The emerging role of enterprise learning consultants

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As part of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Building Researcher Capacity Scheme, a Community of Practice Scholarship Program has been created to encourage a culture of research in vocational education and training (VET) organisations. With the guidance of an experienced mentor, VET practitioners without any formal research experience undertake their own work-based research project. The scholarships also provide participants with an opportunity to have their research peer-reviewed and released by NCVER in VOCEDplus.

About the research

_The emerging role of enterprise learning consultants_

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Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own research to address a workplace problem. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor, and the resulting research papers are published in VOCEDplus, in a special collection that features the work of new researchers.

Kathy Piccardi participated in the 2011 Community of Practice program and she is an education quality manager at Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT) in Queensland. Her research focused on enterprise learning consultants, new positions created at MSIT with responsibility for assisting businesses with workforce development and work-integrated training. Ten enterprise learning consultants from a variety of industry sectors were interviewed to gather their perspectives on what their roles required and the professional development considered necessary. Not surprisingly, the role of enterprise learning consultants varies, depending on the needs of industry and individual businesses. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities, including: understanding adult learning and work-based pedagogies; being able to develop tailored training programs; possessing knowledge about the industry, the specific enterprise and the VET system; and having an ability to build and maintain relationships with the enterprises. Ms Piccardi argues that enterprise learning consultants need a sophisticated skill set to deal with the challenges of working in a range of environments and juggling Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and training package requirements with the enterprise’s objectives.

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Introduction

The vocational education and training (VET) landscape is currently undergoing rapid changes due to contestable funding, increased competition between registered training organisations (RTOs), changes in client cohort characteristics and an increased demand for workforce development and work-integrated learning. The demand for VET provision for workforce development requires highly skilled VET practitioners who are customer-focused, flexible, innovative and responsive to the needs of industry stakeholders. In response to this, the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT) in Queensland created the new staff positions of enterprise learning consultants (ELCs), whose responsibility is to assist industry by combining their educational — in the context of the Australian Qualifications Framework and training packages — and business objectives and thereby promoting workforce development.

While generic attributes such as customer-focused, flexible, innovative and responsive to the needs of industry clients are expected of all VET practitioners, the requirements for effective services through partnerships with enterprises extend beyond these. A diverse repertoire of approaches needs to be adopted by ELCs to appropriately engage enterprises and achieve their respective workforce development objectives. Their role is complex and involves creating, designing, planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and continuously improving all aspects of the training system for every client. As staff took up ELC positions at MSIT, their roles were being defined as they worked in these positions. Accordingly, research was needed to gain greater understanding and insight into the role, functions and competencies of ELCs in order to establish a professional development framework to skill other staff interested in these positions. The study was led by the following research questions:

- What are the roles, duties and key competencies of enterprise learning consultants?
- What areas of professional development are needed to develop new enterprise learning consultants?

Because this was an exploratory study, a case study approach was used, with data collected from in-depth interviews with ten ELCs. The findings highlight the complexities of the ever-changing environment in which ELCs are required to operate. Their roles tend to continually evolve as they attempt to meet the multiple challenges of diverse clients. This suggests that ELCs require a range of competencies to allow them to meet some of the basic tasks required by this role. The findings suggest five key areas of development that would position them to commence operating as an ELC, and then continue their learning through practice.
Background

Australia’s future economic growth relies on the VET sector to build the capability and capacity of the Australian workforce (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2011; Productivity Commission 2011). The main public provider of VET, TAFE (technical and further education) institutes, must become increasingly flexible, responsive and innovative to meet the demands of workforce development. One widely endorsed approach for achieving this is by strengthening partnerships between TAFE and enterprises, specifically for the purpose of workforce development (Skills Australia 2010a; Bradley et al. 2008; National Quality Council 2009). Stronger partnerships underpin the integration of individuals’ training and skills development and utilisation within enterprises, with the aim of improving individual job satisfaction and enterprise efficiency, the latter which then contributes to the broader economy. Hence Skills Australia (2010a) advocates new collaborative delivery methodologies and pedagogies that contribute considerably more to workforce development.

Workforce development goes well beyond staff training to incorporate a holistic interpretation of human resource management, analysis of the workforce, planning and capacity building (Staron 2008, cited in Harris 2011). Workforce development is conceptualised in several ways, but the definition by the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council (2010, p.2) serves the purpose of this report:

Workforce development extends beyond training and encompasses the full range of activities that industry and enterprises use to ensure they have access to the skilled workforce that is required to meet both current and future needs.

The Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council and Jacobs and Hawley (2008) argue that workforce development ‘must be owned’ by enterprises and be comprised of education and training as well as business activities. They imply that traditional VET alone is limited in meeting the goals of workforce development.

Workforce development requires a collaborative relationship between VET practitioners, VET providers and enterprises. It necessitates discussions to formulate long-term planning, development strategies and innovative solutions. Hence workforce development is seen as a substantial extension of traditional VET skill-based teaching and a significant paradigm shift, from supplying industry with skilled workers, to integrating VET into business objectives and workforce development (Hawke 2008). Consequently, there is a growing demand for TAFE institutes to develop a client-focused approach to designing and contextualising accredited training that aligns with business outcomes and enterprise requirements. Not surprisingly, Day and Sachs (2004) found that VET practitioners were increasingly designing and developing learning programs which simultaneously accommodated organisational goals and individual needs. Figgis’s (2009) research also noted a rise in requests by employers for training providers to be involved in workforce capacity-building as well as business development. This makes sense, because collaboratively designed VET could potentially extend beyond just training solutions to improved business solutions and enterprise profitability.

