AQTF Quality Indicator Review
(VTA/TDA Consultation)

Date: 24 September 2010  Time: 9.30 – 11.30am  Place: Boardroom, Level 4, 478 Albert Street, East Melbourne

Notes of Meeting

Attendees
Jenny Smith (NCVER), Adrian Ong (NCVER), Monica Moss (NCVER), Sandip Rattan (AMES), Barry Small (BRIT), John Pittman (Box Hill), Peter Harrison (Chisholm), Vikki Leggett (Chisholm), Peter Watson (GOTAFILE), Phil Murphy (Kangan), Tim Symons (Kangan Institute), Robyn Adams (RMIT), Laurie Armstrong (RMIT), Keri Bailey (Swinburne), Nita Schultz (VTA)

Apologies
Pam Caven (TDA), Wodonga TAFE, Linda Brown (Swinburne), Joe Piper (South West TAFE), Vicki Hildebrand (CAE), Amanda Hennessey (South West TAFE), Sandra Nestor (Central Gippsland)

Welcome
Nita Schultz welcomed everyone on behalf of TDA and Vic TAFE Association. Participants introduced themselves.

NCVER asked to note that participants are all from Victorian public TAFE providers and therefore their comments are offered in the Victorian context.

Introduction
Jenny Smith provided background information and reporting arrangements for the Review. The objectives of the project were outlined and the goals of this consultation.

It was agreed that notes taken of the consultation by NCVER would be distributed to participants through Nita Schultz for review and additional comments.

It was agreed to facilitate discussion, each of the three Quality Indicators would be discussed in turn.

Employer Satisfaction Quality Indicator

- The quality indicator as a standalone survey tool does not provide the depth and breadth of information needed by TAFE from employers.

- The time/cost associated with collecting data from employer cohort is high as most employers do not provide email contact details and the return rate from paper-based or online survey requests is very low. Phone follow-up and manual completion of surveys followed by manual entry of data is time consuming. The administrative burden was noted by both metropolitan and regional providers.

- There was discussion regarding the definition of ‘employer’ and the likelihood of inconsistent approaches in collecting the data between providers and the outcome of comparing apples with oranges.

- Noted that there are distinct employer groups – mainly apprentice employers and others. Described as ‘managed’ employers and ‘unmanaged’ employers. The data
may skew towards apprentice employers and not be reflective of other employers’ views.

- Three participating organisations noted a very useful outcome of collecting the data was highlighting the strengths/weaknesses of customer relations and management systems.

- The current student management system used by all regional TAFEs and some metropolitan TAFEs in Victoria is unable to provide an employer contact list that meets the needs for collecting data from the employer cohort. As a result providers have either enlisted department support to isolate a representative employer cohort, however this requires the support of a large number of people and is time consuming as well as possibly biased. Alternatively a considerable amount of time is spent working with existing SMS data to create a list that is representative and accurate. Participants noted that typically where TAFEs engage with large organisations, the TAFE database includes as the primary contact the HR Dept. It is unlikely the TAFE provider would have the name of the immediate supervisor of an apprentice. If the HR dept. completed the survey the results may be less reliable than if the immediate supervisor completed the survey. There is a degree of trust in these instances that the right person will complete the survey. It is not realistic for TAFE providers to have to seek out the right person in these instances.

- Participants commented that an employer’s ability to give useful feedback varies considerably and that equal value is attributed to each response when in fact they are not equal.

- Issues surrounding the use of a 4 point Likert scale without scope for an ‘unknown’ or ‘not applicable’ response. Participants from Kangan were strongly critical of this approach. Examples given where students are not campus based and therefore don’t use Institute facilities, equipment or student services. Some participants were of the view that only the ‘Strongly Agree’ responses can be taken to truly reflect positive views of the respondent. Request that the scale be reconsidered.

- The survey would be improved if the profile of the employer could be captured. Without knowing the profile it is difficult for the provider to interpret meaning for business improvement.

- Considering the time, effort and cost associated with meeting compliance requirement participants have been frustrated by the lack of feedback on the Quality Indicators reports and process and no ability to benchmark results. *(Nb: this comment relates broadly across all Quality Indicators not just the Employer Satisfaction Quality Indicator)*

**Learner Engagement Quality Indicator**

- Mixed views from participants on the survey tool and the outcomes of the survey of learner engagement.

