The roles, knowledge and skill requirements of the VET practitioner
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Foreword

The Western Australian Department of Education and Training has earned an enviable reputation for its commitment to providing a strategic vision for professional development of practitioners in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Part of that commitment is to commission research which will assist the sector in making informed decisions in the provision of effective professional development for all practitioners.

This report is the result of extensive research and consultation across VET in Western Australia. It highlights new drivers for change which will have a significant impact on the skill sets of practitioners.

Excellent advances have already been made in maintaining a base of highly skilled, motivated professionals in all the sectors that make up vocational education and training. This report provides us with clear professional development directions for the next five years so that we can further enhance the quality of our delivery and assessment to the benefit of industry, registered training organisations and VET students.

Paul Albert

Director General
Department of Education and Training
Executive summary

In 2002 the (then) Western Australian Department of Training commissioned a discussion paper on the future roles and requirements of the VET practitioner, entitled ‘Shaping the VET practitioner for the future’ (Rumsey 2002). Since then, the WA Department of Education and Training (WADET) has devoted significant resources to the development of a comprehensive approach to professional development reflecting Rumsey’s recommendations and national and state priorities. This process has been advised by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy Group (TLASG), which has commissioned this discussion paper.

The paper considers the roles, knowledge and skill requirements of the VET professional for the next five years, with a focus specifically on practitioners, those with a direct teaching/learning facilitator role, and managers, those with leadership and operational responsibilities. It provides an overview of the issues being generated by developments both within and outside the VET sector, considers the impact these are likely to have on the work of VET professionals, and makes recommendations to inform decisions regarding future professional development priorities. In doing so, the authors have drawn on the original Rumsey research, a review of recent literature, and broad consultation across the VET sector in Western Australia and an e-survey of some of those who contributed to Rumsey’s original discussion paper.

What do we know about VET professional cohort?

The TAFE system dominates the VET landscape in WA and is highly casualised. Within this system, there is a huge gap between the relatively small permanent practitioner workforce, in whom much of the knowledge and skills unique to the VET sector and to TAFE are vested, and the large casual practitioner cohort, most of whom have been in the sector for less than 4 years. If current trends continue, a significant proportion of the permanent workforce will retire in the next 5 to 10 years. Given the core role played by permanent staff, the potential scale of the exodus could place undue strains on the system.

Drivers of change

The impact of social, demographic and political influences on the nature of work for VET professionals in Western Australia is already evident, and is affecting the make up of the student cohort, client expectations and provider relationships with industry clients and other institutions, particularly schools. Often acting in combination, a range of external and internal forces will continue have significant impact on the roles of VET professionals, the nature of their work and the skill sets they require to be effective as leaders, managers and practitioners.

Key external influences include:
• the ageing of the population and an increased emphasis on people staying longer within the workforce
• a more diverse society reflecting a greater mix of cultural values, beliefs and expectations
• the growth of the knowledge economy and rapidly changing technologies
• increasing customer sophistication
• an increasing range of skills shortages in areas of critical industry and general community need
• the raising of the school leaving age in Western Australia
• a national focus on increasing the participation of Indigenous Australians in work and work related training
moves to get those at present in receipt of welfare benefits, but capable of work, into work or training for work
an increased proportion of people with disabilities participating in mainstream community life
national recognition of the need to build economic and social capital through education and training.

Forces within the sector itself also continue to change the VET landscape. Critical to the future skills and knowledge needs of VET professional are:

• the increasing complexity of the provider role
• the need to comply with AQTF requirements and other formal accountability measures
• the on-going implementation of Training Packages
• the increasing diversity of the VET client base
• the gradual shift in the role of the VET practitioner from industry expert to learning facilitator
• the expansion of VET in schools and
• the characteristics of the current VET workforce.

Challenges for the VET sector 2006–10

The challenges identified by Rumsey still have currency, but the emphasis has shifted, and new priorities have emerged. Efforts made since 2002 by the WA DET and individual providers have made a difference, such that new ways of working that were perceived by sector members as major challenges in 2002 have become increasingly ‘the way we do things round here’.

Challenges in the next five years include:

• Moving beyond a focus on AQTF compliance to an emphasis on embedding quality practices in every day activity
• Designing and implementing new strategies to help address industry skill shortages
• Establishing and maintaining partnerships with industry and community clients
• Bridging the gap between the VET sector and schools
• Clarifying the role of the VET practitioner, and associated knowledge and skills priorities, in specific contexts
• Managing competing priorities and an expanding set of expectations associated with new roles and responsibilities
• Addressing fundamental issues surrounding the concepts of industry expert and learning facilitator
• Increasing the focus on transferable generic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and ensuring that these are a clearly articulated part of a student’s program
• Developing practitioners’ skills and confidence to manage an increasingly diverse student cohort, with an emphasis on school age students, those from overseas, with disabilities or mental health problems, and those who are required, but not motivated, to become involved in training
• Minimising the impact of the retirement of a significant proportion of the permanent VET workforce, with a focus on developing the pedagogical skills of practitioners employed on a casual basis
• Redesigning strategies, systems, structures and mind sets that currently work against the adoption by VET professionals of new ideas and new ways of working.
Of these, perhaps the most critical relate to fundamental issues concerning the nature of the VET practitioner’s role, the potential loss of expertise through the exodus of a significant cohort of permanent full time practitioners, and the conduciveness of the sector and provider environment to innovation. Innovation does not refer only to leading edge practices. Whenever VET professionals think and act in new ways they are innovating within their own contexts, and their willingness, and ability, to be innovative is affected by organisational and sector climate, structures and systems. Thus, any focus on new and enhanced skills must go hand in hand with on-going review and redesign of aspects of the sector and provider environment within which they are expected to apply these new approaches.

In Western Australia, many of the conditions favourable to innovation and the application of new skills are already in place. Although approaches are uneven, there are now working models and strategies in practice, and these will become enablers in their own right, as providers learn from their own experience, and from each other. However, there are also barriers and hurdles that will need to be addressed if strategies to facilitate professional learning are to achieve their full potential. A key issue will be to ensure that VET managers have the skills to assist VET practitioners in this regard.

What skills and knowledge will VET practitioners need?
Throughout the consultations, it was suggested that VET practitioners would 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.

While there is a continuing need to provide appropriate support for novice practitioners, there is also a need to place more emphasis on the development of advanced pedagogical skills involving the development of reflective practice and skills in strategic inquiry.

While the sector must be able to draw on the skills and knowledge of its VET professionals in a range of critical areas, not all VET practitioners will need the same knowledge and skills sets. There should be no attempt to develop ‘superheroes’. The skills sets needed by any individual will depend on the context within which each operates, and should be determined on a case by case basis, taking the needs of the provider and its client base into account. It is also important to acknowledge that needs may be met by appropriately balancing the skill sets of work teams.

Variations in requirements will be evident not only between individual providers but between individual business units within the same provider. Thus, *one size* professional development programs will definitely not *fit all*. Professional development for individuals and business units will need to be carefully planned and balanced to maximise individual and organisational capability. Focus and resourcing will be influenced by strategic decisions regarding the need for individual practitioners to maintain or upgrade industry skills or to become a combined learning facilitator/knowledge broker.
Conclusions
Many of the challenges identified by Rumsey will continue to influence the skills needs of VET professionals. However, a new set of priorities has emerged.

Target priority groups for professional development
To be effective within a limited time frame, some strategies may need to be specifically supported with resources beyond those currently allocated to professional development. A priority should be placed on casual and permanent practitioners in areas of current and imminent skill shortage. Providers also need a pool of professionals with the capacity to manage partnerships and deliver training within industry and in schools. A formal strategy could be implemented across the sector, utilising communities of practice, networks and professional development. The philosophy and personal style of the sector’s leaders will be a key determining influence on its culture, and the potential for innovation. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that future managers and leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively, and that they are supported by administrative arrangements that help, rather than hinder, their efforts.

Focus on building pedagogical expertise
All VET professionals will need highly developed personal learning strategies, and the knowledge and skills to help their students develop these as well. Although there will always be a need for professional development focused on basic skills, there is also a need to move beyond these to assist competent practitioners to developed more advanced pedagogical expertise, with a focus on the skills associated with reflective practice and strategic inquiry.

Those VET practitioners who need specific skills and knowledge to support members of new student cohorts should be identified and assisted with both generic and customised programs tailored to their circumstances. There will also be a continued need to provide support for the implementation of new and revised Training Packages in general, and for the new TAA in particular.

Clarify the nature of the VET practitioner’s role
Although there is an expectation that practitioners should strive to become expert educators, many currently place higher value on their technical skills. There are fundamental questions to address regarding the level of technical skills and knowledge a practitioner may need. Given the increasing emphasis being placed on the VET practitioner’s role as a facilitator by at least some members of the sector, the nature of the VET practitioner’s role in different contexts needs to be discussed and clarified.

Maintain and enhance sector knowledge
With the imminent departure of a large sector of the permanent VET workforce, the potential for loss of educational, industry and organisational knowledge is immense and solutions are needed at sectoral, provider and business unit level, including the continued promotion of best practice examples, communities of practice, induction and mentoring and networks.

Redesign obstructive structures and systems
Systems and structures with the potential to undermine strategies designed to enhance the skill sets of VET professional need to be redesigned. Although some are obvious, the impact of other accepted ways of doing things can be quite insidious, but highly influential in driving certain behaviours and hindering others. Senior and middle managers could benefit from training in change management and systems thinking concepts and skills to help identify and redesign systems to achieve greater leverage of desired change.
Facilitate effective collaboration with external organisations

Many VET professionals will need skills in establishing and managing collaborative arrangements. Practitioners working with industry will need an understanding of business principles, training needs analysis, resource design and evaluation if they are to successfully deliver tailored programs within workplaces. VET in Schools partnerships will only be effective if fears and misperceptions can be addressed as part of a focus.

Recommendations

1. Promote sector-wide discussion of the nature of the VET practitioner’s role and develop an agreed interpretation of what is meant by ‘learning facilitator’.
2. Place greater emphasis on advanced pedagogical skills for those who have moved beyond basic competence, focusing attention on the importance of reflective practice and strategic enquiry for all VET professionals.
3. Extend practitioner skills in supporting students to develop generic, transferable skills including literacy and numeracy, problem solving and innovation and personal learning strategies.
4. Develop practitioner understanding and skills in working with members of specific student cohorts such as those from different cultural backgrounds (including those from overseas), and those with low motivation, disabilities or mental health issues.
5. Support all practitioners to stay abreast of industry trends, but work with them to define the degree to which this is required in specific contexts.
6. Develop targeted professional development strategies for practitioners employed on a casual basis, and permanent and casual staff in key industries experiencing skills shortages. These initiatives should complement rather than replace existing initiatives for all VET practitioners, and may need a separate resource allocation.
7. Enhance the capacity of VET managers and potential managers to identify and address structural issues and traditional mental models through an explicit focus on change management and systems thinking skills, linked to current leadership development initiatives.
8. Examine current approaches to human resource management and other systems and structures (including performance indicators and funding models) at the State and provider levels to ensure that they are assisting, rather than impeding, VET professionals to gain and maintain the skills they need and ensure the best outcomes for the sector’s clients.
9. Implement strategies to build the capacity of VET professionals to establish, manage and work within collaborative arrangements, with a particular focus on VET in Schools programs and with industry and employers.
10. Develop a comprehensive sectoral approach to identify and stem the loss of critical educational, industry and organisational knowledge through expanded networks, communities of practice, mentoring and succession planning.
Background

The origins of this discussion paper

In response to the State Training Review (McRae 2001), the continuing rollout of Training Packages and the implementation of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), the (then) Western Australian Department of Training commissioned a discussion paper on the future roles and requirements of the VET practitioner, entitled ‘Shaping the VET practitioner for the future’ (Rumsey 2002).

The VET landscape in Western Australia has changed significantly since 2002 in response to national agendas and local needs. Significant national initiatives have included the new national strategy for VET, ‘Shaping our future: Australia’s national strategy for vocational education and training 2004-2010’ (ANTA 2003); the High Level Review of Training Packages (Schofield & McDonald 2004) and major projects, such as ‘Enhancing the capability of the VET professional’ (Dickie et al. 2004), and the review of the ‘Reframing the future’ program (ANTA 2004a).

Shaping our future establishes a national context with a call for a sustained investment in TAFE and other registered training organisations to ensure that:

> The vocational education and training workforce has the capacity and skills to provide high quality, client focused, flexible learning and assessment, in partnership with business and other organisations.

The other three documents cited above and a range of others cited in the references for this discussion paper provide valuable information about the nature of VET professionals’ work in the future.

Since the publication of Rumsey’s discussion paper, the WA Department of Education and Training has devoted significant resources to the development of a comprehensive approach to professional development reflecting Rumsey’s recommendations and national and state priorities. This process has been advised by input from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy Group (TLASG), which has overseen the disbursement of significant funds to support local initiatives in TAFE colleges as well as the development and promotion of a wide range of activities and networks which are accessed by the wider VET sector. An evaluation of the impact of this funding is the subject of a related project to this ‘update’ of Rumsey.
These professional development initiatives complement, and are complemented by, such nationally-based activities as Learnscope and Reframing the future. In addition, the TAFEWA Lecturers’ Qualifications Framework has been developed to describe career and professional development pathways for lecturers working in TAFE colleges in WA, and provides a guide to the skills and roles expected as staff progress through their careers. The Department of Education and Training has recently released a professional development framework for the VET sector in Western Australia 2005/2006 (DET 2005).

These actions and others have led to a richer, more diverse and strategic professional development landscape than that considered by Rumsey a bare three years ago. Evidence from discussions with leaders, managers and practitioners in both public and private VET providers in Western Australia shows that there is now a far more extensive and integrated approach to professional development and other activities relevant to the VET professional at both state and local levels.

Given the breadth and depth of change within the VET sector, and the emergence of external forces with implications for VET, it is now timely to revisit Rumsey’s work. This discussion paper on the future roles, knowledge and skill requirements of the VET professional has been commissioned by TLASG to provide an overview of the issues being generated by developments and changes both within and outside the VET sector, consider the impact these are likely to have on the work of VET professionals in the next five years, and make recommendations to help advise decisions regarding future professional development priorities.

### Aims

The aims of the paper are to:

- identify key challenges which VET practitioners in the Western Australian VET sector are likely to face over the next five years
- explore the potential future roles, knowledge and skill requirements of the VET practitioner
- identify and analyse the implications for the Western Australian VET sector in terms of bridging the gap between current and future role and knowledge and skills requirements
- provide recommendations and advice, on the basis of analysis, as to possible strategic directions for addressing the skills gap.
Sources of information

The paper draws on the original paper by Rumsey, which still has considerable currency, supplemented by a consideration of the impact of key state and national initiatives over the last three years and a literature review focussed on Australian and international work published since 2003. The project team also held discussions with a range of people in the Western Australian VET system, and undertook an e-survey directed at many of those who contributed to the original Rumsey paper to gain their insights into developments since Rumsey, and perceptions of future priorities.

The findings of research commissioned or conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has also informed the paper, including work examining the nature of the VET workforce (NCVER 2004b), the future needs of VET practitioners (Chappell and Johnston 2003, Harris et al. 2005), working in partnerships (Callan & Ashworth 2004), building innovative VET organisations (Callan 2004) and sustaining the skill base of VET providers (Clayton et al. 2005). Other relevant research includes that conducted under the auspices of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF), which examined professional development for part-time and casual VET staff (Stehlik et al. 2003) and the impact of flexible delivery on human resource practices in public providers (McNickle & Cameron 2003, Palmieri 2003). This paper has also taken into account State-based projects, such as the strategic review of professional development services for VET professionals/stakeholders in Queensland (Deborah Wilson Consulting Services 2003), and the findings to date of a research consortium examining VET workforce and organisational capability issues in a comprehensive two-year research program, entitled ‘Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future’.
The structure of the paper

This Background section provides an overview of the origins of the paper.

The following section, VET professionals and their characteristics, refocuses Rumsey’s original definitions to reflect current usage, and better differentiate between the two subsets of VET professional: VET practitioners, who are directly involved in teaching and learning, and VET managers who provide indirect support. It also outlines some of the characteristics of the practitioner cohort nationally, and presents specific data on those directly involved in teaching in Western Australia.

The changing environment examines both external and internal issues that affect practitioners’ work and are likely to impact on the role of practitioners for the next 5 years. It is based on information gained through consultations, the e-survey and a review of the literature.

Challenges for the VET professional revisits the 14 challenges identified by Rumsey and identifies those with continuing currency plus emergent issues with implications for individual professionals, but also for providers.

