AN INDUSTRY-LED SYSTEM: ISSUES FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND PRACTITIONERS

REPORT 5—VET PRACTICE & PRACTITIONERS IN PRIVATE/COMMUNITY REGISTERED TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

TOM DUMBRELL

OVAL RESEARCH WORKING PAPER 03-05

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Dumbrell T *OVAL Research Working Paper 03-05 Report 5: VET practice and practitioners in private/community Registered Training Organisations* (An analysis of survey & interview data from non-TAFE Registered Training Organisations (RTOs))

Melville B *OVAL Research Working Paper 03-06 Report 6: Profiles of participating TAFE Institutes* (Demographic profiles of the four partner TAFE Institutes)


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CONTENTS

BACKGROUND ............................................................................................................................. 1
OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS .................................................................................................. 2
RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC ISSUES BY RTOs ......................................................................... 3
  How does industry now affect the way your organisation works? ...................................... 3
  What kinds of relationships does the RTO have with industry? ........................................ 3
  What roles do teachers/trainers have in maintaining and developing links with industry?  4
  In what area of the organisation’s VET provision is industry most active, involved and    
  influential? ................................................................................................................... ..... 4
  What are the main barriers to increased industry involvement in VET provision in the 
  RTO? .................................................................................................................................... 5
  What aspects of the work of the RTO would be improved by more industry involvement? 6
  What are the main barriers to incorporating more workplace training in your activities?  6
  Should an industry-led VET system continue to be the goal of VET in Australia? .......... 7

THE VIEWS OF EMPLOYERS ......................................................................................................... 8
THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS ............................................................................................................ 9
  College comparisons ........................................................................................................... 10
  Industry involvement in the course and importance of industry control of aspects of course 
  ............................................................................................................................................. 10
  Ways that industry is thought to help with teaching courses ............................................. 10
  Industry groups being most useful in giving advice ........................................................... 10
  Ability of employers to provide assistance or advice ......................................................... 11

TABLES

  Table 1 Age profile of students .............................................................................................. 9
  Table 2 Employment profile of students ............................................................................... 9
  Table 3 Reasons for doing course ......................................................................................... 9
  Table 4 Educational attainment of students ........................................................................... 10

Oval Research Working Paper 03-05
BACKGROUND

Six private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) across three States have been interviewed in the course of this study. Three of these RTOs are located in NSW, two (2) in a regional location and one in western Sydney. The other RTOs are located in inner Melbourne and Adelaide. They service a range of industry sectors including those industries that are the main focus of this study, tourism/hospitality, manufacturing, IT and in the provision of pre-vocational programs. The size of the RTOs varied. One RTO was part of a large training organisation with outlets in all Australian states, while another was represented in two states. Most of the RTOs were associated with, or were part of, an organisation that was also a group training company.

The researchers interviewed a senior member of each RTO and also interviewed approximately 20 teachers/trainers working within those RTOs. These teachers/trainers also were given questionnaires to complete and those returned were analysed. In addition questionnaires were provided to each RTO to distribute to students undertaking courses related to the industry/training areas under investigation. A total of 71 student questionnaires were returned and analysed, a disappointingly low return. The results of these analyses are discussed later in this section. The questionnaires used were based on those used for interviews with TAFE personnel and students, but were modified to make them more suitable for use with private training providers. Copies of the questionnaires and interview guides used are attached.

In some cases the RTOs interviewed provided training to industries outside the sectors that are the immediate focus of this study. Because the private RTOs were much smaller than the typical TAFE college, discussions were extended where appropriate to gather information in relation to their experience in dealing with other industry sectors. As well some RTOs addressed their training to several of the sectors included in the focus of the study, (such as manufacturing and pre-vocational), even though they had not initially been selected for inclusion in the study for this reason.

Interviews with senior managers and teachers/trainers were taped for later summary.
OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

While each group of survey respondents is discussed in detail below there are some general comments that can made as a result of the interviews.

