In the frontline - the voice of VETeran teachers
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Abstract
As we move into a period where the ramifications of having an ageing population of teachers is beginning to impact on the VET sector, the need for experienced mentors and master practitioners is becoming more apparent (Wheelahan 2011, p.12). This paper gives voice to the Lead Vocational Teachers (LVTs) of TAFE Queensland. A quantitative electronic survey was distributed in June 2011 to the total population of 738 Lead Vocational Teachers. In total 283 LVTs responded (38.3% response rate), and 245 completed the survey (33.2% completion rate). Almost three-quarters (73.8%) had been working in TAFE for more than 15 years. The question of how best to use this group of experienced teachers clearly needs to be addressed as findings indicate that overwhelmingly the majority of participants did not believe that their role is clearly defined. The research examines the role and attitudes of these LVTs in TAFE Queensland within the context of ongoing change. It addresses issues of job satisfaction and commitment. Who indeed will listen to the voices of these veteran teachers in the VET sector?

Introduction
In 2005, TAFE Queensland introduced a new category into the scale of TAFE Queensland VET teachers. The role of the Lead Vocational Teacher (LVTs) was ostensibly created to provide a career pathway for teachers who had reached the top of the pay scale. In return for extra pay, LVTs have to take on extra duties commensurate with their skills and experience. Teachers were encouraged to negotiate duties they believed to be appropriate. The question of how best to use this group of experienced teachers clearly needs to be addressed. In reviewing the role and attitudes of these LVTs in TAFE Queensland within the context of ongoing change, this paper analyses data relating to issues of job satisfaction and commitment. In particular it examines how LVTs view their role; what LVTs see as important in their role and what they would like to be implemented in their role. It identifies some clear indications of factors that could influence teacher retention.

Literature Review
There has been a great deal of research undertaken in the field of well-being at work linked to productivity and customer loyalty (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003). Wellbeing at work is defined by Harter et al (2003) as employee engagement which generates positive affect that includes job satisfaction, commitment, joy, fulfillment, interest and caring which then results in ‘efficient application of work, employee retention, creativity and ultimately business outcomes’, (p.1). Work engagement is described by Gorgievski & Bakker (2010) as:

Engaged employees... [who] ... have a sense of energetic and effective connection with work activities. They work hard (vigor), are involved with a feeling of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (are dedicated), and feel happily engrossed (absorbed) in their work. Engaged employees exercise influence over events that affect their lives – they are self- efficacious (p.265).

Engaged employees have been found to perform better, are innovative, better able to take advantage of business opportunities, develop important connections and networks, and are generally healthier and happier at work (Gorgievski & Bakker 2010).

Among VET teachers, personal factors, such as job satisfaction, confidence and self-esteem, work/life balance and family have been shown to rank highly, influencing their career choices and decisions (Simons 2008). In addition to seeking career advancement and movement within the system, VET teachers require internal satisfaction in their work, which includes notions of
meaningfulness, fulfilment and personal development (Simons, Harris, Pudney & Clayton, 2008). As well, personal and professional satisfaction and development have been identified as essential components influencing staff retention (Harris, Clayton & Chappell 2008).

Personal and social factors which influence the work of teachers, their purpose and sense of identity involve a complex mix of intellect, emotion, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and values within a dynamic context of social, political, ethical and power relations (Clarke, 2008; Beijaard 1995). The challenging of long-supported and deeply-held beliefs has been found to have profound effects on teachers in the profession forcing them to leave, retire early, withdraw commitment or take extended stress related leave (Maclure 1993). Despite, the ongoing changes to the VET environment affecting teachers, it has been found that teachers continue to express concerns about ‘equity, fairness, social justice and public access rather than profit, competition, efficiency and entrepreneurial activity when describing their work’ (Chappell 2001, p.33).