Roles, skill and knowledge requirements for VET professionals 2006–2010 describes the skill and knowledge requirements for practitioners now and into the future. The consultations and literature review have highlighted that many of these needs continue as practitioners and other VET professionals begin and progress through their careers in the VET sector.

The penultimate section, Meeting future skill needs: The providers’ role, considers the facilitators and barriers to addressing future skill needs for professionals personally, as well as those present in their immediate work environment and more broadly.

Conclusions and recommendations draw the threads of the various sections together and proposes potential ways forward.

In addition this discussion paper includes a range of appendices:

- a summary of the literature review is provided in Appendix 1
- a consolidated list of practitioner and manager/leader skills and competencies is provided in Appendix 2.
- details of those who provided input during the project either through forums or other meetings are provided in Appendix 3.
VET professionals and their characteristics

Who are the VET practitioners?

Rumsey suggested that that the best response to this question is that there are, in fact, a whole range of ‘VET practitioners’ contributing to the achievement of VET outcomes – some directly involved in the learning processes, others indirectly involved but also critically important.

In his view those directly involved included:
- permanent, part-time, casual and contracted teachers, lecturers and trainers in public and private VET
- school teachers teaching VET in schools
- trainers, coaches, mentors, assessors in industry
- supplier-based trainers
- lecturers in higher education teaching VET
- and off-shore VET teachers/assessors.

He considered those indirectly involved to include:
- VET managers; human resource/staff development managers; course, assessment and educational resource developers and designers
- technical support staff, including technicians and IT staff
- VET administrative staff who have some role in VET delivery
- employers and industry managers involved in VET delivery.

More recently, in their report, ‘Enhancing the capability of VET professionals’ Dickie et al. (2004) have made a useful distinction between those directly and indirectly involved in teaching and learning, and those who work in a myriad of general roles. They suggest that:
- VET practitioner be used to describe those staff of registered training organisations (RTOs) who are directly involved in delivery of teaching, training and/or assessment programs that are nationally recognised. VET practitioners are a subset of VET professionals.
- VET professional be used to describe a larger group that includes both VET practitioners and those staff who provide leadership, management and support for teaching, training and assessment within RTOs, but who are not directly involved in delivery of nationally recognised training. VET professionals are a subset of the VET workforce.
- VET workforce be used to describe all staff of RTOs including VET practitioners and other VET professionals, together with staff working in generic, transferable roles such as accountants, marketing and maintenance staff.
These definitions have been adopted within this paper, because they allow an easier distinction between members of the VET workforce with a professional interest in teaching and learning and those in more generic roles, and then between those for whom teaching and learning is the main role, and those whose main role is to provide leadership, support and operational management (referred to within the paper as VET managers). The focus of this paper is on the VET professional group and its two main subsets: in particular VET practitioners, but also VET managers and leaders.

Where do VET professionals work?
Nationally, organisations employing VET professionals include:

- **TAFE institutions**: the major providers of VET in WA and largely government funded.
- **Non-TAFE public providers**: government-funded institutions such as secondary schools, community and agricultural colleges, and universities registered to provide VET programs and services.
- **Private providers**: commercial (business colleges, training consultants), community (adult education and community centres), industry (skill centres, group training companies), and enterprise (in-house training providers).
- **Registered Training Organisations**: training providers registered by State/Territory authorities under the standards of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) to deliver training products and services according to a specific scope of activities and to award qualifications within that scope. An individual or group of individuals who are able to satisfy AQTF registration can become a registered training provider. RTOs include secondary schools, private training colleges, enterprises, adult and community providers, universities, group training companies, and agricultural colleges (ANTA, 2004b).

What do we know about the VET professional workforce?
The focus of the following section is largely on practitioners within TAFE, as there is little data available on the VET manager cohort of the VET workforce, nor on practitioners working within private providers.

A national study profiling the VET workforce (NCVER 2004a) reported that in 2002, there were some 2800 TAFE practitioners in Western Australia involved directly and predominantly in teaching and learning, with a roughly equal number of males and females.
An ageing practitioner workforce

While national data suggest that VET professionals in general are no older than the workforce at large, with 34% 45 years or older, VET practitioners in TAFE are on average much older, with 61% aged 45 years or older and 16% aged 55 years or more (NCVER 2004a). In the TAFE sector, the ageing of the workforce is accompanied by a growing gap between the older, permanent, qualified practitioners and the considerably less qualified non-permanent practitioner group (NCVER 2004a).

In 2002, about 9% of the total practitioner workforce in TAFE WA was aged 60 years and over, nearly 38% were between 50 and 59 years with 33.6% were between 40 and 49 years. Only 17.6% were 39 years or younger. (The ages of about 2% were not known.) In comparison, two thirds of all permanent practitioners within this workforce were aged 50 years and over (12% were 60 years and over, 50% were between 50 and 59 years). This was the highest of any Australian TAFE system. Only 27.8% were aged between 40 and 49 years, with just under 7% aged 39 years or younger (3.3% unknown).

A permanent-casual divide

In 2002, 32.5% of TAFE practitioners in WA were permanent, with about 27% working full time. Of the nearly 68% non-permanent staff, 52.3% were part time. This level of casualisation was far higher than for the Australian workforce as a whole. Consultations for this project suggest that the level of casualisation varies somewhat between TAFE colleges and between individual work teams within the same college, and that it may be stabilising. However, time series data are not available.

In TAFE colleges, the relatively small core group of permanent, full time practitioners appears to shoulder the majority of administrative tasks required to maintain effective operations within a business unit. This small permanent TAFE practitioner workforce is generally of longstanding with few new entrants. In 2002, 76.5% of male permanent staff had 10 or more years of service, with over half of this cohort having been employed for 20 years or more. Less than 2% had been employed for 4 years or less. Over 67% of female staff had been employed for between 5 and 14 years, with some 31% having 15 or more years. In stark contrast, a large number of contract practitioners in TAFE had been employed for 4 years or less (77.1% female; 79.2% male). Few had more than 10 years of service. On-teaching staff were more likely to be employed full-time and to be younger. Just under 50% were non-permanent (NCVER 2004a).
Recent work by Harris et al (forthcoming) suggests that most private providers are relatively small, employing less than ten staff. If trends in WA are similar to those nationally, there are likely to be fewer part time and casual staff relative to the number of full time employees.

**VET professional qualifications and on-going learning**

Nationally, two-thirds of VET professionals overall hold a post-school qualification. This proportion is relatively high compared to the workforce as a whole, and higher still in TAFE, at four in five (NCVER 2004a). However, data from the *Survey of Education and Training* (ABS 2001) found that relatively few VET professionals have a qualification in education or training.

No nationally consistent data are available on the nature and levels of the vocational or educational qualifications of TAFE practitioners specifically. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the percentage of Western Australian TAFE practitioners with education and training qualifications may be higher, given that the WA VET sector has placed considerable emphasis on the acquisition of the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment for AQTF compliance purposes.

Since 2002, there has also been a concerted push to improve the quality of professional development. While there has been significant take up of opportunities by permanent practitioners, the evaluation of the TLASG program found limited involvement by casual staff, due to factors such as lack of payment for anything other than actual teaching time, competing work and family commitments. Indeed, many casual staff appear to have little involvement in any aspect of the overall work of the business unit, or any regular interaction with other members of their teaching teams.

**Summary and implications**

The VET workforce is made up of VET professionals with a direct or indirect role in teaching and learning, and a group of support staff with more generic transferable skills. This paper considers the future knowledge and skill needs of the two groups that constitute VET professionals, namely practitioners, with direct teaching/learning facilitator role, and managers, with leadership and operational responsibilities.

TAFE employs the majority of VET professionals in Western Australia. In 2002, 2800 people were employed as VET practitioners, with the male: female ratio being roughly
equal. More than 80% were over 40. Nearly half of the cohort was over 50, and close to 9% were over 60 years of age. The permanent practitioner workforce within TAFE WA was the oldest in the Australian TAFE workforce, with 93% over 40 years of age, two thirds aged over 50 and 12% over 60. In contrast, non-teaching staff in TAFE WA were more likely to be younger.

Only about 30% of TAFE WA practitioners were permanent, with most employed full time. Over half of the male permanent staff had been employed for more than 20 years, while three quarters had been employed for at least 10 years. One third of female permanent staff had been employed for over 15 years. About two thirds of VET practitioners within TAFE WA were employed on a casual, part time basis. Around 80% had been in TAFE for less than 4 years. Consultations for this project suggest that the relatively small core group of permanent full time practitioners shoulders the majority of practitioner level administrative tasks required to maintain effective business unit operations.

There is little data available on staff employed in non-TAFE environments in WA. However, national research (Harris et al. forthcoming) suggests that these organizations are mostly small with less than 10 employees, and tend to employ a higher ratio of full time to part time or casual employers.

**Implications for the VET sector**

The TAFE system dominates the VET landscape in WA. Within this system, there is a huge gap between the relatively small permanent practitioner workforce, in whom much of the knowledge and skills unique to the VET sector and to TAFE are vested, and the large casual practitioner cohort, most of whom have been in the sector for less than 4 years.

If current trends continue, a significant proportion of the permanent practitioner workforce will retire in the next 5 to 10 years. Given the core role played by these permanent staff, the potential scale of the exodus could place undue strains on the system. The degree of impact will depend on the quality of succession planning, including recruitment strategies to bring in new blood, and mentoring programs to facilitate the sharing of tacit knowledge and specific skills. The difficulty of involving casual practitioners in activities that do not occur during teaching time, such as professional development, team meetings and business unit administrative work, could mitigate against members of this large group stepping in to take the place of those departing.
The changed environment

Rumsey (2002: 21–35) identified changes external to, and within, the VET environment that were likely to have significant implications for the VET practitioner. Our consultations show that these remain current today, although in some cases, the nature and emphasis has changed.

The following is a brief summary of trends and issues that are likely to have significant implications for the future skills needs of the VET sector. It draws on the literature review, consultations across the VET sector in Western Australia and an e-survey of those who contributed to the original Rumsey paper.

Drivers of change

External influences

The impact of social, demographic and political influences on the nature of work for VET professionals in Western Australia is already evident and is affecting the make up of the student cohort, and the nature of VET provider relationships with industry clients and other institutions, particularly schools. Key influences for the future include:

- the ageing of the population and an increased emphasis on people staying longer within the workforce
- a more diverse society reflecting a greater mix of cultural values, beliefs and expectations
- the growth of the knowledge economy and rapidly changing technologies
- increasing customer sophistication
- an increasing range of skills shortages in areas of critical industry and general community need
- an increase in skilled migration and a resultant increase in demand for English language training
- the raising of the school leaving age in Western Australia
- a national focus on increasing the participation of Indigenous Australians in work and work related training
- moves to get those at present in receipt of welfare benefits, but capable of work, into work or training for work
- an increased proportion of people with disabilities participating in mainstream community life
- national recognition of the need to build economic and social capital through education and training.
Implications for VET

A changing student cohort

Increasing proportions of VET students are likely to come from older age cohorts, and may have little recent experience of formal education and training. There is already evidence that the proportion of older learners in the VET sector has been increasing steadily (Anlezark 2004). This trend may continue as, proportionately, the number of younger people in the population drops, as more people choose to remain in employment beyond traditional retirement, and as industry invests in training of older workers to meet skill requirements.

On the other hand, the raising of the school leaving age means that an increasing proportion of students in VET in Western Australia may also be drawn from younger aged cohorts. Some VET professionals will have to confront a range of issues and learner expectations new to them, possibly in unfamiliar contexts, as they are drawn into closer relationships with schools and secondary teachers. VET providers will need to address issues related to the presence of younger students on campus, such as duty of care.

VET national strategy continues to place considerable emphasis on improving the education outcomes for Indigenous Australians. This will involve the increasing participation of Indigenous learners in programs above Certificate II level. VET practitioners who have never been significantly involved with these learners before will need to develop a greater understanding of the values and expectations of Indigenous students and communities.

As Australian society diversifies through migration and humanitarian programs, and as more overseas students study in Australia or are involved in off shore Australian VET programs, professionals will need the knowledge and skills to assist students with very different backgrounds to their own. For some, this may involve acquiring special skills in areas such as managing students who have suffered torture and other major traumas.

An increasing proportion of people with one or more disabilities are also participating in community life, including VET programs. Although identified as a student cohort, this group is extremely diverse in its own right, including those with a range of mental health and substance abuse problems as well with those with a range of physical problems. VET practitioners will need to offer appropriate learning experiences, and be able to understand and address a range of needs that can at times be complex.
Federal government policy to involve those on welfare benefits in paid work will impact on training providers, particularly as some members of this student group may be unwilling participants in training.

**Changing industry needs and expectations**

The VET sector is helping industry sectors in Western Australia address a range of skill shortages, but not fast enough to counter rapid growth in some sectors and the effects of an ageing skilled worker base. Providers and their staff will need to find ways to facilitate skills acquisition quickly but effectively. As has already become evident, this may challenge traditional expectations about the role of the VET provider, appropriate training outcomes and approaches to delivery.

Skill shortages also place pressure on the VET sector itself, by driving up salaries and other benefits to a point where VET providers face a recruitment problem as they cannot compete in key vocational areas. It may also impact on the pool of casual staff available to teach in the highly casualised VET workforce. The evidence suggests that it is already increasingly difficult to find casual staff for some technical fields and in rural and remote areas.

**Increasing emphasis on generic skills**

With the growth of the knowledge economy, increasing dependence on information and rapidly changing communications technologies, it will become increasingly difficult for the VET sector to provide its students with some sort of durable technical skills set that somehow anticipates future developments. Rather, practitioners will need to be adept in helping student develop employability skills and attributes, the most important of which will be those that enable learning, and foster an interest in learning throughout life. They will need to provide learning experiences that appropriately balance the acquisition of specific technical knowledge and skills with these generic, transferable skills.

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1 In some cases staff can only be paid salaries commensurate with those offered in industry by being paid for teaching above standard hours. This then affects their ability to access, and benefit from, appropriate professional development. They simply do not have the time to do it.
Increased customer sophistication

Individual consumers generally are becoming increasingly discerning and have high expectations of service providers. Those consulted for this project reported that this was also true of those seeking training, and was a driving force in the development of new products and services.

Organisations increasingly see themselves as part of ‘skills ecosystems’ or supply chains, the effectiveness of which depends on the development of sophisticated relationships with service suppliers, such as the VET provider. VET providers will need the ability to respond quickly to customer needs and new market opportunities. They will need a pool of VET professionals who understand the goals and needs of a potential client organisation, can build sustained, formal relationships with them and deliver customised training within the workplace. These provider representatives will be called upon to act as intermediaries between the VET system, with all its complexities, and the client. As VET providers assist business innovation, including the introduction of new technologies and new ways of working, there will also be continuing pressure on some VET practitioners to expand their technical knowledge and skills.

As more VET practitioners move out of the provider environment, the nature of their work will change. This will call into question how their work should be defined and how workloads should be managed. In TAFE colleges in particular, this trend may also strain bureaucratic processes that work against flexibility and innovation and lead to a major rethink of internal business processes.

A role in community capacity building

The need to build economic and social capital through education and training is a priority of the current national VET strategy, particularly in regional and remote regions affected by a loss of people and resources to the cities. If the VET sector is to establish and maintain effective partnerships with local communities, at least some VET professionals will need highly developed skills in understanding their needs and priorities and facilitating community-based projects.
Internal forces driving change
In conjunction with those external forces discussed, forces within the sector itself continue to change the VET landscape. Critical to the future skills and knowledge needs of VET professional are:
• the increasing complexity of the provider role
• the need to comply with AQTF requirements and other formal accountability measures
• the on-going implementation of Training Packages
• the increasing diversity of the VET client base
• the gradual shift in the role of the VET practitioner from industry expert to learning facilitator
• the expansion of VET in schools
• the characteristics of the current VET workforce.

Implications for the future
The increasing complexity of the VET provider role
As the role of the VET provider evolves, and horizons expand to meet client, industry and community expectations and take advantage of new opportunities, the nature of management will continue to change across the sector. While the traditional management focus has been on the efficient running of existing systems, VET will continue to require managers with leadership ability. Effective leadership will be critical in facilitating the innovation required to achieve new visions, and as TAFE colleges in Western Australia have already recognised, educational leadership will be needed not only at the helm, but at every level of the organisation.

In the increasingly complex and changing business of the VET provider, and indeed of the VET sector generally, systems and processes will need to be goal oriented, clearly articulated and streamlined – but at the same time, they will also need to be flexible enough to respond to changing market conditions and emerging opportunities. Again, VET professionals will need effective leadership skills, including an ability to think systemically, and the courage to challenge long established ways of doing things and the mental models that underpin them.