There was very strong support among all private RTOs interviewed that the move to a more industry-led VET system had been successful. There was however some divergence of opinion among these RTOs on exactly what was meant by an industry-led system. Some believed that “industry” was in practice industry peak bodies and Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs), supplemented by some large employers who often could dominate the formation of “industry” views. Several of the employers interviewed agreed with this view, however the predominant view among employers appeared to be one of general satisfaction with training packages reflecting their training needs. Combined with this was a unanimous view among employers that there was a place for both on- and off-the-job training. Employers regarded RTOs as the appropriate providers of theoretical and underpinning knowledge while at the same time accepting that employers needed to provide enterprise-specific training. Several employers conceded that they could have more involvement in the development of training packages if they were prepared to allocate the time.

Another view on the meaning of “industry-led” was the ability of an RTO to respond quickly to the unique training needs of the individual enterprises for which they provided training. Several of the RTOs commented that the nature of their business had changed in recent years, with several now receiving little funding from government programs. These RTOs predominantly earned their income from fee-for-service training provision. As a result, these RTOs believed that their business was almost entirely driven by industry demand – that is, individual employers – and that they would not remain in business if they failed to respond to the needs of this market.

Several of the employers interviewed supported the view that market forces were driving their training services. In particular several employers discussed having changed their main VET provider as a result of the emergence of a training market. Generally, these employers switched trainers because the new RTO provided greater flexibility and better communication with the employer than had former RTOs.

There was also generally agreement among both RTOs and employers that the present model of an industry-led system was not producing training that was narrowly focussed on enterprises’ immediate needs to the detriment of the longer-term needs of learners. This was occurring because most employers were prepared to accept that they were not experts in training and relied on the advice of RTOs in the design of training courses. A side issue that arose in some discussions with RTOs was that skills enhancement and upgrading of existing workers was now easier because there was now a much larger menu of training options available as a result of developing more customised training.

On this issue of a wider menu of training options several employers, particularly those involved in high technology areas, noted an increasing trend towards the provision of product-specific training by producers of such technologies. Some such producers appeared to be using this provision as an additional marketing tool. Many were also charging a fee for such training, although it seems that the costs of this type of training are shared with the employer, through the employer’s provision of facilities and staff time off.

During interviews with both RTOs and employers one issue that arose quite regularly was that of frontline management training. While most employers and RTOs acknowledged a continuing need for such training, and a deficit of these skills in the labour market, most also commented on the difficulty of persuading workers to undertake such training, especially if the employee was required to contribute to the cost of this training.
RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC ISSUES BY RTOs

How does industry now affect the way your organisation works?

Many of the private RTOs interviewed were undertaking a substantial amount of fee-for-service activity and therefore regarded their provision as largely industry-led. Some of the benefits of the industry-led approach were seen to be:

- More innovation in training provision.
- Improved industry awareness of training (although most thought there was still a long way to go for smaller enterprises).
- Training is now more attuned to enterprise needs.

Several RTOs interviewed regarded the system as being led by either larger employers or industry bodies, not by all enterprises equally. Larger enterprises were more likely to have been consulted in the design of training packages and were more likely to demand more customisation of training packages than smaller enterprises. Some larger enterprises are also RTOs in their own right and more able to specify their training needs than those less familiar with training concepts and current jargon. This was not regarded by the RTOs as necessarily to the disadvantage of smaller enterprises. Some of the innovations introduced in response to the demands of the often industry-leading larger enterprises can be efficiently transferred into training provision for smaller enterprises, hastening the diffusion of both new technologies and the associated training needs.

Several RTOs commented on the unevenness of quality of training packages. In this regard one RTO commented that the remoteness of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) made it difficult for private RTOs to raise such issues with them. The substance of this criticism of the training package was that industry and RTO consultation had been done almost as an afterthought and seemed more designed to show that consultation had occurred rather than to undertake the task as a genuine exercise. This criticism seemed to be an isolated one, with most other respondents commenting favourably on the content of training packages. There was a perception that the process of reviewing training packages was becoming more efficient and leading to better products.