Issues such as equity, fairness and social justice take second place to the job related and skills formation foci of current government education and economic policy which emphasises that ‘Industry and business needs must drive training policies, priorities and delivery’ (DEST, 2005, p.4). It creates a strain between the need for skills to drive economic growth and more personal and community based outcomes, ‘Similar tensions arise as a result of the need to underpin economic growth against community needs, incorporating issues such as access and equity, while still operating within a model based on efficiency and market orientation’ (Gara 2012, p.557). This was identified as an issue for TAFE teachers in 2001 because ‘when teachers are asked to “do things differently” in their everyday teaching practices they are also being called upon to become different teachers’ (Chappell 2001, p.24) and is clearly unsettling for many TAFE teachers who question their current role, identity and purpose.

When these findings are linked to the general requirements of a society with an ageing workforce that increasingly has flagged the need to continue working past the expected retirement age in order to pass on skills, knowledge and experience and alleviate the burden of the elderly on the young (Beddie 2010), a picture emerges of the growing importance of retaining experienced staff in VET (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.21), particularly at the master practitioner level (Wheelahan 2010b).

Two recent reports with conflicting views relating to the VET workforce were released in 2010. The first by the Productivity Commission (2010) describes the VET workforce as highly casualised with an older than average population that is likely to continue working. It predicts that, along with new teachers, VET practitioner numbers will adequately meet future needs. However, the second by Wheelahan (2010a, p.11) contends that the VET workforce is in ‘crisis’ requiring the implementation of a drastic review of working conditions in order to attract and retain staff. In addition, the Australian Government (2010) has indicated its intention to introduce a Productive Ageing Package that will encourage older workers to continue working in roles that will enable the passing on of their skills and knowledge to the younger generation. Against this backdrop, there is the very real question of whether TAFE will be able to continue attracting and retaining staff to prevent a loss of knowledge and mentor new teaching staff (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.21).

Wheelahan (2010a, p.12) proposes the introduction of the master practitioner role along with a raft of changes in their pay and working conditions relating to job security and the use of casualised teaching staff (2010a, p.11). This would enable the knowledge, skills and experience of current VET practitioners in areas of teaching, learning and assessment to be inherited by the ensuing generation of VET teachers. The Lead Vocational Teacher (LVT) role in TAFE Queensland aligns with this concept.
Aside from extrinsic factors that influence the retention rate of VET practitioners, such as pay, working conditions and professional development (Guthrie, Nguyen & Perkins, 2006; Reframing the Future, 2004; Harris, Simons & Moore, 2005) other intrinsic factors that provide job satisfaction, engender loyalty and a sense of shared values require greater understanding and further investigation (Dickie, Eccles, FitzGerald, McDonald, Cully, Blythe, Stanwick & Brooks 2004; Corben & Thompson 2002, cited in Guthrie et al. 2006, p.67).

On the issue of trust, it should be noted that the ‘audit culture’, which causes extensive amounts of time to be ‘spent on “paperwork” related to compliance’ (Black & Reich 2010, p.1), was established to develop trust in transparent government institutions, using performance measures from the fields of accounting and auditing. Indeed, this focus tends to reflect a devaluation of teaching and education. As Power (1994) claims the professional judgment of the teacher is no longer trusted and is superseded by the quality of the performance measures of auditing. Additionally, these measures will not necessarily improve the quality of teaching and learning (Morley 2003) and are not the most suitable way to measure quality (Hoecht, 2006), rather it is the relational trust between students and teachers that is essential to the successful implementation of any program (Palmer, 2003).

Research by Simons, Harris, Pudney & Clayton, 2008 revealed that meaningfulness, fulfilment and personal development rank highly on the list of internal satisfaction indicators sought by VET teachers in their work, in fact, just as highly as the extrinsic rewards. To meet their needs, Harris, Clayton & Chappell (2008) suggest providing opportunities for individual development, continued learning and a quality work life, because what staff require is ‘enjoyment, development and satisfaction’ (Harris, Clayton & Chappell 2008, p.2).

