



Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: literature review — support document

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Introduction

There is a lack of distinction and definition around how the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia might effectively recruit and retain suitably qualified teachers, trainers and assessors. The logic is clear: in order to enable and develop an immediate pool of competent and qualified workers for new and developing industries, as well as develop the skills and knowledge of workers in the stalwarts of Australian industry, such as the mining, building, finance and service industries, particular talented individuals are required. This is a requirement for a dynamic training environment that is also impacted by, for example, the internet of things, the diversity of learners and the consequences of an aging population.

VET teachers, trainers and assessors are the key to enabling such developments across industries. These VET practitioners, as they are commonly known (Chappell & Johnston 2003, Tyler & Dymock 2017, Orr 2019), teach, they train, they assess. But that's not all. They also support, counsel, and role-model what is required of an individual to be successful in a particular vocation. They need to know their industry and know their teaching. Recognised as 'dual professionals' (Plowright & Barr 2012), they are constantly traversing the borders between industry and teaching in their attempts to prepare new workers for new vocations, revitalise industry with up-to-date skills and knowledge, and enable the transitioning of existing vocational practices into newly required competencies (Köpsén 2014). VET practitioners 'play a pivotal role in training a flexible workforce, addressing skills gaps and supporting Australia's future economic prosperity' (AISC 2020, p. 1).

But a problem exists in relation to attracting industry experts to the VET teaching profession, an issue that is not restricted to Australia (Rasmussen 2016). This situation is influenced by several factors. For example, the ageing of the current VET workforce (Guthrie & Loveder 2009); skill shortages in traditional industries and the VET sector struggling with meeting these demands (Bolton 2018); new and emerging industries requiring trained workers (AISC, 2020); new knowledge and practices being drafted into work processes (AIS 2019), large new players entering and competing in the skills-for-work arena, e.g. universities (Knight, White & Granfield 2020); and the VET system itself requiring relief from bureaucratic complexity (Joyce 2019).

In order to make sense of this VET landscape and the demand for VET practitioners, the following literature review firstly provides a snapshot of the current state of the VET workforce and the changing industry climate in Australia. It then considers some of the factors that appear to be barriers or 'stumbling blocks' to recruiting teachers and trainers into vocational education and training. This is followed by examination of some of the incentives that have been adopted in other countries in an effort to boost their VET workforces, and exploration of other strategies that might help to increase the number of educators and to retain their services.

Background

Vocational education and training (VET) in Australia is structured around a national training system that is based on occupational skills standards achieved by completing units of competency offered through industry-relevant training packages (AISC 2020). These packages are developed by Industry Reference Committees (IRCs), with support from Skills Service Organisations (SSOs), and submitted to the Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC) for approval. Once approved, these nationally recognised qualifications align with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

Developing skills for emerging and changing occupations, such as those in construction (Artibus 2019), logistics and warehousing (AIS 2019) and advanced manufacturing (IBSA 2019), and other transformations of industry puts a huge responsibility on the vocational education and training workforce. Under the national training system, teaching and assessing training packages and skill sets is undertaken by a network of registered training organisations (RTOs). Although the exact number fluctuates as providers join or drop out, there are around 4 000 RTOs in Australia (Joyce 2019; Knight, White & Granfield 2020).

Numerically, 75% of these RTOs are private providers, responsible for training 60% of vocational students in Australia (Joyce 2019). The other major group of providers is Technical and Further Education (TAFE), funded by state and territory governments. Universities, community education and enterprise providers, and school RTOs make up the remainder of VET providers. In 2019 TAFE institutes accounted for some 30% of students who were studying a VET qualification (Joyce 2019).

In recent research, Knight, White and Granfield (2020) reported the size of the VET workforce in RTOs in February 2019 to be 246 167. Almost 30% (71 390) of this workforce were trainers and assessors. Other relevancies from this report are associated with how these trainers and assessors were employed, '53.5% were employed on a permanent basis, 13.9% on a contract or in temporary positions, and 32.6% on a casual or sessional basis' (p. 7). Volunteers in the sector who were involved in training and or assessment totalled 6 841.

Almost a decade ago the Productivity Commission (2011) noted that one of the key features of the VET training workforce is its diversity, which is still an element that sets the sector apart from other spheres of education: a sizeable proportion of the current VET trainer and assessor workforce comprises multiple job holders not working full time (Knight, White & Granfield 2020). Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates indicate secondary jobs are particularly common in the education and training industry, which had the second highest number of secondary jobs, placing it amongst the top three industries for secondary jobs in June 2019 (Knight, White & Granfield 2020).

This notion of 'multiple job-holding' has implications for the recruitment and retention of trainers and assessors in VET because it influences how they see their professional identity, as well as their willingness to undertake pedagogical training and participate in professional development. Hence, while the diversity of the VET workforce can be seen as one of its strengths, it also provides challenges in ensuring the sorts of quality outcomes that modern skills development demands (SSON 2020). These expectations are particularly pertinent in the light of projected developments in a post-COVID working world.