Compliance and accountability
The national review of the AQTF (ANTA 2004b) found general support for the standards. Those consulted felt that they provided a good framework for organising the business of VET providers. The need for compliance motivated providers to review their approaches, and the framework provided a means of focusing attention on specific areas.
Nevertheless the AQTF review also identified issues around the ambiguity, duplication and unnecessary complexity of some standards, their prescriptive nature and a sector wide over-reliance on documentation. It also pointed to an absence of evidence regarding their impact on the quality of training outcomes. In light of these findings, the authors argue that the current AQTF compliance framework is a necessary, but not sufficient, means of ensuring good quality teaching, learning and assessment, and that what is needed is a capacity-building approach that emphasises quality, creativity, professional judgement and growth, rather than simply compliance (ANTA 2004b).

When the Rumsey paper was released, the AQTF was a very new beast. Since then, a number of parties have expended considerable effort to assist with its implementation. There has been a focus on standards 7, 8 and 9 (the competence of RTO staff, RTO assessments and learning and assessment strategies), all of which are relevant to the future needs of practitioners. Staff from the Western Australian Training Accreditation Council believe that there have been tangible improvements in quality and compliance since the first audits. However, although VET providers and practitioners are coming to terms with the AQTF process, the Council suggests there is still some way to go. This was confirmed by some consulted for this discussion paper, who noted that there was a tendency to focus on completing paperwork to meet minimum compliance requirements, rather than on real improvements in quality to meet client needs. On the other hand, there were also examples of groups of practitioners for whom the AQTF process had become an integral part of practice. They found it both challenging and useful to use the documentation process as a basis for asking critical questions about what they were offering, to whom and why.

As VET providers and professionals become more conversant with the AQTF, greater attention will need to be paid to continuous improvement consistent with the notion of a maturing system. The AQTF review notes that belonging to a ‘quality group’ has proved to be extremely useful for providers in sharing resources and increasing understanding. Professional development, networks and active dialogue with the Training Accreditation Council will continue to be needed to assist practitioners to address AQTF requirements efficiently and effectively. However, as Rumsey identified, available time and the need for highly developed time/priority management skills remains an issue to be addressed.
On-going implementation of Training Packages
As Schofield and McDonald (2004) point out in the *High Level Review of Training Packages*, Training Packages assume a high level of competence to facilitate valid training, delivery and assessment. Nationally, there were still many practitioners who had not developed this degree of understanding and skill. Those consulted for this project believed the situation was less critical in WA, due to the effectiveness of professional development activities implemented in WA since 2002. However, they felt there was no room for complacency. The continuing release of new and updated Packages will present on-going challenges for VET practitioners over the next 5 years. The impact of the new TAA package in particular is likely to be profound.

Those consulted identified a need for a continued focus on tailored professional development suitable to initiate new staff, or extend the skills of existing practitioners, especially casuals. In this regard, general information sessions were deemed to be of limited value. Interactive workshops and action learning projects were far more effective in encouraging practitioners to work actively with a Training Package and its associated resources. It was useful to have these coordinated centrally by the Department, and available on a continuing basis, rather than having each provider offer their own versions, but at the same time, it was important that workshops were multi–sessional to provide on-going support as participants put new methodologies into practice.

The increasing diversity of the VET client base
Given the new student cohorts entering the VET system, those consulted for this project felt that VET practitioners would 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.

However, most felt that practitioners currently lacked the skills and confidence to assist some groups – particularly students with mental health issues and those who do not really want to be involved in VET. This could have wide ranging implications if not addressed, including the undermining of existing programs and experiences for the traditional student base. Although this emerged as one of the most critical issues identified overall, there were diverse views on the nature and degree of problems associated with an increasingly diverse client base, depending on the context within which those consulted were operating.
It became increasingly clear that although the student cohort will continue to change, it will not change uniformly. There will be a wide variation in skill and knowledge requirements not only across VET providers, but even between individual business units within a provider. In providing professional development, one size definitely will not fit all. There will need to be an appropriate mix of local and system wide professional development, combined with other activities, such as networks and communities of practice, with considerable flexibility to tailor to specific need.

The consultation process also identified literacy and numeracy skills as an issue for those in the increasingly diverse and disadvantaged groups. However, literacy and numeracy did not emerge as a mainstream issue as it had during the Rumsey consultations. Perhaps this is because it has become subsumed within the broader diversity issue. Nevertheless, industry continues to have issues with the literacy and numeracy skills of its new and existing workforce, and the implications of using the world wide web and other information sources potentially place greater strain than ever before on such skills. There will still be a need for an increased focus on these essential skills across the training arena.

The shift from industry expert to learning facilitator

There is no doubt that the VET practitioner’s role is changing shape, and will continue to do so over the next 5 years. This will be partly an instinctive response to changes such as those already discussed. However, it may also be more formally engineered. Rumsey (2002:37) identified the move to learning facilitator as a key challenge facing VET practitioners. Although most people consulted for this paper felt comfortable with the idea of changing to the role of facilitator in theory, there was evidence of fundamentally different perceptions of what it meant in practice. The interpretation will have significant implications when it comes to future decisions concerning which knowledge and skills will be most valued, nurtured and resourced. The majority of practitioners placed the highest priority on maintaining their industry knowledge and skills -and in some cases, felt it was imperative to be leading edge experts. When they spoke of facilitating learning it implied using a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies that supported students to learn, although it was not often apparent that the process might also change the power dynamics to place learners, as clients, in a more pivotal and influential role in determining what, when, where and how they learn, with the relationship becoming more of a learning partnership.
On the other hand, some VET managers suggested that although it might be important for the sector to maintain technical currency, it was not necessary for all individual practitioners to strive to keep up to date in their industry speciality. Some also questioned whether the sector itself needed to be at the technical forefront. When they envisaged practitioners acting as learning facilitators and knowledge brokers, they saw them drawing on their technical and industry knowledge to locate and assess the relevance of information and select the right specialists to deliver parts of a course. They also envisaged arrangements whereby VET providers only prepared students to a certain level, but worked closely with workplaces to facilitate on-going learning. This concept, the argument went, would empower clients. It also offered potential for VET practitioners to learn alongside their students - from guest lecturers or from experts offering training within a client work place. A key component of the model was the need to promote self-directed learning, and the development of generic and employability skills, not only for students, but for practitioners also. (Indeed, some saw this as a critical element in ensuring the future effectiveness of VET practitioners, within any model).

This approach was seen as more practical, and potentially less costly, than trying to arrange large numbers of industry placements or expensive specialist courses, particularly in fields characterised by rapid change. However, it represents a significant conceptual shift that challenges some deeply held mental models, and the potential for this to create tension was evident during the consultation.

We suggest that the options may not be mutually exclusive. Both could be used as part of a carefully targeted strategy that would involve, amongst other things, open discussion with practitioners, choosing the best option for the context, and a review of arrangements that currently preclude the employment of guest lecturers.

**The expansion of VET in Schools**

The national and state push to create a seamless education and training system continues. In WA, this has been reflected at the highest level in the creation of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, and in the increasing number of schools establishing VET in Schools programs, often in partnership with TAFE and/or private VET providers. There were concerns expressed throughout the consultations about perceived differences in values and approaches to teaching and learning between the sectors that made it difficult to collaborate effectively. There was
also a widespread belief that VET practitioners were not seen to have the same status as school teachers, and that the VET sector was the poor cousin in any high level decision making and resourcing arrangements, and this made partnerships more problematic. Some practitioners consulted believed their approaches to teaching and learning would be incompatible with those of the schooling system.

**Characteristics of the VET workforce**

As discussed earlier, the present TAFE WA system relies on a relatively small group of core permanent practitioners and a much larger group who are casual, and mostly part time. The exit of a large proportion of permanent practitioners over the next 5 to 10 years will have serious implications for decisions regarding the future needs of VET professionals.

While the industry knowledge of casual staff is valuable to VET providers, and may be more recent than that of permanent practitioners, they often lack practical teaching and learning skills, and knowledge of adult learning and educational theory. Members of the casual VET workforce have less exposure to one-off professional development activities, and very limited involvement in ongoing professional development programs. Indeed the loneliness of the VET practitioner identified by Rumsey may be more pronounced in this group than in any other, with some having little direct interaction with their peers in any form (There was anecdotal evidence to suggest that prolonged lack of contact had been a deciding factor in the decision of some casual practitioners to leave the VET sector).

Thus, the retirement of older practitioners will leave serious gaps in vocational, educational and organisational knowledge and skills. Many casual VET practitioners are likely to need a set of survival skills and other support mechanisms if they are to be effective.

Those consulted in recent national research by Clayton et al. (2005) saw the imminent departure of a large cohort of experienced practitioners as both a loss and an opportunity for organisational renewal. If the impact of the imminent changing of the guard in Western Australia is to be positive, it will involve a high level strategic effort, succession planning, retention of key permanent and casual staff coupled with a structured, well resourced process to support knowledge transfer.
Summary and key messages

The impact of social, demographic and political influences on the nature of work for VET professionals in Western Australia is already evident and is affecting the make up of the student cohort, and the nature of VET provider relationships with industry clients and other institutions, particularly schools. Key influences that will continue include:

- the ageing of the population and an increased emphasis on people staying longer within the workforce
- a more diverse society reflecting a greater mix of cultural values, beliefs and expectations
- an increasing range of skills shortages in areas of critical industry and general community need
- the growth of the knowledge economy and rapidly changing technologies
- increasing customer sophistication
- the raising of the school leaving age in Western Australia
- a national focus on increasing the participation of Indigenous Australians in work and work related training
- moves to get those at present in receipt of welfare benefits, but capable of work, into work or training for work
- an increased proportion of people with disabilities participating in mainstream community life
- national recognition of the need to build economic and social capital through education and training.

Forces within the sector itself also continue to change the VET landscape. Critical to the future skills and knowledge needs of VET professional are:

- the increasing complexity of the provider role
- the need to comply with AQTF requirements and other formal accountability measures
- the on-going implementation of Training Packages
- the increasing diversity of the VET client base
- the gradual shift in the role of the VET practitioner from industry expert to learning facilitator
- the expansion of VET in schools
- the characteristics of the current VET workforce.
Often acting in combination, these external and internal forces, will have significant impacts on the roles of VET professionals, the nature of their work and the skill sets they require to be effective as leaders, managers and practitioners. Throughout the consultations, it was suggested that VET practitioners would 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.

However, not all VET practitioners will need the same knowledge and skills sets. Variations in requirements will be evident not only between individual providers but between individual business units within the same provider. Thus, ‘one size’ professional development programs will definitely not fit all. Professional development for individuals and business units will need to be carefully planned and balanced to maximise individual and organisational capability. Focus and resourcing will be influenced by strategic decisions regarding the need for individual practitioners to maintain or upgrade industry skills or to become a combined learning facilitator/knowledge broker.

At a systemic level, the VET sector must be prepared to manage the impact of the retirement of many of its most experienced practitioners. The high proportion of casual staff in the current workforce generally have less background and expertise in the teaching and learning aspects of the VET practitioner’s role, and providers currently make only limited provision for professional development that might change this situation.
Challenges for the VET professional

In 2002 Rumsey (2002: 36-37) identified 14 challenges facing VET practitioners. While most of these remain, it is clear from the literature and consultations that some are perceived to be less of an issue than they were, while several new challenges have emerged.

Rumsey’s challenges revisited

Drawing on discussion in previous sections, the following is a ‘state of the nation’ report concerning the key challenges Rumsey identified in 2002.

1. Coping effectively with the pace of change

The consultations suggest that new ways of working, such as those associated with the move to competency based assessment and Training Packages, are now becoming part of the landscape. Unlike the situation prior to 2002, changes now tend to build on what has come before, so are less confronting and easier to assimilate. Although there are still small groups of practitioners clinging to the old ways, their influence over others is diminishing. For the majority ongoing change is now an accepted fact of life. The challenge now is to find ways to meet the expanded range of expectations that come with new ways of working.

2. Maintaining balance within the demands on the time of the VET practitioner

All of those consulted identified this as a key issue for themselves and for their colleagues. Practitioners reported that the range and number of demands on their time outside of contact hours continued to increase. Some complained particularly about seemingly endless internal administration and AQTF documentation. Others were more concerned about the difficulty of bringing peers together, or of progressing innovations, because provider and sector day to day priorities took precedence.

3. Keeping up-to-date and understanding changes to VET

Although VET practitioners still need to keep abreast of sectoral expectations and requirements, there has been a significant shift in the level of concern regarding this area. The foundations of a new way of working are now in place, and VET practitioners have had several years to test them in action. Many of those consulted suggested that, although there was still a place for information provision to alert people to new requirements and ensure consistent messages, the preferred method for developing genuine understanding was to engage in the change issues and processes, rather than just being told about them.
4. Understanding and working with Training Packages
Some of those consulted commented that they had expected this issue to diminish over time, but had realised there was a need for ongoing provision of information and support for new staff, and some casuals who had had limited opportunities for professional development in this area to date. Permanent and longer term casual staff also needed assistance when new or revised Training Packages were introduced, and the new TAA would require an investment of time and effort across the board. In particular, it will be important to introduce and bed down the TAFEWA Lecturers’ Qualifications Framework.

5. Understanding and reconciling apparent dilemmas in the VET practitioner’s role, such as industry’s skill needs versus student’s personal education needs; being flexible while maintaining consistency.
VET practitioners still report considerable tension between their core training activities and the pressure to become involved in other work functions such as revenue-raising and administrative functions. There can also be tension between the call to act flexibly to meet customer needs and the drive to comply with Australian Quality Training Framework requirements and ensure consistency of outcomes. As student cohorts become more complex, some are also finding that the needs of some individuals dominate those of others. The consultations revealed a fundamental conceptual divide between practitioners and some senior managers concerning the future roles and responsibilities of VET practitioners which may create further dilemmas for individuals and business units as providers make decisions about where the emphasis should lie, and which areas of skills and knowledge will be most valued.

6. Ensuring compliance with AQTF standards
VET practitioners report focusing a huge amount of time and energy in the last 3 years on ‘getting it right’, with feedback from sources such as the WA Training Accreditation Council suggesting that this had led to the basic requirements becoming embedded in VET workplaces. The challenge now is to move from a focus on demonstrating compliance to the letter of the law, to one that achieves the desired outcomes through the embedding of quality practices in everyday activity.
7. Keeping up-to-date with industry trends

This was a major concern for many VET practitioners who were committed to their specialist technical area and keen to remain at the cutting edge. Some of those consulted reported finding it difficult and expensive to access the latest technology and associated training, while others could not spend enough time in industry to maintain the currency of their understanding of needs and trends. Although there are conceptual issues regarding the role of the VET practitioner and priorities for the system, there will continue to be a need to ensure that practitioners remain aware of the latest trends in their vocational area, within a carefully targeted and strategic approach. The challenge now is to define what ‘up to date’ means in different contexts.

8. Understanding the changing nature of work

The implications of the changing nature of work are starting to hit home in the VET sector, not just in relation to the industries supported by VET, but in regard to the nature of the work of VET professionals themselves. Students need skills in managing their own careers, particularly in light of proposed changes to industrial laws that shift the emphasis from collective bargaining to individual contracts. VET practitioners need an understanding of industry trends and career pathways, of how to facilitate the development of both technical and generic skills and of their potential transferability across traditional industry boundaries. To date, relatively little attention has been given to fostering such skills in a comprehensive way. As it becomes a more pressing need it will have implications for the practitioner’s personal skill sets and for the ways in which groups of practitioners work together to ensure that everybody is on the ‘same page’.

9. Operating in a competitive market

Within the TAFE system, there has been a move away from the competitive market to one which is more collaborative. The badging of TAFEWA rather than individual providers has certainly had an impact, and had support from managers and practitioners, who welcomed renewed opportunities to network and work more closely with those in other public and private providers. A sign of increasing maturity in the sector is the move towards co-optition, where providers can be cooperative, but still competitive on other occasions.
10. Working collaboratively within partnership arrangements

The increasing number of formal partnership arrangements involving the VET sector is revealing a lack of capacity within some VET providers to manage the shared power, relationship building and formal contractual arrangements associated with this way of working.

While not all VET professionals will need the sophisticated skills required to operate effectively in this emerging context, it is quite possible that a majority will at least be called upon to make some contribution to a partnership in the next 5 years. A particular area of concern identified during the consultations was the potential for increased interaction with the school sector. If not strategically, and sensitively addressed genuinely different ways of working, coupled with long established stereotypes on both sides, could seriously undermine effective collaboration.

