PROWLING THE JUNGLE IN A POST-BRADLEY WORLD:
AN INDUSTRY VIEW OF INNOVATIVE AND
HIGH-PERFORMING INSTITUTES

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FULL PAPER

Introduction

While many outcomes may result from Australians who commence courses through TAFE and other registered training organisations (RTOs), not all of these outcomes are as yet fully understood. Furthermore, from an industry perspective, it is apparent that there is sufficient capacity for some of these outcomes to be improved.

Essentially, the key indicators of a successful training organisation (as identified by industry) are its capacity to improve the job and career prospects of the students commencing—and, ideally, completing—its courses. This may include developing existing workers’ capabilities for future promotion or enhancing the career prospects of school students undertaking a VET in Schools (VETiS) program.

This paper will briefly describe the service industries’ view through the prism of a selection of four recent and current projects undertaken by Service Skills Australia. The foci these projects comprise issues of:

1. Employment as the outcome of VET
2. Productivity and its relationship to education and training
3. Completion rates of VET qualifications, and
4. Workforce development for VET practitioners.

Some issues for industry

Service Skills Australia’s VETiS project aims to provide clear guidance and resources in order to maximise the career pathways and employment outcomes for youth partaking in VETiS programs relating to the services industries. Feedback from our initial consultation process—with industry peak bodies, enterprises, Boards of Studies and State Training Authorities—has emphasised a need to move ‘kids into jobs’, to dissect the policy and implementation landscape in relation to the position of industry, and to promote VETiS good practice. While this places the spotlight on employment as the direct measure of success, it also draws attention to concerns of industry engagement and pedagogical practice.

Looking at education and training from the perspective of how it contributes towards the improvements in productivity, Service Skills Australia (SSA) is currently working with the Centre for Economics in Education and Training (CEET) at Monash University. In addition to focusing on labour and skills forecasting for the service industries, this project examines the nature and measure of productivity in these industries. To date, this piece is challenging a number of assumptions held about measuring productivity in a service industries context.
Ultimately, it is the belief of SSA that any such measurement must take into account the industries’ educational investment in its human capital as skills acquisition (alongside workforce participation) holds an important key to developments in national productivity.

SSA has also engaged John Mitchell and Associates to investigate completion rates of service industry VET qualifications. Due for completion in early 2011, this project has commenced on a pilot involving three RTOs\(^1\) that deliver services to the retail industry. Though fraught with complexity, SSA believes that the issue of completion rates can be adequately solved in a very practical way through an improved and more detailed measurement of non-completions (i.e. the reasons why people do not complete the qualifications they commenced).

Finally, there is the issue of developing the VET workforce of trainers and assessors. This was covered in 2009 as part of a three-stage project (The New Deal) that sought to discover ways to improve quality outcomes from VET for the service industries. Undertaken by the University of Ballarat, this piece found the defining characteristics of high-performing VET providers to be essentially dependent on RTOs investing in developing their VET practitioners—both in terms of fostering industry currency and driving a culture of pedagogical expertise.

**Effective workforce = effective RTOs**

As per *The New Deal* (2009: 85-86), the attributes of effective VET teachers and trainers may be grouped into three overarching areas:

1. Commitment to learning, embodied by:
   - Teaching/training delivery skills and assessment skills
   - Attention to learners’ needs
   - Disposition to learn and to help colleagues learn

2. Commitment to communication, embodied by:
   - Being seen as empathetic, approachable, flexible and adaptable
   - Management/organisational skills
   - Thorough understanding of VET and an ability to interpret the system for a variety of audiences

3. Commitment to industry, embodied by:
   - Industry technical skills
   - Having passion for the industry.

Conveniently, the RTOs that appeared to have an effective VET workforce already in place were identified as possessing traits conducive to similar groupings:

1. Commitment to learning, embodied by:
   - A strong individual/champion/team encouraging high quality among teachers
   - Good learning resources

2. Commitment to communication, embodied by:
   - Regular team meetings

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\(^1\) For diversity, these comprised one public RTO (i.e. TAFE), one private RTO and one enterprise RTO.
- Tight performance management and quality systems

3. Commitment to industry, embodied by:
   - Managers liaising with industry
   - Culture of passion for the industry among teachers

4. Commitment to innovation, namely a culture that encourages innovation and risk-taking (within certain parameters).

If communication and learning are to be understood as integral aspects of pedagogy (at least in this context), then this analysis can be seen to produce some overlap with a recent news article on a new model business school that is successfully maintaining industry relevance while investing in research and teaching (Dodgson 2010). The three important lessons for education identified in this piece are:

1. Partnerships that encourage businesses to fund and support research and training
2. Actively engaging researchers to address concerns confronting business and society
3. Developing expertise in innovation and entrepreneurship.

**Summary and conclusions**

High-performing institutes are essentially characterised by high-performing practitioners who, themselves, are partly of such quality because it is being consistently encouraged and developed by the institutes for which they work. These areas that require consistent development may be boiled down to industry engagement and pedagogical engagement (SSA 2009: 88).

Industry engagement encompasses keeping up-to-date with industry skills and developments, understanding the as a whole (not just one part of it), understanding how companies organise their business, and being aware of global industry and economic trends.

On the other hand, pedagogical engagement involves attention to good delivery and student learning, evaluation of teaching from students and industry, benchmarking against other practitioners, professional development, and encouraging a collegial environment of improving practice collectively.

Innovation, too, requires active and consistent engagement. Ultimately though, the measures of an institute’s success will be governed by its ability to model high standards, provide creative direction and enhance professional practice.

**REFERENCES**