The term ‘vocation’ finds its roots in the Latin vocare meaning ‘to call’. It has both Christian and secular connotations. For many, it means being drawn to do a life’s work for which people are suited and which they find genuinely meaningful. It often refers to work that requires dedication and a high level of commitment and implies less focus on financial gain. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary provides a definition of “vocation” as "The work or function to which a person is called; a mode of life or employment regarded as requiring dedication." It is associated with providing a public service such as in teaching and medicine.

Holland (1993, p. 1) describes a vocation in this way: ‘Vocational Identity means the possession of a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, and talents. These characteristics lead to relatively untroubled decision-making and confidence in one’s ability to make good decisions in the face of some inevitable environmental ambiguities.’ In view of the social and moral dimensions embedded in their work, it is worth noting that the motivation that enables teachers to accept the level of ongoing change in VET is perhaps their level of engagement in their work.

Far from denoting something esoteric, restricted to a dedicated or enlightened few, the idea of teaching as a vocation calls attention to the personal and moral dimensions of the practice that draw many persons to it from the start, and that keep them successful within it despite adversity and difficulty. (Hansen 1994 p. 261)

A vocation requires a sustained effort on behalf of the individual who makes a valuable contribution to society and it provides the individual with a level of certainty. In addition, Heyes states that it is a shared meaning, ‘We take it to mean two things, that (a) that person is particularly devoted, going ‘beyond the call of duty’ in doing their job, and (b) they do the job because they like doing it or feel a need to do it (they ‘care’)’ and that by having a vocation individuals gain not only a financial reward but also ‘a non-pecuniary benefit’ (Heyes 2004, pp561-2). Furthermore, Osterloh and Frey (2000) contend that with employees who are intrinsically motivated, as required by a ‘vocation’, there is more likelihood of the transfer of tacit knowledge and skills which is not present under certain conditions with extrinsic reward and therefore is of
greater competitive advantage to the business. They describe intrinsic motivation as ‘...an activity is undertaken for one’s immediate need satisfaction...The ideal incentive system is in the work content itself, which must be satisfactory and fulfilling for the employees (p.539). An over emphasis on extrinsic reward can ‘crowd out’ intrinsic motivation and reduce the sense of public spirit and civic duty (Osterloh & Frey 2000, p.539; Frey, p.1301).

One aspect of teacher education has been to build awareness among teachers regarding their role in redressing the imbalances in society due to factors such as socio-economic background, race, and gender. Historically, teacher education focuses on enabling teachers to provide an educational experience for their students that will enable them to have a rich, inclusive, empowered adult experience, ‘Because the sorting process significantly influences the quality of students’ adult lives, teachers—as the school professionals most directly involved in the sorting—have a moral and ethical responsibility to teach all their pupils fairly and equitably. They also must be vigilant about the fairness and equity of the educational enterprise as a whole.” (Villegas 2007, p.371). This sense of responsibility does not stop with school education and poses questions regarding the values embedded in a teacher’s role and education and the educational enterprise as a whole, particularly when the business model of education has changed a number of Queensland TAFEs into statutory authorities enabling more independence in business based decision-making that effect access and equity. This relates to the issues first identified by Chappell in 2001 (p.33) as expressed by teachers in the 1990s.

Aside from these issues, the role of teacher leadership is problematic as it is largely unrecognised within the hierarchy (Jameson and McNay, 2007). There is a strong case being made for the implementation of distributed leadership model (Pearce, 2004; Harris, 2008), which would mean that leadership would be performed by individuals most able to take on particular tasks as they arise, allowing for a more shared and fluid roles; this model is not the norm.

The literature poses many questions that require further investigation. Can the preferences and needs of LVTs be met within the current VET environment? LVTs from previous focus groups have reported a developing sense that management and teachers do not share the same vision, mission or values critical to the success of an organisation (Davids, 2012). There is still a great deal of work to be done in this area. What is the role of teacher leadership in VET? How do teachers lead when teacher leadership remains unrecognised and lastly, how does this link to the notion of workplace well-being, which impacts on whether skilled and experienced teachers stay and transfer their knowledge and skills, or go?