11. Implementing flexible delivery strategies

Flexibility continues to be ‘the name of the game’. While those consulted supported the theory of flexible delivery, they identified mind sets and structural issues that make it difficult to put theory into practice. This involves addressing human resource management, business practice and other structural issues within the VET sector and individual providers in Western Australia which do not prevent, but can certainly hamper, the implementation of more flexible delivery strategies.

12. Understanding and using current and emerging instructional technologies

The rapid development of new technologies continues to challenge practitioners. This is particularly so when their work environment is not well designed to support experimentation and innovation. However, established national, state and provider based programs appear to be making a noticeable difference, and are starting to reach beyond the early adopters.

13. Changing to the role of facilitator (in the teaching/learning process)

While many have recognised that their roles are changing, and nominally accept the concept of learning facilitator, there are different definitions, and many have not come to terms with what it might mean to their practice. Continuing discussion of the mental models underpinning the role will be needed to assist some practitioners in thinking their way into this new way of defining themselves and their work. If new ways of working are to become widespread, VET professionals will need to identify and change policies and systems that currently make it difficult, such as the short term employment of external specialists, to provide the latest technical knowledge.
14. Maintaining own employment/career pattern in insecure times

This may have been an issue of concern in 2002 because of a range of amalgamations. It no longer appears to be a major issue for permanent staff, but does affect non-permanent staff, particularly casuals, who wish to ensure they remain in work. The new TAFE WA Lecturers Qualifications Framework may have a positive impact on career planning and pathways generally, although it is unlikely to be able to overcome the inbuilt uncertainty of casual employment.

On the flip side, present skill shortages in key vocational areas in Western Australia mean that some VET practitioners’ skills are in high demand in industry. Anecdotal evidence suggests that experienced practitioners are being lured away because the sector cannot compete with external salaries and benefits, and casual staff may find they have better options elsewhere. In the next five years, the insecurity may be more of an issue for providers.

15. Emerging leadership challenges

In any effort to address future skills needs, perhaps the most critical ‘new’ challenge facing VET leaders is to redesign those strategies, systems, structures – and the underpinning mindsets - that work against new ways of thinking and working.

Issues identified from the literature and consultations include:

- developing a strategic approach to VET workforce planning to tackle recruitment, retention of key staff, provide career paths, succession planning, mentoring, and new approaches to the training of casual staff
- building better environments, with appropriate structures and systems to support practitioner innovation
- designing supportive, streamlined administrative and resource allocation systems, that enable practitioners to focus on core business
- implementing human resource management systems which support the way practitioners now work.

These issues are discussed further in the chapter ‘Meeting future skill needs’.
Challenges for VET professionals: 2005–2010

Looking forward to 2010, the major challenges facing the VET sector, VET leaders and practitioners include:

1. Moving beyond a focus on AQTF compliance to an emphasis on embedding quality practices in every day activity
2. Designing and implementing new strategies to help address industry skill shortages
3. Establishing and maintaining partnerships with industry and community clients
4. Bridging the gap between the VET sector and schools
5. Clarifying the role of the VET practitioner, and associated knowledge and skills priorities, in specific contexts
6. Managing competing priorities and an expanding set of expectations associated with new roles and responsibilities
7. Addressing fundamental issues surrounding the concepts of *industry expert* and *learning facilitator*
8. Increasing the focus on transferable generic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and ensuring that these are a clearly articulated part of a student’s program
9. Developing practitioners’ skills and confidence to manage an increasingly diverse student cohort, with an emphasis on school age students, those from diverse cultural backgrounds (including those from overseas), those with disabilities or mental health problems, and those who are required, but not motivated, to become involved in training
10. Minimising the impact of the retirement of a significant proportion of the permanent VET workforce, with a focus on developing the pedagogical skills of practitioners employed on a casual basis
11. Redesigning strategies, systems, structures and mind sets that currently work against the adoption by VET professionals of new ideas and new ways of working.
Summary and key messages
The challenges identified by Rumsey still have currency, but the emphasis has shifted. Efforts made since 2002 by the WA Department of Education and Training and individual providers have made a difference, and new ways of working that constituted major challenges in 2002 have become increasingly ‘the way we do things round here’.

Of the 11 key challenges facing VET professionals over the next 5 years, perhaps the most critical relate to fundamental issues concerning the nature of the VET practitioner’s role, the impact on the practitioner’s ability to implement new ways of thinking and working of structures and systems designed for a past era, and the potential loss of organisational, educational and vocational expertise through the exodus of a significant cohort of permanent full time practitioners.
Roles, skill and knowledge requirements of VET professionals 2006–2010

This section outlines the knowledge, skills and personal attributes that will equip VET professionals to meet key challenges in the next 5 years. It builds on the previous work of Rumsey (see Appendix 2), a review of recent literature, the skill sets and units of competency outlined in the recently endorsed Teaching and Assessment Training Package, and the skills and knowledge implicit in the TAFEWA Lecturers’ Qualifications Framework.

As Rumsey suggested, and as our work has confirmed, personal qualities, skills and attributes continue to be critically important for individual practitioners and their organisations. In addition a range of systemic and organisational issues have come to light in the literature and in the course of our consultations which will have an effect on the extent to which roles and skills can be effectively implemented. One of the key issues will be to ensure that VET managers have the skills, and the systems in place, to assist VET practitioners to undertake new roles and gain new skills. Others are the need for VET system knowledge, vocational expertise and industry currency and skills in strategic enquiry to enable practitioners to research and analyse information to assist them to judge their success and to find ways to improve their practice further. While such skills are implicit in the nominated personal qualities, we feel they are sufficiently important to be given greater prominence.

The requirements are organised in nine categories related to:
1. Teaching, learning and assessment expertise
2. Program and resource development skills
3. Strategic enquiry
4. Technology
5. Business and client focus (which includes Rumsey’s category of learner support)
6. Vocational expertise and industry currency
7. VET system knowledge
8. Management and leadership

The basis for this categorisation is outlined in Appendix 2 and, while it retains elements of Rumsey’s original 6 categories, it draws on more recent work from the literature.
The range of skills and knowledge is broad. However, we are not suggesting that every practitioner needs each of these skills and personal attributes. Rather, those required by an individual practitioner are dependent on a combination of personal abilities and interests and client, work team and organisational needs.

In the following discussion, starred aspects ** are those consistently identified during the consultation as priorities for the future.

**Teaching, learning and assessment**
To be effective in the world of VET in the next 5 years, VET practitioners will need:

- an understanding of learning theories (including how various learners learn, learning styles, adult learning principles, simulations, problem- and project-based approaches to learning)
- pedagogical skills reflecting emerging pedagogical theory, including the concept of the learning facilitator (and what that role involves)
- understanding of the needs of diverse groups of learners
- a flexible approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, with the skills and knowledge to adapt strategies to individual student needs, and to motivate and empower individual learners**
- ability to foster the development of generic skills and learning strategies, including the ability to innovate**, and to balance the emphasis on technical and generic skills appropriately**
- skills to plan, organise and conduct assessment (formative/summative/RPL) and integrate assessment into the learning process
- skills to use student recording and reporting systems effectively
- the skills and knowledge to counsel students and provide career guidance.

**Program and resource development**
VET practitioners will need to be able to:

- interpret and unpack Training Packages**
- access and customise existing learning programs and resources to meet particular needs
- design and develop new learning programs and/or training resources
- design and develop new assessment resources
- design and develop recording and reporting systems.
Strategic enquiry
VET practitioners will need to be able to:
• undertake research and analysis to better understand key issues and priorities, examine new approaches to work and learning and ensure they are meeting client needs**
• review teaching, learning and assessment processes
• evaluate learning resources and technologies
• evaluate the effectiveness of training programs.

Technology
VET professionals will need to be able to:
• research technologies for use in learning and teaching
• use computers and other technologies (such as i-Pods, digital cameras) appropriately to support flexible delivery
• use the internet and other communications technologies effectively to communicate with students and colleagues e.g. chat rooms, video and web-based conferencing, web searches, email.

Business and client focus**
VET professionals will need to be able to understand and respond to the needs of business and employers. They also need to be able to effectively support one of the VET sector’s key clients, its learners. This includes the ability to
• adopt an entrepreneurial approach
• establish and sustain relationships with other providers and enterprises
• understand the links between training, human resource needs and workforce development for industry clients
• conduct appropriate needs analyses, consult and negotiate with clients
• adapt learning and teaching strategies to suit individual client organisations
• provide support, guidance and advice to individual learners.

Vocational expertise and industry currency**
The VET sector, and identified VET practitioners will need to:
• maintain, update and upgrade industry skills and knowledge relevant to area of delivery/assessment (including current and emerging systems, work processes and practices and technologies)
• develop and maintain appropriate enterprise and industry contacts
• access and apply industry research and new technologies.
VET system knowledge
VET professionals will need an understanding of:
• the VET system and its context
• their own organisation, including its strategy, structure, key organisational units, processes and systems**
• AQTF requirements, and ways of integrating these into teaching, learning and assessment**.

Personal skills and attributes
These include skills in:
• communication using the written and spoken word, and through technologies
• thinking, including questioning, conceiving, analysing, interpreting, reflecting, problem-solving, lateral thinking, evaluating
• innovation
• information management, including researching, sourcing, sorting, weighing, interpreting and reporting
• observation
• project management
• working collaboratively and in formal teams, within business units and cross-sector networks
• priority setting and time management.

The qualities and attributes of an effective VET professional are likely to include:
• self awareness – a knowledge of one’s personal values, needs, interests, strengths and weaknesses, and effect on others
• respect for learners from a wide range of backgrounds, and different levels of ability and motivation
• open mindedness and flexibility, with an ability to accommodate the identity shifts associated with adopting new roles
• resourcefulness – the ability to adapt to change and cope with complexity and uncertainty
• responsibility for own career management and professional development
• behaving appropriately and ethically – including maintaining confidences and avoiding personal bias.
Leadership and management

One aspect of the role of anyone in a promotion position is to focus on the management of current operations and resources. This is a focus on the issues of today. However, increasingly, a manager must also have the skills to provide leadership, where the focus is on the future. This will be of particular importance in the VET sector over the next 5 years.

The leadership role includes:
- facilitating the development of corporate vision and direction
- maintaining a strategic focus
- ensuring alignment between vision, strategy and organisational structures and systems
- building a climate that encourages mental risk taking and innovation
- developing and empowering people
- providing educational leadership to ensure the quality and continuous improvement of teaching, learning and assessment processes
- establishing sustainable productive relationships with external parties
- leading teams and ensuring team effectiveness.

The management role includes:
- developing and managing infrastructure and resources
- overseeing day to day operations
- ensuring policies and procedures are effectively implemented and adhered to
- meeting VET sector requirements, such as overseeing the organization of teaching, learning, assessment to meet the requirements of AQTF and other standards
- recruiting, selecting and ensuring appropriate induction and performance management of new staff
- managing projects and contracts
- preparing and managing budgets and financial plans
- managing physical resources
- maintaining the information required by the organisation.

The Department developed a managers development framework (DET 2004). This framework is a tool to guide managers through a professional development pathway. The pathway aims to provide a range of strategies, which strongly focus on leadership development and change management.
Drawn from Peter Senge's (1990) *The Fifth Discipline*, the Five levels of perspective (See Box 1) has implications for VET leadership and management in a time of continual and often radical change. The model is based on the proposition that the potential effectiveness of strategies for change depends on the level of perspective from which they derive. Those driven directly from a shared vision are likely to have the most powerful, long term impact. Although impact potential decreases from level to level, strategies seeking to develop or reinforce mental models, or to integrate structures and systems aligned with the vision are still proactive and effective ways of leveraging change. However, those designed in reaction to identified patterns of behaviour or one-off events can be resource intensive, but will have minimal impact in terms of sustainable long term change.

The effective leader should invest most time in high leverage thinking and action. Management activities are more likely to be at the lower levels, and may put out fires, but will not change the status quo. While there is clearly always a need for management activity the effectiveness of the VET sector of the future will hinge on the leadership skills and high leverage activity of VET professionals at all levels of the VET sector.

**Box 1: Leading and managing in an age of change: Five levels of perspective**
Skills and knowledge priorities

Based on the environmental scan, literature review and consultation process, priority areas for VET professionals in the future we have identified a set of priority areas for focus over the next five years.

VET professionals in Western Australia will need:

1. the skills and knowledge to support students with a range of diverse needs particularly students from diverse cultural backgrounds, or from overseas, those with low motivation and those with disabilities or mental health problems
2. concepts and processes to support the development of students’ employability skills and learning strategies
3. skills to unpack and implement new and revised Training Packages, with a particular focus on the TAA
4. advanced skills in teaching, learning and assessment incorporating new approaches, technologies and ways of working
5. evaluation and strategic enquiry skills to build personal and organisational capacity and to promote better and more reflective practice
6. knowledge of current and emerging industry processes, systems and technologies appropriate to the industry and provider context
7. increased understanding of their own provider organisation, including its strategy, structure, key organisational units, processes and systems
8. skills in networking within an institution, across institutions, education sectors and with industry members
9. enhanced understanding of business needs and skills to tailor programs and work in new contexts
10. skills to establish and manage partnerships, collaborative and contract arrangements with industry clients and other educational sectors, especially schools.

Do all VET professionals need all skills?

The sector, and individual providers, need the capacity to respond to the external and internal drivers outlined earlier. Thus, they need a pool of skilled professionals on whom to call, but this does not necessarily mean that every VET manager or practitioner needs a high degree of expertise in all of the areas listed above.
During the consultations, some VET professionals expressed a fear that the VET sector expected each practitioner to be some sort of ‘superhero’. In reality, no professional can be all things to all people. Each has his or her own sets of strengths, weaknesses and interests. It must be clearly acknowledged that, in determining individual skills needs, personal career plans and strategic organisational needs must be taken into account. It is also important to acknowledge that needs may be met by appropriately balancing the skill sets of work teams.

However, having said this, it is difficult to see how a VET professional can be effective in the next 5 years without some understanding of, and skills in, each of the priority areas. It may be more a question of identifying priority areas of focus for each professional and the degree of expertise required to support particular client groups.

We found the ideas in a recently released discussion starter (*A discussion starter for the development of a Western Australian Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma of VET Leadership, n.d.*) a valuable conceptual framework. It describes a 5-phase approach to continuous skill development for VET professionals:

- **Phase 1** emphasises *skills and knowledge in a defined range of areas*, with limited responsibility for others
- **Phases 2 and 3** involve developing and consolidating stages, where VET professionals *increase the breadth, depth and complexity of their knowledge* and increasingly take on a multitude of roles and responsibilities
- **Phase 4** of the development model, which is the stage of ‘high accomplished practice’, where VET professionals use *professional judgement* in planning, designing and evaluating learning programs and are increasingly involved in professional networks, organisational activities and advisory services
- **Phase 5** is based on *mastery and leadership*. It focuses on concepts of *professional expertise* which acknowledges that VET professionals have *mastery of training and assessment (TAA) standards and continue to maintain their vocational credibility in their industry area by demonstrating an expert command of wide-ranging, highly specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills*. They demonstrate high-levels of critical analysis and think rigorously and independently in innovative ways to solve complex problems.

**What type of professional development works best?**

Although many practitioners entered the VET sector with a high level of technical expertise, they were often novice trainers, and had limited understanding of the requirements of the VET sector itself. Those consulted supported
a continuing emphasis on formal support for novice practitioners, and reported that current induction processes for new staff were valued not only by new practitioners, but also by their mentors, who found the interaction provided them with new skills and helped them to reflect on their own practice and professional skills.

There was also support to provide more opportunities for VET practitioners to develop their pedagogical skills and understanding at deeper levels, including an increased emphasis on reflective practice, although, interestingly, this call came more often from VET managers and principal lecturers than it did from VET practitioners, many of whom placed greater priority on maintaining their industry expertise.

Rumsey (2002: 55–56) identified 4 types of professional development- Foundation, Just in Time, Refresher and Targeted. From the consultations, and other evidence, it appears there is a fifth type, specifically focusing on advanced skills, and intended for practitioners and professionals who are already competent in the designated area. Research suggests that reflection and strategic enquiry are key components in the development of high level expertise, so advanced skills professional development would be designed to promote this.

**Summary and key messages**

Professional skills, and personal qualities of VET professionals continue to be critically important. However, a range of systemic and organisational issues will affect the extent to which practitioner expertise can be utilised, and how well new ways of working can be implemented. One of the key issues will be to ensure that VET managers have the skills, and the systems in place, to assist VET practitioners in this regard.