As jobs change, the ability of the workforce to flex into new roles and develop capabilities will be key to individual and organisational success. The degree to which leaders and economies benefit from this rapid transformation will in large part depend on the skills of the workforce and the ability to adapt to the digital world (PWC 2020, p. 1).

Another issue that has led to a need for new VET practitioners in recent years is the ageing of the VET workforce. This phenomenon itself is an aspect of a wider societal development as the surge of the so-called 'baby boomer' generation moves into retirement ages and is not replaced by equivalent numbers of workers (Dawe, 2009; O'Loughlin, Browning & Kendig 2016).

VET workforce and ageing

Over a decade ago, Guthrie and Loveder (2009) called attention to the issue facing the VET workforce globally in relation to its ageing and said that greater attention was required because of the issue of skills development need. This they believed required the implementation of far more active recruitment and retention practices. Yet, in Australia Guthrie and Loveder noted, understanding of the VET workforce characteristics was poor, there was a lack of consistency in method and data collection that detailed a national picture.

What Guthrie and Loveder (2009) did conclude was that generally, practitioners in public training organisations were older than those in private training organisations, that the teachers in permanent positions were older than those in temporary positions and that few teachers were under the age of 40. So, an older worker profile was evident. The challenge was, attracting and keeping skilled practitioners in a teaching /training role in the face of 'other potential TVET employers as well as industry-based employers who can often offer better salaries' (p. 2496). This is particularly pertinent in times of skill shortages where the VET sector itself is competing for labour with the very industries in which the skills shortages exist.

A later study conducted by the Productivity Commission (2011) stated, 'Robust estimates of the overall VET workforce - which includes trainers and assessors, other VET professionals and general staff - are not available' (p. XXXIV). The Commission used the best estimate at the time, announced by Mlotkowski and Guthrie (2008) at one million. Recruitment demand for VET practitioners was not reported as exceedingly high except for trainers and assessors in:

- mining, building, construction, and electrical engineering, to deal with a resources boom; nursing and aged care, as a result of an ageing population
- indigenous education, literacy and numeracy education and e-learning, and
- a greater demand for trainers and assessors in regional and remote locations (Productivity Commission 2011, p. 170).

Concerns over the retention of VET practitioners were voiced, with the VET workforce identified as 'relatively old' by the Commission when compared with the wider workforce (p. XXXVII).

The JobOutlook website, an Australian Government National Skills Commission initiative, (JobOutlook 2020) in late 2020 suggested that the average age for 'Vocational Education Teachers' is 50 years (using the 2016 ABS Census). Given that this website does not acknowledge the existence of RTOs, it is unclear how up to date that figure is.

Nevertheless, the pressure to bolster and grow the VET practitioner workforce is mounting, especially when we consider that there are 35 broad occupational categories with skilled labour shortages (DESE 2019), new and emerging skill demands, and that VET practitioners will be needed to help reorient an economy post COVID-19 extremes to speed up transitions across industries and support millions of workers both new and existing.

The sections that follow examine barriers and enablers in recruiting and retaining new VET teachers, trainers and assessors who can combine industry expertise and pedagogical skills to become the ‘dual professionals’ Australia requires to ensure the development of skills essential for the contemporary workforce and its future needs. Some of these factors are related to perceptions of VET as a professional field or vocation, and the sorts of contributions a VET practitioner might make, while others are about the incentives and support that might encourage an industry professional to move into VET and remain there, whether casual, or part- or full-time.

Barriers

Status of VET

The status of VET has been affected by a public perception that it is of lesser value than university education, a view that begins at school level (Billett, Choy & Hodge 2020). Additionally, in recent times a seeming lack of quality control has resulted in some private RTOs exploiting government funding arrangements to offer low quality courses, leading to cancellation of their registrations, poorly trained ‘graduates’, and some distrust of the sector (Joyce 2019). Such perceptions may well discourage well-qualified industry professionals to be associated with VET (Productivity Commission 2011; Smith 2019).

Rasmussen (2016) proposed that RTOs collectively need to set a ‘quality benchmark’ in VET, and that this will lead to the community and market regaining confidence in the sector, thereby raising its status. ‘The teaching workforce is the key to successful quality VET practice,’ Rasmussen (2016, p. 27) said, and argued for professional development as a key element in ensuring ‘a benchmark, a language and a clear position description that enables and promotes the importance of the work that VET teachers do.’

Some commentators believe the low status of VET is compounded by government support for the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) as being a sufficient minimum qualification for teaching in the sector, compared with the graduate qualification required for teaching in schools (Smith 2019; Harris 2020).

Certificate IV TAE and its role in recruitment and retention of VET practitioners

A key issue for the VET sector is recruiting experienced industry professionals who hold or are willing to obtain and maintain the minimum qualification to become a VET practitioner, especially in particular occupational fields, and in regional and remote localities (Joyce 2019). But what role the Certificate IV TAE plays in the recruitment and retention of VET practitioners appears unknown. Certainly to date, there has been no research into the question. The qualification’s role in supporting staff entering the sector as new practitioners is seen as crucial to enabling them to begin practice - as long as the course contains the right content (Simons et al. 2009).