One RTO expressed concern with government industry policy, particularly the lack of clarity over future policy settings. Their point was that aligning the VET system better to current industry needs was not, of itself, a sufficient approach to ensure the relevance of VET provision. Their view was that industry policy needed to identify future areas of employment demand and the expected skill profile of the future workforce. For example, were government industry policies going to favour or deter research and development, or would government policies seek to encourage regional development or rely simply on market forces? Associated with this question was the issue of likely new industries. Were government policies going to encourage the growth of industries based on new technologies through their investment and taxation policies? The implications for VET were both in the size and the nature of VET required to be delivered in the near future.

This RTO also raised concerns over the poor connections between VET and labour market policy, believing that there is a strong linkage between unemployment, poor incomes and training policy. In their view VET should have a role in social policy, not just in economic policy.

What kinds of relationships does the RTO have with industry?

As many of the RTOs interviewed provided fee for service training to niche markets they tended to have close and ongoing relationships with enterprises. As noted these relationships on a fee for service basis mean that most of their provision is market-driven and often highly customised. Four of the six RTOs included in the study were also group training companies (GTCs) and thus had another avenue for establishing relationships with employers.
One hospitality industry RTO and GTC provided an example of how customisation can have a positive effect, not only on the enterprise for which the course is designed, but also on the industry as a whole. One of their clients is a 5 star hotel. When another client, rated as 3.5 to 4 stars, wished to upgrade its service the RTO was able to draw on the customised training designed for the 5 star establishment. This led to an upgrading of the work practices and skills of the staff working in the 3.5/4 star establishment, facilitating that organisation’s plans to upgrade its star rating.

Most of the RTOs did not have formal mechanisms for dealing with industry. Many in fact regarded the concept as strange, since they regarded industry liaison as a central and critical part of their job.

Workplace assessment by RTOs was also mentioned as a useful and regular way of maintaining contact with industry. Some RTOs also mentioned that they were sometimes approached by employers seeking general information on training system issues as well as requesting advice on specific training provision. In fact it seemed that, with the demise of the bodies like the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and some state government level training services many employers were unsure of where to obtain broad-ranging information on training issues. The plethora of bodies now involved in VET appears to have caused substantial confusion among smaller enterprises, that do not maintain ongoing contact with VET providers.

One senior manager noted that he and his trainers had regular contact not only with HR personnel in the enterprises they dealt with but also with professional and line management staff. This variety of contact, especially in relation to apprentice training, was regarded as an important way for maintaining contact with changing technology and industry practices.

What roles do teachers/trainers have in maintaining and developing links with industry?

In some RTOs teachers/trainers had regular contact with employers, while in others these staff were generally only in contact with students, leaving employer contact to senior managers, workplace assessors or marketing personnel. One senior manager described her role as ‘business management’, gathering market knowledge and establishing business networks. She also saw her role as providing more general advice to industry and ensuring quality standards were maintained. She also made the point that VET needed to adopt a broader approach to liaison with industry. In particular she stressed that VET was now becoming an export industry and hence liaison with only Australian industry was narrowing the focus. She instanced differences between Australian and Asian standards in occupational health and safety as posing difficulties for Australian VET providers establishing meaningful and relevant curriculum for foreign students. Her point was that to be a successful export industry VET needs to recognise that it is not just servicing Australian industry and cannot only apply Australian standards.

Only two (2) of the 6 RTOs interviewed were exporting VET, that is providing training in Australia to foreign students. One RTO was considering establishing an outlet in China. All RTOs however stressed that they were commercial enterprises with a primary aim of making a profit and staying in business. For this reason maintaining effective links with industry was a necessity for RTOs. Teachers/trainers in some RTOs involved in apprenticeship training regarded their dual role of RTO/GTC as providing their apprentices with the valuable opportunity of exposure to a range of employers. This also gave the teacher/trainers another avenue for observing industry trends through feedback from apprentices and their workplace supervisors.

In what area of the organisation’s VET provision is industry most active, involved and influential?

