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# Visions and options: A report on five forums introducing the research consortium on building vocational education and training provider capability

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# About the research

*Visions and options: A report on five forums introducing the research consortium on building vocational education and training provider capability* by Berwyn Clayton, Victoria University[1]; and Pauline Robinson

This paper presents the outcomes of five state-based forums conducted to introduce the consortium research program investigating building vocational education and training (VET) provider capability. Despite being first published on the consortium's website in 2005, it presents visions and options that remain current today. This is hardly surprising as the forum participants were asked to consider how registered training organisations might position themselves to meet the future demands of their various clients.

## Key messages

✧ Changes in the sector have offered new opportunities for improving client focus and responding to both community and industry needs. Nevertheless, the ongoing changes in the sector have caused turbulence. Many of those providers and staff who are trying to be more flexible feel themselves constrained by the operational environment.

✧ New structures and ways of working need to be fostered, including enhancing industry connections, having registered training organisations collaborate rather than compete, and increasing flexibility both at the whole-of-organisation and work-team levels. Collaboration needs to be encouraged, despite the push towards increased contestability of funding.

✧ A more strategic approach is needed to VET workforce planning. This includes recruiting staff with relevant skills and attributes, maintaining and building the skills of staff, and finding better ways to make registered training organisations employers of choice.

Readers interested in other components of this research program on building VET provider capability should visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/workinprogress/projects/10345.html>, where all the consortium's research activities have been consolidated. The overview of the research findings: *Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future: Research overview* by Harris, Clayton and Chappell <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1827.html> is of particular relevance.

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# Contents

## Tables

# Visions and options

## Introduction

This summary report sets out details of the structured forums conducted with a wide range of vocational education and training (VET) personnel in five states, and outlines the key themes, issues and existing innovative activities reported by the sector.

## Purpose of the forums

As with the initial consultations undertaken in each state and territory, these forums were geared towards actively engaging the VET sector in the research program as a whole. In particular, they were designed to listen to the voices and 'feel the pulse' of a cross-section of those most closely involved in the sector, as they identify the challenges and imperatives they face, and explore how these are likely to impact upon their registered training organisations and their practices over the next three to five years.

The outcomes of the forums will inform the Consortium's research program and provide key information from the field on innovations, issues, futures, constraints and opportunities, which principal researchers can utilise as they shape their specific research activities over the next two years.

## Description of the forum activities

In total, five forums were conducted in different states and involved participants drawn from technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, private providers of training, enterprise registered training organisations, industry bodies, senior secondary schools and state training authorities. Two half-day forums organised through the consortium were conducted, one in Sydney and one in Brisbane. The other three structured activities were presentations and workshops undertaken in conjunction with existing state-planned events. Dates and locations for forums are set out below.

**Research activity 1   Forum distribution and timing**

| Dates | Event | Location |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 16–17 May 2005 | Training Forum 2005 (two workshops) | Perth, WA |
| 23–24 May 2005 | VISTA Annual Conference (workshop) | Lorne, Vic. |
| 26 May 2005 | Consortium Forum (half-day forum) | Sydney, NSW |
| 27 May 2005 | Consortium Forum (half-day forum) | Brisbane, Qld |
| 6–7 June 2005 | VET Quality Forum (workshop) | Adelaide, SA |

## Consortium forums

The success of the forums in Sydney and Brisbane was largely dependent upon identifying an appropriate mix of people and encouraging them to participate in the activities. Considerable assistance was given in this regard by Greg Chapman, TAFE Teaching and Learning Support Services in Sydney, and Peter Skippington, Professional Practices Unit, Centre for Innovation and Development in Brisbane, who willingly coordinated the invitation process. To ensure reasonable representation from key stakeholders, the facilitators requested the following mix of participants:

✧ 14 teachers/trainers, preferably drawn from a range of teaching disciplines and types of registered training organisation—public, private and enterprise-based

✧ 4 middle managers who are actively engaged in the supervision of teaching and administrative staff

✧ 3 people from support services, such as librarians, industry liaison people, technical support staff, student counsellors and people working with students with a disability

✧ 4 human resource managers who are involved in recruitment, performance management and associated human resource practices

✧ 4 people responsible for professional development (either central or institute-based)

✧ 4 senior educational managers who oversee staff delivering in broad industry areas (for example, heads of school, deans of faculty)

✧ 3 chief executive officers, especially people who have interesting views about the future of TAFE and its workforce

✧ 2 state training authority people or departmental representatives responsible for organisational development/strategic planning

✧ any key personnel working within organisations or systems in parallel areas to the consortium research program.