**Research method**

An electronic survey was distributed in June 2011 to the total population of 738 Lead Vocational Teachers (LVTs) in Queensland. In total, 283 responded (38.3% response rate) and 245 (33% completion rate) completed the survey. The LVTs answered questions in relation to their role and attitudes within the context of ongoing change. The survey addressed issues of job satisfaction and commitment, and also focused on personal and professional development needs as well as avenues for career development. It is worth acknowledging the limitations of this research. The research was undertaken in Queensland and the experience of teachers in other states in Australia may be very different. In addition, further analysis is still underway and while this was a quantitative survey, it will be followed up with a series of in depth interviews to be undertaken later in the 2012.

Who were the respondents? Over half of the respondents were men (n=132, 54%) and slightly less than half were women (n=111, 45%). Just over one fifth (n=52, 21%) of the respondents were over the age of 60, while over one half (n=135, 55%) were between the ages of 50 – 59 years. The remaining quarter (n=58, 23%) were under the age of 50. In addition they were well qualified with
96 (39%) having a degree, 78 (31%) a postgraduate diploma, 50 (20%) a master’s degree and four (1.6%) a doctorate. Almost three-quarters (73%) had been working in TAFE for more than 15 years. The respondents were therefore both well qualified and experienced.

Findings

1. Roles: how do LVTs view their roles?
A key line of the enquiry in the research was to identify their reported motivation for choosing to teach; therefore, teachers were asked whether they viewed their work as a vocation, a career or a job. Were teachers drawn to their work through a sense of vocation, or did they see it as a step on the progression of a career ladder taking place over many years, or was it simply a job that provided financial dividends? LVTs were asked to explain their choice. Just under half of the respondents (n=119, 48%) stated that they viewed their work as a vocation.

Table 1: LVTs’ views on teaching as a vocation, career or a job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you describe teaching as a vocation, career or a job?</th>
<th>Count N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocation</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In explaining their choices of answer as a vocation their responses ranged from finding teaching rewarding work to wanting to participate in transformative work, the outcomes of which could affect not only the lives of students but the future of society. Their language contained frequent reference to as ‘passion’, ‘dedication’, ‘making a difference’, ‘meaningful’, ‘commitment’, and ‘love.’ It substantiates the importance of affect in teaching and education (Zembylas, 2003 for example, ‘You have to feel as though you can really make a difference in peoples lives to be good at this job. without passion you just couldn’t provide the quality of service required’, ‘It is an opportunity to give back to those following in my footsteps…Moreover open doors for achieving a sustainable future,’ and ‘I believe I am a "born" teacher and have always got satisfaction from teaching’.

A further 101 (41%) described their work as a career. Yet, the language used to explain why respondents chose ‘career’ sometimes corresponded very closely to the language of people who believe it is a vocation. Some typical comments included: ‘A passion for helping students and industry and making a difference to both’, ‘Believed I could make a difference,’ and ‘I truly love teaching. I love what I do and do what I love!’

It is clear from these responses that they encompass a social and moral dimension. It is a sense of mission that corresponds to the findings of other researchers on teaching in general (e.g. Fullan 1993; Korthagen 2004).

In comparison, those that described their work as a job used language such as: ‘pays the bills’, ‘somewhere you go to earn money.’ However, among those (n=26, 10%) that described their work as a job, it should be noted that a high number described how they used to view their work as a career or vocation, for example, ‘was a career or vocation, now just a job’ and also with a sense of pride ‘I was initially proud to be called a TAFE teacher. This is not the case any more’ now state that they feel that teachers are undervalued, ‘teachers are not valued anymore’ and that it is ‘...just like working in KFC...also, that they have lost their sense of joy, ‘Used to be vocation but the joy has gone’.
2. What do LVTs see as important in their roles?