Many of the respondents misunderstood the intent of this question. Perhaps because of the relatively small size of the RTOs surveyed compared with a typical TAFE college the respondents did not think of their organisation as being compartmentalised. Rather they regarded their provision as being a single product, delivered according to the needs of their customers. Most
identified the industry sector that was most keen to engage with them on training issues. Industry sectors mentioned were:

- mining (for a provider mainly involved in training for manufacturing)
- legal firms (for IT training)
- information technology training was identified by another RTO.

**WHAT GROUPS/INTERESTS ARE CONSULTED WHEN MAKING DECISIONS ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES?**

This question produced a variety of responses. One hospitality RTO said that it was rare for them to consult outside their organisation. They said that they used the industry’s training packages and designed these to meet each individual enterprise’s needs. Informal networking was much more common and this technique was cited as keeping teachers/trainers in touch with industry developments. Much of this networking however seemed to be with other RTOs, industry-based trainers and TAFE rather than with those directly involved in the production process.

The majority of respondents did identify a range of outside groups that were consulted. Most identified ITABs, while other groups included local TAFEs and schools, Group Training Australia, peak industry bodies such as the Australian Industry Group (AiG), provider organisations such as the Australian Council for private Education and Training (ACPET), the Australian Council of Independent Vocational Colleges (ACIVC), Worksafe (Victoria) and other RTOs. In fact several RTOs said that there was a good deal of interaction and information exchange between RTOs, despite their being in competition.

One RTO was involved in the delivery of a VET in schools program that seemed to be unique. The establishment of this course involved detailed liaison with the school as well as the NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW Board of Studies personnel. Under this program students are able to complete a Certificate II while qualifying for their HSC. The completion of the Certificate II equates to the first year of an apprenticeship. The Certificate course can be completed over one year (instead of the usual 2) and requires students to attend in blocks from 7.30am to 3.30pm during school vacations. Of the 12 trainees last year nine (9) entered apprenticeships and one (1) entered university. This RTO noted (as did several others) that there was increasing pressure on employers for the provision of work experience places and that this competition was having a negative impact on other workplace based training programs, such as this VET in schools program. They were, in the case of this program, having increasing difficulty in finding host employers.

**What are the main barriers to increased industry involvement in VET provision in the RTO?**

Several RTOs noted that many employers still regarded training and the associated demands on their time as an intrusion. These RTOs said that they often had to remind employers with trainees of their responsibilities for the provision of on-the-job training as well as provision of access to the RTO for checking on the trainee’s progress. The introduction of a new form of logsheet for monitoring the progress of trainees and apprentices over the last year had caused some difficulties according to one RTO, however another disagreed, saying they had assisted in improving compliance.

One RTO was critical of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) saying that it was a “nightmare”. They said that mutual recognition arrangements between the states and territories had broken down and, that for RTOs operating in several states, it was still necessary to deal with separate state agencies. This was one example of several frustrations with the VET policy process that were raised by RTOs. Several RTOs said that the ANTA was too remote from day-to-day training delivery to appreciate the realities of the process. They also said that the introduction of logsheets by Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) had been done with inadequate consultation. They said that there was insufficient attention paid by DEST to advising
RTOs of such changes. The normal process they said was for DEST to post procedural changes on their website without advice or adequate explanation of the changes. It was suggested that DEST and ANTA should have email systems that automatically generated advice notices to RTOs when procedural changes were introduced. While these matters were not direct barriers to more industry involvement in training provision they were sources of irritation for both RTOs and employers and tended to distract employers from the central tasks of training provision.

One RTO interpreted this question as being “What were the barriers to increasing the quantum of training being undertaken?”, and identified the cost of training as the major barrier. Confusion among employers about the training system and the difficulty of obtaining information were also seen as barriers. Some RTOs also believed that there was still a widespread lack of interest among many employers about training. One RTO involved in apprenticeship training said that it was very difficult to persuade tradespersons to fund their own post-trade training (even spending $300) after they had come through the apprenticeship system, being paid by their employer and receiving government support for their training. This RTO also had significant involvement with the construction industry and noted that there were particular problems with the heavy emphasis on sub-contracting in that industry. They said that the construction industry was so competitive under this system that contractors could not build the cost of training into job quotes.