Both forums had a reasonable mix of teachers and administrative staff and of managers and people 'at the grass roots', but not all categories of staff as set out above were represented. TAFE and enterprise registered training organisations were well represented in both forums, but only a few private providers attended the Sydney event. However, private registered training organisations were strongly represented and actively participated in the Brisbane forum.

## Other structured forums

Members of the consortium were offered opportunities to talk about the consortium research program and to seek information on three focus questions at existing events organised in Western Australia (2005 Training Forum), Victoria (VISTA Conference) and South Australia (VET Quality Forum).

In each instance, an abbreviated form of the consortium forum was conducted, including a brief overview of the challenges and imperatives impacting upon VET, an outline of the consortium research program, and discussion and documentation relating to the three focus questions.

In total, the structured forums involved 239 participants.

A copy of the invitation to participants, an outline of the structured forum activities and participant lists are attached.

# Views of the current VET environment

## The here and now

> VET … the turbulent blancmange.                                    (TAFE teacher, Sydney forum)

This quote encapsulates many of the paradoxes which emerged when participant perceptions of the current world of VET were explored. Participants were clearly feeling the impact of significant change. The descriptors of change were mostly negative—'threatening', 'turbulent', 'change for change's sake', 'uninformed', 'complex', 'inconsistent' and 'straight-jacketing'. The 'blancmange' in the quote referred to the perception that their organisations were struggling ineffectively to respond to the turbulence. Flexible staff were seen to be struggling within inflexible organisations. Organisational descriptors included 'reactive', 'risk-averse', 'under-resourced', 'leaderless', 'inflexible', 'compliance-driven', 'change-resistant', 'skill-deficient', 'defensive', 'inconsistent', 'trend-following' and 'fractured'.

Glimmering through the change fatigue, however, were many positive perceptions. People working in the sector were seen to be passionate, committed, hard-working, motivated, full of genuine intent and innovative. Organisations were seen to have a strong client focus, to understand and respond to their local communities, to be industry-focused and productive. There was also a perception that there were great opportunities in times of change, internationally, as well as locally.

## Understandings of change and challenges

Participants in all forums were well informed and articulate about the drivers of change. They were able to identify a wide range of imperatives and it was clear they are grappling with these issues in their daily work. Broadly, the areas of change they identified—and the imperatives driving such change—were:

*Workforce changes*

✧ skill shortages: recruitment becoming an increasing issue, with current skill shortage in trades a clear driver of government funding

✧ industrial relations changes: providing major change for the VET workforce with unpredictable outcomes

✧ the ageing workforce in VET itself and the consequent challenges to retain staff and to plan for succession

✧ the issue of the widening age gap between teachers/trainers and many of their students

✧ the training and retraining of mature workers

✧ the preparation of learners for new ways of working

✧ the globalised workforce and the need to prepare students for work in it.

*Changing technology*

✧ Technology is impacting on delivery strategies, requiring multiskilled staff, changing team structures and changing cost structures.

*Competition/collaboration changes*

✧ the demand for cost-effectiveness

✧ delivery of VET across sectors, making school linkages vital

✧ competition for funding factionalising the sectors.

*National/state changes*

✧ change of national VET structure

✧ compliance requirements at state and national levels

✧ state-level restructures in TAFE

✧ changes in immigration requirements impacting on the international student market, which is a very important part of VET.

*Changing student demands*

✧ need for employability skills/generic skills

✧ need for improved student pathways across sectors

✧ need to continue to streamline recognition of prior learning

✧ demand for skills sets not necessarily whole qualifications

✧ demand for quality.

