Delivering high-quality VET: what matters to RTOs

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What we aimed to do

Explore how RTOs:

– Define and measure quality in VET delivery

– Describe features of high-quality delivery

– Use quality measures

– Perceived barriers to quality

– Suggest what could be done to help them do a good job

Builds on a previous publication: Unpacking the quality of VET delivery (2021)

Who we talked to

- 102 people including:

  – 73 working in 44 different RTOs (teachers, CEOs, quality & teaching managers in groups or individually)

  – 11 experts in VET policy, practice and/or quality

  – 9 people working in funding or regulatory authorities

  – 7 representatives from RTO peak bodies and

  – 2 from industry associations

Guiding framework

- Harvey's (2007) five dimensions of quality in higher education:

  1. Special or excellent (the exceptional view)

  2. Consistently good (the consistency view)

  3. Fulfils stakeholder requirements (student, government, industry, RTO) (the fitness for purpose view)

  4. Provides a return on investment (the value for money view),

  5. A process of learning and change that adds value to students (the transformational view)

- Euler's (2013) three purposes of VET: individual, social and economic

Compelling messages

- Definitions of delivery quality that suit all stakeholders are almost impossible

- How RTOs define delivery quality depends on their purpose & goals, student types, courses and qualifications and context

- RTO type matters because it determines what is important to them

- RTO size, breadth of profile and 'cultures', and the number of campuses also matter

- A person's role in an RTO has a strong bearing on perceptions of quality

- RTOs find it hard to sustain high quality delivery in the current climate

Good quality delivery

RTO say that quality delivery:

- Prepares students for work (or other destinations) and life

- Develops an occupational identity (if applicable)

- Is closely tied to industry and the workplace

- Meets the needs & expectations of employers,

- Results in employment or other outcomes

- Supports students' personal growth and well-being

- Continually adapts to changing circumstances

How RTOs evaluate delivery quality

- A mix of measures focused on input, **process**, output, outcome and **impact**

- Information collected internally (surveys, focus groups, system data, complaints and 'feeling the vibe')

- And externally (NCVER student outcome survey, employer feedback, ASQA audits, benchmarking, peer review)

- RTOs form a balanced and comprehensive picture of delivery quality at different points in time and look at trends over time

What RTOs want to know

- Student satisfaction, engagement, progression, 'sense of belonging'

- Outcomes of learning

- Employer satisfaction & confidence

- Teacher satisfaction and capability

- Compliance with internal and external quality standards and RTO targets

- Community and industry engagement

- If they are delivering what they say they will (and if not why not?)

'Think of it like a big pie. There's a bit for results, a little bit for attendance, a bit for student evaluations, a little bit for teacher evaluations and a little bit for auditing results, which in my pie would be a small part'
(ACE RTO)

What is not measured well (but important)

- The effort RTOs go to 'to not leave anyone behind'

- Longitudinal impact of delivery (not only 'just in time' skills)

- The amount of networking and collaboration RTOs do

- The transformational aspect of learning

- The subjective qualities underpinning high-quality teaching

- The real cost of good and high-quality delivery (all RTOs) – including student services.

Barriers to quality

- Funding - formulae, levels, contract duration and inconsistencies between jurisdictions

- Compliance-driven regulation

- The quality of training packages and effort and cost of updates

- Difficulty recruiting, retaining and developing teachers

- Limitations of current quality metrics

We don't let teachers do anything without it passing through compliance. If they want to make any changes to learning and assessment materials, it goes through our compliance team. This dulls their creativity and passion and stops them from wanting to do anything new or better (Private RTO)

What is needed: RTO suggestions

- A national VET body to promote & support quality delivery

- Funding models that support & incentivise good efficient delivery

- Trust in proven RTOs to do a good job, while supporting others to improve

- More trust and investment in the professional judgment of teachers

- Better use of VET's significant body of research

- Getting rid of the term 'compliance'