Furthermore, due to the increasing cost of training, more enterprises are partnering with educational institutes to ensure that programs are customised to maximise the return on investments and to cater for the continuing education and training that maintains the knowledge and skills to meet workplace requirements (Cedefop 2010). Preliminary evaluations by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (2010) found that partnerships between registered training organisations and enterprises
resulted in high-quality industry-tailored training with improved productivity and workforce utilisation, enhanced skills and more targeted professional development expenditure. Understandably, achievement of such outcomes requires distinctive skills and attributes different from those for basic VET delivery in TAFE institutions.

Learning consultants

Kearns (2004) recognised that learning consultants need to be personable, with the ability to get along with others, be good listeners and have the desire to continually improve. He argues that they need to be results-oriented. Psychometric tests conducted by Nelson (1994), Walter (1998) and Leach (1996) (cited in Western Australia Department of Training 2002) showed that exemplary VET practitioners are enthusiastic, tolerant, flexible, sincere, and responsive and possessed a sense of humour. Personal attributes and ‘people skills’ are critical for developing and maintaining partnerships, where the social aspect often underpins the essence of the relationship. Harris, Simons and Moore (2005) emphasised the importance of selecting the ‘right’ people — those who can operate well in enterprise environments. Their research concluded that these ‘right’ people must have the ability to identify skill deficits, quickly build relationships, be able to mentor and have a strong desire to learn. They argued that building and sustaining enterprise relationships is based on mutual trust, not only between enterprises and trainers, but with trainers and their institute management.

Arguments in favour of enterprise-based training suggest that a transition from a learning world to a workforce development approach is an evolutionary shift (Harris, Simons & Moore 2005), whereby VET practitioners need to rapidly develop new skills (Cedefop 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011) and step out of a purely educational model into a business approach (New Media Consortium & Educause Learning Initiative 2009). Mitchell (2008a) progressed some of the initial research by Harris, Simons and Moore (2005), Hawke (2008) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA; 2004) and went on to suggest that to achieve outcomes of a business nature VET practitioners need to operate as educational training consultants. Guthrie, Perkins and Nguyen (2006) also argue that VET practitioners need to become highly skilled professionals who:

- have a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire
- use more learner-centred, work-centred and attribute-focused approaches rather than traditional transmission pedagogies
- can work with multiple clients, in multiple contexts and across multiple learning sites
- understand that the integration of learning and work is a major feature of the contemporary work environment (p.6).

Mitchell (2010b) anticipated new roles for practitioners and labelled their position as ‘advanced VET practitioners’ with ‘extraordinary capabilities’, who are committed to building sustainable and productive relationships with industry (p.6). He expected advanced VET practitioners to have diverse responsibilities and act as change agents and deliver individualised training to sophisticated, technically savvy industry clients. Working collaboratively with enterprises, these advanced practitioners would provide more than just training solutions, but collaboratively develop business solutions and improve enterprise profitability and productivity (Mitchell 2008a). What he described here fell into the third and fourth paradigm of his ‘Four Paradigm Model’, which illustrated different VET teaching paradigms.
The first paradigm in Mitchell’s Four Paradigm Model is characterised by traditional on-campus VET teaching, the second combines offsite, blended and workplace delivery, while the third and fourth are more sophisticated. The third paradigm uses an industry-focused delivery method that includes self-paced and individual learning and recognition of prior learning (RPL). Mitchell (2008a) describes the fourth paradigm as a ‘self-sustaining training ecosystem’, characterised by workforce development strategies and the use of multifaceted delivery methods to focus on industry and community workforce development. He contends that each paradigm requires different skills and competencies, with the fourth paradigm requiring the most sophisticated set of skills. Mitchell’s (2008a) research found that advanced VET practitioners, who have the ability to work in all four paradigms, are able to quickly progress between the various paradigms according to the learners/clients’ needs. The fourth paradigm focuses largely on diversification of workplace delivery by utilising the workplace pedagogies advocated by Billett (2001).

There are several merits in increased workplace learning for workforce development. Skills Australia (2010b) promotes workplace learning, arguing that workforce development activities should be work-centred, that real life problems and scenarios should be utilised, and that the adult learners’ work experience should be acknowledged. This necessitates an appropriately tailored service that relies on exceptional interpersonal skills and business-industry knowledge. Kearns (2004), who described VET practitioners working with industry as learning consultants, suggested that to be highly effective in customising programs for enterprises they need to possess the ability to quickly gain detailed knowledge of job roles and responsibilities, analyse training needs and map processes to appropriately design programs. These skills and attributes supplement the following set of workforce skills and capabilities for the VET practitioner (ANTA 2004, p.6):

- ability to adapt and change with uncertainty
- client-focus skills
- management and leadership capabilities
- coaching and mentoring skills
- knowledge—work capabilities that add value to businesses
- ability to work across teams and within networks
- pedagogical expertise.