# Visions and options for the future

Given these significant changes and the government imperatives attached to so many of them, how might the VET sector best position itself to meet new demands from individuals, industry and the community? This issue was addressed by posing three questions to the forum participants:

1 How do you think the imperatives/challenges (raised in this session) will play out in terms of structures at whole-of-organisation level and at work-team level?

2 How do you think recruiting, managing and training our workforces will change?

3 What are some examples of things happening now that you think will position your organisation well for the future?

## Focus question 1: New structures and new ways of working

In each forum, participants were asked to focus their thinking on the next two to five years and to consider how the changes and challenges would play out in terms of structures and ways of working for their organisation as a whole and for their own work teams. Participants were encouraged to think beyond issues of funding, compliance and the broader industrial relations environment and to explore different ways of working.

The analysis of the information provided across the five forums revealed a number of common themes and consistent thinking about ways of addressing the challenges. The common themes can best be summed up as:

✧ enhancing the industry connections with improved client focus, collaboration and strategic alliances

✧ working in partnership: collaborating with other registered training organisations rather than competing

✧ increasing flexibility in structures at whole-of-organisation level

✧ increasing flexibility at the work-team level.

Further details of participant responses against each of these themes are set out below.

*Enhancing the industry connections with improved client focus, collaboration and strategic alliances*

There was general consensus across all jurisdictions and all provider types (TAFE, private provider and enterprise-based) that registered training organisations will have to work more closely with industry. It was often suggested that collaboration, strategic alliances and partnerships were essential in meeting the increasing training demands of enterprises and industry more broadly.

The types of activities participants suggested would become more and more important for registered training organisations to undertake were:

✧ embedding and streamlining recognition of prior learning processes to meet enterprise and industry needs for recognition

✧ customising training programs for specific partner enterprises

✧ working together with industry to determine appropriate streamlining of programs to meet new skills sets rather than delivering full qualifications

✧ partnering with industry to develop learning and assessment strategies to be delivered in industry by industry

✧ collaborating with individual enterprises to share expensive equipment for training purposes.

One comment that best reflects this broad-ranging thinking about better provider–industry connections was made by an industry representative who noted:

> RTOs [registered training organisations] will need to embed processes to build and maintain robust linkages at multiple levels with industry and enterprises in order to maintain their relevance.

*Working in partnership: Registered training organisations—collaboration rather than competition*

Collaboration between registered training organisations was the focus of considerable discussion in each of the forums. Discussions generally related to developing economies of scale and removing some of the inefficiencies of duplication/replication of effort. In particular, some TAFE participants in the Western Australian and New South Wales forums questioned whether the breadth of TAFE provision was sustainable in an environment where funding is 'stretched'. These participants suggested that greater cooperation or collaboration between providers, together with the development of centres of specific industry 'excellence' or 'expertise' was more likely to be viable in the future. In parallel with this thinking, a number of Queensland TAFE participants suggested that there would need to be much more systematic co-provision to reduce the duplication of effort across the state and to make the most of the combined potential of registered training organisations.

Despite these comments about possible narrowing of TAFE provision, there was also acknowledgement by TAFE participants in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia that TAFE organisations were committed to providing broad programs of training as part of their social compact; thus, there were likely to be tensions between social commitments and business imperatives in the next few years.

In the majority of forums, active collaboration, resource-sharing and networking were seen by many participants to be the strategies which would best position all registered training organisations for the future. Particular beneficiaries would be regional and rural registered training organisations and small private providers.

Collaboration by registered training organisations (both public and private) was seen as a sensible way of meeting the training needs of regional clients, usually located in what have been called 'thin markets'. This was well reflected by a Western Australian participant who suggested:

> We must change from a competitive culture to one of collaboration. Partnering and mentoring across institutes is the best way—particularly when we are dealing with regional approaches to training for clients. Sharing resources and expertise makes a lot of sense.

Queensland participants also spoke of regional integration across sectors. They felt that 'sharing' should be a performance indicator for registered training organisations. They indicated that a major benefit of cross-sectoral sharing would be improved student pathways.