The debate about the suitability of the qualification for the VET workforce involved in teaching and assessing is a common companion to discussions and opinions on the quality of teaching in VET. Generally, the VET practitioner’s workplace is an increasingly complex environment (Tyler & Dymock 2017). Its diversity, including of the learner population, implores the fulfillment of the need for VET practitioners to make complex pedagogical decisions in routine and non-routine situations with learners. The proportion and dimension of teacher knowledge required, is central to the discussion of the quality of teaching in VET over the years.

The Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 require that industry currency and a Certificate IV TAE is the minimum requirement to teach National Training Packages in Australia. Since 1998, a Certificate IV TAE has been the base qualification for teaching in the VET sector (Simons & Smith 2008). As Tyler and Dymock (2017) state, ‘it was intended to be a minimum qualification, but quickly became the industry standard’ (p. 36). Yet, over the years the suitability of a Certificate IV (AQF level 4) qualification to meet the pedagogical knowledge and skill requirements for VET practitioners has been contentious.

There have been criticisms of the Certificate IV TAE's pedagogical content, how competencies were taught, and the ease with which recognition of prior learning (RPL) practices were deployed (for example: Simons & Smith 2008; Down, De Luca & Galloway 2009; Clayton et al. 2010; Smith & Grace 2011). Other voices (for example, Wheelahan & Moodie 2011; Productivity Commission 2011; Guthrie 2010) indicated that the qualification was suitable and adequate for VET practitioners as a foundational qualification, provided it was taught properly. More recent concerns have been raised in regard to VET practitioners' capabilities in relation to interpreting VET curriculum (Hodge 2014; Smith 2019) and the inadequacy of the Certificate IV TAE for teaching VET competencies in secondary schools (Brown 2017). These are issues that might test the resolve of neophyte educators to remain in VET.

What is evident is a cyclic debate: voices of discontent in relation to the adequacy of a Certificate IV TAE qualification are raised, followed by the response of producing a new iteration of the qualification. Then a claim of adequacy is announced with the new iteration or with the editing of existing units of competency. Further claims of inadequacy are raised with new adjustments made. This is reasonable when one considers the process of prototyping, and possibly adequate for continuous improvement. But a recent updating of the Certificate IV TAE brought three kinds of response: some of those with an older version of the qualification resented having to upgrade to an updated version because they thought the initial version was sufficient; others saw it as an opportunity to have current skills upgraded and were interested in reflecting on how their skills could be renewed; and there were also voices from those who resisted the whole way: 'It is taking me longer to do this one unit than it took to do the whole [insert expletive] Cert IV originally.' And, 'This is ridiculous. Why do I need to know this stuff anyway? Can't I just get RPL?' (West n.d., p. 1).

This hints at the possible frustrations VET practitioners experience at the recurring necessity to upgrade their teaching certification, by having to engage in new versions of the same qualification and new competencies. The question remains: does this 'inconvenience' influence the degree of retention of practitioners in the VET industry and/or act as a roadblock to possible new applicants? Smith (2019) suggested that the Productivity Commission report (2011) did not recommend an increase in qualification for VET practitioners because 'there was a fear that people might not be attracted to the occupation if they had to gain a higher-level qualification' (p.1631).

Bogduk (2020) noted the cost of the Certificate IV TAE updating exercise to RTOs and cites TAFE NSW as having to upgrade 10 000 of its staff. The question here too is: are RTOs' recruitment models influenced by the demands of constant upgrades? Guthrie et al.'s (2014) work hints at this when he noted that TAFE institutes and reputable private providers reported being forced to cut corners.

Rasmussen (2016) argued that all VET practitioners must consider themselves as educators, but the ambivalence over the Certificate IV TAE is one indication of why, in an environment where fields of practice overlap, such distinctions are not always so clear. Fejes and Köpsén (2014, p.13) noted:

some vocational teachers construe strong occupational identities and do not primarily identify themselves as members of the community of teaching, whereas others have weak relations to the occupational community, stressing, instead, belonging to the community of teaching.

This issue is important in any quest to develop genuine 'dual professionals' in VET, i.e. those with both industry expertise and pedagogical skills, because the question of professional identity affects attitudes to obtaining an initial teaching qualification and undertaking continuing professional development.

Developing a professional identity

The Australian Productivity Commission (2011) noted that VET practitioners, as distinct from school teachers, already had a professional identity when they joined the VET workforce, and that they fell along a 'spectrum' of where they belonged as teachers. In fact, the Commission said, VET practitioners in private RTOs preferred to be known as trainers rather than teachers, because 'training' was what industry did. There was a similar attitude in the UK, where Further Education (FE) teachers emphasised their industrial links as their distinctive contribution to education (Lucas 2013).