In the next five years, the sector must be able to draw on the skills and knowledge of its VET professionals in nine critical areas. However, these do not necessarily equate to the skills and knowledge needed by each individual. There should be no attempt to develop ‘superheroes’. The skills sets needed by any individual will depend on the context within which each operates, and should be determined on a case by case basis, taking the skill sets of other members of their work team and the needs of the provider and its client base into account.

While there is a continuing need to provide appropriate support for novice practitioners, there is also a need to place more emphasis on the development of advanced pedagogical skills involving the development of reflective practice and skills in strategic inquiry and educational leadership.
Meeting future skill needs: the provider’s role

The VET sector must continue to innovate if it is to meet the evolving needs of its existing and expanding client base and respond effectively to emerging social, economic and political imperatives. Innovation can take many forms, from development of products and services that have not existed before, to the application of a new strategy or skill by an individual VET professional. Thus, innovation does not refer only to leading edge practices. Whenever VET professionals think and act in new ways they are innovating within their own context.

There is a consistent message from the literature that organisational and sector climate, structures and systems have a critical influence on the willingness and ability of VET professionals to be innovative. Thus, any focus on new and enhanced skills for VET practitioners must go hand in hand with on-going review and redesign of aspects of the sector and provider environment within which they are expected to apply these new approaches.

This section considers a range of enablers and barriers to innovation in general, and to the development of the skills needed by the VET sector in the next 5 years.

The characteristics of innovative organisations and systems

Callan (2004) found that innovative organisations in any field:
- create learning cultures which promote innovation as a core organisational capability
- have leaders who are failure-tolerant
- identify their innovators
- reward people who propose innovative ideas
- use partnerships
- promote innovation through teams.

Using these characteristics as the benchmark for both the VET sector and its member organisations, Callen’s research shows that the development of a climate that supports innovation is uneven. While some individuals and teams linked to larger industry partnerships are leading the way, there is little evidence nationally that VET providers have established either well-developed organisational capabilities for innovation or clear structures for rewarding innovators. There is still tremendous potential to foster innovation, but it will not be realised unless providers are serious about building learning cultures and promoting innovation as a core enterprise capability.
Key enablers for promoting the effective development of new VET practitioner roles and skills include:

- the building of a learning culture, with effective leadership, clear strategic direction, realistic goals and expectations, flexibility, and a focus on practitioners as an asset rather than a cost
- redesign of systems, structures and processes to support new ways of working
- involvement in the ownership of professional development, facilitated by local identification of needs and flexibility of access
- using networks and communities of practice to identify needs and deliver relevant professional development
- effective communication and promotion of professional development in a variety of forms, but especially those that are ‘hands on’ and encourage reflective practice
- strong links with industry to enhance opportunities that help maintain industry currency
- regular opportunities to discuss and review professional development needs and strategies.

Research into the current professional development situation in Western Australia (Perkins, Guthrie, Nguyen 2006 forthcoming.), shows that many of the conditions favourable to innovation and the application of new skills are already in place. Although, as Callen found nationally, approaches are uneven, there are now several working models and strategies in practice, which will become enablers in their own right, as providers learn from their own experience, and from each other.

**Barriers to learning and applying new skills**

Many things make it difficult for VET professionals to be innovative, and a number of these undermine the first step in the process – learning and applying new skills and ideas. The literature and those consulted for this paper identified a range of barriers and hurdles that currently make professional learning difficult for VET professionals in different parts of the Western Australian VET sector. These include:

**An unsupportive climate**

- lack of a well co-ordinated and planned approach to skills acquisition, no easy access to professional development opportunities or recognition of achievements
- managers with little understanding of the real nature of practitioners’ work and of the difficulty of achieving results in the face of unsympathetic policies and procedures, and unnecessarily complex administrative processes
• limited formal or informal opportunities to interact with peers to explore new work roles, learn new skills or reflect on practice
• poor recognition of the need for certain practitioners to maintain their industry standing
• lack of clear career paths for VET practitioners
• lack of individual commitment and mutual obligation by employer and employee to support professional development.

Access issues
• workloads or work responsibilities that cannot be readily transferred to others – in ‘lean and mean’ organisations, and in regional providers, there is often no one else to do the job
• lack of ability to negotiate backfill or time release
• lack of support and resourcing to enable casual staff to attend key activities
• the time and expense of getting to events, particularly for those in remote areas
• lack of locally delivered or Just in Time professional development
• family unfriendly scheduling and/or lack of advance warning
• timetabling that precludes any opportunity to bring peers together or encourage interaction across teaching and learning areas.

The nature of the professional development activity
• a focus on programs that only provide information about policies, procedures and systems, rather than allowing participants to work actively on issues or problems within their own contexts
• poor quality professional development that deters practitioners from making an effort to attend further events.

Personal priorities
• professional development that participants do not see as relevant to their needs (Practitioners were critical of generic programs not tailored to their contexts, those that did not acknowledge their own expertise and those that concerned the organisation’s business rather than teaching, learning or assessment)
• practitioners who were committed to their students and did not want to miss contact hours, and did not want to delegate to anyone else, or had no one else who could step in.
**Sectoral issues**

Although some sectoral issues do not necessarily prohibit the acquisition of new skills and a move into new ways of working they can make it more difficult because they do not focus on the nature and diverse range of practitioners work now but rather on the ways things were done in the past. Those mentioned most often during the consultations, and in the literature (for example NCVER 2004b), include:

- administrative systems which are sometimes overly complex
- award conditions, including contact hours, and employment conditions for casuals
- approaches to measuring system and organisational performance, and
- funding models.

The activities developed and promoted through various initiatives in Western Australia have gone a long way to addressing these barriers and promoting and improving practices. However, the full value of the considerable professional development being undertaken will not be realised until a range of these systemic issues are addressed.

If strategies to facilitate professional learning are to achieve their potential, VET leaders must have the skills and knowledge to identify and address these limiting factors.

**Summary and key messages**

It is widely accepted that the VET sector must continue to innovate. Innovation can take many forms, and does not refer only to leading edge practices. Whenever VET professionals think and act in new ways they are innovating within their own context. The willingness and ability of VET professionals to be innovative is affected by organisational and sector climate, structures and systems. Thus, any focus on new and enhanced skills must go hand in hand with on-going review and redesign of aspects of the sector and provider environment within which they are expected to apply these new approaches.

In Western Australia, many of the conditions favourable to innovation and the application of new skills are already in place. Although approaches are uneven, there are now working models and strategies in practice, and these will become enablers in their own right, as providers learn from their own experience, and from each other. However, there are also barriers and hurdles that will need to be addressed if strategies to facilitate professional learning are to achieve their full potential.
Conclusions and recommendations

In 2002, Rumsey identified specific areas in which VET practitioners required skills and knowledge, and called for an overall VET professional development strategy to provide as framework for action. Subsequent initiatives in line with these recommendations have laid the foundations for a VET sector in WA that will have the capacity to meet future needs if momentum is maintained.

Many of the challenges identified by Rumsey will continue to influence the skills needs of VET professionals. However, influenced by a range of internal and external factors, a new set of priorities has emerged. These require action focused directly on VET professionals, and action to better align existing structures, systems and mental models with the vision of the VET sector as it could be in 2010. Conclusions and recommendations concerning these two complementary areas are outlined in this section.

It is important to recognise that there are already a range of strategies, programs and processes in place to address some of the issues discussed. Although some are proving to be extremely effective, they are not necessarily operating across the board. Others may need to be refocused if they are to be effective in addressing new priorities.

Conclusions

Target priority groups for professional development

Research shows that the general approach to professional development and general availability of professional development opportunities for all VET professionals is making a significant contribution to the growth of a learning culture, and should continue. However, there is also a need to target specific groups. To be effective within a limited time frame, some strategies may need to be specifically supported with resources beyond those currently allocated to professional development.

A priority should be placed on casual practitioners in areas of current and imminent skill shortage. Any new approach to professional development for casual practitioners will involve a review of employment conditions, the type of professional development offered and consideration of the potential to send a strong message about the importance of professional learning through the provision of payment beyond actual contact hours. It may also involve a review of the composition of the workforce, and strategies to increase the size of the permanent workforce.

Continuing skill shortages are a major issue for WA. Current practitioners in key industry sectors such as the trades, are being called upon to adopt new ways of working that may challenge long held beliefs. They may benefit from targeted professional development strategies that encourage exploration of new concepts and practices. Knowledge transfer, retention and recruitment strategies focused on areas of skill shortage will also make a difference.

Providers need a pool of professionals with the capacity to manage partnerships and deliver training within industry and in schools. A formal strategy could be implemented across the sector, utilising communities of practice, networks and professional development.

The philosophy and personal style of the sector’s leaders will be a key determining influence on its culture, and the potential for innovation. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that future managers and leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively, and that they are supported by administrative arrangements that help, rather than hinder, their efforts.
Focus on building pedagogical expertise
All VET professionals will need highly developed personal learning strategies, and the knowledge and skills to help their students develop these as well. Although there will always be a need for professional development focused on basic skills, there is also a need to move beyond these to assist competent practitioners to develop more advanced pedagogical expertise, with a focus on the skills associated with reflective practice and strategic inquiry.

Those VET practitioners who need specific skills and knowledge to support members of new or growing student cohorts should be identified, and assisted with both generic and customised programs tailored to their circumstances. There will also be a continued need to provide support for the implementation of new and revised Training Packages in general and for the new TAA in particular.

Clarify the nature of the VET practitioner’s role
Although there is an expectation that practitioners should strive to become expert educators, many currently place higher value on their technical skills. There are fundamental questions to address regarding the level of technical skills and knowledge a practitioner may need. Given the increasing emphasis being placed on the VET practitioner’s role as a facilitator by at least some members of the sector, the nature of the VET practitioner’s role in different contexts needs to be discussed and clarified. Although decisions in this regard may mean that some practitioners will no longer need to be at the forefront technically to maintain credibility, they will, however, need to stay abreast of industry trends. Increasingly, more practitioners will also need a better appreciation of their own provider’s business goals and needs. For some, this will involve developing an understanding of why these are relevant to their own work, and of how they contribute to the ‘Big Picture’ and the bottom line.

Maintain and enhance sector knowledge
With the imminent departure of a large sector of the permanent VET workforce, the potential for loss of educational, industry and organisational knowledge is immense. However, research suggests that what constitutes critical knowledge is not well defined. Comprehensive solutions are needed at sectoral, provider and business unit level, including the continued promotion of best practice examples, the promotion of communities of practice, induction and mentoring to spread knowledge and enable effective succession planning. There is a need to expand the formal networking opportunities available sector wide and within providers.

Redesign obstructive structures and systems
Systems and structures with the potential to undermine strategies designed to enhance the skill sets of VET professional need to be redesigned. Although some are obvious, the impact of other accepted ways of doing things can be quite insidious, but highly influential in driving certain behaviours and hindering others. Senior and middle managers could benefit from training in change management and systems thinking concepts and skills to help identify and redesign systems to achieve greater leverage of desired change.

In seeking to align structures and systems with the goals for professional learning, VET providers in Western Australia are fortunate in that they can learn from their own and others’ experiences. An evaluation of recent innovations could inform systemic and local human resource policy development across the sector.
Facilitate effective collaboration with external organisations
Many VET professionals will need skills in establishing and managing collaborative arrangements. Practitioners working with industry will need an understanding of business principles, training needs analysis, resource design and evaluation if they are to successfully deliver tailored programs within workplaces. VET in Schools partnerships will only be effective if fears and misperceptions can be addressed as part of a focus. Providers generally could consider how to best utilise collaborative arrangements with industry to maintain the currency of practitioner skills. There could also be benefit in building links with a government and not for profit organisations with expertise in dealing with issues faced by the sector’s increasingly diverse body of students.

Recommendations
1. Promote sector-wide discussion of the nature of the VET practitioner’s role and develop an agreed interpretation of what is meant by ‘learning facilitator’.
2. Place greater emphasis on advanced pedagogical skills for those who have moved beyond basic competence, focusing attention on the importance of reflective practice and strategic enquiry for all VET professionals.
3. Extend practitioner skills in supporting students to develop generic, transferable skills including literacy and numeracy, problem solving and innovation and personal learning strategies.
4. Develop practitioner understanding and skills in working with members of specific student cohorts such as those from different cultural backgrounds (including those from overseas), and those with disabilities, low motivation or mental health issues.
5. Support all practitioners to stay abreast of industry trends, but work with them to define the degree to which this is required in specific contexts.
6. Develop targeted professional development strategies for practitioners employed on a casual basis, and permanent and casual staff in key industries experiencing skills shortages. These initiatives should complement rather than replace existing initiatives for all VET practitioners, and may need a separate resource allocation.
7. Enhance the capacity of VET managers and potential managers to identify and address structural issues and traditional mental models through an explicit focus on change management and systems thinking skills, linked to current leadership development initiatives.
8. Examine current approaches to human resource management and other systems and structures (including performance indicators and funding models) at the State and provider levels to ensure that they are assisting, rather than impeding, VET professionals to gain and maintain the skills they need and ensure the best outcomes for the sector’s clients.
9. Implement strategies to build the capacity of VET professionals to establish, manage and work within collaborative arrangements, with a particular focus on VET in Schools programs and with industry and employers.
10. Develop a comprehensive sectoral approach to identify and stem the loss of critical educational, industry and organizational knowledge through expanded networks, communities of practice, mentoring and succession planning.
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Appendix 1: Summary of the literature

Introduction
In summarising the literature related to the future needs of VET practitioners, we have drawn on:
• the literature review previously conducted by Rumsey in 2002 to support ‘Shaping the VET practitioner for the future’
• more recent literature reviews related to the changing nature of practitioners’ and managers’ work (for example the review that has formed an appendix to the report ‘Enhancing the capability of the VET professional’ (Dickie et al. 2004))
• a range of individual reports and other recent literature concentrating on that published since the beginning of 2003 (for example, Chappell & Johnston 2003, Chappell et al. 2003, Harris et al. 2005, Mitchell et al. 2005 a & b, Callan 2005a).

The literature covers a wide range including that which:
• provides contextual information on the factors outside the VET sector that are likely to shape future needs
• considers professional development: its forms and approaches, its roles in helping to address the identified needs and the factors which help or hinder its effectiveness
• explores the organisational conditions conducive to innovation and change.

The review has also considered relevant national, state and local strategies, policies, processes and practices that will affect the nature of practitioners’ work.

A new national strategy for VET
‘Shaping our future: Australia’s National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010’ released in 2003 is the blueprint for achieving the vision of a VET system that can contribute significantly to the international competitiveness of Australian businesses. The strategy aims to give Australians world-class skills and knowledge, and build inclusive and sustainable Australian communities.

The strategy has four objectives:
• Industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy
• Employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training
• Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment
• Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.

The national strategy recognises four key groups of players in vocational education and training:
• industry, which defines skills needed for work, and advises on the products and services it requires
• training providers (Registered Training Organisations), which translate skill needs into quality, client-focused training and assessment
• the clients of VET, including businesses, students, apprentices, trainees and people who work, are preparing for work and looking for work, and
• training brokers and facilitators acting for both individuals and companies, who act as the intermediaries between vocational education and training system and employment.
The national strategy notes that VET’s clients value:

- clear links between learning, skills development and employment
- nationally recognised skills standards, defined by industry, covering most occupations, and providing the basis for training and assessment
- nationally recognised qualifications
- customised products and services to meet particular client needs
- active measures to address barriers to learning
- rigorous quality assurance arrangements applied through nationally agreed arrangements
- funding allocated transparently and linked to areas of need
- a strong and vibrant national market of training providers, to give clients more choice
- pathways to and from vocational education and training, schools, universities and adult and community education.

Within the national strategy, twelve specific strategies are outlined to achieve the vision and objectives, grouped into three subsets, based on the nature of their contribution to the overall task. These subsets are Servicing, Building and Improving. ‘Building’ consists of four specific strategies, one of which relates directly to improving the capability of VET training providers:

**Make a sustained investment in TAFE and other Registered Training Organisations**

- The vocational education and training workforce has the capacity and the skills to provide high quality, client-focused, flexible learning and assessment, in partnership with businesses and other organisations
- Registered Training Organisations have the support services, technology, buildings and business systems to provide high quality, client-focused products and services. Vocational education and training provides skills and knowledge for work, enhances employability and assists learning throughout life.

Understanding and acting on the future skill needs of VET practitioners is an important element of that investment.