Private providers attending the New South Wales and Queensland forums also stressed the need to work together. They were able to provide examples of strategic alliances being set up to meet the

training needs of specific clients—partnerships which involved private providers, TAFE institutes, enterprises, schools and universities working together. It was noted that this was likely to be an economic imperative for some small providers of training if they are to survive in the near future. As one participant noted:

> We need to develop strong networks of organisations and personnel to become more efficient and share scarce resources.    (Private registered training organisation, Queensland)

### Increasing flexibility in structures at whole-of-organisation level

In line with these views about enhanced relationships between registered training organisations and between registered training organisations and industry, participants from TAFE institutes in particular identified the need for their organisations to be 'more agile'.

Some of the issues acknowledged to be important in achieving this agility were cited as:

✧ teachers and trainers having a 'whole-of-business' understanding

✧ better-quality systems and information technology infrastructure to support emerging business imperatives

✧ more coordination across the networks (TAFE systems)

✧ the ability to adjust rapidly to changing profiles

✧ the ability to adjust structures to meet new demands in delivery and other service provision.

Not surprisingly, given the systemic differences across the jurisdictions, TAFE participants differed in views about how agility could be achieved in terms of organisational structures. Some favoured more centralised structures to reduce duplication of functions, such as human resource management, and to standardise products and services across individual TAFE systems. Others felt that more decentralisation of decision-making to institute level would achieve greater agility.

The range of views on which whole-of-organisation structures would best serve TAFE institutes included:

> Structures will need to be able to respond to specific delegations, to action partnerships, projects and shared initiatives rather than traditional practices in executing business and delivering training.                              (Queensland TAFE participant)

> Structures will need to foster (rather than inhibit as is now the case) flexibility in delivery in and assessment and innovative practices.                  (South Australian TAFE participant)

> At the organisational level there will be lower infrastructure numbers and more technology-based delivery. Imperatives will drive different organisational models. Optional scenarios will include: TAFE NSW moves to Commonwealth funding model; local/smaller RTOs rather than one large organisation; TAFE separate from School Education, independently responsible to government; or TAFE colleges collaborate to become regional VET sector provider partners.                              (TAFE NSW participant)

In contrast to the views of TAFE participants, the people drawn from private registered training organisations considered that their existing structures would position them well in the next three to five years. However, they acknowledged that their organisations would need to retain the ability to respond quickly to emerging work in what they see as an increasingly competitive environment. Working more closely together would allow them greater opportunities to take on new work as it arises in the marketplace.

### Increasing flexibility at the work-team level

Forum participants, regardless of their organisational type (TAFE, private, enterprise, state training authority, schools or industry), saw teams as critical to the effective delivery of VET in the next few years.

Teams were variously described as cross-functional, multi-disciplinary or self-managing. Participants saw teams as being made up of mix of teachers, trainers, information technology officers, resource developers, assessors, facilitators and administrative support personnel.

While recognising that flexible work teams were likely to play a critical role in the future, Queensland participants identified three major skill challenges that teams would have to address, namely:

✧ the requirement to keep up with technological changes driven by a particular industry

✧ the difficulty of recruiting new team members with the necessary technical skills

✧ the management and make-up of the skills of the work team with different categories of staff, for example, teachers, assessors, information technology support staff and administrative personnel.

In the New South Wales forum the following comments were made about how these new work relationships might occur:

> Work teams will be more mobile, transient, knowledge-driven, engaging in evidence-based decision-making about learning relationships, task relationships and performance relationships.

> Structures will have to be more flexible to accept more fluid work teams. Work teams will form and reform around specific issues. Team members will need to move to these fluid teams as required. Job titles will have to be more generic so that people will not have a narrow focus on the areas they work in.

Private provider representatives suggested that, because of their size, they were already generally working in small teams to meet client needs. Participants felt that teams would change to include greater multiskilling, the role of trainers would increasingly be one of facilitation and management of learning rather than delivery, and there would be an increasing use of technology-based delivery.

In enterprise registered training organisations, services and products were seen to be more effectively delivered with the involvement of more cross-divisional teams or cross-sectional collaboration, which would assist more relevant and responsive training solutions.