This focus on their industry origins is not unexpected, because it is that derived knowledge that gives the teachers credibility with the students who are seeking to join that workforce (Robson, Bailey & Larkin 2004). Nevertheless, there is a tension between the two identities, and how individual trainers perceive the balance is likely to influence the extent to which they engage with initial training and ongoing professional development opportunities (Avis & Orr 2014). Commentators have also noted the ambivalence of the VET educator identity, sitting somewhere between school teacher and university lecturer (Lingfield 2012; Lucas 2013).

Tyler and Dymock (forthcoming) found that Australian VET educators they interviewed saw themselves as a unique form of professional, with dual expertise in their trade and in teaching, and considerable autonomy. Nevertheless, in Australia, VET practitioners have to comply with the requirements of a national standards framework, so they need to tread the territory between their independence as a professional and the need to comply with employer-monitored continuing professional development (CPD). Rasmussen (2016, p. 27) argued that

until professional learning becomes the individual teacher's responsibility rather than the responsibility of the RTO, the approach to ensuring that both pedagogical currency and industry currency is kept (and is clear what currency is) then it will be a 'stick' approach' [rather than a carrot].

In examining vocational teacher identity in Sweden, Köpsén (2014) also found vocational teachers emphasised dual identity, trade and teaching. Köpsén noted that a feature of this identity was bound up in assisting the development of skills and knowledge for 'life and work' - not only training in skills but preparing for a future workplace. This required the VET teachers to move back and forth between the classroom and the workplace, between the college and industry, a process that has been termed 'boundary crossing': 'figuratively bringing the practice of work into the practice of education' (Berner 2010, p. 208).

Köpsén (2014) argued that in order to be successful 'boundary workers', teachers needed to be 'competent with respect to teacher identity as well as vocational identity' (p. 208). As the Productivity Commission (2011) observed, Australian VET practitioners array themselves somewhere along the continuum between those two identities, which then shapes the professional identity each of them adopts. Where an industry professional sees themselves on this continuum is likely to influence the extent to which they are attracted to become a VET practitioner, and for those already employed as VET educators, may affect their attitude to CPD.

Incentives for recruiting and retaining VET teachers and trainers

Career pathways

Given the dual professionalism of VET teaching and training, it is inevitable that VET practitioners will come into the profession through various routes and with diverse industry backgrounds and experience, including as educators (Institute for Learning 2014; Tyler & Dymock 2019; Knight, White & Granfield 2020).

One notion is that there is a ‘push’ from a current occupation and a ‘pull’ into vocational education and training (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant 2003; Richardson et al. 2007; Berger & D’Ascoli 2012). According to this interpretation, the move results from an individual perceiving that their current occupation does not fit with their interests, needs and personality, and that VET teaching in particular will suit them better.

Berger and Ascoli (2012) cited other researchers’ findings that second career teachers tended to be dissatisfied with the quality of working conditions in their previous occupation, especially a stressful environment and incompatibility with family life, and saw teaching conditions as more attractive. Other incentives included a lack of satisfying social relationships and of feeling they were not making a societal contribution. According to that cited research (Berger & Ascoli 2012), the prospect of making such a contribution was a key motivation for second career teachers. However, Berger and Ascoli’s (2012) own research in Switzerland indicated that perceptions of the social impact they were already making and of existing good working conditions often convinced individuals these were factors that would also apply if they switched to teaching.

For some, the attraction was that the requirement was part-time and in the evenings, a few hours a week or at weekends, which also meant they could continue to work in industry (IfL 2014). On the other hand, unrealistic perceptions of the full-time VET workforce may result in transferees not remaining in VET, as one FE college principal in the UK articulated: ‘Perhaps some still perceive teaching to be a simple and less stressful job than the one they have just left, and are unpleasantly surprised by the reality of low pay and long hours’ (quoted in Ryan 2018).

Another motivation for industry experts to become VET practitioners is being able to move into a new professional role while at the same time maintaining their links with their previous occupation (Berger & Ascoli 2012; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant 2003). According to Berger and Ascoli (2012, p. 320), ‘this allows the individual a degree of career diversity within a familiar area of interest and expertise’. Berger and Ascoli (2012, p. 331) portray such a transition as a ‘continuation’ of an individual’s career development rather than a career change. They suggest that under this scenario, industry experts were attracted to teaching not only because of the attraction of that profession but also because they were genuinely interested in the subject matter, portrayed by Orr (2019) as ‘affection’ for their trade. Prior teaching and learning experiences were also seen as influential on recruitment, and VET teachers generally perceived their role to be challenging and needing expertise, which they regarded as more important than salary or social status (Berger & Giradet 2015).

In fact, the transition from industry to VET teaching has been characterised as ‘opportunistic’ rather than intentional (Berger & D’Ascoli 2012; Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005). That is, instead of planned or defined career pathways, some VET practitioners seem to have taken advantage of opportunities that had

arisen to become teachers (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005). In a UK study, FE teaching was described as an ‘accidental’ career that people fell into because they were otherwise not aware of the sector as a career option (CooperGibson Research 2018).