**The changing environment in and around VET**

**External drivers of change for the VET sector**

As Kearns (2004) notes:

*Leading countries around the world are searching for a 21st century approach to vocational education and learning in a dynamic knowledge-based society founded on more integrated and holistic strategies which recognise the interdependence of social and economic policy directed at the modernisation of society and the economy. European Union countries are setting benchmarks for performance to be achieved by 2010 in line with the Lisbon Strategy, and Australia cannot afford to fall behind in achieving a world class workforce in an inclusive and cohesive society. (Kearns, 2004, p8)*

He notes the need for policies that emphasise learning, skill, enterprise, creativity and innovation. These are associated with a number of significant shifts in the policy frameworks of leading OECD countries, including ways of progressing beyond a traditional training paradigm to one relevant to 21st century conditions and imperatives. In this context he identifies 4 key themes and 9 policy issues and reforms.
The core themes are:
• The search for holistic strategies to drive the transformation of VET
• Development of a lifelong learning and skilling framework
• The enhanced centrality of the individual
• Sustaining and revitalising inclusive communities.

The key policy issues and reforms are:
• Meeting 21st century skill needs
• Addressing the needs of adult learners
• Progressing beyond a training paradigm and moving to one focussed more on continuing learning and skill maintenance throughout life
• The search for a 21st century concept of competence which is broader and more holistic in its view
• Ensuring key generic skills
• Fostering creativity and innovation
• Developing the key roles of technology
• Implementing localisation strategies so that locally appropriate responses are developed
• Strengthening intermediate skills through better use of higher level VET awards.

Future drivers of change for Europe are similar to the drivers of change in Australian VET, identified by Mitchell et al. (2003): the rising complexity and uncertainty in society and the economy; the changing structures of work; the changing structures of industry and employment; an appreciation of the value of generating and applying knowledge; the aggressive spread of the proposition that workers need to add value; public policy; new technology; shrinking time horizons; and the shift from mass production to market segmentation.

The European drivers of change also concur with the findings of Dickie et al. (2004) who found considerable consensus in Australia about the features of the environment in which VET professionals will be expected to work in the future:

an environment characterised by increasing diversity in the client base; increasing sophistication in client expectations; change in products and expansion of options for training delivery; changes in employment, work roles, team structures and places of work; increasing competition and increasing demand; and globalisation of the training market.

This environment indicates that future VET professionals will require an extensive range of capabilities and an increasingly sophisticated mix of generic, professional and leadership skills. (p.4)

Environmental scans conducted to inform both the national strategy for vocational education and training (ANTA 2003a), the Western Australia’s State Training Strategy (2003) identify a range of significant external issues for VET in the future. These are in line with Chappell et al. (2003)) who analysed the current and future context in which Training Packages will need to operate as the first phase of the High level Review of Training Packages. Chappell et al. (2003), Kears (2004) and Mitchell et al. (2005a), provide excellent reviews of the literature in this area. In addition Guthrie and Dawe (2004) summarise a series of research projects and commissioned chapters in relation to VET and its role in innovation (Dawe 2004).

Many of the issues raised in this body of more recent literature accord with those identified in Rumsey (2002).
Future external issues affecting the VET sector, and the nature of the work of its practitioners include:

- **the aging of the population**, with increasing proportions of VET students likely to come from older age cohorts who are increasingly remaining in employment beyond traditional retirement, and may have little recent experience of formal education and training

- **a more diverse society**, through increasing international migration and humanitarian programs, together with increasing numbers of overseas students studying in Australia, or studying for Australian programs in their own countries. In addition, an increasing proportion of people with one or more disabilities are participating in community life, including VET programs. This means that VET practitioners have to be able to offer learning experiences suitable for these diverse groups of learners, be empathetic and understand and address their needs

- **a growing gap between the rich and poor**, and providing appropriate programs to those from disadvantaged backgrounds – including those trying to acquire the skills and experience to help engage, or re-engage with work

- **a role in community development and maintenance**, with the VET sector helping, by working in partnership, to build the economic and social capital of communities and regions, particularly those seen as vulnerable as a result of losing people and resources through urbanisation. However, some global factors threaten addressing these local needs

- **greater concern with environmental issues**, and the impact this will have on the way industry, employers and employees work

- **trade liberalisation**, with increasing open global markets and economies – allowing individual countries to exploit their competitive advantages, and opening up markets, such as Australia’s, to non-traditional competitors. There may also be increased competition and an increasing need for companies to be adaptable and able to change rapidly. They also need to be more market and customer focussed, and respond quickly to customer needs and market opportunities. This has implications for the skill sets and other attributes of their workers

- **the take-up and use of new technologies and ways of working**, with new technologies, new ways of combining and using technologies, and new ways of working (Guthrie and Dawe 2004) contributing to business innovation, but also challenging the currency of VET staff and their skill sets in their vocational discipline because skill sets have a shorter half-life. This has led to the breakdown in traditional occupational demarcations (Chappell et al. 2003). In addition, Chappell and his colleagues argue that all work has become more skilful, because flatter management structures have increased the work expectations on all employees

- **the growth of the knowledge economy**, with dramatic increases in the available knowledge, increasing dependence on information and communications technologies, and greater needs for basic literacy and numeracy skills; IT, thinking, research and communication skills, and a range of employability or ‘soft’ skills and personal attributes (ACCI/BCA 2002, NCVER 2003a & b) that go far beyond the traditional view of what constitutes vocational knowledge. This requires a balance between technical and vocational skills, putting the learner at the centre and helping them to develop skills which empower and enable learning, and a love of learning, throughout life (Kearns 2004). Many workers nominate learning through work as the most important contribution to their learning (Skule & Reichborn 2002), making the work site and the way it works crucial if learning organisations are to be fostered. We will return to this issue later in this review as it is relevant to the learning needs of practitioners, but can be enabled or threatened by the nature of the VET workplace and how well it is set up, managed and led to allow practitioners to develop and use the skills they need now and into the future
• **changes in the way people work**, with flatter management structures and an increasing range of non-standard employment arrangements (such as portfolio workers), core/periphery employment models, a weakening of the relationship between employers and employees and shifts in the responsibility for maintaining skills increasingly moving to individuals. This, in turn, has implications for VET program design and delivery strategies.

• **changing organisational relationships**, with organisations increasingly seeing themselves as part of a skills ecosystem or in supply chains with growing relationships between those supplying and utilising skills and services (Chappell et al. 2003). Under this model skills provision and training is another form of service, with the growth in the importance of partnerships and relationships between those supplying training and those using its outcomes (Callan and Asworth 2004).

• **growth in small business and entrepreneurship**, and the VET sector’s role in supporting and supplying training for these groups.

• **skill shortages** in a range of industries and industry sectors. In collaboration with industry, the VET sector has a role in attempting to address these shortages where appropriate, although increased numbers in training may only be part of the answer (for example, see Richardson and Tan 2005).

• **increased customer sophistication**, leading to changes in customer expectations and the development of more customised products and services, with organisations needing to be able to adjust their product and service range to meet changing and varied customer demands. As the next section shows, providers in the VET sector have not been immune from such customer pressure on their products and services as they move to become more customer focused.

Harris et al. (2005) asked VET practitioners to identify drivers of change. Practitioners perceived that these drivers were largely attributable to influences outside their place of employment. They named government policy as having the most marked effect, influencing curriculum practices and the way training is provided. The second major driver was the combination of expectations of industry and the community, and the third was economics/finances. These three factors were judged to be closely interrelated and to drive each other, with policy being the prime driver of change affecting VET practitioners, especially in the transition to Training Packages.

Schofield and McDonald (2004) predict a number of ways in which the organisation of learning will be changed. They suggest it will become increasingly work-based and workplace focussed. It will be both formal and informal, with the informal learning perhaps being valued more highly than it has been. It will reflect both individual and collective competence, and therefore be more closely linked to human resource management and business strategies. Learning through work will become increasingly important, and employers and providers will need to make a concerted effort to make work more conductive to learning. With increased cross-industry collaboration, there will be a greater need for seamless pathways and cross-sectional linkages, especially through local partnerships and collaborations. These trends will affect most workplaces: those to whom VET provides services and VET organisations themselves.
Internal drivers of change for the VET sector

The reforms outlined above have fundamentally transformed the orientation of many VET providers, particularly public providers, away from ‘education and training’ towards ‘business and service’, and markedly shifted the roles of managers and practitioners in the process (NCVER 2004b). Rumsey (2002) identifies the following developments in the VET environment:

- ongoing review and implementation of Training Packages
- wider use of flexible delivery strategies
- new approaches to assessment, particularly graded assessment as an issue in Western Australia
- rapid growth in VET in schools programs, although this is now plateauing
- wider use of partnerships
- increasing delivery of VET in industry environments
- increasing emphasis on cross-sectoral pathways
- increasing diversity of the VET client base requiring flexibility and a range of skills, knowledge and attitudes to effectively meet their needs (he includes schools students, school leavers, workers changing occupations, groups with special needs such as indigenous students, NESB students, long-term unemployed etc.)
- increased compliance processes associated with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)
- continuing growth in multiculturalism and related challenges for VET
- significant reforms in the regulatory environment that underpins an wide range of vocational areas (licensing requirements etc.)
- innovation in teaching, learning and assessment
- networking
- increased focus on generic and employability skills
- aging VET workforce
- increasing use of casual and contract staff
- linking access and prevocational programs with national training package qualifications and pathways
- inclusion of literacy and numeracy as a critical requirement of all VET participants
- more emphasis on self-directed learning for students and practitioners
- increasing reliance on converging technologies
- growth in the export of VET to overseas countries
- the delivery of higher education qualifications by VET, which is now a reality
- increasing responsiveness of VET to meeting local community needs, which is now a part of the VET national strategy for 2004 to 2010.

Recent literature suggests that these issues remain current, although their relative emphasis and importance may have changed since 2002.

The High Level Review of Training Packages (Schofield & McDonald 2004) has suggested that generic skills need to be ‘front and centre’. National managed research in this area suggests the need to share real practice in the teaching, learning and measurement of generic skills, including what has been learnt from trying to implement the Mayer key competencies. The research has also suggested the need to find ways to certify and record attainment of these competencies.
Drawing on the work of Chappell and Johnson 2003, Chappell et al. 2003 and Dickie et al. 2004, VET professionals in the future are likely to be working in a service characterised by:

• an increasingly diverse client base with equally diverse needs that includes groups of much younger clients (aged 15–19) as the age of compulsory education rises, as well as older clients (45+) and the traditional cohort of 19–25 year olds
• a more sophisticated client base that is accustomed to choice and has high expectations for the quality of learning and for products and services to align closely with personal or business objectives
• a more diverse range of delivery options including more delivery in workplaces and online, less in classrooms and formal settings
• multidisciplinary teams of staff, also working in partnership or collaboration across educational sectors or with external organisations
• greater numbers of part-time, casual or portfolio workers
• a broader range of products and services, including VET degrees, that are highly flexible and changing in response to market demand and innovation
• a lesser investment in bricks and mortar and a greater investment in human capital
• international demand for products and services which will also include competing and delivering in a global market.

A CEDEFOP project (PROFF – Professionalism of VET teachers for the future) authored by Cort et al. and published in 2004, noted the following contextual issues:

• the need to provide vocational education to new target groups
• changing paradigms in educational theory and the trend towards student centred approaches
• the increasing role of IT as an educational and management tool
• new developments in labour markets
• changes in national VET legislation
• organisational changes at the school level
• the impact of internationalisation.

Harris et al. (2005) noted that internal drivers included increased expectations for responsiveness, pressure for greater accountability, rethinking approaches to teaching and learning and access to learning opportunities, changing workloads, and student characteristics.

In particular, work levels seem to have intensified significantly for VET practitioners, with their work becoming more unbounded by time and space. Work intensification emerged as a common theme across all roles in the VET workforce (Dickie et al. 2004), with increased staff travel, responding to student emails, general administration, increased workloads of managers particularly for head teachers (or principal lecturers in the Western Australian context). The effects of this level of work intensity include stress, chronic tiredness and burnout. As suggested above it is often a result of the need to address compliance issues, rather than issues more directly associated with the quality of teaching and learning.
In relation to the changes in the VET sector itself and the way its staff work, the final report of the *Enhancing the capability of VET professionals* project (Dickie et al. 2004) suggests that there will be a change in products and expansion of options for training delivery, as well as changes in employment, work roles, team structures and places of work for VET professional staff. There will be increasing competition and increasing demand, and a globalisation of the training market.

In this environment, VET workforces will require an extensive range of capabilities and an increasingly sophisticated mix of generic, professional, leadership and management skills.

A range of research suggests that the need to deliver Training Packages has placed teachers and trainers in a pivotal role. This demands a greater degree of professional expertise and flexibility – in constructing suitable learning pathways, creating learner-centred learning environments, and facilitating effective, consistent teaching, learning and assessment. Some also believe many of the key ‘design’ skills to support these teaching and learning processes have either been forgotten or never learned.

In addition, providers will need organisational structures that allow them to meet the changing expectations of their clients: industry, individual employers and individual learners alike. They will need to be flexible and to work in new ways to maintain their capability and relevance. For example, some providers continue to be structured around traditional ways in which work was organised, but shifts in the boundaries and nature of work means that providers may not be well placed to address them.

Teachers, managers and leaders in vocational education and training need access to professional development to support them in responding to the dynamic environment in industry and their communities, and to contribute to improving the professionalism and professional standing of VET staff as individuals. Professional development needs to be used more strategically to build organisational capacity in order to enhance organisational effectiveness.

A key issue identified in recently completed research related to their professionalism is the need to improve practitioners’ understanding of, and skills in providing, quality teaching, learning and assessment experiences for their various clients. For example the study by CURVE and the University of Ballarat published by ANTA in 2003 (*Doing it well, doing it better*) has focused on a range of resources and processes which could help improve teaching and learning practice. This report notes that examples of quality teaching and learning practice can be characterised as having three distinct, interlinking features. These are:

- a learner-centred approach – with a focus on the needs and learning styles of learners with the teacher or trainer as facilitator
- workplace relevance – with a focus on practitioners with good industry links who are knowledgeable about work practices and able to contextualise learning experiences regardless of the context of learning
- flexibility and innovation in translating Training Packages into learning experiences – with a particular focus on customised and integrated learning and assessment strategies.

This report suggests, however, that what some practitioners are doing well continues to challenge others. A good deal of the research literature has pointed to the skills and knowledge gaps that many practitioners have when working in the Training Package environment. These are considered later in this review and in the body of our paper.
VET organisations and their capability

The issues to be considered here are:

• what organisational capability is, and how professional development contributes to developing that capability and meeting the future skill needs of its practitioners
• how VET providers can become better learning organisations so that skill needs are developed more seamlessly
• the role of leadership and management in maintaining, fostering and building capability, and issues related to improving the leadership and management of VET institutions.

Organisational capability is defined by Dickie et al. 2004 as the ability of an organisation to effectively meet its business objectives. The factors that contribute to capable organisations include the organisational culture and values, business processes and management systems, work organisation and the capability of individual employees.

Their report states that, in order to deliver agreed national priorities in *Shaping our Future: the National Strategy for VET 2004–2010*, VET providers, and the individuals within them, will need to have:

• A clear vision of their purpose, and how (or whether) the services that they offer are distinctive
• Values and behaviours which ensure that employment relationships within the organisation are characterised by confidence, trust and commitment of employees
• Organisational structures and systems that support a high standard of service delivery.

*(Dickie et al. 2004, p.35)*

Schofield and McDonald (2004) suggest that successful organisations of the future will need to be more agile and adaptable, less hierarchical and increasingly able to organise work through networks and collaborations. This has implications for the skills and knowledge practitioners will need in the future.

Poell (2004) describes a high-performance organisation in the ideal world of 2013, as:

> An organisation that treats its employees fairly and respects the environment from which it attracts its (knowledge) workers. That uses profit as a means to improve the life of its employees and the environment. That capitalises on the self-managing capacity of its workers not only within tight pre-set boundaries, but also as a means of encouraging actual creativity and innovation. *(Poell, 2004, p. 4)*

The capacity to transform is clearly positioned in the descriptions of the skill sets that the leaders of those organisations will need, and also in the skill sets of the staff. Leaders are needed who can influence followers to commit to difficult goals, and achieve more than previously expected. These leaders are not necessarily heroic or charismatic, but they do need to promote and create an intellectually stimulating and collaborative work environment. As Callan (2005a) suggests, their focus is best summarised by the catch cry “encouraging ordinary people to do extraordinary things”.