A number of TAFE participants suggested that a possible shortage of teachers in the future will cause a realignment of delivery areas into 'industry teams' and the re-skilling of some administrative support staff to undertake delivery support roles. It was noted that such a multidisciplinary approach will enhance the 'connectedness' of the services provided by a registered training organisation.

Importantly, TAFE participants in most forums saw considerable potential for work teams, but highlighted how teams formed for specific purposes would be likely to cut across existing unit or departmental structures and ways of working. They considered it critical, therefore, for flexibilities to be built into human resource and management practices to accommodate these significantly different ways of working within bureaucratic organisations.

## Focus question 2: Renewing registered training organisation workforces

The second focus question asked participants to consider how recruitment, management and training of the VET workforce will change in the next three to five years—especially given the challenges and imperatives facing vocational education and training. The key themes emerging from these discussions covered the desirability of:

✧ adopting a more strategic approach to workforce planning

✧ managing the tensions inherent to the casualisation of the TAFE workforce

✧ recruiting people with relevant skills and attributes

✧ enhancing the flexibility of human resource practices

✧ developing and maintaining the skills of registered training organisation personnel

✧ establishing and maintaining the registered training organisation as employer of choice.

### *Being more strategic in workforce planning*

The seemingly ad hoc and incremental nature of workforce planning in their organisations was noted by numerous participants across the full range of forums. Some suggested that, in future, registered training organisations would need to plan in a much more holistic and strategic way if they were to 'keep ahead of the game'. Recruitment, retention strategies, job design and re-design, leadership development, management training and targeted professional development, in line with organisational goals and objectives would be critical to ensuring high levels of organisational and individual capability.

The importance of succession planning, especially in light of the ageing of the VET workforce, was also a common issue for many participants and included all categories of registered training organisation. A number of people commented on the lack of real commitment their organisations were making to deal with the problem of skills and knowledge loss. There was considerable discussion in organisations about the problem, but limited examples of real commitment and concrete solutions.

Performance management within registered training organisations was also seen as an issue, yet participants saw it as an essential component of strategic workforce planning. A significant number of people noted that the current form it took in their organisation was 'low key' and ineffectual. It was suggested that, in TAFE institutes, poor performance was rarely acted upon and this had a deleterious effect on work teams and the broader organisation.

### *Managing the tensions inherent to the casualisation of the TAFE workforce*

The issue of casualisation in TAFE institutes generated considerable debate in the Victorian, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australian forums. Participants spoke of the imbalances and inequities in situations where casual employment was prevalent; these would need to be addressed if organisational capability was to be enhanced in a major way.

Comments such as the following emphasise the concerns about casualisation across the various groups:

> There is enormous hostility about casualisation, contracts and part-time work, especially in the industry areas where highly developed flexible people are needed. So many teachers have decided not to do it any more because they cannot earn a full living—only a bit here and there … It is unjust and unethical. (Victorian TAFE participant)

> Casualisation of the workforce leads to instability and a lack of loyalty. It will have to be addressed in some way if we are to attract new people into VET careers.
> (New South Wales TAFE participant)

> How do you manage staff who are employed on short-term contracts resulting from serendipitous tenders? How do you help them have a sense of a future?
> (South Australian TAFE participant)

But at the same time there was general recognition that casual employment offered the essential flexibility that registered training organisations will need to meet the requirements of specific clients and new and emerging industry training demands.

> It will be a new way of working. There will be fewer permanent jobs or jobs for life—we will need the flexibility that casual employment affords. The emphasis will be on a life career with short, sharp employment experiences. (New South Wales human resource manager)

Suggested employment arrangements which would achieve a greater degree of workforce flexibility included:

✧ multiple employing bodies: trainers being employed by both registered training organisations and industry

✧ ongoing contract work with defined timeframes that allowed forward planning

✧ ongoing permanent part-time work

✧ job-sharing

✧ fractional/part-time work, with a requirement to have ongoing involvement with a relevant industry.

