noted earlier, much of the discourse associated with VET practitioners and the work of teaching includes reference to being professional, acting professionally and belonging to a community of professionals (for example, Robertson 2008; Volmari, Helakorpi & Frimodt 2009; Figgis 2009; VET Network Australia 2016); it also refers to enacting the intellectual work of the educational worker with decisions and actions that require, 'not simply a set of techniques for delivering content' (Hutchings, cited in Shulman 2004, p.8). Robertson (2008) in particular suggested that there is an expectation that VET teachers will use professional judgment in their practice and that the professional knowledge base upon which their decisions are made in an increasingly complicated VET marketplace is not straightforward (p.18).

Summary

The findings from the body of work discussed above imply that, regardless of context, where teaching or training occurs, complex challenges – with the associated decisions and actions – abound. This position is at odds with the stereotypical notion that educating or teaching as something that one does 'on the side' is not that complicated, demanding and

anyone can do it, as Hutchings (in Shulman 2004) suggested. The implications for the professionalism and the professional practice of VET practitioners are rightly in the spotlight. Understanding what is encompassed by VET practitioners and their work calls for a recognition of the unique set of conditions that define and underpin their roles; namely, complex practice in complex circumstances, ethical approaches and continued higher-order learning (Shulman 2004). In addition, the term 'professional' has technical and moral connotations attached to the notion of highly competent performance of any skilled work in complex situations (Brint 1994).

Shulman (2004, p.530) claimed that professions and, hence, professionals are characterised by the following:

- the obligations of service to others, seen as a 'calling'
- understanding of a scholarly or theoretical kind
- the exercise of judgment under conditions of unavoidable uncertainty
- the need for learning from experience as theory and practice interact
- a professional community to monitor quality and aggregate knowledge.

Judging from the direct references in the literature to VET practitioners as professionals working in the profession of education and training, it would be reasonable to assume that most, if not all, stakeholders associated with VET would aspire to have practitioners who possess Shulman's (2004) characteristics. However, the Certificate IV Training and Assessment, a key conduit through which such professionals are created, has been demonstrated through the literature to be ineffective and inadequate in this role. The perceived shortfalls in this qualification include:

- The Certificate IV Training and Assessment does not address the ongoing pedagogical knowledge requirements of VET practitioners.
- Those who deliver the Certificate IV Training and Assessment have varying expertise and experience, which affects the consistency of the knowledge and skills transferred.
- VET practitioners are having difficulty in interpreting and analysing training packages.
- Notions of professional practice are expected of VET practitioners, yet these are not evident in the learning outcomes or performance criteria of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE).
- VET practitioners are actually carrying out the tasks and duties of positions requiring the deployment of AQF-level knowledge and skills that are higher than a level 4 AQF qualification, such as supervisory.

The limitations of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment revealed through the synthesis of research given above raise a number of questions for the continuing professional development of VET practitioners, including:

- Should the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) in its present form continue to be the minimum qualification for teachers and trainers in VET?
- What is an appropriate level of AQF qualification for the further development of pedagogical expertise?

- Should undertaking further formal qualifications in teaching and learning be mandatory for VET practitioners as their level of responsibility and complexity increases?
- How might any requirement for the ongoing development of educational expertise best be met? Should this differ among industries or be consistent?
- If a professional institute were established for VET practitioners, should the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) be regarded as the minimum qualification for membership?

The variable nature of the VET practitioner workforce, and of the educational providers that employ them, militates against the development of any systematic, national CPD response.



Conclusion

Vocational education and training plays a key role in the initial training of workers, in assisting in the upgrade of their skills to meet the changing demands of industry and workplaces, and in preparing workers for a future that may be quite different from today's world of work, especially in regard to technology. Learning in VET is increasingly moving out of the classroom and into new settings, for example, online, through social media and in the workplace, and through greater collaboration and networking. Equipping VET teachers and trainers for this rapidly changing environment is a major challenge, especially for those practitioners already in employment, because their professional credibility and consequently their employment rely on both maintaining their industry currency and developing their teaching and assessment skills. There are additional complicating factors, including the ageing and growing casualisation of the VET workforce, and the increasing demands being placed on VET practitioners, including in assessment, certification and leadership, and for their contribution to overall workforce planning and capability development.

In this scenario, the role of continuing professional development for VET practitioners cannot be underestimated. Yet this survey of literature has shown that the variable nature of the VET practitioner workforce and of the educational providers that employ them militates against the development of any systematic national CPD response. There is a lack of agreement on the size and composition of the workforce itself, let alone on such issues as maintaining industry currency and pedagogical skills; whether CPD should be mandatory or voluntary; the credibility of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as an educational qualification; and the need for registration of VET practitioners.