Given the inherent ‘messiness’ of the change process, the best laid plans are never sufficient for effective change, so successful organisations need staff at all levels who expect the unexpected, are flexible and feel that they have the capabilities to capitalise on new opportunities (Callan 2005a). This means that VET practitioners in the future must be tolerant of uncertainty, but also have the skills, knowledge and attributes which will help build their organisation’s capacity as a learning organisation.
Learning organisations are geared to the needs of their stakeholders and tap the knowledge of their members in the activities and direction-setting of the organisation. Members learn as they do, on an ongoing basis. The way the organisation develops and implements its strategies and systems becomes imbued with this process of ongoing development. Hence, the organisation itself acquires the capacity to be innovative and flexible. This approach assumes that workforce development activities are integrated with, not derived from, the policy, practice and culture of the organisation (ANTA 2004a). Recent research investigating whether TAFE organisations were "up to the task" and able to model learning organisations and life-long learning was inconclusive (Comley et al. 2002). However, results indicated that staff in public providers are generally not risk takers, and that their reluctance is due to a fear of criticism from management. As Callan (2004 & 2005a) argues, managers and leaders must be risk tolerant if staff are to innovate, to take more calculated risks and help the organisation to change and develop.

It can readily be argued that VET practitioners and professionals are knowledge workers because of their high skill/knowledge levels and their need to be flexible and innovative in meeting client’s needs. As such they may require different management strategies from those needed for managing other VET staff. Drucker outlined six major factors that determine knowledge-worker productivity (Drucker 1999):

- Focus on the right task
- Give knowledge workers autonomy
- Continue innovation as part of the knowledge worker’s responsibility
- Encourage continuous learning, and continuous teaching on the part of the knowledge worker
- Treat quality of output as important as quantity
- Value the knowledge worker as an asset rather than a cost.

Building on the work of Dickie et al. (2004); Dunphy et al. (2003); Shani & Docherty (2003) and Schofield & McDonald (2004), the Reframing the Future strategic review report (ANTA 2004a) points out that to assist VET providers in meeting their goals, a workforce development program and its associated program of professional development must be seen in a wider context, and needs to support providers to develop:

- a clear and strategic vision
- values and behaviours to ensure the confidence, trust and commitment of employees
- organisational structures and systems to support a high standard of delivery
- strong customer focus and a demand driven approach
- market intelligence and a rapid response to emerging markets
- emphasis on flexibility, adaptability and innovation
- intellectual and social capital used to strategic advantage through innovation
- programs to recruit the best talent
- programs to develop high levels of competence in individuals and groups
- learning designed around key organisational processes
- performance management linked to strategic goals
- strategies in place so that the organisation is less vulnerable to the loss of key individuals
- reflective inquiry as integral to learning around key processes
- organisational learning mechanisms compatible with the organisation
- workforce skills mix and diversity seen as integral and important aspects of strategies
- flexible workplace practices are strong features of workplace culture and contribute to work/life balance
- the organisation views itself as a member of the community, contributing to community betterment.
For the individual practitioner, they believe this needs to:

- include high quality learning products and services
- be designed to suit the diversity of employees and take into account their employment status, learning needs, job categories and levels, and availability
- integrate learning with meaningful work
- acknowledge the changing roles of VET practitioners and professionals.

Dickie et al. (2004) have identified suggested capabilities involved in a best practice approach to workforce development and planning:

- match workforce capability to employment trends and skill needs (at the national, organisational and perhaps even the work team levels)
- shape recruitment, retention and retraining strategies and initiatives to meet strategic and organisational objectives
- understand the motivation of current and prospective staff for entering, staying and leaving the VET workforce
- match initial training and professional development strategies and implementation to broad strategic objectives (at the national, State and provider levels)
- match job design and employment agreements to the current and future work performed by VET practitioners and professionals, while balancing the interests of employees and employer organisations
- provide a balance of tangible and intangible rewards to attract and retain staff, drawing on the identified motivations and aspirations of the current and prospective workforce
- employ recruitment and development strategies to address succession planning and retention issues, including to ensure a new generation of leaders and managers is available to VET providers
- incorporate strategies for managing and disseminating knowledge and information, including soft knowledge, within providers and across training, client and partner organisations
- build in evaluation measures that clearly demonstrate the return on investment from workforce development and management activity, including impact on client and staff satisfaction.

Thus the whole notion of what skills are needed now and in the future, and the best way to develop and sustain these practitioner skills, sits within a much broader context. However, despite this, research demonstrates that the VET approach to human resource management continues to be typically reactive and poorly planned (Dickie et al. 2004, Mulcahy 2003, Schofield 2002). As Dickie and her associates (2004) propose, there is a preoccupation with the past and the present. There is too much focus upon operational human resource (HR) issues (e.g. staff recruitment, selection, salaries, leave) and little or no work that adopts a future focus.

Clayton et al. (2005) have examined the issue of sustaining VET providers’ skill base in the face of its aging workforce, particularly in TAFE. They found that TAFE managers recognised knowledge loss in many forms and acknowledged that this ultimately affects organisational efficiency and achievement, whether the loss is of teaching experience, qualifications, course development knowledge, VET know-how, organisational knowledge, or industry connections and good-will. Several approaches to addressing this problem were identified, including recruitment, retention of key staff coupled with knowledge transfer process – including staff re-training, knowledge sharing and mentoring.
Strategic human resource practices need to focus more upon developing and supporting the achievement of business goals to improve organisational effectiveness (Noe et al. 2000). Central to achieving such business goals is the development and promotion of an organisational culture that attracts and retains people with the recognised capabilities and the knowledge and skills that will drive the future performance for an organisation (Callan 2005a). If issues in this broader context are not adequately addressed alongside the provision of appropriate professional development, chances are that the skills and knowledge practitioners need will not be properly developed and sustained.

**Skill sets for VET practitioners**

Rumsey and Associates (2002) characterise practitioners’ work as involving instruction and assessment, student support, technology, design and management skills as well as a set of personal skills. Personal skills are considered as critically important for dealing with ongoing change, participating in flexible learning delivery and undertaking self-directed professional development.

Corben and Thomson (2002) identified five clusters of attributes that teachers and trainers require:

- learner focus and responding to learners as individuals
- technical knowledge and maintaining its currency to enhance credibility with learners and other client groups, and to improve self-esteem and confidence
- expertise in teaching and learning methodologies and the shift, for some, from professional and technical expert to professional educator
- a belief in the value of education and training for themselves and others, including the joy they derive from influencing peoples’ lives in positive ways
- motivation to develop as a teacher through formal training, observation of colleagues, mentoring, personal reflection and professional development.

Other clusters of skill sets for practitioners are presented in Appendix 2, and in the body of the discussion paper.

**Skill sets for the broader set of VET professionals**

As noted by Dickie and her associates (2004), little attention has been given to the capabilities of non-teaching professional staff. These professionals include librarians, student support staff, counselling and careers staff, disability support officers, community liaison and curriculum development staff. There is evidence that:

- their role is expanding as students make greater use of e-learning and new technologies for enrolment and student administration
- support staff perceive themselves to be increasingly a major source of corporate knowledge and as key knowledge workers in the changing VET system (Callan 2005b). They expect to be increasingly involved in roles that require the completion of activities around giving advice, guidance and assistance to learners and staff; managing systems, equipment and resources that assist both groups; and working in ways that further the capacity of their organisations to meet government and industry standards and its corporate objectives.
Based upon an interview study of support staff in several public providers, Callan (2005b) identified (besides a general set of more generic capabilities) two specialist capability areas required for the broader range of VET professional staff:

- Learner support, including an ability to manage systems, equipment and resources that assist learners; and the provision of general pastoral care, including access to general advice and broader career advice
- Designing business systems, including an ability to learn about and to develop new systems and resources; and knowledge of new VET and industry requirements that will drive further enhancements to existing administrative systems.

The professional development of VET practitioners

The research and analysis conducted as part of the preparation of Rumsey’s paper ‘Shaping the VET practitioner for the future’ for the (then) Western Australian Department of Training confirms one of the findings of the McRae Report: that is, that there was an urgent need for a significant increase in professional development to support proposed strategies for the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment in VET in Western Australia. This gave rise to Rumsey’s work, and to the introduction of the Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy Group (TLASG) funding to support enhanced professional development in both public and private providers in Western Australia.

The ‘Enhancing the capability of the VET professional’ report (Dickie et al. 2004) notes that VET staff are not only the major asset but also the major expense to the VET budget – at the level of the registered training organisation (RTO), three dollars out of every five are spent on staff (Burke 2003). Despite changes in staffing structures, employment conditions and delivery of services, that overhead seems unlikely to reduce further in the near future. However, investment in the development of the people asset is relatively low by other industry standards – on average, an estimated 1–2% of payroll is spent on professional development.

For Dickie et al, this raises two central questions:

- Is the VET workforce made up of the right kind of people with the right mix of skills and attributes to meet the needs of clients, the expectations of the community and the demands of a changing economy?
- What mix of people, skills, experience and attributes will be required to meet future needs and how can they best be acquired, developed, retained and managed and at what cost?

Deborah Wilson Consulting Services (2003) suggested that the major targets for professional development are:

- part-time workplace trainers, assessors and mentors
- sessional and casual staff in registered training organisations
- entry level and inexperienced full-time trainers
- experienced vocational education and training professionals
- coordinators of vocational education and training
- managers of vocational education and training.
Types of professional development

Current approaches to professional development in the VET sector are largely designed to address priority skill needs such as those identified in Dickie et al. (2004), and employ a wide range of formal and informal strategies. They include:

- national professional development programs – Reframing the Future, Australian Flexible Learning Framework initiatives including LearnScope and Flexible Learning Leaders, and equity professional development projects
- State and Territory initiatives including training and development opportunities provided to State and Territory public servants, by State and Territory Education and Training Departments (such as that co-ordinated through the TLASG funding in Western Australia)
- development opportunities provided by industry advisory bodies and professional associations
- programs which school and university teaching staff are able to access through their employers, including State Education and Training Departments
- various initiatives undertaken by RTOs and the national association of private VET providers in Australia, ACPET.

A detailed examination of the broad spectrum of current initiatives at both national and state/territory levels is beyond the scope of this review. However, both the Australian Flexible Learning Framework and its associated professional development, and the Reframing the future program (ANTA 2004a), have recently been evaluated. Dickie et al. (2004) note that:

- At the national level, professional development activity has been largely focused on implementing aspects of the national training system, in particular Training Packages and competency-based training, flexible learning and delivery, and the AQTF. They suggest that the bulk of professional development at the national and State and Territory levels focuses on current system priorities such as the AQTF; language literacy and numeracy; action teaching and assessment, and professional development about the VET system, and is not very future focused. This view is supported by other research, such as that conducted into by Deborah Wilson Consulting Service 2003 and Forwood et al. 2001.
- In addition, at the RTO level, a lot of professional development activity relates to compliance, for example with the AQTF and other legislative requirements such as occupational health and safety (Harris et al. 2001).

However, it is worth noting that professional development initiatives have broadened from a focus on VET practitioners to supporting VET professionals more widely. This is evident in the new focus on managers and leaders, for example in Reframing the Future’s strategic and change management initiatives (Mitchell 2003b).

Communities of practice, networks and mentoring are becoming more widely used. For example, the Flexible Learning Leaders initiative actively supports and encourages champions or front runners as mentors for other staff, while Reframing the Future’s Communities of Practice initiative fosters ongoing use of specific purpose networks to advance implementation of the national training framework (I&J Management Services 2003, Mitchell 2003a).

New and emerging needs and interests are evident in projects such as the TAFE NSW pedagogy project, which aims to provide VET practitioners with the latest information about pedagogical practice, together with practical techniques for application (Dryen 2003).
The benefits of professional development
Deborah Wilson Consulting Services (2003) noted the following benefits of professional development programs in their strategic analysis of the professional development needs of the VET system in Queensland:

- improved quality of training delivered to vocational education and training students
- vocational education and training outcomes which will better meet industry needs
- closer and more effective networks at a regional level which allow professionals to access information, solve problems and access expertise much more effectively at a regional level in Queensland
- known information and professional development pathways for ‘new to sector’ individuals and organisations will reduce wasted time and resources and improve the skills and capabilities of those individuals and organisations more quickly
- substantial reduction in wasted resources which occurs through duplication of resources and activities, not being able to access existing resources and wasted time tracking down information and support services
- an increase in participation rates for Indigenous students and more effective training and employment outcomes for Indigenous students
- fewer problems experienced by students with a disability – resulting in more effective training and employment outcomes for students with a disability
- reduced burden on support services which currently react to the needs for students who experience problems – changing from a reactive approach of fixing problems once they have occurred to a proactive approach
- supporting a learning culture within the vocational education and training sector
- greatly increased access to professional development, information and expertise in regional areas of Queensland.

Enablers and barriers to reshaping VET practitioners
The barriers
Research attention related to professional development has concentrated on full-time practitioners – in particular, teachers and trainers. Little is really known about the mix of professional development that occurs across the spectrum of the VET workforce and how professional development is handled at the provider level on a whole-of-organisation basis.

More information is needed, especially about particular groups of staff. For example research by Stehlik et al. (2003) suggests that casual staff tend to miss out on professional development. The study found that these staff usually choose to become involved in professional development if opportunities are offered to them, the motivation for some being keeping their job or increasing their employability. Others see participation in staff development as just being ‘part of the job’, while some are focused on giving students the best possible outcomes.

It would be assumed that opportunities for involvement in staff development are equally available to all staff, regardless of employment status. However, as Stehlik et al. (2003) found, when funding is available, managers are more likely to give permanent and full-time staff priority for staff development.
In many providers, the employment of contract and casual staff is central to overall organisational goals. There is little or no evidence in the literature that contract and casual teachers require different knowledge, skills and attributes for their work from those required by permanent staff. It is therefore essential that they are not excluded from staff development opportunities.

In addition, Stehlik et al. found a significant proportion of professional development relies heavily on learning by doing, informal learning, networking with colleagues and using communities of practice. Opportunities exist to increase informal learning and integrate contract and casual staff into wider working groups.

Many staff embrace opportunities for development where it is available, while others avoid it. Finding the time, back-filling staff and who pays are all issues the system and providers are grappling with, but creative solutions need to be identified and documented, and key lessons drawn out.

A study investigating issues relating to professional standing and development in the non-teaching and non-executive VET staff in Victoria (Reed & Reed 2003) found that staff perceived management as crucial in establishing a learning culture, providing access to professional development and demonstrating recognition of achievements. They found access to professional development variable and the quality limited by:

- over-reliance on TAFE staff for delivery
- lack of specialised funded training for professionals
- too much focus on organisational rather than individual needs and
- a lack of networking opportunities.

Apart from lack of management support, other barriers to participation in professional development identified included the following:

- workloads or work responsibilities that could not be readily transferred to others (e.g. student counsellors’ case loads)
- family unfriendly scheduling
- lack of staff backfill or time release
- poor recognition of the need for professionals to maintain their industry standing
- bias towards teaching in professional development programs
- a focus on organisational policies, procedures and systems in professional development programs
- reliance on internal staff training calendars and
- reliance on TAFE staff rather than external experts.

Staff also commented that they could see no clear career path outside teaching and that professional development lacked formal planning and co-ordination.

Work in Queensland by Deborah Wilson Consulting Services in 2003 suggests that those barriers which have a high impact on participation in professional development are:

- distance and logistical barriers
- cost and time, and other constraints on the ability to release staff to attend professional development
- motivation – the lack of individual commitment and mutual obligation (employer and employee) to support professional development
availability factors, including the lack of locally delivered professional development
• quality factors: while important topics are being covered, existing professional development strategies are not addressing all of the current needs or the diversity of needs as they change over time
• lack of clear career paths for teaching and non-teaching staff in vocational educational training
• a lack of ‘just in time’ access to professional development to meet needs as and when they arise.

Work by McNickle and Cameron (2003) and Palmieri (2003) examined human resource (HR) issues in relation to addressing more flexible approaches to delivery in TAFE providers. They note that reforms to how practitioners work have been facilitated by professional development activities, but other changes in human resource practices are also needed.

They found that current human resources and the wider organisational environment and context (awards, performance indicators, funding models etc.) do not prohibit more flexible ways of working, but do make it more difficult. Policies and practices have not kept pace with the new ways in which many VET practitioners are working. Practitioners need to expend energy they can ill afford in order to work around barriers. Addressing problems associated of job design, workload and performance management and succession planning is becoming a matter of increasing urgency. The research concluded that there is a plethora of effective solutions at the operational level within public TAFE providers that now need to be examined seriously to inform systemic human resource policy development. (No research has yet been conducted on approaches used in private, enterprise and community-based providers.)