However, other UK research found that many industry professionals made their way into full or part-time VET teaching as a ‘deliberate and conscious choice’ (IfL 2014, p.11). The main reasons they gave for making such a decision were: the flexibility of training while teaching; the subject choice, the profile and diversity of the learners, the opportunity for career progression, flexibility in teaching hours, and the ethos of the sector. For many, teaching in further education provided the opportunity to ‘give back’ to their subject, vocation or craft (IfL 2014).

Berger and Ascoli (2012) proposed that some people may make the transition because they have the opportunity to do so, and their interest in the subject is the catalyst for the move. They identified two particular characteristics of industry experts from the trades who were likely to be ‘optimal candidates’ to teach in VET: a high confidence in their abilities to train colleagues; a strong interest both in their professional field and in training apprentices (Berger & Ascoli 2012, p.332). Furthermore, these characteristics applied across all professional trades, and independently of the length of experience working with apprentices.

Nevertheless, like a city resident making a sea change, the reality may not be as rosy as the promise, as one FE college administrator in the UK noted:

There’s always kind of individuals round the periphery, who come in for probably quite altruistic reasons and reasons to support the profession, but they end up leaving very quickly because teaching is hard, you know, it’s not all warm indoors and no heavy lifting (quoted in Hanley & Orr 2018).

The significant point that emerges from the literature is that for most teachers and trainers in VET, this is (at least) their second career and they have come into it at different points in their working lives and for different reasons (IfL 2014). The corollary is that they will therefore be older than most new graduates, such as beginning school teachers (Orr 2019). They are also likely to be earning salaries in excess of what the VET sector can pay; a discrepancy that has been seen as a major impediment to the recruitment of VET teachers, especially on the number and quality of applicants (Harris et al. 2005; Ryan 2018; Orr 2019). In the UK, FE colleges have found it particularly hard to recruit in engineering and construction because potential candidates could earn much more in industry (Hanley & Orr 2018).

In regard to Australia, Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) commented that TAFE may struggle to attract and retain staff from industry because private training providers have greater scope to negotiate salaries. Nevertheless, they suggested that localised TAFE recruitment, rather than at state or territory level, made it more likely that new teachers would meet the requirements of a particular position. They also noted the benefit of recruiting from industry where there was a workplace component of a vocational qualification, as distinct from recruiting a trainer who had taught only in a classroom (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005).

One paradoxical factor is that the VET sector may be in competition with industry for staff (Hanley & Orr 2018). A boom in a particular industry drives up the demand for more qualified workers, so there are potentially more students seeking RTO enrolment. But an industry boom may also inflate wages, so current and prospective VET practitioners may well be lured away from that vocation.

This raises the question about what sorts of incentives might be offered to encourage an industry professional to make what has been seen as both a ‘jump’ and a ‘slide’ into a VET career.

Incentive schemes and strategies

A recent review of incentive programs 2000 to 2010 aimed at encouraging new teachers to enter or remain in FE in the UK found:

- Financial compensation alone is not enough to attract or retain FE teachers. Financial incentives may increase recruitment levels short-term, but not longer-term retention
- Strategies that combined financial compensation with developing skills and supporting teachers in their roles were most effective in recruiting and retaining teachers
- The effectiveness of different incentive types seemed to vary according to personal circumstances - career stage, settings, contexts, experience
- A good model may be one where the educational provider is flexible about combining different types of incentivisation (financial and non-financial)
- Non-financial incentives, particularly mentoring and support appear to play a key role in the successful transition from training to teaching, and for continued retention in the sector (CooperGibson Research 2018, p. 10).

The review of recruitment and retention strategies also identified financial incentives offered in the USA, Canada, Australia and Germany: bonuses for hard-to-fill subjects, loan forgiveness for teacher training, tuition/loan reimbursement, holiday travel expenses, rural relocation allowances, assistance with relocation and housing support, bursary schemes, simplifying the teacher qualification process, providing wider support packages [e.g. CPD], and ensuring a 'civil service status' for teachers (CooperGibson Research 2018).

Not all of these appear to be applicable to the Australian situation, e.g. 'civil service status' might apply only to those employed in public RTOs; to extend it would be a major policy development.

The CooperGibson (2018) review examined the pros and cons of a number of specific strategies adopted by the British Government. FE 'Golden Hellos' provided one-off payments from 2002 to 2010 to incoming FE teachers in their second year of service. While the incentive assisted some teachers to feel more valued and to remain in FE teaching, job satisfaction, workload and salary were seen as more influential. In addition, some of the recipients were teachers who would have remained in or left FE, regardless.