What aspects of the work of the RTO would be improved by more industry involvement?

Most RTOs did not believe that there was any need for more industry involvement in the operation of their college/training centre. One RTO, however, commented on the need for teachers/trainers to have more opportunity for workplace experience. While many teachers/trainers are casual or sessional workers who still retain some direct involvement in workplaces related to their teaching specialty, increasing numbers of teachers/trainers are combining a number of such teaching jobs to make up full-time hours and are therefore not working in industry. This RTO stressed that it would be erroneous to assume that, because there is a high level of casualisation in the industry, there is an in-built mechanism ensuring casuals are retaining contact with industry practices. For this reason this RTO believes that increasing the opportunities for teachers and trainers to gain regular work experience in industry would be a worthwhile industry contribution to improving the quality of VET.

What are the main barriers to incorporating more workplace training in your activities?

Several RTOs identified the difficulty under traineeships of getting employers to accept that trainees are learners, not just subsidised employees. Many employers are, they said, reluctant to provide supervisory access to trainees or to provide the minimum amount of structured training required. One RTO singled out differences in employer attitudes to workplace monitoring between Certificate II and Certificate III learners. They said that many employers resented monitoring visits of Certificate II level learners, tending to regard them as employees whose time was to be used for work. They specified hospitality industry employers as particular offenders in this regard, attributable to the casualised nature of this industry’s employment and the rostering of employees to coincide with high levels of demand with no allowances made for structured learning. Another RTO with experience in the provision of apprenticeship training noted that workplace learning, other than for apprentices, is still generally not properly structured.

The following photograph shows one example of how one private RTO in the Hunter Valley of NSW was providing, at their training centre, an industrial-like setting for apprenticeship training.
Should an industry-led VET system continue to be the goal of VET in Australia?

All RTOs believed that Australia should aim for an industry-led VET system. Having experienced the system prior to the current one, under which they believed industry had very little say in what was delivered, they believed we should not return to a system where providers determined what was offered. None of those interviewed however believed that we had a system in which industry was dominant. Many stressed that most employers recognised that they were not training experts and that more employers were recognising that VET should not just be focused on a narrow, mechanistic view of skill needs. Several of the RTOs noted that most employers with whom they dealt did not demand that only narrow, enterprise only skills be included in their training.

None of the senior managers of the RTOs nor the teachers and trainers interviewed believed that a system under which the system was totally controlled by industry was desirable. They did not think that this was currently the case but rather believed that the current arrangements represented a good balance between industry needs and broader educational needs. They believed that the main benefit of the current system was that it had corrected the former excessive influence of TAFE. (It should also be noted in this context that a number of the teachers/trainers interviewed had been TAFE teachers and that a number of the RTOs specifically commented on their co-operative relationships with TAFE colleges.)
THE VIEWS OF EMPLOYERS

The researchers initially aimed to conduct interviews with around 12 industry representatives (all employers) suggested by RTOs, however for various reasons several RTOs were unable to provide sufficient contact details, while some declined to be interviewed. As a result only six (6) industry representatives were available to be included in the interview process. Nevertheless the researchers believe that the quality of the information provided via these interviews contributes substantially to the project’s objectives. All interviews with employers were conducted face-to-face. Not all employers were in the focus industries, although all either had some involvement with the focus industries, with pre-vocational programs or had skill profiles similar to some of the focus industries. Several firms were involved in the hardware side of information and communications technology with involvement in the installation and maintenance of optical cables, electronic control systems in buildings and remote monitoring of electronic and electrical systems.