- There is confusion regarding capabilities to use sampling methodologies.

- The quality indicators as a standalone survey tool do not provide the depth and breadth of information needed by TAFE from learners. To address this TAFEs either risk over surveying students or as in South West TAFE trying to merge the QI tools with internal survey systems which is proving challenging and time consuming.
• Help Desk – Comments that feedback was not given at the time of request which in all instances resulted in downtime. In almost all cases the help desk personnel were unable to answer queries and when forwarded on, an adequate response was not always guaranteed. One comment cited poor customer service by ACER.

• Training – South West TAFE as a rural and remote training provider found the level of support and training unsatisfactory. The training provided early in 2009 only gave an overview of the program and did not provide the depth of information or discussion needed to return to the workplace with the confidence to manage the process and technology. To fully utilize the survey results additional training and support was/is needed. The opportunity to network with other TAFE organisations would be beneficial as on the occasions training (provided by private training organisations) was accessed private providers were well represented with few TAFE organisations available for networking.

• Student Management Systems – As noted by South West TAFE, the QLS student management system currently used by the majority of TAFEs in Victoria is unable to provide an accurate student contact list. This resulted in percentage return rates being dramatically inaccurate as QLS gives multiple student references. Greater consideration needs to be given to aligning the data collection requirements with SMS at the state/territory level.

Competency Completion Quality Indicator

• As data is already collected on the AVETMISS system the costs associated with producing the reports is minimal. The reports are easy to read.

• Participants questioned the value of this indicator to provide anything useful and in addition to what is already available.

• Completion cannot always be directly linked to a quality learner experience. Examples given where learners completion is linked to licencing requirements in their employment or salary/wage progression. Just because they completed does not guarantee quality of experience.

• The relationship between the teacher and the student is the key to quality outcomes. Quality outcomes require investment in teachers through qualifications and continuous professional development

General comments

• Criticisms of the order of questions that lack continuity and would be better grouped into themes.

• Criticism of the need to submit the data in the single page report.

• Some students (eg ESL) lacked the literacy to complete the survey unassisted. This assistance added to the costs of meeting the requirements to collect and report data.

• Old data cannot be retained as the system requires it is cleaned out to input new data. As consequence valuable information is lost that could be used for time series comparisons.

• Information needed if SMART is not used and feedback needed that the data has been received.

• Providers do not know when, how or to whom reports on actions plans for improvement are to be made.
Concerns the flaws in the survey instruments will compromise benchmarking. Publishing the data in any form would result in benchmarking of data that is not collected using the same methodology so any comparisons would be inaccurate.

Course categories/fields of training used to calculate response rates are university categories and are not representative of VET and are not understood by students and not necessarily applicable to students.

Ongoing concerns about how the data will be used for benchmarking purposes. VRQA continue to state that the main purpose is for quality improvement for our own organisation and avoid discussion about other uses.

If providers are responsible for managing surveys the rigor and reliability of the outcomes can be compromised.

It is imperative that any changed processes must be communicated with maximum advance notice and lead-time for implementation.

South West TAFE noted via email that since the introduction of the QI survey SWTAFE has had to adjust internal survey frequency to avoid over surveying staff and students.

Regional providers will also be challenged in surveying the same industries and businesses on an annual basis. The current difficulties experienced in gathering data from industry will be increased if the same customers have to be surveyed annually.

Improvements to Quality Indicators

- More opportunity for training customised to users needs.
- Improved and increased communication from ACER / VRQA.
- Timely and knowledgeable feedback from the helpdesk
- Networking opportunities with 'like organisation'
- If the data is to be published or benchmarked in anyway a level playing field must be established.
- Data provided for providers’ benchmarking purposes.
- Review of the Likert scale to include ‘Not applicable’.

Where to from here?

Jenny Smith advised that a Quality Indicator Questionnaire will be available for select RTOs. NCVER will seek feedback regarding VTA/TDA input to review.

Outcomes of consultations will be incorporated into a report to National Quality Council.

VTA to request examples of other surveys/tools and forward to NCVER. (Nb: request sent 30 Sept 2010 for feedback to VTA by Oct 15, 2010)

VTA to collect indicative costs to implement Quality Indicators processes. (Nb: request sent 30 Sept 2010 for feedback to VTA by Oct 15, 2010)