Other initiatives, which had not been evaluated at the time of the report, included: 'Retrain and Retain' paid a bursary of £2 000 per teacher to training providers (public and private) to retrain existing teachers into areas of need, with a maximum payment of £10 000 per organisation; 'Further Forces' aimed to retrain 110 armed forces personnel who were exiting the services to teach technical subjects such as science, engineering and technology, and to help them obtain an employed teacher training post with an FE provider; and the purpose of 'Pathways to FE Teaching' was to raise awareness of FE teaching as a career path, utilising a teacher preparation program at a particular institution and providing work placements in FE colleges and private training providers for students in their third year of study (CooperGibson 2018). A charity organisation, 'Teach First', has been offering a similar and apparently very successful training program for school teachers for many years, paying a salary and organising placements for trainees as they study (Ryan 2018).

Among the final recommendations from the CooperGibson (2018) extensive literature review were: i) to use a holistic approach: financial incentives to promote initial recruitment, followed by both financial and non-financial support to encourage retention, and ii) to provide funding at institutional level to meet local needs, as well as a combination of targeted individual incentives and provider funding. The first of these recommendations is in line with what See et al. (2020) found in a review of approaches to attract

school teachers to schools that were difficult to staff: financial incentives worked best in recruiting them, but a supportive working environment was the key to retaining their services.

Once again, these recommendations refer to the UK situation, where the provider set-up and teacher preparation are different from those in Australia. The recommendations also tend to assume that teaching is full-time, whereas in Australia a high proportion of teachers and trainers are employed part-time or casually (Knight, White & Granfield 2020, p. 14-15). Under those circumstances, career pathways tend to be precarious, as Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005, p. 29) reported: 'The career pathway for most teachers and trainers is one of moving from the periphery of a program area as an hourly paid instructor, to increasing involvement and engagement with the program with the attainment of a contract, and then a permanent position.' In TAFE, career progression may mean moving away from teaching, into management or project work, or a long wait for a promotion position (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005).

In a study from the field of higher education which may have implications for VET, Stewart (2020) followed the transition of novice clinical practitioners into academia. She found that these newcomers, highly trained in their own professional field, benefitted in their journey into teaching from help with instructional methodology, and from peer mentors, along with professional development supported by the institution, a topic that is explored in the next section. At the other end of the scale, some FE colleges in the UK offered 'taster sessions' where prospective teachers could try out their skills (Hanley & Orr 2018).

Other supportive factors

Continuing Professional Development

The importance of professional development was highlighted by Guthrie and Loveder (2009) as a means to retain staff in the VET sector. Pointedly, they drew on the distinction between the different continuing professional development needs of new staff and more experienced staff and the need to cater for these differences. The provision of clear career pathways for VET practitioners was also suggested as another means to aid in understanding staff movements in an effort to inform on retention strategies. Being 'able to continue to play a role in the life of the institution' (p. 2492) was considered essential.

Some 15 years ago, Clayton (2005) called for renewal of the VET workforce by:

- Being more strategic about workforce planning, particularly in regard to succession in an environment of an ageing VET workforce
- Making decisions about whether recruitment should focus on workers with resilience and soft skills, or adaptive workers who can deal with emerging skills, or those that are job-ready and who could be replaced as skills demand changed
- Having in place CPD to enable the maintaining of VET practitioner's capability given the increased diversity of demands placed on them. Such responses included mentoring of young practitioners by older more experienced practitioners and industry negotiated skill development activities
- Better management and use of casual staff to meet flexibility and enhance organisational capability
- Putting in place salaries commensurate with those in industry, flexible work arrangements that acknowledged the importance of work-life balance.

These recommendations appear to still be relevant to the contemporary VET workforce.

Clayton (2005) also argued that up-to-date technological support and individually-negotiated professional development activities were important and reasonable 'perks' for dedicated, innovative and highly skilled RTO staff (p. 10). In knowledge-based industry sectors, Clayton et al. (2013) found that RTOs with pro-active CPD had established processes, strategic planning and flexibility to allow for 'just in time' learning, and rewarded those who consistently updated their skills, and sometimes acted against those who did not.

In a major review of CPD and VET in Australia, Tyler and Dymock (2017, p. 47) concluded:

The VET sector has yet to arrive at a point where practitioners and training providers are wholeheartedly committed to CPD. ... Such a commitment may ... be part of what the sector needs to help restore its status as a significant contributor to the development of a more skilled workforce and to the improvement of Australia's productivity and international competitiveness.

One way that RTOs can support their staff both within the organisation and to build bridges to industry is through communities of practice.

Communities of practice

The concept of a community of practice is based on the notion that working with others requires the development of a set of relationships over time, so that, for a newcomer in a workplace, learning is not

only about skills and knowledge but also ‘moving toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community’ (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 95). This idea can be utilised as a strategy not only to help new workers understand the expectations and requirements of a workplace, but also to become a valued and fully contributing part of it. For VET teachers, who mostly are undertaking a second career, a community of practice can help ease the transition from their previous employment and influence the extent to which they develop a professional identity as an educator (Bathmaker & Avis 2006). For those who continue to work in industry while also teaching on a part-time or casual basis, this might mean simultaneously being members of two different communities of practice.