Most of the employers interviewed were generally satisfied with the VET system, although there were some consistent criticisms. Several employers (covering both the construction and manufacturing industries) employed electrical apprentices who attended their off-the-job training with a private RTO, Victec, located in Melbourne. This RTO has become the largest single location for electrical apprentice training in Victoria. It is a facility owned by the industry, governed by a board of directors representing electrical industry employers and the union. Several of the employers interviewed in Melbourne commented that they had switched their apprentices’ off-the-job training from TAFE to Victec in recent years, citing the greater flexibility and better feedback provided by this private RTO.

There was a consistent view expressed by all employers that there was a role for both formal off-the-job and on-the-job training. This meant that employers believed that industry should accept a role in providing enterprise-specific training. They believed however that, especially in relation to trade training, it was essential for theoretical aspects of skilled trades to be provided by specialist teachers/trainers in an off-the-job setting. Most were satisfied with the existing apprenticeship system although several employers, as noted above, preferred the flexibility of a private RTO over the arrangements available via local TAFE colleges. Other employers expressed satisfaction with TAFE provision, often using both TAFE and private RTOs.

The main criticism employers mentioned of RTOs, both TAFE and private providers, was the lack of regular feedback on the progress of their apprentices and trainees. Several Victorian employers singled out one private RTO, Victec, that excelled in this area. Communication problems between employers and RTOs seemed related in some cases to frequent personnel changes in the RTO.

The other main message that emerged from the employer interviews was the impact of technology on industry skills. The most frequently cited technological changes were those in communications and computer control systems, although changes in tools, materials and handling systems were also cited. One employer interviewed operated both as a manufacturer and installer of complex electrical switchgear. As such they were able to provide a wide range of on-the-job experience to their electrical apprentices. Their view was that the skills required in their industry niche were so enterprise-specific that they could only be effectively learnt on the job. Most employers felt that over the next five years there will be an increasing emphasis on employees acquiring product- and enterprise-specific skills and these skills will generally be gained either through employer-provided, on-site training or via training provided on-site by the suppliers of such technology. Some employers commented that some workers, especially older workers, experienced difficulties in adapting to technological changes.

Several employers commented on the emerging importance of frontline management training and the difficulty of encouraging sufficient numbers of workers to undertake this training. Some instanced frontline management training as an area where industry was not well equipped to provide training. Some also noted that industry-based training could often fail to use innovative
and alternative learning methods as a result of the generally lower levels of technical expertise in industry-based trainers.

Several employers associated with the construction sector identified (in Victoria) a disincentive operating on employers in the employment of apprentices. This disincentive was the requirement to pay site allowances to apprentices working on construction sites, as apprentices are now required by the relevant union to be union members before working on such sites. One employer claimed that site allowances could double the earnings of first year apprentices, meaning that many employers and sub-contractors could not afford to take on apprentices.

**The views of students**

All private RTOs included in the study were asked to distribute a questionnaire to students studying in an area relevant to the industry areas included in this study. One RTO indicated after the study had begun that they would be unable to distribute the questionnaires to their students, while another large RTO, despite several requests, failed to return them. Usable responses were received from 71 students connected with the four (4) remaining RTOs. The characteristics of these students and their responses to some of the main issues are summarised in this section.

The colleges returning questionnaires showed distinctive respondent profiles in terms of courses, age, employment profiles, reasons for undertaking courses and highest education levels. While just over half of the seventy-one students completing questionnaires were male there was considerable variation in the gender mix between the 4 colleges. The majority of respondents were aged under 25 years.

**Table 1 Age profile of students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 18</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 19</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or more</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the nearly 60% of respondents who were employed, most worked on a casual basis.

**Table 2 Employment profile of students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full-time</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contract</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not employed</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main reason given by respondents for doing courses was to gain promotion. Sixty per cent of respondents were employed and two thirds of these were training to get a promotion. A similar number were studying for the primary reason of wanting to get a job. Forty percent of students were not employed and 36% were studying to get a job.