The research examined aspects of their role that have been traditionally linked to teachers’ sense of identity and purpose. It found that teachers placed very high to high levels of importance on equity (n=217, 87%), fairness (n=225, 91%), public access (n=188, 76%), efficiency (n=209, 85%) and social justice (n=208, 84%). In comparison, the levels of very high to high levels of importance that were placed on other factors were markedly less - profit (n=57, 23%), competition (n=73, 29%), and entrepreneurial activity (n=102, 41%). Profit (n=100, 40%) and competition (n=95, 38%) in fact fell mostly into areas of moderate importance (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are each of the following aspects in your work as a Lead Vocational Teacher?</th>
<th>Very high N</th>
<th>High N</th>
<th>Moderate N</th>
<th>Low N</th>
<th>Very low N</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public access</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial activity</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, teachers commented on the tension between business and education, ‘Education should NOT be a business, it is to firstly benefit the person and 2nd benefit our community. It can not be a business looking at costs vs outcomes.’ and ‘I believe it compromises educational delivery to be very business focussed. Education should be broader than just being able to perform in a particular job’ and ‘education is not a commodity to be bought and sold to the lowest bidder’. While some teachers commented on adhering to the principle of delivering a public service, ‘The public service is here to serve the public,’ and, ‘As a public educational service provider we have moved away from providing skills for our students, and rather there is a trend to satisfy the budget bottom line no matter what!!!’, others stated their opinion that the focus of education should be on the students and their outcomes, ‘Education is about empowering and enriching and enabling,’ ‘Teachers see their students as the focus’ and ‘What about skills and the student’s (please don't call them clients) outcome that will assist them?’.

When teachers were questioned regarding the change that had occurred in the VET sector, the research showed that almost two thirds (n=160, 64%) had considered leaving their position due to their level of satisfaction. In response to the question, How have you felt about the following changes that have occurred in the TAFE sector since you have been working within it?, the greatest level of dissatisfaction was expressed in regard to the casualisation of teaching staff (n=196, 79%) followed closely by the TAFE administration processes (n=176, 71%) and
development of a business based model of education (n=175, 71%). On the other hand, teachers were satisfied with the increased influence of industry in education (n=184, 74%) and the increased use of online course delivery (n=158, 64%). However, they were equally divided in their views on the process of implementing ongoing change: half (n=120, 49%) were satisfied to very satisfied and half (n=121, 49%) dissatisfied to very dissatisfied.

Responses to questions relating to levels of happiness and wellbeing at work are particularly pertinent when such high percentages have identified their work as a vocation or career (Table 1). In fact, over half stated that the changes in TAFE had negatively affected their trust in their organisation (n=139, 56%); their sense of satisfaction (n=126, 51%) and their happiness at work (n=133, 54%). Also of concern were the negative effects on their level of meaningfulness (n=107, 43%), sense of community (n=102, 41%), sense of purpose (n=94, 38%) and level of integration between work and personal values (n=112, 45%). However, healthy numbers of teachers still remained passionate about their work (n=181, 70%) and committed to their job (n=177, 72%).

Table 3: LVTs’ views on how changes in TAFE have affected their attitude work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How have changes in TAFE affected your attitude to your work in each of the following areas?</th>
<th>Positively N %</th>
<th>No difference N %</th>
<th>Negatively N %</th>
<th>Total N %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to my job</td>
<td>43 134 69 246</td>
<td>17 55 28 100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in my organisation</td>
<td>17 89 139 245</td>
<td>7 36 57 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for my work</td>
<td>42 139 63 244</td>
<td>17 57 26 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose</td>
<td>38 113 94 245</td>
<td>16 46 38 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of meaningfulness</td>
<td>29 110 107 246</td>
<td>12 45 43 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>29 113 102 244</td>
<td>12 46 42 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of integration between work and personal values</td>
<td>16 117 112 245</td>
<td>6 48 46 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of satisfaction</td>
<td>27 92 126 245</td>
<td>11 38 51 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness at work</td>
<td>21 91 133 245</td>
<td>9 37 54 100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262 998 945 2205</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Preferences: what do LVTs want in their work?