The potential benefits of a productive community of practice are highlighted by a study that found when there was a non-supportive environment in FE colleges in the UK, the result was low staff morale, burnout and a lack of commitment to students (Bathmaker & Avis 2006). Consequently, new FE teachers were marginalised instead of being drawn into colleges’ socio-cultural practices. Communities of practice encourage trust among their members and a sense of common purpose, as well as the potential of transferring skills and knowledge between industry and the VET sector (Mitchell et al. 2001).

When considering communities of practice in VET environments, one of the key issues is the development of professional identity as a teacher or trainer, alongside the competence in an industry-related area (Plowright & Barr 2012). If pedagogic expertise is seen as optional, the likely result is that a mandatory qualification in training will be completed in order to satisfy bureaucratic requirements rather than for the professional development of the educator (Orr & Simmons 2010). Such a situation may occur when there is an urgent shortage of industry experts, resulting in an outcome similar to that found in a UK study of FE trainee teachers, where developing identity as teachers ‘was primarily shaped by expediency’ (Orr & Simmons 2010, p. 86).

Secondment

Secondment is not a subject in the VET literature that has been considered as a means through which to recruit and retain VET practitioners. But it appears as a human resource instrument to exchange ideas, renew enthusiasm and learn new skills. Generally, secondment is the assignment of an employee from one organisation to another for a temporary period of time. O’Donoughue Jenkins and Anstey (2017) wrote that, ‘[s]econdments have been used...as a way to bring an individual’s expertise to a team, and to develop staff knowledge and skill’ (p. 1). In times and places where VET practitioner expertise is in short supply it may well be considered as an option for RTOs. Secondments may not be a direct means to recruit VET practitioners, but certainly they are a possibility for retaining staff, offering another means to deliver the requirement of industry currency, and supporting the vital connections and relationships RTOs need with industry (ASQA 2018).

As an example, Dryden and Rice (2008) describe a personal experience of secondment in the health sector, presenting the case of a clinical nurse specialist seconded to an educational unit for three days a week over an eighteen-month period. The experience was reported as ‘increasing knowledge skills and knowledge, raising motivation and aiding retention’ (p. 65). The authors’ position was that the key to a secondment’s success is a clear framework for implementation and evaluation, both from a personal and organisation point of view.

Costley et al. (2014) investigated secondment as a way to enhance initial teacher education. The assumption was that the quality of teacher education would be enhanced through the inclusion of current school teachers. Teachers were seconded to university education faculties in fulltime blocks or as casuals, additional to their full-time teaching position. In some cases where teachers were working with a university and education department, they were paid jointly and considered as joint appointments. The

outcome was seen as ‘Overwhelmingly... positive’ (p. 9) with caution articulated around negotiating conflicting needs from university and school, and dealing with the theory/practice divide. The importance of building relationships in local contexts was highlighted as a success factor.

O’Donoghue Jenkins and Anstey (2017) provided two case studies of secondment aimed at enhancing knowledge translation between academics and policy makers. They defined knowledge translation as a ‘dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination [and] exchange’ (p. 1); the exchange element emphasising human interaction. To improve the interface between policy and research, reciprocal secondments were arranged between government and university. Enablers in the success of the arrangements were: flexibility in the way two organisations dealt with time adjustments, having specific outputs for evaluation, actual increases in secondees’ capacities and skills, and their familiarity with the hosting organisation. A planned approach to the arrangement was considered vital.

Retaining older workers

As noted earlier, Guthrie and Loveder (2009) called attention to the ageing of the VET workforce in Australia and advocated the need for policies aimed at retaining older VET practitioners. Given that, because of its ‘dual nature’ VET is usually a second career for teachers and trainers, and that they therefore tend to be older when they begin their new occupation (IfL 2014; Orr 2019), it seems sensible to utilise their industry expertise and pedagogical skills ‘to reduce the risk of losing valuable talent and ensure people can enjoy fulfilling careers and continue contributing as much as possible, for as long as possible’ (Butler 2020).

A systematic review by Chen and Gardiner (2019) identified six key factors in older workers’ decisions to remain in, or retire from, their employment: work demands, learning and development practices, job autonomy, recognition and respect, mentoring opportunities, and a supportive organisational climate. Heavy and high-level work demands increased the likelihood of older workers retiring at or before ‘normal’ retirement age. The availability of continuing professional development not only influenced older workers to stay on and have the opportunity to reduce possible skill obsolescence, but also signalled that the organisation continued to value them (Niu 2020).

Suggestions for ways of engaging older workers include: leveraging existing knowledge and experience for mentoring and developing knowledge transfer initiatives; identifying ‘autonomous’ job experiences for retirees (e.g., consulting or independent contractor assignments); creating project-based assignments focused on addressing real organisational problems; providing experiences and training that leads to professional development and new work experiences; and establishing intergenerational, team-based task forces (Heisler & Bandow 2018, p. 425). There also seems value in offering optional pathways to retirement, through such initiatives as a less demanding workload, part-time work, working from home and other bridging opportunities (Van Yperen & Wörtler 2017).