**Table 3 Reasons for doing course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONS FOR DOING COURSE</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to get a job</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to change jobs</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a promotion</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three quarters of employed respondents were doing a course related to their current job. Nearly three quarters of the respondents’ highest education level was school, while for most of the remainder it was TAFE or other VET qualifications.
Table 4 Educational attainment of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE or Other VET</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College comparisons**

Looking at the importance of industry in various aspects of their courses students from three colleges provided very similar views. The remaining college was quite different from the others. This was the pre-vocational provider whose students were in a different field and showed different gender and age characteristics from the other colleges.

**Industry involvement in the course and importance of industry control of aspects of course**

The views on industry involvement were very similar between students from the three industry-focussed providers. Students undertaking courses with the predominantly pre-vocationally-focussed provider were, not unreasonably, more of the opinion that industry involvement was not important in most aspects of the course they studied.

However, students were of the opinion that industry should be strongly or actively involved in what is taught in the course. Eighty-four percent ranked this issue as 1 to 4, i.e. “important” to “very important”.

Similarly industry’s involvement in the use of new technologies was seen as important. Industry involvement in setting knowledge and skills students should have on graduation was rated as critical, with over 95% of respondents identifying this area as at least “important” (ranked 1 to 4). Similarly 88% saw an important role for industry in defining appropriate attitudes for graduates. Less important, in the eyes of students, was industry’s involvement in planning the number of students in courses and course availability. However 65-75% of respondents (varying between the 4 colleges) still ranked these as important issues for industry to be involved in.

**Ways that industry is thought to help with teaching courses**

In most areas the majority of respondents thought that industry was involved in their courses. Eighty-four per-cent of respondents thought that industry was involved in advising what should be taught in their course; 78% thought that industry helped teachers with new technologies/processes, 87% thought that industry gave advice on students’ knowledge and skills on graduation and 65% thought that industry was helping students find employment. Only 50% however thought that industry helped arrange student work placements, as over half of students from the main pre-vocational provider said they did not know whether this was the case.

**Industry groups being most useful in giving advice**

There was a diverse range of responses to this question between the different RTOs. This may reflect a less than informed response to the questions and reduces the ability to put too much weight on the analysis of this question.

Respondents identified the following three industry groups as being most useful in giving advice about their courses: Local employer groups; state-wide industry associations and individual local employers.
Ability of employers to provide assistance or advice

Employed students were surveyed on their perceptions of their employers being able to advise or assist on various aspects of VET. Generally students recognised the ability of the organisations where they had worked to provide advice and assistance in VET. Given that 60% of employed respondents were training to get a promotion, it can be assumed that employees were working in activities related to the field of study being undertaken.

There was no similarity of views from employed students between the different training organisations, perhaps indicating a randomness of experience and knowledge. This suggests a diverse range of opinions among students, based on local conditions and knowledge.

On many issues it was perceived that employers failed to provide the support that they could. While 36% of students felt that employers were equipped to assist in college VET training only 29% felt that their employer was providing assistance. It was felt by 40% of the employed respondents that their employers could advise the college of other courses that should be provided, however only half of these respondents thought that their employers had such involvement. Similarly far fewer respondents believed that their employers provided advice on student skills needed on graduation or helped by providing access to up-to-date equipment, despite being able to do so.

On the other hand respondents felt that their employers could and did tell colleges what knowledge students needed on graduation and what is taught in courses. Some 30% of respondents felt that their employers could advise on knowledge requirements but fell short in actually doing so, while 40% saw this happening. Similarly nearly a quarter of students felt that employers could advise of what is taught in courses and 40% thought this was actually done.

Less than a third but more generally about 20% felt that employer involvement was not applicable (for example 34% felt that is was not applicable for employers advising on the number of students to be enrolled in courses and 17% felt that it was not applicable for employers to be involved in advising on new technologies or up-to date equipment.)

Similarly 7% to 20% (varying between the RTOs) felt that their employer could not provide advice or help in the issues named. At the lower end students felt that their employing organisations could not tell the students what knowledge or skills they should have on graduation, how to use new technologies or if there are other courses that should be provided. Twenty percent of respondents felt that their employers could not tell the college what attitudes students should have when they graduate.