The Western Australian Department of Training (2007) specified five core role characteristics for ‘exemplary VET practitioners’. These were: subject matter knowledge, cognitive function skills, business industry knowledge, interpersonal skills and ethical skills. Mitchell (2008a, p.10) went on to summarise the features and attributes of the ‘new VET practitioner’ into 15 categories as follows:

- views individuals students as lifelong learners on career pathways
- respects the business risks and pressures of enterprise clients
- appreciates that enterprises need skills to achieve business outcomes
- understands links between training, HR and workforce development
- functions effectively within supply changes and skills ecosystems
- exercises professional judgment in delivery and assessment
- develops and sustains long-term relationships with clients
- participates within a team to access colleagues’ specialist skills
- taps into wider networks for information and resources
- understands the value of accessing and applying industry research
- commits to achieving and maintaining the quality of the profession
- contributes to the development of innovative products and services
- improves the tools and frameworks of professional practice
- updates technical skills and industry-specific knowledge
- possesses the ability to cope with the complexities and uncertainties of industry demands.

Guthrie (2010) extended this by suggesting that highly skilled VET practitioners need to work collaboratively with the wider community, develop skills in ‘career advice’ and ‘work placement, and take additional administration functions including managing budgets’ (p.6). While these various lists capture the leadership and management skills of advanced practitioners, additional attributes that incorporate the complexities of the knowledge and skills required to deliver work-integrated learning by utilising work-based pedagogies are essential. VET practitioners operating in today’s environment need to have knowledge of contemporary pedagogies, including the use of mobile devices and e-learning and the adoption of strategies to maximise learning by developing a safe, collaborative and peer learning environment. After all, technology is already assisting VET practitioners to work at a wide range of workplaces with different contexts and to cater for the unique and individual needs of industry.

**Enterprise learning consultants at Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE**

The nature of the client mix of the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT) has extended in recent years from learners wishing to gain qualifications for employment to existing workers continuing their education to improve their enterprises’ productivity. There is an increase in demand from enterprises for VET provision to develop their workforce. This change is accommodated in recent government policy and funding models present business opportunities for TAFE to increase its market share for existing workers and enterprises, and leads to benefits. This may include more responsible approaches to services by TAFE, an increase in industry investment, and an ability to better align workforce development with government training priorities (MSIT 2010).

Recognising the imperative for workforce development, Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE in southeast Queensland piloted practitioner positions for enterprise learning consultants, who operated within a self-sustaining business model. A sample of 12 highly skilled VET practitioners took up their ELC positions with no specific training.

It did not take long for them to recognise that preparing and customising programs takes time and energy, as does establishing trust and open communication between VET practitioners and enterprise members (Harris, Simons & Moore 2005). This realisation prompted them to focus on a partnership model. They took responsibility for combining educational and business imperatives and assisted with workforce development by partnering with enterprises in their respective industries. They were all creative individuals who engaged in action learning and made adjustments to their provision as they progressed. All the training they delivered aligned with qualifications under the AQF.
The ELCs work in a separate business unit called Enterprise Workforce Solutions, established five years ago to respond to business training requirements. The unit has evolved considerably in a relatively short period of time. Initially the unit predominately focused on recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessment and off-campus delivery for business and management qualifications. The unit now uses an assortment of teaching paradigms and is client- and learner-centric. Client feedback to date shows a high level of satisfaction with the ways in which the ELCs met enterprise and individual needs.

The ELCs work fairly autonomously, mostly remotely, and tend to be on campus at least once a week. They work in close proximity to industry and are able to continually consolidate their professional knowledge and competency. Essentially, these ELCs are VET teachers who have a thorough knowledge and understanding of training packages, VET courses and industry requirements. They work closely with industry partners to integrate VET training requirements with the business imperatives of enterprises by using a diverse range of teaching paradigms such as RPL, blended, mobile learning, workshops and work-integrated strategies.

ELCs are currently employed under the same industrial instruments as traditional TAFE teachers. MSIT has worked closely with ELCs to mutually agree on their working arrangement. However, as the role further expands, there is potential and indeed a need to assign this role its own unique classification to keep pace with the demands of industry.

A preliminary evaluation of the VET provision organised and facilitated by ELCs indicated several positive outcomes for MSIT and the partner enterprises, who noted benefits such as relevant and contextualised training, improved employee skills, increased productivity and improved staff morale. These benefits reflect the client service outcomes for MSIT, with the consequence that the institute’s management team has endorsed the extension of ELC positions to more industry disciplines.
Research methodology

Considering that there is no previous research on enterprise learning consultants, an exploratory study was needed to gain an understanding of the roles, duties and key competencies of this group of TAFE workers. The study focused on two research questions:

- What are the roles, duties and key competencies of enterprise learning consultants?
- What types of professional development do staff wishing to take on enterprise learning consultant roles require to successfully meet the needs of industry clients and MSIT’s strategic goals?

A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to collect data. Following ethical clearance from the Institute Director and the Queensland Education and Training Department, 12 enterprise learning consultants were invited to participate in the study. Of these, ten ELCs who worked with the waste management, retail, business, community services, finance and hospitality industries agreed to participate. A variety of industries were selected to compare and contrast the different industry groups. Table 1 summarises their details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant identification</th>
<th>Industry sector</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of service as an ELC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Waste management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03, 04, 05</td>
<td>Business and management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Hospitality (Management)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Hospitality (Cookery)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Hospitality (Food and beverage)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Community services</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These ELCs delivered courses from certificate III to advanced diploma qualifications. The sample included novice practitioners with up to five years of experience in TAFE as well as experienced staff with between six and 24 years employment at TAFE. All of the ELC positions were offered to individuals on the basis of their personal attributes, capabilities and their desire to deliver work-based learning.