The LVT role tunes with Wheelahan’s concept of the master practitioner (2010a, p.12). In response to the question, ‘In what areas do you think teachers could best provide leadership?’ where teachers were allowed to choose multiple responses, LVTs selected the following: teaching and assessment (n=48, 90%), resource development (n=48, 90%), the induction and mentoring of new staff (n=47, 88%) and course coordination (n=43, 81%). However, a large percentage of LVTs consider the role of the LVT to be ill-defined (n=211, 79%) for example, ‘To start with, having a clear definition of what a LVT is and have a scope of work that we can discuss and participate in according to work team environment’ and ‘Better definition of what we are supposed to do…’ Furthermore, many LVTs stated that the level of administration detracted from their ability to fulfil their teaching duties adequately, ‘I believe the T in LVT means TEACHER not administrator,’ and ‘I spend too much time accounting for what we do, AQTF and AVETMISS, and too little time preparing for lessons and mentoring teachers, engaging employers.’ Overwhelmingly, they wanted to have more input into areas that would enhance educational and business outcomes and to
spend less time on administration and paperwork. A typical comment was, ‘LVTs should be able to focus their efforts on improving the products and services offered by their work teams which would in turn increase student satisfaction and the institute’s profitability.’

In addition, some asked for more trust in their professionalism and thereby being allowed to take a more proactive role in decisions being made by management within their institutes:

• Generally, being trusted and consulted more for your educational expertise and experience.
• More trust - I am a professional - well educated, intelligent, committed to maximising student outcomes and maintaining quality & integrity :)
• Being allowed to contribute/interact in management administration issues that affect teaching delivery/staff.

Lastly, the findings also indicated a desire by teachers to be given substantial time to perform different roles alongside their teaching, so that they could dedicate time to a needed task such as mentoring or resource development. When teachers spoke personally, they expressed a preference for an opportunity to undertake a role that combined either teaching 75% and 25% another role or 50-50%, but they were equally divided in their response as to whether they would like to see more opportunities for other roles to be combined with teaching generally.

Discussion

Vast changes have been enacted on and within the TAFE system through the Queensland Skills Plan, described by the Queensland Director General of the Department of Education and Training on 5 Nov 2011 as ‘...the most significant period of reform to the state’s vocational education and training sector in 40 years.’ In view of this, it is unsurprising that the findings indicate that these experienced practitioners question certain aspects which affect their role.

Wheelahan (2010a) identifies the casualisation of teaching staff as a major issue which poses a number of problems relating to security, commitment, staff retention and is of particular relevance to this study, due to the extra teaching tasks that are shouldered by permanent and more experienced staff members, thereby increasing their workload. There are also inherent difficulties for casual staff seeking to gain access to formal mentoring programs in TAFE due to the fact that they are commonly only available to contract or permanent staff. Furthermore, Wheelahan identifies the need for a master practitioner role which would be used within a formal mentoring program.

The needs articulated by the LVTs in this study attune closely with Wheelahan’s identification of the importance of a master practitioner. However, LVTs report that their time is consumed by the very real demands of compliance and administration due to a failure to apply stringent parameters and clearly define how LVTs can best be used. In addition, some state that it is not a ‘real’ role which to them would have educational outcomes at its core such as, teaching and assessment, resource development, mentoring new staff and course coordination. This discordance is a frustration for many LVTs and has been noted in their comments which stress a desire to focus on educational outcomes that benefit the public and society, with less focus being placed on business outcomes and processes.

