



NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

Submission

Subject: Quality of Teaching in VET: options paper

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Introduction

The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council is the peak professional body representing teachers, workplace trainers and assessors, educational managers, teacher educators, researchers and policy developers and others involved in the field of adult literacy and numeracy in NSW. We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide comments on *The Quality of Teaching in VET: options paper*.

The Council supports efforts to promote, support and sustain quality teaching and learning in VET for the economic health of the country, but equally if not more so, for educating skilled and knowledgeable adults who can participate actively and effectively in creating a fair and inclusive society.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the options presented in the paper. We do so mostly in relation to the literacy and numeracy teaching undertaken in the VET sector. Literacy and numeracy teachers work in the VET sector in a variety of ways including:

- teaching in Government funded labour market Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programs (LLNP) and Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programs;
- community outreach programs for disadvantaged groups;

- access/ pathways programs to vocational courses;
- literacy and numeracy support teaching in vocational courses.

Responses to questions for consultation

Question 1: do you believe that current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are satisfactory?

While there are many quality assurance arrangements that are shaping VET teachers' work, we are not aware of many arrangements for assuring *the quality of teaching and learning* in VET. While in NSW TAFE, there continues to be an evaluation of a teacher's classroom practice before they qualify for permanency, an increasing number of teachers are employed as casual teachers, including in large RTOs such as NSW TAFE. Those who undertake a university adult education teaching qualification course would have, whether employed in a NSW TAFE college or in another RTO, undertaken supervised practicums that provide opportunities for further feedback on the teachers' classroom practices. However, there are few, if any, established approaches for evaluating the quality of teaching beyond the teachers' initial period in the field.

Specification of the teachers' qualifications in the key curricula used in the area of literacy and numeracy in NSW RTOs provides a way of assuring that teachers are qualified to teach the curriculum; current curricula stipulate that teachers must have a specialist qualification in addition to the Certificate IV in TAA. Although we do not have definitive figures, we estimate that most adult literacy and numeracy teachers working in NSW TAFE colleges would hold either a specialist Bachelor or a Graduate Diploma level teaching qualification, or a qualification deemed equivalent by the employer.

We are also aware that new VET Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualifications have been developed by IBSA and have been endorsed and are likely to be offered through VET providers in the near future.

An important contribution that literacy and numeracy teachers can and do make to the quality of teaching in the vocational courses is through the 'integrated literacy and numeracy learner support' work in many larger RTO's. We believe that language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) are integral enablers for learning, and hence critical aspects of pedagogy. Where literacy and numeracy learner support teachers are engaged in the vocational courses, the learner support teachers play a range of roles that may include:

- working with the vocational teacher in designing the teaching sessions and materials
- team teaching with the vocational teachers, addressing the LLN demands of the course
- giving assistance to individual students in the vocational classes

- providing LLN tutorial support to all or small groups of the vocational students
- undertaking 'LLN screening' of students at the time of enrolment into their vocational courses to identify special needs
- producing self-study resources or resources for the vocational teachers to use in the learning and teaching of specific LLN content of the course
- supporting classroom management, and pastoral care of individual students in a vocational teacher's class

Team teaching among professional teachers has the potential to promote quality teaching because there are two sets of eyes observing the ways in which their students are engaging in the learning, two people to attend to the diverse needs of the learners, two sets of complementary expertise that inform the content and approach to teaching and learning, for each teacher, opportunities to gain feedback on their teaching from their co-teacher, and opportunities for joint teaching improvement initiatives. However, the value of team teaching, or any kind of collaboration between the literacy and numeracy teachers and the vocational teachers is currently not sufficiently recognised in ways that embed an integrated pedagogical approach in vocational courses. This means that learner support remains on the whole to be 'optional' and reliant on the vocational sections to 'invite' the literacy and numeracy teachers into their classrooms to support their students – assuming of course, that the RTO has literacy and numeracy specialists who are engaged for this work.

The lack of a system wide policy of integrated literacy and numeracy pedagogy in VET (despite the existence of a policy on integrated LLN in the design of training packages) limits the extent to which VET teaching quality can be strengthened. Another limitation is the subordinate status of literacy and numeracy teachers in many of the vocational areas. Although their contributions to the students' learning are critical, many only see themselves, or feel they are seen, as 'only the support teacher' because their status is not secure in institutional policy. Even where the literacy and numeracy teachers are respected and treated as 'equal' in the vocational sections, both the vocational teacher and the literacy and numeracy teacher are often limited in the amount of hours they are afforded for joint preparation; this further limits the potential benefits of having a literacy and numeracy teacher working with the vocational area.