The participants were provided with an overview of the research and given consent forms and assured of confidentiality, and that they could withdraw from the research at any time with no consequences. They engaged in face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted at one of the campuses. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and all conversations were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The following are the interview questions:

1. How did you become an ELC?
2. Can you discuss the role and duties you perform as an ELC?
3. What skills and attributes do you consider as important and why?
4. What tasks and duties do you undertake daily?
5. In your opinion, how do staff at MSIT perceive the role of ELCs?
6. Do you experience any barriers in your role?
7 How do you determine what training an enterprise requires (what analysis do you undertake)?
8 Selling the training, how do you negotiate and close the deal?
9 How do you maintain relationships with industry/enterprises?
10 How do you contextualise the training to match the needs of enterprises as well as delivering to national training packages?
11 How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the training? Explain the techniques you use.
12 What professional development activities do you think are important for ELCs?
13 Any other comments in relation to the role of ELC and the relationship with enterprises.

The transcripts were sent back to the ELCs for verification. All the transcripts were then de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

Analysis of the data began with the researcher identifying the major themes, such as the key duties, job tasks, knowledge and skills sets, and personal attributes. The themes displayed synergies with the findings of a study by Harris, Simons and Moore (2005) on the attributes, skills, knowledge and competencies needed to meet the challenges experienced by VET practitioners.

The main limitation was that the research was conducted by an MSIT employee and some of the ELCs were reluctant to give negative feedback in their interviews regarding their positions and the barriers they were experiencing. The researcher was familiar with all ELCs interviewed, having worked at MSIT for four years.
Research findings

Most of the commentary from the participants aligned well with what is reported in the literature. However, the ELCs identified additional competencies they considered were essential to their roles. These were: financial management, sales and negotiation skills and using unique work-based pedagogies. The business and management ELC (participant 3) used the analogy of ice cream to explain the enterprise learning consultant role and connection with enterprise:

We don’t just make vanilla ice cream here, we can make any flavour they want, with any add-ons or add-ins the client desires and service it anyway they want.

Their industry knowledge and connections are essential for them to deliver high-quality, fully contextualised training for the enterprise. This was explained by the finance ELC (participant 6) as follows:

We are delivering these qualifications how they were intended to be delivered. We are in industry delivering to industry and fully contextualising the student’s Learning Plan and matching the Training Package to meet the student’s objectives and in turn the industry objectives. Being up to date with current and future industry and VET trends is critical and continually improving is just something we just do intuitively. In some ways we are more connected with industry than the institute.

The roles and tasks surrounding each role are depicted in figure 1. A likely profile of an ELC would encompass the major roles and responsibilities of: adult facilitator, manager and administrator, a person displaying leadership and entrepreneurship, having a client focus and possessing technical knowledge.

All of the roles are interrelated and fundamental to developing workforce capability-building, and all are critical to effective ELC functioning. The ‘adult facilitator’ role incorporates the comprehensive application of adult learning principles, designing, developing, and contextualising learning and assessment strategies and resources, while the ‘manager and administrator’ role relates to the management, organisation and financial viability of the program. The ‘client focus’ role involves engaging and maintaining relationships and networks. All ELCs require ‘technical knowledge’ of the VET system, and the industry and enterprise they are serving. Finally, the ‘leadership and entrepreneurship’ role relates to the strategic positioning of the ELCs as a business unit.

An understanding of the details associated with these categories in addition to the requisite personal attributes will help to identify the types of competencies to be included in the professional development activities that build the capability and capacity of traditional and novice VET practitioners interested in working as ELCs.
Adult facilitator

The adult facilitator role focuses on ways to design and tailor pedagogies to enrich the learning experience by incorporating the work environment and maximising the return on investment for the enterprises. The ELCs continually draw on their extensive industry knowledge and experience and their understanding of group dynamics and work-based pedagogies to manipulate the training packages to align with the enterprise’s workforce development outcomes. A range of work-centred pedagogical approaches, as opposed to traditional transmission pedagogies (Guthrie, Perkins & Nguyen 2006), are used to cater for diverse VET clients. Essentially, the adult facilitator role involves three main approaches to meeting client needs:

- creating, designing, contextualising and delivering training programs
- applying work-based pedagogies
- utilising technology to enrich the learning experiences.
Once the workforce development outcomes and goals are determined, the ELCs develop a tailored training program. This requires a sophisticated set of skills and knowledge to design the principles and delivery strategies that ensure an engaging and purposeful learning experience. ELCs’ skills in operating in a ‘work-centred’ environment result in positive consequences for enterprises such as improvements in policy, procedures and processes, as well as the promotion of organisational change. Participant 7 explained the holistic nature of this requirement:

While the qualification processes focus on the ability of the candidate to meet the training package, the overall picture of the training is a holistic approach to improving the overall business, and embedding improved and value-added sustainable business practices.

The ELCs observed that it is common for a single client to use a combination of two or more strategies such as RPL, workshops, online study, self-paced, project-based work or third party verification reports. All of these strategies require different learning and assessment resources, which are developed and customised separately, and customisation takes time. While some resources can be purchased easily, these too need modifications and contextualising because the quality and suitability of these resources vary considerably. The training packages on their own are often too generic and lack the depth required for enterprises to achieve their workforce development objectives.