Hence, it has not been possible from the research literature to provide specific answers to the three research questions, answers that might support the development of national CPD policy or processes, even if such a course of action were to be universally welcomed, which the research to date indicates is unlikely. Nevertheless, some of the findings from the research need to be considered in any discussion of CPD for VET practitioners, including:

- There is no single approach to CPD for VET practitioners that can meet the needs of every industry, every organisation or every teacher and trainer.
- International experience with CPD for VET practitioners indicates that authorities are grappling with the same issues as in Australia and that there is no ready acceptance of the need for CPD among those practitioners.
- Industry currency is highly regarded but differently understood, and requires a variety of approaches, which must have accountability for the sake of credibility.
- Almost all professions have a mandatory CPD requirement, which is often overseen by a professional body and which is considered as not only potentially keeping its members up to date, but also providing public accountability.
- CPD is often undertaken to fulfil obligations and meet certification requirements – as opposed to recognising its potential to impact on the quality of practice. The exercise of individual agency is a key element of *learning* in CPD.

- CPD is more than participation in courses and events: it is concerned with long-term learning from a variety of sources and in a variety of contexts, including the workplace.
- CPD should consider the needs of both the individual and the organisation.
- The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is adequate only as an entry-level qualification and is not substantive enough to support VET practitioners operating in increasingly complex teaching environments, where creativity and innovation are required.

In many professions, continuing professional development is generally seen as part of the occupational requirement – expected and fulfilled – to a greater or lesser extent. The synthesis of the literature presented above suggests that the VET sector has yet to arrive at a point where practitioners and training providers are wholeheartedly committed to CPD. That commitment is only likely to develop more fully with a widespread acceptance that industry currency and updated pedagogical practice are essential in the rapidly changing world of work. Such a commitment may also be part of what the sector needs to help restore its status as a significant contributor to the development of a more skilled workforce and to the improvement of Australia’s productivity and international competitiveness.

The challenge

When considering how continuing professional development might be most effective for VET practitioners, two elements stand out: how CPD might best be structured, organised and monitored for the VET practitioner workforce; and how CPD might best be implemented to enable individual VET practitioners to maintain industry currency and pedagogical expertise.

The range of organisational responses proposed in the literature include:

- making VET practitioners individually responsible for their own CPD
- industry skills bodies developing and monitoring CPD activities for VET practitioners in that industry
- utilising a centralised state-based agency that provides CPD activities
- imposing a mandatory requirement as part of a national registration scheme.

Considerations for maintaining industry currency include how ‘engagement’ can best occur, taking account of individual opportunities and accessibility, industry differences; allowing for casual and part-time VET practitioners whose substantive employment is in industry; recognising and possibly weighting the potential range of activities for maintaining currency; and monitoring the extent of individuals’ engagement.

Similar factors are at play in the maintenance of pedagogical expertise, along with such issues as identifying the most appropriate level of qualification for different levels of responsibility or for operating in more complex teaching and learning situations, and whether upgrading pedagogical skills should be mandatory (possibly after a certain number of years beyond an initial basic qualification).

Consideration of these two major elements – organisation and implementation – leads to research questions that still need to be answered.

Across the VET sector, there has not been the will, nor have there been sufficient resources, for sustained discussion of the issues involved with CPD implementation.

Organisation of CPD for the VET practitioner workforce

- How can CPD be best organised and supported to meet the needs of a diverse VET practitioner workforce in a wide variety of learning and training settings?
- What are the respective responsibilities of the individual VET practitioner, RTOs, employers, industry bodies, professional associations and government in encouraging, sponsoring, organising, accrediting and funding CPD for the VET practitioner workforce?

Implementation of CPD for individual VET practitioners

- What arrangements and accountability are most effective and workable for maintaining VET practitioners' industry currency?
- What sorts of CPD are most appropriate for VET practitioners and take account of increasing levels of responsibility and complexity in teaching and learning?
- To what extent do such arrangements need to take into account the differences between industries, types of providers and employment conditions?

As the synthesis of research has shown, most of these questions are not new. They have been raised at different times, in different places and by different stakeholders, individuals and organisations, and sometimes in different ways. It seems that, across the VET sector, there has not been the will, nor have there been sufficient resources allocated, for sustained discussion of the issues involved. Another possibility is that, in the complex environment of VET provision in Australia, the questions have been just too hard to answer in ways that will satisfy the key stakeholders.

Consequently, it may be timely to restore and reinvigorate the debate on the capacities and professionalism of VET practitioners. The logical next step is a systematic exploration of how the barriers and constraints to a more comprehensive approach to CPD for VET practitioners in Australia might best be overcome, and what structures, processes and practices should be established to promote the development of an adaptive and innovative VET practitioner workforce.



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