Sound educational outcomes, in consultation with management and based on a model of trust, was a common theme through the responses of many of the LVTs: to be trusted to use their professional judgment and consulted for their experience and abilities. Many of the tasks performed by LVTs are reported to be in quality assurance answering the demands of excessive paperwork. This default position is common in contemporary educational institutions (e.g. Power, 1994; Morley, 2003; Black & Reich, 2010; Hoecht, 2006), creating tension in the performance of their duties and their understanding of their role as teachers. LVTs in this study commonly declared that they were not administrators and they remain unconvinced that the quality of their teaching and assessment practices is being measured adequately.
Nearly half of the LVTs identified their work as a vocation that is, work that provides meaning, purpose with the intrinsic motivation to provide a service which is personally and professionally satisfying. The transfer of tacit knowledge by the intrinsically motivated would make the business more competitive (Osterhol & Frey, 2000). Indeed, the passing on of knowledge and skills is critical to the continuing success of Australian business and its economy as is the teaching of new skills, (Beddie, 2010; Clayton, Fisher & Hughes, 2005, Wheelahan, 2010b). Yet almost two thirds of LVTs stated that they had considered leaving their job and reported feelings of dissatisfaction that lowered their levels of commitment and trust and affected their level of integration between work and personal values. Given that many feel passionately (74%) and committed (72%) to their work and that experienced staff prioritise a sense of personal satisfaction, development and enjoyment (Harris, Clayton & Chappell 2008), the research on these experienced and well qualified teachers presents worryingly high levels of negative effects on levels of happiness, satisfaction, trust and meaningfulness. In addition, given that a vocation has the element of ‘non-pecuniary benefit’ (Heyes 2000, p.562), many LVTs still question the business based model of education which has been adopted, where decisions are made based on financial considerations, causing some measure of angst about their role, purpose and identity (Chappell, 2001, Davids 2012).

The crux of the matter may reside in a lack of recognition of the role of teacher leadership (Jameson & McNay, 2007) and consequently a lack of definition of the LVT role, as well as a failure to clearly demarcate its purpose and responsibilities. This has led to dissatisfaction among teachers who consider that they are not being used appropriately. Many LVTs have expressed a preference to undertake other roles combined with their teaching, which would enable a substantial amount of time to be dedicated to educational outcomes, for example, mentoring or resource development. The retention of experienced staff to pass on their skills and knowledge needs more serious attention, as many LVTs expressed doubts that their skills and knowledge are being appropriately used or their professional judgement trusted, detracting from their levels of satisfaction and meaningfulness.

Conclusion

The Lead Vocational Teachers in TAFE Queensland are among the longest serving teachers in TAFE Queensland, most highly qualified, experienced, skilled and knowledgeable. They fit the category of those who are required to stay in the VET sector to pass on their knowledge and skills and mentor new staff in excellence in teaching, learning and assessment. Nearly half (48%) state that their work is a vocation which implies a high degree of dedication, purpose and meaningfulness, while a large percentage (40%) view their work as a long standing career with a strong sense of professionalism. Yet, an alarming number (64%) have considered leaving. Their levels of job satisfaction, happiness and trust in their organisation show signs of fatigue.

Many LVTs expressed a desire to focus more on teaching and less on the administration, stating that educational outcomes suffered when the priorities of the institutes centred on business outcomes and quality assurance. Many would like to see a greater balance between education outcomes and business needs, with greater trust placed in their professional knowledge and expertise. In addition, LVTs identified areas where they felt they could more valuably use their time and effort, such as resource development, teaching and assessment and mentoring new staff, however, their leadership role remains ill defined and so often their expertise was inappropriately used to fill gaps in administration, causing frustration and disquiet.

Should TAFE Queensland wish to retain their experienced staff for the continued success of their business in line with common wisdom, it is essential that the role of the LVT be revisited, redefined and recognised as an essential component in the strategic intent of their organisations.
References

- Clayton, B, Fisher, T & Hughes, E (2005), Sustaining the skill base of technical and further education institutes, NCVER, Adelaide.