As they prepare resources and design delivery strategies, ELCs also educate enterprises about delivery methods. There are often contrasting opinions about the efficacy of different delivery methods. For example, online provision is frequently requested by industry for its assumed flexibility, although this mode is well known for low completion rates and is least effective for organisational change purposes. Therefore, ELCs feel obligated to inform enterprise managers about the limitations of any particular mode and the need to allow a combination of approaches that will assist in achieving the desired outcome within defined timelines:

So sometimes we’ve got to guide the client as to what is a reasonable expectation of a part-time student, given from experience, sometimes they are people who have not done any online study and sometimes there are people who have been very successful at work but their last memory of school and study was 25 years ago, so this might well be a little bit scary for them.

(Participant 3, Business and management)

Additionally, the delivery and assessment strategies are often negotiated with the enterprise managers and not with the individual learners. The ELCs also frequently asked to conduct on-the-job training so worker—learners can remain at the worksite, such that learning does not interfere with work operations or productivity. However, the cookery ELC reported that on some occasions training would be more effective if the learner attended on-campus classes or workshops where the TAFE institutes have all the equipment and resources to deliver the training:

The first thing industry is going to say is I want you here on the job, I want you to come in as the trainer and train on the job, whether that’s effective.

(Participant 9)

The added advantage to learners attending classes is that it enriches the learning experience, as individuals would be exposed to a variety of experienced chefs in a different environment. However, this is often not the preferred option for enterprises, as they do not want to lose productive working hours.

The application of work-based pedagogies is critical to workforce development. While VET practitioners have the capability to work on multiple sites and contexts and fully understand the contemporary work environment, they need to constantly assess each situation and make adjustments because the learning locations vary considerably. They recognise that, due to distractions, the work
environment at times is not the ideal place to learn. Additionally, the theory-based component is best learnt during workshops in a classroom/training room or through self-paced learning. The ELCs have noted that the application of appropriate work-based pedagogies maximises the impact for enterprises, including behavioural change, as one participant explained:

This training and assessment method [work-based] will revolutionise the training industry, as it is client-focused and embeds sustainable business practices into the organisation. This leads to a sustainable business relationship, as we not only have a satisfied customer but a loyal customer.

(Participant 7, Hospitality management)

Most ELCs engage workers in group learning activities in the workplace. Such an approach allows workers to contextualise the content to their specific work area. They become a resource for each other in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, such practices encourage a learning culture. A group approach also enables the workers to review their practices in light of what they have learnt and make improvements, as explained by another participant:

We’re looking at them [organisational policies, procedures and systems] analysing and actually adjusting them ... we’re picking up faults with their system. (Participant 1, Waste industry)

As part of the workshops, the ELCs and the participants review internal policies and procedures to promote continuous improvement. Work-based delivery requires meta-abilities, a deep level of task knowledge and the application of critical thinking and adaptability. Here, the ELCs need highly developed listening, questioning and responding skills to support the learning process.

The ELCs reported that when technology is integrated as part of the learning and assessment process in a work-based context the uptake of technology by individuals and enterprises has been rapid. For example, several ELCs have successfully transferred the enterprise’s forms and processes onto an interactive tablet tool, which allows the learner to utilise this technology as part of their daily routine and simultaneously capture assessment evidence. This strategy has benefited the enterprise by ensuring very little ‘down time’ for training and given the learners new technical skills. The ‘assessment on the go’ strategy has been so successful that enterprises have incorporated the tablet technology, introduced by the ELCs, into their business practices.

Although Guthrie, Perkins and Nguyen (2006) advocate that VET providers should assist enterprises to adopt technology, including introducing them to new ways of working with new technologies, the ELCs cautioned about the significant investment that is required for technology to work. They quoted the development of assessment for one unit of competency having taken up to 12–14 hours and requiring the support of educational designers. Some of the qualifications consist of up to 39 units of competency, requiring in excess of 450 hours of work to transfer the qualification over to tablet technology. This is a significant investment in time and cost for ELCs and the TAFE institute.

Management and administration

As Mitchell (2008) highlighted, advanced VET practitioners need to understand the connection between training, human resources and workforce development. Similarly, ELCs need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the administration and management processes and systems within the enterprise and also at the TAFE institute. This role relates to strategies for converting business opportunities into training: the planning, organising, monitoring, evaluating and reporting of programs to determine the financial viability and achievement of the objectives. This role consumes much of
the ELCs’ time, as it is fundamental to the success of the training program. The role can be broken into four sub-roles:

- analysis of enterprise requirements
- sales and negotiating
- organisation and administration management
- financial management.

The ELCs explained how they developed training programs to suit the immediate needs of the enterprise, including those focusing on behaviour change, as well as developing long-term workforce development strategies. Understandably, it takes time and commitment to become familiar with enterprises and to develop trust. Investment in these collaborative relationships is high from both parties; however, it is imperative for positive outcomes, which make a real difference to the individuals and enterprise:

Well first of all, we have got to understand the company, and when I say understand the company not necessarily what they want, but what they’re doing. So what is the company doing, what’s its background … so having that in that background and as an organisation, as a supervisor is talking to me, I start to map things in my head, you know what I think would suit their needs.

