

*PwC's
Skills for
Australia:
TAFE Directors
Australia
Convention
2016*

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September 2016

What kind of TAFE workforce will be needed to be produce graduates with skills needed for jobs of the 21st century?

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Through our work as a Skills Service Organisation we have identified skills required to enable a flexible and skilled workforce in VET and adapt to the trends shaping the sector.

The skills listed below are already cultivated to varying extents in the VET sector, however our research, consultations with Education Industry Reference Committee members and Foundation Skills subject matter experts, and responses to the PwC's Skills for Australia Industry Voice Survey suggest that developing the following skills should be prioritised in the VET workforce.

Delivering quality training

Quality training will underpin the success of the VET system, ensuring learners acquire skills needed to excel in the workplace and find fulfilling careers.

Recent adverse publicity has led to an undermining of public confidence in VET and we need to rebuild the reputation and brand of VET. Quality has to be the overriding pillar of this approach.

The recent strengthening of the current Certificate IV qualification to include an assessment unit has caused some angst, but is one way of making sure the trainers and assessors are skilled at assessment design and understand how assessment is linked to training.

The assessment of learners in VET is currently under review following a number of Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) audits that identified systemic issues with the assessment of VET learners, allowing inadequately skilled VET teachers and practitioners to 'slip through the cracks'.

Delivering enterprise skills training

It is estimated that 44 per cent of Australian jobs (5.2 million) are at high risk of automation over the next two decades. This drives demand for enterprise skills in the workforce which cannot be replicated by machinery, such as critical thinking, interpersonal skills and creativity.

Recent consultation with subject matter experts in foundation skills has shown that training in enterprise skills is more effective when contextualised to learners' vocational backgrounds. The need for skills in contextualising training will be further heightened with the rise of higher apprenticeships and future plans to streamline units of competency across training packages.

This is a skill that not all VET practitioners currently have. It will be critical in future that these skills are developed – hence the need for a suite of qualifications that provide a professional development pathway in the sector

Undertaking professional development throughout a career in VET

Professional development is a core component of workforce development and will be critical to maintaining quality of teaching and assessment in the VET sector. Professional development includes maintaining up to date industry knowledge through practical experience and applied research, supporting VET teachers and practitioners to shape a career pathway in VET, as well as supporting innovation in teaching. Senior and experienced practitioners, often in collaboration with professional development experts, need the skills to facilitate workforce development and support their staff in shaping and moving through their career pathway.

Being proactive in one's own professional development and having a willingness to undergo further education will complement any future action around suggestions to improve the use of skill sets in VET. It has also been identified by subject matter experts in foundation skills that long-serving trainers and assessors should 'refresh' their vocational, numeracy and digital literacy skills to ensure alignment with developments in STEM and learning needs.

This links to the need for a defined professional development pathway and the option to create a Professional Association for VET practitioners

Delivering through e-learning

While online and flexible learning is well established, it will continue to be central to the teaching of vocational education. As Australian workers reskill and upskill, demand for the delivery of vocational education using a range of current and emerging technologies will be greatly enhanced. A consistent pedagogical approach to the delivery of e-learning skills and knowledge of VET teachers and practitioners is required across the system. This will enable VET teachers and practitioners to integrate e-learning concepts into all teaching modes thus enabling learners to engage in self-determined learning.

Competencies needed to effectively deliver e-learning include being familiar and comfortable with the internet and technology (including management of online content) and promotion of an online learning community.

Quality training and good interpersonal skills will also be required, where VET teachers and practitioners will face challenges in delivering through e-learning and training in digital literacy, given Australia's relatively poor digital and numeracy outcomes.¹

Again, we know there is a skills gap for many practitioners in this area. The qualifications of the future need to recognise this and give opportunities to build these skills and the confidence to use them.

Understanding regulation

The rapid pace of regulatory change in the VET sector has required RTOs to direct resources towards understanding regulatory change, or risk non-compliance. This has been reflected in recent course accreditations in the areas of RTO management and compliance.

All VET professionals must have a strong understanding of regulations and how to ensure their RTO remains compliant, including the requirement to maintain current industry skills.²

However, the focus on compliance is really in response to poor quality, lack of management controls and poor behaviour in the sector. The focus should be on Quality not compliance – i.e, a desire to improve outcomes for the student, not merely to be able to tick all the boxes on the regulations.

Adapting to change and resilience

VET professionals must continue to embrace change if they are to be successful in VET's fluid regulatory and economic environment. The workforce's ability to understand the implications of change and adapt their working style accordingly will be critical to the teaching of high quality and current education and training.

These attributes also underpin professional development which is responsive to changing learning needs and regulation.

As with all jobs of the future, the pace of change is increasing. Education is one of the big growth areas predicted in the future, but it will be different – more blended learning, more work based, smaller chunks of learning, more project based etc etc. This is going to need a flexible and dynamic skill set and mindset in the sector to keep giving a great outcome for the Vet customers – the students and employers who rely on it for their future success.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011-2012) *Program for international assessment of adult competencies, Australia*

² It is recognised that levels of responsibility will vary across positions and seniority of staff.

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