We believe that central to improving the quality of VET teaching is the need to:

- afford proper professional status to all VET practitioners involved in classroom teaching;
- ensure VET teachers are supported to obtain a university teaching qualification (in addition to any VET qualification that provides them with the 'here and now' skills and knowledge) so that all VET teachers have the intellectual and practical resources to function effectively in the immediate policy context, and to ask critical questions that enable them to imagine alternative policy futures that may be needed;

- create an attractive career structure for VET teachers (that is, security of employment and career progression structure);
- critically examine the use of contestable funding that leads to precarious forms of employment for teachers and undermines integrity and professionalism in programming

Without these measures, it will be difficult to attract new quality teachers into VET.

Question 2: To what extent do the options outlined here allow teachers, RTOs, and/or VET more broadly to build on existing processes to improve and ensure the quality of VET teaching?

Element
<p>1. The structure of the VET teaching workforce</p> <p>For literacy and numeracy specialists, the categories of practitioners would be different to those applicable for the vocational teachers. For example, it is difficult to think of an equivalent for the visiting industry expert that may be applicable in some of the vocational areas. However, there may be benefits in considering the different needs of practitioners who are classroom teachers versus those working as workplace assessors and workplace trainer; and between those teaching a literacy and numeracy course versus those working within a vocational course.</p>
<p>2. Developing master practitioners</p> <p>n/a for literacy and numeracy teachers</p>
<p>3. Cross sectoral teachers</p> <p>We support the recognition of the different demands for teachers working within VETiS, VET in the tertiary sector, and in higher education programs. LLN should feature centrally in the pedagogy in all of these sectors. There will an increased need for well qualified professionals in each of these areas to facilitate effective learning, and learners' transition from one sector to another, especially if there is a genuine commitment in the tertiary sector to widening participation.</p>
<p>4. Staff data collection</p> <p>We are unsure of the benefit of a MySkills website if what is envisaged is anything like the MySchools website. We think that minimal qualification levels should be established for different categories of VET practitioners. RTOs who receive public funding should be required to demonstrate that they have teachers who meet these standards before they are able to receive the funding.</p>

Element

5. Entry level teacher qualifications

We believe that the qualification level for literacy and numeracy teachers in the tertiary sector should be at least as high as that for school teachers. Literacy and numeracy teachers work with diverse learners, including learners who have experienced multiple disadvantage, sometimes with learning and intellectual disabilities, and often with poor experiences of schooling that have to be 'unlearned' before they can engage productively in learning again.

We also believe that the vocational teachers should have the same level of qualification as school teachers, that is a degree level teaching qualification so that they have the opportunity to develop the intellectual as well as practical resources to respond to the demands of the complex teaching and learning environments in which they work.

If VET teaching is to be properly afforded professional status, and if literacy and numeracy are to be properly integrated into VET pedagogy, it is important that both the LLN and the vocational teachers have degree level qualifications. The LLN teachers working in the higher education sector would normally need a specialist postgraduate qualification to help them assist students with the higher level academic literacy and numeracy demands of higher education students.

6. Mentoring and supporting new teachers

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) is a national professional peak organisation for adult literacy and numeracy professionals. There are state and territory-based affiliates in all states and the Northern Territory, such as our own organisation in NSW. These organisations provide professional development through seminars and conferences, and disseminate information to their members through newsletters. However, most of these Councils, including our own, function with volunteer labour and rely solely on membership fees, and so our capacity to support new or existing teachers is very limited. Furthermore, the casual status of so many of the teachers working in the field is also affecting the level of membership in these organisations as well as their capacity to undertake new initiatives.

As part of any initiative to strengthen the quality of teaching in VET, associations such as ACAL and its state affiliates need to be strengthened and their relationship with a new VET teachers' association be clarified to ensure that the relationship is mutually enforcing rather than competitive.

We believe that each RTO in recipient of public funding should demonstrate the capacity and track record of providing mentoring and support for new teachers. Teachers in literacy and numeracy sections of many RTOs currently face difficulties in responding to the requests for practicum placements because many of the literacy and numeracy sections are highly casualised, and it is almost exploitative of their good will to expect them to take student teachers for their practicums.

Element
<p>7. Continuing teacher education qualifications</p> <p>As mentioned earlier, many literacy and numeracy teachers working in the large public RTOs in NSW would hold either an adult education Bachelor or a Graduate Diploma teaching qualification in the specialist area of LLN. Some would hold Master level qualification as well, in adult education, TESOL or applied linguistics.</p> <p>Where literacy and numeracy teachers choose to move from the 'traditional' VET sector teaching to teaching in VETiS or in higher education academic literacy programs, further credentialed or uncredentialed professional development would be useful. There are also some teachers who come into the adult literacy and numeracy field with a qualification in adult TESOL who should add numeracy to their skills and knowledge base and who therefore may need to undertake a course.</p> <p>It is important that there is a system of paid study leave established that encourage and support teachers in upgrading their qualifications.</p>
<p>8. Continuing professional development</p> <p>Anecdotal feedback from many of our members is that there is hardly any professional development from their employers, particularly in regard to pedagogical issues that are of central concern to them. The conferences of professional organisations such as our Council, ACAL or other bodies such as AVETRA, ALA and ACTA are relied upon for professional development.</p> <p>We believe that higher education institutions should collaborate with RTOs to provide professional development for teachers in the VET sector. In addition to seminars and workshops, secondments of academics to the VET sector and vice versa should be contemplated.</p>
<p>9. Maintaining teachers' industry currency</p> <p>The skills and knowledge base of our members is not 'industry based' in the same way as it is for other VET teachers. However, as in all fields, there is new knowledge being created in the adult literacy and numeracy disciplines, and teachers should be expected to maintain currency in their field.</p> <p>An area where some 'industry currency' is required for literacy and numeracy teachers is where the teacher is providing literacy and numeracy support in a vocational course. For learner support to be genuinely integrated the literacy and numeracy teacher should also be afforded some level of professional development in the vocational area in which they are working.</p> <p>The kinds of activities described in point 8 above could contribute to this.</p>