A whole of system approach
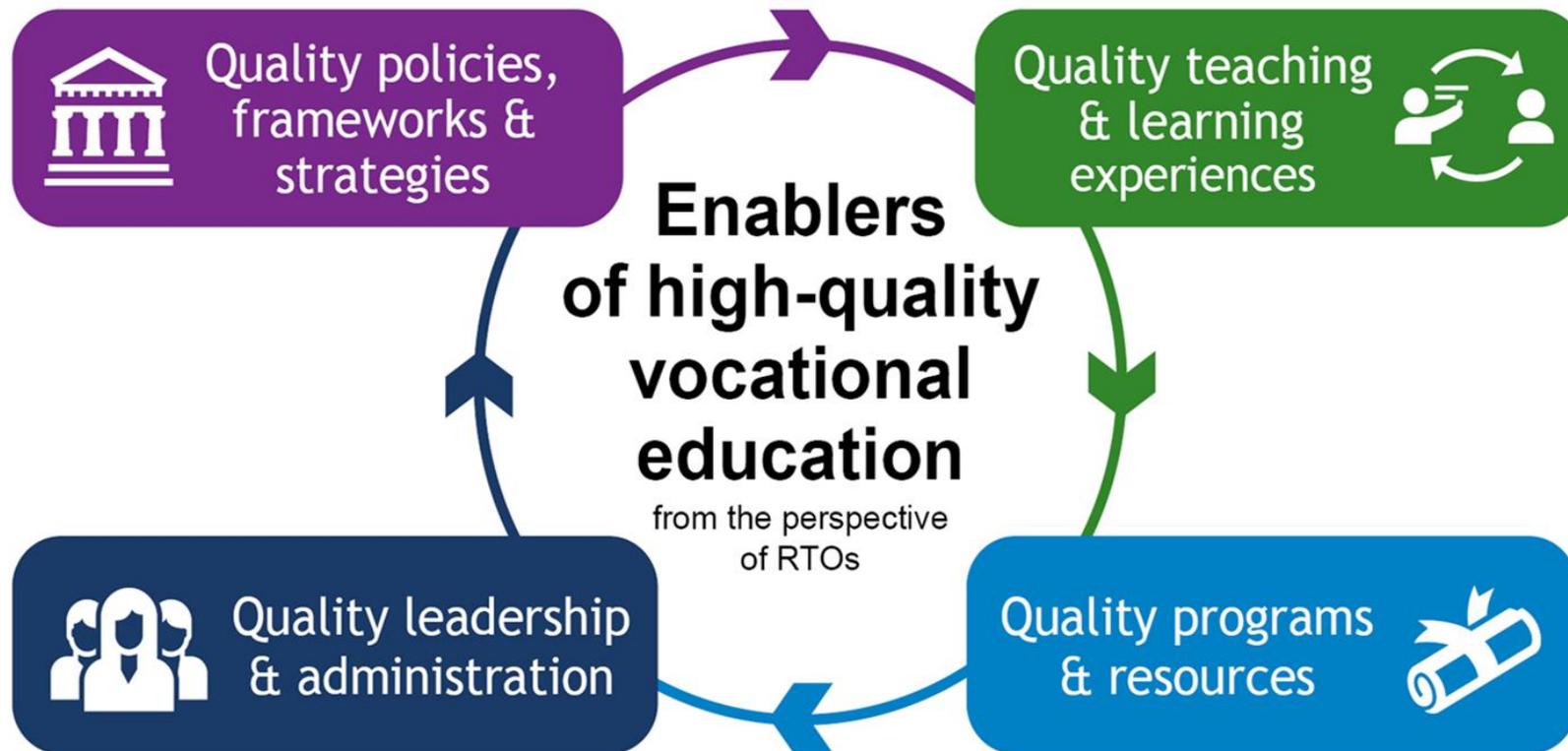
Adapted from Blom & Meyer (2003)

Towards a definition of quality

1. Transformational (in varying degrees)

   – how well students are achieving and developing professionally and personally

2. Student-centred

   – how well individual students are supported and encouraged to learn

3. Fit for purpose

   – how well stakeholder needs and purposes are met

4. Evolutionary

   – how well delivery keeps up with stakeholder and workplace/industry needs.