Like other workers, older people in the workforce are not a homogenous entity, but have different family and personal circumstances and, as they age, may face age-related health issues (Van Yperen & Wörtler 2017). It would therefore seem prudent for organisations to develop individual transition plans for older workers based on those circumstances and on their merits rather than age (Taylor et al. 2017). These might be ad hoc arrangements, such as varying arrival and departure times or working from home on occasions (Atkinson & Sandiford 2016), or formally negotiated through what have been called ‘I-deals: ‘voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers . . . predicated on an individual worker’s value to his or her employer’ (Rousseau et al. 2006, p. 978, quoted in Atkinson & Sandiford 2016, p. 14).

Job-sharing

Another strategy for reducing older VET practitioners' workloads is job-sharing. Through its flexible work arrangements, job-sharing enables two employees to cooperatively work together. It is another option RTOs may wish to consider as an option in the retaining of VET practitioners. For those employees who may be thinking of resigning in order to downsize their workload commitment for various reasons, for example, moving onto a path toward retirement or for work-family balance issues, job-sharing offers the advantage of keeping two valued employees, two brains and two sets of enthusiasm (Heathfield 2019).

Job-sharing is a unique form of part-time work and an important part of flexible work arrangements (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman 2015). It is unique because two employees are responsible for the work of one full-time position (Freeman & Coll 2009). Williamson, Cooper and Baird (2015) analysed job-sharing in terms of its consequences for employees and employers in an education setting. Their research resulted in findings that 'job-sharing resulted in the retention of highly skilled employees' (p. 460). But this was not without challenges. Notwithstanding Job-sharing creating positive outcomes such as: reconciling work-life balance matters, easing time-tabling issues, and having two separate but complementary employees for the same class, enabling a diversity of engagement strategies with students, it also meant some more organisational and communication work for employees that was sometimes unpaid. The authors concluded that this and other workload negotiation challenges 'could be overcome with patience and attention from HR' (p. 460).

Conclusion

This literature review has shown that attracting ‘industry experts’ to become VET practitioners and then maintaining their involvement is a complex issue. Not only do VET teachers, trainers and assessors in Australia come into the field along numerous pathways, but they are employed casually, part-time and full-time by a wide range of private and public RTOs. Clearly there is no ‘one size fits all approach’ here, but at the same time the review has identified a range of possible strategies that might appeal to ‘some of the people some of the time’ to encourage them to consider a ‘second career’.

Based on the outcomes from some of the incentive schemes adopted (and abandoned) in UK Further Education in the past 20 years, it appears that initial incentives to increase recruitment numbers, particularly financial, need to be followed up by policies and practices that support new educators as they make the transition from their earlier trade or profession. There is also the notion of drawing on those retiring from the armed forces.

Many of the European incentives appeared to be aimed at recruiting full-time teachers, however, often into further education colleges, and may not be as appropriate for the sort of VET workforce and range of providers found in Australia. On the other hand, overseas experience with ‘boundary crossing’, where there are continuing strong links between educators and industry, suggest that there may be models that could be explored which would enable industry experts to make teaching inputs into VET along a continuum of time and effort.

There is also an element of personal disposition in the literature about VET recruitment, with some educators wanting to ‘give back’ to the trade or profession that has given them career satisfaction and to make a contribution to society through an upcoming generation. Others are seeking to ‘escape’ from the sometimes highly physical aspect of their jobs or are seeking more flexibility in their working hours.

Since for most VET practitioners teaching is a second career, it is not surprising that there is no clear pathway into the profession. The challenge for recruitment is to try to identify and exploit the ways that ‘opportunities’ present themselves so that the move into training becomes less ‘accidental’. Secondment for a period is one of the options within this scenario.

A mandatory educational requirement (currently the Certificate IV TAE) appears to be a confounding factor, potentially operating as both an enabler and a barrier, depending on the attitude of the individual and the RTO. This issue is also related to the status of VET and how it might be regarded by would-be educators in industry. The extent to which the mandatory CPD requirement for RTOs is genuinely met might also influence perceptions of the status of VET, as well as have an impact on developing and therefore retaining VET trainers if they can see it as worthwhile. Communities of practice offer the possibility of collaboratively developing practitioners within RTOs as well as promoting ‘boundary work’ with industry.

In addition to increasing recruitment, another strategy worth considering in this context is to retain the services of older VET practitioners by negotiating around their individual circumstances and developing transition to retirement programs, including through part-time work and job sharing.

Sitting over all of the discussion about recruiting and retaining VET practitioners are the uniqueness of their 'dual professional' role and the difficulty of settling on a professional identity that encompass both aspects. The potential and need for continual 'boundary crossing' between education and industry is a challenge for VET educators and RTOs alike, but ultimately it is the individual who decides in which direction they will lean, or if they will seek a balance, and it is that decision that affects both their desire to make a contribution to vocational education and training, and the nature of their involvement.

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