The enablers
According to Deborah Wilson Consulting Services (2003), key enablers for promoting effective professional development include:
• encouraging greater involvement in the ownership of professional development. This can be supported by local identification of needs and flexibility in providing access to professional development
• effectively using networks or communities of practice to play a key role in identifying needs and delivering relevant professional development. Communities of practice cover networks of expertise, access to local resources as well as developing industry links
• providing relevant types of professional development programs. This includes ‘excellence program’, allowing high quality professional development to be delivered in many regional centres for different providers as well as providing short, sharp, relevant updates. Coordinated professional development for industry currency can meet the needs of small RTOs and other providers
• providing better access to information on professional development and better communication and marketing of professional development. A professional development calendar and regular updates will deliver significant value
• developing stronger links with industry to improve professional development opportunities covering industry currency
• establishing a reference group or forum to regularly discuss and review professional development activities
• effectively tracking, reporting and evaluating professional development activities to help monitor changing demands and identify successful professional development strategies.
The professional training needs of VET practitioners

In considering training needs, Rumsey (2002) developed a skills matrix involving six categories:
- instruction and assessment
- personal skills
- student support skills
- education and teaching skills
- design skills
- management skills.

He also identified a range of critical gaps in current skills:
- flexible delivery
- online learning
- competency-based assessment and criterion-referenced graded assessment
- up-to-date industry skills and knowledge
- time management
- change skills – flexibility and innovation
- managing information and knowledge
- partnerships and collaboration
- supporting students
- information technology and computer based presentation
- knowledge of vocational education and training development
- compliance with the Australian Quality Training Framework
- current and emerging industry developments.

In their Queensland review, Deborah Wilson Consulting Services identified 5 focus areas:
- working with a diverse client base – students, employers and the VET network
- training system knowledge
- teaching and learning management, and assessment skills
- industry currency and career pathways
- organisation capability building.

They found that the professional development priorities considered important for all audiences were:
- professional development covering life skills and employability skills
- professional development to meet the needs of Indigenous students
- professional development to meet the needs of students with a disability
- professional development for assessment skills
- partnering skills to develop stronger links within the sector and with industry and the community
- professional development covering links with industry and industry training advisory bodies
- professional development covering industry needs and priorities for training
- options for accessing industry knowledge and practices
- vocational education and training career pathways
- ‘new to sector’ professional development pathways.
In addition, the following represented high priorities for public providers, (both small and large) private providers and community-based providers:

- communication and interaction, in particular customer service skills
- human interaction skills
- working with different client groups
- numeracy and literacy
- overseas students
- technology skills
- analysis and planning
- building the skill base of Certificate IV qualified teachers and trainers
- facilitating career path development by recognising existing skills, developing the skills needed in the Cert IV and further professional development.

Callan (2005a) points to a number of recent reports that build upon our understanding of the capabilities required of practitioners to operate in these multiple contexts that require a mix of industry specific, as well as more pedagogical, capabilities. In terms of skills in integration as well as innovation, Mitchell and his associates (2003) provide numerous examples of the creativity of leading VET practitioners, and their capabilities around integration, innovation and clever assessment devices.

However, in viewing practitioner capabilities as a whole, Schofield (2002) is concerned that practitioners are being recruited in subject areas that are in demand now, but will not necessarily be in demand in the future. A new focus is required upon capacity building among practitioners that emphasises quality, creativity, professional judgment and growth rather than simply compliance (Schofield & McDonald, 2004).

In a recent review, Callan (2005b) identified five required capability areas for VET practitioners:

- expertise in teaching and learning (e.g. demonstrates an understanding of a range of learning theories and techniques that inform practice, adapts learning and teaching strategies to suit individual students and learners)
- flexible delivery and assessment (e.g. able to factor on-site assessment to suit the systems of the workplace, has knowledge and skills in forms of flexible delivery, including distances, blended, on-line or work-based learning)
- learner support (e.g. able to customise learning resources for groups and personalise for individuals, knowledge of a range of behaviour management strategies for responding with difficult people)
- industry currency (e.g. demonstrates a technical expertise in their subject area, able to partner with industry)
- budgeting and planning (e.g. understands the nature of organisation budgets and funding, formulates with others business and marketing plans to support new training initiatives).
In summary

Overall, Dickie et al. (2004) suggest that to build provider capability and address practitioner skill development needs in the future the VET sector and its providers need to:

• continue to extend what has already been learned, and provide a coordination and knowledge sharing function to enable VET providers, individuals and jurisdictions to share good practice
• continue to broaden engagement and participation, including among part-time, casual and sessional staff, support staff, and staff of non-TAFE providers
• increase investment in workforce development initiatives, based on a quantitative and qualitative understanding of capability requirements and development needs
• prioritise investment according to where it is most needed
• measure returns on investment in development initiatives, for individuals, teams, providers, clients and the VET system, in order to continue to build the business case for investment in developing the workforce.
Appendix 2: Skill sets for VET practitioners

Each category of VET practitioner requires distinctive combinations of skills and knowledge. These are described in more detail in Section 3 of Rumsey’s paper but can be grouped under six basic categories:

- Instruction and assessment skills
- Personal skills
- Student support skills
- Educational technology skills
- Design skills
- Management skills.

Rumsey also drew on the competencies associated with VET practitioner roles within human resource development identified in Nelson (1998) and the management and leadership framework developed by Callan (2001). Another draft leadership capability framework to assist leadership development in the Victorian TAFE sector has since been developed by Foley and Conole (2003). Western Australia has developed its own set of capabilities for its senior and middle managers in RTOs, and for its educational leaders (see the publication Professional development framework 2005/2006 for Vocational Education and Training in Western Australia (DET 2005).

There was an increasing importance placed on ‘personal or soft skills’ in dealing with the extensive changes occurring within the VET system, that is – skills for dealing with ongoing change, conducting and participating in flexible delivery learning programs and undertaking self-directed professional development.

Rumsey’s six skill categories are presented in detail below:

Instruction and assessment skills

- Classroom teaching methods
- Workplace-based training, including structured instruction, mentoring, coaching etc.
- Managing and participating in flexible learning programs/delivery strategies, including understanding of and capacity to deliver/support the various learning options within flexible delivery
- Managing on-line learning
- Assisting other VET practitioners
- Providing instruction within partnership/contract arrangements
- Coaching and mentoring
- Industry skills and knowledge relevant to area of delivery/assessment (including current and emerging systems, processes and technologies)
- Planning for assessment
- Conducting competency-based assessment in a VET institution, in a workplace, in a school
- Conducting (criterion-referenced) graded assessment
- Conducting recognition processes (RPL/RCC)
- Conducting formative assessment
- Maintaining inclusiveness in teaching/learning/assessment – i.e. responding to differing student needs
- Knowledge and understanding of adult learning principles
Personal skills
- Innovating in teaching/assessment/VET management/professional development etc
- Networking with others – including other VET practitioners, industry contacts, ITABs
- Communicating with others – including active listening
- Managing time
- Self-directed learning (own professional development)
- Meta-cognitive skills for dealing with change – including reflecting, conceiving, interpreting, evaluating, problem solving, analysing, hypothesising etc
- Accessing and exploiting institutional staff development/formal training opportunities
- Participating within teams/partnerships/collaborative training/assessment arrangements
- Negotiating
- Understanding and managing attitudes
- Being critical
- Being responsive/flexible
- Working collaboratively
- Working safely
- Working in accordance with relevant state/national/international regulations
- Managing information such as sourcing, sorting and interpreting information
- Knowledge management
- Consultancy skills

Student support skills
- Counselling
- Advising/explaining
- Resolving conflicts
- Career guidance
- Motivating
- Teaching students ‘how to learn’

Technology skills
- Using information technology in VET activities
- Using computers to support classroom delivery, such as:
  - Using Powerpoint presentation software
  - Operating computer projection equipment
  - Using computers/communications systems within on-line learning
  - Using computers/communications systems to manage flexible delivery
  - Using the Internet effectively – e.g. chat rooms, web-searching, email, internet conferencing etc.

Design skills
- Developing training resources
- Developing assessment resources
- Designing support materials for on-line learning
- Assisting in the design of multimedia learning resources
- Unpacking Training Packages to develop training programs, instructional resources and assessment/recognition materials
- Assisting in the design of VET management systems
- Assisting in the design of VET quality management processes
Management skills

- Organising training, learning, assessment and VET resource management activities
- Planning training, learning, assessment and VET resource management activities
- Reviewing training, learning, assessment and VET resource management activities
- Project management
- Managing quality of training, learning and assessment activities
- Supervising training, learning and assessment activities
- Team leading
- Managing partnership arrangements
- Contract management (within VET partnership/collaborative/sub-contracting arrangements)
- Conducting continuous improvement of training, learning, assessment and VET resource management activities
- Monitoring and reporting on compliance – e.g. AQTF.

More recently, the *Enhancing the capability of the VET professional* project (Dickie et al. 2004) draws the following clusters from across the literature and synthesise the capabilities and skills discussed in detail in material reviewed:

- **Pedagogical expertise.** This includes the capacity to adapt learning and teaching strategies to suit individual students, pedagogical understanding and access to a range of learning theories and techniques. Increasingly it will also involve understanding and applying new pedagogical approaches, such as those identified in the TAFE NSW pedagogy project – including coaching, mentoring, and facilitating learner-centred, self-directed learning, and learning at work (CURVE and University of Ballarat 2003; Dryen 2003)

- **Learner focus.** Some studies identify learner focus as a specific capability. This includes the ability to promote and support self-directed learning, as well as to cater for individual learning differences, and enable lifelong learning (Corben and Thomson 2001). However, a learner-focused approach is not the same as learner-centred learning in which the VET practitioner is one of a range of resources available to the student (Dryen 2003)

- **Industry currency.** Vocational expertise in the practitioner’s subject area is as critical as pedagogical expertise. This is particularly important as it is highly valued by employers and students alike. However, demand for generic skills among employers means that practitioners need to be able to balance delivery of technical and industry specific skills with generic employability skills

- **Use of technology.** This covers knowledge and expertise in using new and emerging technologies, in particular to stay in touch with and advise students, as well as for flexible delivery. These skills are also important to enable practitioners to stay in touch with each other, including via communities of practice and other networks, and can help to combat the isolation many teachers and trainers experience

- **Client focus.** This involves brokering and relationship-building skills, to enable teachers and trainers to provide advice to clients (including students and enterprises), establish and maintain relationships, network with industry, develop partnerships, customise training and delivery to meet client needs, and evaluate and monitor outcomes

- **VET system expertise.** This includes working with Training Packages and the AQTF, applying competency-based assessment, RPL, and emerging requirements such as employability skills and client focus
• **Personal qualities and attributes.** Personal attributes are identified as being absolutely critical for all VET practitioners. However, there is some variation in the way these are defined by different authors. For example, Corben and Thomson (2001) identify a passion for learning and teaching as a key aptitude, together with communication skills, and a commitment to self-development. Rumsey (2002) suggests that these attributes include capacity to deal with change, self-directed learning, managing time and managing knowledge.

Dickie et al. (2004) also identified the need for a broader range of skills for all VET practitioners, leaders and managers and support staff, such as:

- ability to adapt to change and cope with uncertainty
- client-focus skills
- management and leadership capabilities
- coaching, mentoring and networking skills
- information and communication technologies (ITC)
- knowledge work capabilities, i.e. the ability to access, create and use knowledge to add value to the business they are in.

There was also a need for all staff to:

- continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge
- self-manage their own careers and development as they move across RTOs and within industry
- accommodate identity shifts as they move across roles and organisations
- learn to work in teams, across organisations and within networks
- be prepared for more fragmented and specialised roles, such as in assessment.

and more specifically:

- *For those directly involved in delivery* – pedagogical expertise, learner focus and industry currency knowledge and skills
- *For managers and leaders* – transformative leadership which is the ability to build and communicate a vision and lead staff
- *For support staff* – the skills to become more directly involved in delivery and the greater capacity to work with clients.

In Scotland the Scottish Further Education Unit (2004) identified the following key priority staff development needs:

- embedding legislative competencies with regard to, for example, race relations and disability, into everyday working practices and the improvement of staff attitudes towards these issues
- embedding ICT in learning and teaching activities
- promoting new approaches to learning and teaching
- facilitating technical/subject matter update
- development of management/leadership skills
- staff development tailored to meet the needs of support staff.

In Europe, a CEDEFOP project (*PROFF – Professionalism of VET teachers for the future*) produced by Cort et al. and published in 2004 noted teachers need to acquire and teacher training to provide:

- new pedagogical skills in line with the learner-centred approach of modern pedagogical theory and the on-the-job learning techniques now being offered to trainees.
• up-to-date vocational skills related to modern technologies and work practices
• awareness of the needs of business and employers
• skills for team working and networking
• managerial, organisational and communications skills.

The ‘Doing it well, doing it better’ report (CURVE and the University of Ballarat 2003) identified the following areas for resource development to support the professional development of VET practitioners:

**Working with Training Packages – translating to suit context**
- Understanding the VET context
- Interpreting Training Packages
- Unpacking Training Packages
- Translating into learning experiences for different training contexts, including off job training environments
- Customising to meet local industry needs

**Catering for individual learner differences**
- Acknowledging cultural diversity in training
- Understanding and managing diverse groups of learners
- Motivating learners
- Enhancing learner autonomy
- Negotiated learning and learning contracts

**Learning theories – implications for VET**
- How learners learn
- Adult learning principles
- Learning styles
- Problem-based approaches
- Project-based learning

**Teaching skills – particularly constructivist approaches and ways of addressing underpinning knowledge and higher order cognitive skills**
- Facilitation skills, including managing group dynamics
- Presentation skills
- Integrating skills, knowledge and attitudes
- Mentoring

**Generic skills development – approaches and models**
- Understanding, incorporating and modelling generic skills
- How to address language and literacy issues in VET teaching and learning

**Flexible approaches to learning and assessment**
- Flexible delivery and assessment
- Blended approaches
- Using and managing learning technologies
Work based learning – approaches and models

• Collaborating with industry
• Negotiating learning experiences with industry
• Conducting training needs analysis
• Developing portfolios
• Developing a repertoire of strategies and options for learning in the workplace
• Using simulation in learning and assessment
• Accessing and modifying learning resources

Assessment – ways to make assessment an integral part of the learning process, with attention to RPL, valid assessment tools and exemplars

• Integrating learning and assessment
• Assessing Key Competencies and generic skills
• Developing and assessing higher order cognitive skills
• Collaborative and negotiated assessment.

They recommended that the provision of any ‘product’ resources be accompanied by mechanisms that engage practitioners in an interactive way. These include:

• networking
• mentoring by designated champions
• communities of practice
• action learning
• formal professional development.

Most recently, Mitchell et al. in a forthcoming publication from NCVER, asked the question: What skills do VET practitioners need to service a multitude of client needs? In analysing the data, they formed a picture of a new VET practitioner who has a sophisticated understanding of how adults learn in different ways and in different settings, and of how skill development underpins business outcomes for enterprises and career development for individuals. Their work shows that these practitioners:

• view individual students as lifelong learners on career pathways
• respect the business risks and pressures of enterprise clients
• appreciate that enterprises need skills to achieve business outcomes
• understand links between training, human resource and workforce development
• function effectively within supply chains and skill ecosystems
• exercise professional judgment in delivery and assessment
• develop and sustain long-term relationships with clients
• participate within a team to access colleagues’ specialist skills
• tap into wider networks for information and resources
• understand the value of accessing and applying industry research
• contribute to the development of innovative products and services
• commit to achieving and maintaining the quality of the profession
• improve the tools and frameworks of professional practice
• update technical skills and industry-specific knowledge
• cope with complexities and uncertainties about industry skill demands.
A range of work from this project will be published in the early part of 2006. It is part of a broader body of work concluding at the end of 2006 whose purpose is to support VET providers in building their capability for the future by:

- developing a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the changing VET workplace and the capacity of VET providers to respond to the increasingly complex and changing demands of clients
- critically analysing key management, leadership, human resources and industrial relations practices and their applicability for VET providers
- investigating cutting edge practices in VET that support increased quality, agility and responsiveness
- examining the inter-relationships between the development of people, practices and cultures and their impact on the capability of VET providers.

It will be important that the Department, providers and practitioners in Western Australia continue to monitor this body of work as it emerges. It can be accessed at http://www.consortiumresearchprogram.net.au
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<td>Advanced Skills Lecturer 2, Pilbara TAFE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ray Tuckey</td>
<td>Principal Lecturer, TAFE PD Strategy Network member, Great Southern TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsley</td>
<td>Director of Training Services, Maritime Studies, Challenger TAFE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waterhouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-survey</td>
<td>20% response rate from the original Rumsey list (n=17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Also includes responses from a group of lecturers from Central TAFE (n = 6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>