Element

10. Research on VET pedagogy and models of teaching

An area that has suffered greatly in recent years is the amount of practitioner research in adult literacy and numeracy in Australia.

We believe this to be due to a combination of:

- lack of career structure in the field, and consequently little incentive for the majority of casual teachers in the field to engage in research;
- the loss of almost all of the mechanisms that encouraged and supported professional learning among adult literacy and numeracy teachers - The Adult Literacy & Information Office in NSW that was a hub of professional development and resource development and dissemination; the loss of the Adult Literacy Innovative Project funding; the loss of funding for ACAL that has meant an end to its publication; the loss of dedicated adult literacy NCVER funding;
- the decline in numbers of adult literacy and numeracy academics as student numbers in teacher education courses could not be sustained (due to the lack of attractiveness, or need, of university teacher education qualifications).

We strongly support measures to support and encourage research and scholarship in VET. We would encourage a collaborative effort involving VET providers, the existing professional associations (ALA, ACAL, ACTA), research associations (NCVER, AVETRA), and universities.

12. Accrediting qualifications

We support the accreditation of teaching qualifications for both the vocational teachers and the literacy and numeracy teachers. We believe there should be examination of different approaches to accreditation, but would lean towards a peer – based accreditation process that involves a 'panel' of people from the VET teachers' professional association, VET teacher education academics from two or three universities, and relevant industry skills councils and/or professional associations. An accreditation cycle of say, 4 years, could be established. The panel would visit the institution whose course is being accredited and examine their course documentation, meet with staff, students and graduates, and deliver a report. The higher education institution would be given a specified time to respond to any concerns in the report.

Such a process would assume an agreed set of criteria for course accreditation. This would need to be established through wide consultation with stakeholders.

13. Registering VET teachers

Registration of teachers should be considered once the accreditation process is established and proves to be robust and workable.

Element
<p>14. Evaluating the quality of VET teaching</p> <p>We support evaluation of teaching for the purposes of ongoing development of the teacher and the continuing improvement of the courses. Evaluation should be based on multiple sources, including peer feedback, student feedback (negotiated in consultation with teachers, students and teacher unions), and teachers' own reflections. Information from data such as course completion or employer surveys should not be read as evaluation of the quality of VET teaching; however they may be used to focus on aspects of teaching for peer and student feedback.</p>

Question 3: do you find helpful the paper's presentation of options in stages: stage 1 – the augmented status quo, stage 2 – intermediate enhancement, and stage 3 – ambition?

Yes, and it is our view that Stage 3 should be what is ultimately achieved for most of the elements if we are serious about improving the quality of VET teaching.

Question 4: do you find helpful the paper's analysis of VET teaching into elements –

1. The structure of the VET teaching workforce
2. Developing master practitioners
3. Cross sectoral teachers
4. Staff data collection
5. Entry level teacher qualifications
6. Mentoring and supporting new teachers
7. Continuing teacher education qualifications
8. Continuing professional development
9. Maintaining teachers' industry currency
10. Research on VET pedagogy and models of teaching
11. Accrediting qualifications
12. Registering VET teachers
13. Evaluating the quality of VET teaching

Yes, this has been helpful, although element 9 has a slightly different meaning for our field of adult literacy and numeracy than it does for VET more broadly.

Question 5: have we missed any element or might some elements be combined?

The career path structure of VET teachers is an important element that needs to be examined. So long as the VET workforce is a casualised workforce, VET teaching will not be attractive for many. Unless VET teaching is genuinely attractive as a career, universities will not attract students into their teacher education courses, and many of the goals outlined above will not be viable.

Question 6: is there any option that we have missed that you believe should be considered?

No.

Conclusion:

The potential for a vibrant , sustainable and quality VET system is exciting, particularly if the goals outlined in Stage 3 of the paper is achieved. We are happy to be contacted should you need any clarification on any of the comments we have made. We have also made a submission to the NVEAC draft Equity Blueprint (http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint/submissions) that elaborates on some of the issues specific to the literacy and numeracy area, should you wish to refer to it.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments.



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