(Participant 2, Retail)

The enterprise and the ELCs collaboratively define the training objectives and negotiate the optimum training strategies.

In consultation with [enterprise] management I will make recommendations for training and resource development opportunities to strengthen business development needs.

(Participant 1, Waste management)

Analysing the organisation and the training requirements is only part of the solution. Training also needs to align to the AQF level, the appropriate training package/s and the units of competency.

We are talking to them about what they really want. We then have to align that with the training package that’s going to best suit their needs and provide advice on what units of competency, what electives might be suitable for their particular needs. Then discuss delivery options ... and basically negotiate with the client about exactly what they want, document all of that, and then go and develop the program that they need.

(Participant 3, Business and management)

Analysing the business is not only conducted upfront but is continually reviewed. The training programs are developed in consultation with enterprise management and on occasions there is a mismatch between the employees’ (participants’) expectations and those of their management. ELCs use two main strategies to defuse this type of situation, as it can be disruptive to the learning experience:

- The manager is invited to attend the training to clarify training points.
- The ELCs brief the management team regularly on the training progress.

These briefing sessions ensure that the training is continually being evaluated and is in line with the enterprises’ objectives. Frequently, the ELCs utilise the work-based projects completed by the worker–learners to evaluate business practices within the enterprises. For example, employees may complete an assessment task to determine and implement work-based strategies to enhance the ‘bottom line’ or reduce the carbon footprint. Their reports may form a source of information for
evaluating business practices within their respective enterprises. Good practice examples are then used by ELCs to promote similar practices in other enterprises. In doing so, ELCs use their skills in marketing and promoting innovation. Their experiences as expert VET practitioners and content experts, as well as their familiarity with a range of industry practices, position them to market and negotiate with enterprises of all sizes and in different locations. Their ongoing learning from servicing different enterprises enriches their understanding of the diverse needs of enterprises. They are then able to connect with enterprises by using industry-specific language and during the consultation process begin formulation of a customised training program. Combined with their extensive knowledge of training packages, VET funding models, business/industry competencies and work-based pedagogies, they negotiate customised training programs. However, a really broad-based and comprehensive knowledge is required, not just from one training package but from a number of training packages, to formulate and negotiate a complete workforce development solution. For example, competencies from the business and finance training packages may be applied to a vast range of industries for different qualifications.

The selling and negotiation strategies vary between the ELCs; the business ELCs work collaboratively with business development officers to undertake training needs analysis, while other ELCs work independently. The majority of ELCs commenced selling with no previous sales experience; however, they have quickly acquired these skills as it is a critical aspect of their role:

“You have to have a fairly solid and sound sales knowledge so that you can actually work out what are the priorities of the person you’re trying to approach ... because a lot of people are not even aware that what you’ve actually got is what they need.” (Participant 1, Waste management)

Enterprises are not always aware of the training options available and ELCs work with them to develop a training program:

“Sometimes they don’t know what they want ... you need to be able to engage with people really quickly. You need to be able to listen and hear what it is that they want.”

(Participant 1, Waste management)

They highlight the importance of ensuring they are speaking to the people who can make the decisions about training for the enterprise. The ELCs reported that, from the initial contact with an enterprise, a considerable time can elapse from consultation to the sign-up of a training agreement/contract. Being respectful and understanding with enterprises is a critical component of establishing a relationship. However, ELCs noted that training can be a low priority for industry. The barrier is frequently money for training, especially with small businesses:

“I think a big barrier is on some employers to see the dollar value of what they are going to get.”

(Participant 8, Hospitality cookery)

Many of the ELCs reported that they dedicate approximately one day a fortnight to following up with clients. The time that industries take to decide on training varies considerably; however, the hospitality sector seems to experience the most issues:

“It is a six month process from the first appointment to getting sign-offs and that’s actually normal, that’s not somebody ignoring me or trying to put me off. I am 20th on their list of things to do.”

(Participant 7, Hospitality management)

The organisation and administration of training programs is a fundamental requirement of any course or program; however, ELCs need to organise the training off campus while the administration is predominately conducted on campus. The consultants manage the on-campus administration support
for printing and compiling learning and assessment resources, organising class listings, training aids etc. However, many tasks must be completed by the ELCs as the VET teacher, such as setting the training environment up, record-keeping, assessing and managing students’ academic progression and inquiries, and lesson preparation. For ELCs who work with a variety of enterprises, utilising an array of delivery methodologies is a multifaceted and complex task:

At the moment, managing students, managing paperwork, resubmissions, students emailing, I can’t remember how to log-on, I can’t remember what I do. I want to change my training course, so we’ve got individual students as well. So, we don’t have just corporate groups, we have individuals. (Participant 3, Business and management)

Qualifications are frequently tailored not only to the enterprise but to different individuals in the enterprise, as their work roles may vary, and the ELCs manage these complex variances. Students with different units and qualifications within the one enterprise all require personalised training and support:

A diploma or a certificate in business can be two almost entirely different lists of units. So Student A might be doing those eight units, Student B who is also online might be doing six totally different units and two of the same have started a week differently and be doing them in a different sequence and require different levels of support. (Participant 3, Business and management)

The ability to manage an array of units, qualifications and student support requires the ELCs to prioritise and manage their time efficiently. All the ELCs mentioned that prioritising and time management skills are vital and clients remain on top of their priority list:

I prioritise my time, I’m pretty brutal with my time. (Participant 1, Waste management)

My time management skills are pretty good and, yeah, couldn’t be without them. Students and employers are on the top of the list. (Participant 2, Retail)

Skill sets that ELCs require in the area of financial management include a strategic focus on sales and budget. All ELCs were aware of the team’s financial targets but also continually monitor their own individual performance against the team’s target, which is fairly unusual in the TAFE environment. Generally team targets are formulated by MSIT management in consultation with the ELCs. However, the individual targets are developed by the ELCs themselves and form an aspect of self-motivation:

I need to have something to aim for. I need to have a target ... I need to measure performance myself. (Participant 2, Retail)

Some ELCs work collaboratively with the business development officers to calculate training costs:

So we look at what they can get for their money in terms of, if this is what they have got in their budget, this is what we can afford to give you. So we are aware of costings, although we don’t do the nitty-gritty and work out the price for the contracts; the Business Development Officers do that. (Participant 4, Business and management)

Other ELCs formulate the program costings, making the process more seamless for the customer:

I’ll go back and formulate and develop a proposal. The only thing I do at this point with my manager is that I do not authorise any costings ... I know where my costs are, I know how to do the costings but I always get her to authorise it. (Participant 1, Waste management)

The ELCs are aware of the financial costs to enterprises for training and the net profit to MSIT for ensuring the sustainability of the programs they deliver.
Technical knowledge

Currency of technical knowledge is fundamental to all VET teaching. However, ELCs also need to have enterprise-specific knowledge. The two areas included in this category are:

- industry and specific enterprise knowledge
- VET system knowledge, including commitment to quality.

These two areas are intertwined with the ability to communicate, deliver, contextualise and manage work-based training. ELCs, like all trainers, need to keep abreast of the ever-changing VET and industry landscape. However, as the ELCs are continually working with enterprises, it is easy for them to keep abreast of changes in vocational competency.

ELCs require industry and business acumen to perform their job effectively and to maintain the sustainable relationship. They become so familiar with enterprises that they rely on them at times as a source of information and guidance:

At [enterprise] we know our way around the staff intranet better than the employees. They actually ask us for help. (Participant 2, Business and management)

Recently, when an enterprise management employee suddenly died, it was the ELC the enterprise turned to for assistance because they had the trust and inside knowledge of the workplace. The ELC worked in the organisation for two weeks to ensure operations were maintained while the staff came to terms with this tragic event and the organisation was able to secure a replacement.

To maintain the currency of VET knowledge and changes in the sector, a dedicated unit at MSIT provides support to all education staff including ELCs. For example, staff are regularly updated on educational excellence, quality, compliance, VET legislation and VET policy. The MSIT Education Quality Centre assists the ELCs by continually reviewing, validating and improving the quality of the learning and assessment resources. This is explained by the finance ELC:

We are committed to a quality product, as we need to uphold our reputation within industry. MSIT has an excellent validation review process which provides us a quality product and the assurance we are audit compliant. (Participant 6, Finance)

The ELCs keep up to date with changes in VET funding through the institute’s business development officers.

Client focus

The fourth area, client focus, is concerned with the people skills and personality traits required to operate with a diverse range of clients and remain results-oriented, as advocated by Kearns (2004). This requirement can be narrowed into two distinct sub-categories. Both highlight the important social aspect of the ELC role:

- to be a business coach and mentor
- to build and sustain individual and business networks.

In smaller enterprises, ELCs are being looked upon as business coaches and mentors even though this role may be additional to the training objectives. It is more about investing in the long-term relationship and supporting industry. To embed and implement their learning and assessment projects within the enterprise, the managers of the enterprise, or even the owners, may call upon the ELC for
support. The ELCs are their support partners who develop and implement strategies, particularly with regard to organisational and procedural changes:

So, really a partner for that business ... you are working with the business. The individual coaching and mentoring builds a sustainable relationship. This has been achieved through a customer-driven focus as I am able to deliver innovation and industry-relevant training.

(Participant 7, Hospitality management)

Interestingly, the ELCs maintain a variety of networks, including of students, managers, skills councils, business networks and also internal networks. It is these networks that the ELCs are continually liaising and working with. The networks are critical as they will bring in future business:

Being organised, time management, multitasking, it's important obviously because ... a massive part of it involves networking and relationship building. So, obviously, being a bit of a people person I suppose in getting our foot in the door and maintaining relationships are really, really critical. (Participant 9, Hospitality, food and beverage)

The ELCs use electronic communication to maintain client relationships and through these interactions future business can be generated:

I got an email the other day from a student I had when I first started at TAFE four years ago ... he’s been keeping me in touch, he is now actually managing and he is now in the middle of buying his own store ... You know they want to stay in touch with me. He is going to have his own staff. So he doesn’t want anyone but me to train his staff. (Participant 2, Retail)

Business networking and recommendations are key components in business generation:

Really I love it, so far it has been word of mouth ... I had been recommended to them from another organisation that I have gone to and when I got there I just laughed because they are in the same building as the training provider. But you were recommended to us, because you have done a service with another organisation. (Participant 10, Community services)

The ELCs' extensive industry knowledge is recognised by the industry peers and drawn upon, which is the very essence of the consulting component of their role:

If industry has a question they come to us, maybe not to be documented or anything, but it's the whole process of strengthening industry. (Participant 3, Hospitality cookery)

These interactions once again are about the long-term sustainable business relationship.

Leadership and entrepreneurship

As the ELCs operate within a ‘self-sustaining ecosystem’ (Mitchell 2009b), they all possess leadership skills and, to a varying degree, entrepreneurial traits. Their leadership skills centre around five core components of the Queensland Public Service Capability and Leadership Framework, including: support strategic direction, achieve results, support productive working relationships, display personal drive and integrity, and communicate with influence.

This section describes how the ELCs are operating in three main ways.

- select and recruit
- think strategically
- work autonomously.
The ELCs may not deliver a full qualification, but bring in content experts to deliver units or topics. They are frequently involved in the selection and recruitment process as they know the particular needs of the enterprise and the type of personal attributes that would best suit it. When the ELCs first suggest a different trainer they often experience resistance.

I think initially they want me in particular, because it’s the only contact they’ve had. And if I said to that client, I’m not delivering … but we’ve got another teacher delivering and they are fantastic, of course, he is going to take my word for that, because he has that trust in me.

(Participant 2, Retail)

However, selection and recruitment go beyond delivery of the qualification. Enterprises have been known to call upon the ELCs for recruitment as they value their opinions. As an ELC explains:

I got an enquiry from an enterprise about a position vacant and if I knew anyone that would be interested in the position. I’ve probably got two other girls … which have just finished a course with us [on-campus student]. I just send an email out to clients that said, you know is anyone looking for staff.

(Participant 7, Hospitality management)

As previously highlighted by the Finance ELC, it is essential to engage continually with industry and to spend more time in enterprises than on campus. For this to occur, they work autonomously and think very strategically for the enterprise and seek support from the institute as required. The ELCs appreciate the flexible work arrangement and being in control of their programs:

It’s nice to be in control of my own destiny, in a lot of ways, it’s nice to actually have the power in my hands to be able to change things … Be able to deal with true professionals, be in control of what we’re able to do, to have the ability to grow a business and be able to sustain it.

(Participant 3, Hospitality management)

The balance between maintaining their current workload and continually learning their role while still looking forward to the long-term requires strategic thinking and long-term planning. Working with enterprises is not a one-off training event; the ELCs are ever mindful of the long-term objectives and of sustaining relationships.

Professional development for future ELCs

The range of competencies the ELCs require to perform their role is comprehensive. Along with these they require a high level of personal commitment and drive. The role of an ELC varies from industry to industry and from enterprise to enterprise. The role requires continual learning and support from the institute. The ELCs’ knowledge and skills in all five categories generally develop over time. However, it is imperative that they are expert ‘adult facilitators’ with comprehensive ‘technical knowledge’. Over time the ‘management and administration’ and ‘client focus’ skills will gradually develop, as will skills in ‘leadership and entrepreneurship’.

Table 2 is a list of suggested professional development topics and areas from which entry-level ELCs may benefit: being proficient in these areas will enable them to operate effectively and efficiently for the registered training organisation and the industry enterprises they serve. To develop more VET practitioners into these roles, professional development is critical.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult facilitator</td>
<td>Conducting organisational training needs analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Linking the enterprise objectives with AQF levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding different learning styles, delivery and assessment contextualisation and methodologies and work-based pedagogies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management and administration</td>
<td>Selling and negotiating techniques (including understanding funding and budgeting)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Designing, planning, organising, monitoring and coordinating the training programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of how to report the training program outcomes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Time management and organisational skills training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client focus</td>
<td>Strategies for building rapport: ELC with student and ELC with enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to network and maintain those networks (internal and external)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coaching and mentoring techniques for enterprises</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical knowledge</td>
<td>A broad knowledge of VET compliance, governance and AQF levels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive understanding of vocational competency, VET knowledge and industry knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of how VET policies and VET reforms are impacting on the workforce and the VET sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>How to select and recruit trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techniques and strategies for goal setting, action plans and long-term planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project management skills</td>
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Conclusion

The enterprise learning consultants at Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE are developing the capacity and capability of enterprises, which in turn is improving productivity and building stronger industries for the Australian economy. Harris (in press, 2011) reported that the future direction of the VET sector lies in the responsive development of the workforce through the use of highly skilled and knowledgeable VET practitioners.

The ELC’s role has been developed to respond to these contemporary workforce development imperatives. These positions require a sophisticated skill set, extensive knowledge of VET, adult learning and work-based pedagogies and a high degree of personal drive and commitment. The networking and social aspect of the ELC’s role is equally critical to building trust and long-term, sustainable relationships. Their work is challenging because they operate in a range of environments and continually juggle the requirements of both the AQF and training packages with the objectives of enterprises.

Developing the skills and attributes of the ELCs or a similar role is important not only for VET providers but also for enterprises and industry. This development needs to be ongoing so that emerging changes in industry and VET practice can be accommodated.
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The aims of the building researcher capacity initiative are to attract experienced researchers from outside the sector, encourage early career researchers and support people in the sector to undertake research.

The building researcher capacity initiative includes the following programs: NCVER fellowships, PhD top-up scholarships, postgraduate research papers and community of practice scholarships for VET practitioners. These grants are awarded to individuals through a selection process and are subject to NCVER’s quality assurance process, including peer review.