### Recruiting people with relevant skills and attributes

As with many of the aspects discussed in the forums across Australia, there was a diversity of views about what qualities registered training organisations should recruit for in potential staff. Some participants wanted to see more of an emphasis in recruitment on 'soft skills' and adaptive workers, who could then be trained to deal with emerging changes. In their view, appropriate attitudes were likely to be more valuable than technical skills and as such would be likely to appear in job descriptions in the future. Attributes such as work ethic, resilience, the ability to take a global view and employability skills were identified as valuable in high-performing and capable organisations.

> RTOs will need to focus their recruitment on people who will be globally-focused, knowledge sharers and self-motivated. (New South Wales TAFE participant)

By contrast, others favoured contracting specialised staff that were 'job ready' and who could be replaced as change emerged.

A number of participants commented that, with reduced funding, there was a real need for training providers to recruit highly skilled employment-ready people who will need little time for induction, need little initial training or require much money to retrain and enhance their skills down the track.

> We do not have the time or the dollars to develop people in basic technical skills. More and more individuals must accept responsibility for maintaining their own skills—after all it is their portfolio of competencies that makes them attractive.
> (New South Wales private provider)

In the future, many participants suggested, registered training organisations will be required to undertake careful and strategic planning to determine 'what skills, where and when', so that they are able to meet the needs of specific clients and new and emerging industries. Discussion across the forums often centred on the importance of making clearer connections between recruitment and organisational values and strategic goals.

The importance of recruiting to improve the age balance and diversity of registered training organisation workforces was also strongly acknowledged. Diversity is seen as crucial, and recruitment strategies will need to be developed which encourage younger people to take on a career in VET, especially given the potential loss of older workers in the next five to seven years.

### Enhancing the flexibility of human resource practices

In the majority of forums, private training providers and enterprise registered training organisation representatives considered that they were able to manage their human resources relatively simply and that they were not constrained by bureaucratic rules and processes. TAFE participants, on the other hand, highlighted the constraints placed upon them by inflexible and overly bureaucratic human resource policies and practices.

Participants currently working with centralised human resource structures noted the importance of making human resources 'part of everyone's responsibilities'. Decentralised approaches would

allow managers to tailor recruitment, promotion, job design and professional development to suit their particular needs. Furthermore, participants wanted 'user friendly' approaches that were faster to implement and simpler to document than the current practices they are required to employ.

Participants outlined a range of strategies for enhancing the flexibility of human resource practices. These included:

✧ online recruitment

✧ online induction

✧ job-sharing in parallel programs and across institutes

✧ development of faster cross-functional and cross-sectoral induction processes.

In Western Australia, participants raised the issue of working from home and more flexible working conditions for those engaged in the flexible delivery of training. While it was acknowledged that such approaches might be inequitable, particularly for those who were engaged totally in face-to-face delivery, many participants considered such options should be explored because they could represent the kind of incentives that might encourage people to come to and stay in the sector.

> Flexibility needs to be maximised in a range of areas for both employers and employees. For example, more flexibility will need to be built into the processes for recruiting, recognising and rewarding staff. Career pathways need to consider potential for upwards, sideways and diagonal movement—we need to be able to broaden people's skills so that we are not so dependent upon people with considerable amounts of knowledge about small matters! At the same time there needs to be recognition that funding will be finite. Constant change is inevitable—organisations need to be smarter, cleverer and more flexible. Then they will be highly capable of meeting any need.     (State training authority participant, Western Australia)

*Developing and maintaining the skills of registered training organisation personnel*

There was general consensus across all forums that the ongoing training of staff within registered training organisations would need to be a high priority if providers are to have the capability required to meet the demands being placed upon them in the near future. A full range of professional development activities was suggested as a means of doing this.

Some participants suggested that the least useful professional development programs were the half-day or full-day activities which drew people away from their workplaces for quite general coverage of generic activities. In line with this view, one participant commented:

> We are pushing the cause with our own clients that learning at work is what it is all about— but do we do it ourselves? No way! We should be mirroring what we are preaching and it may well be cheaper than the other ways that we give PD to people anyway. Coaching and mentoring in the workplace is where we should be heading.
>
> (Western Australian TAFE participant)

More useful strategies in this new environment were seen to be:

✧ online programs

✧ workplace projects

✧ flexibly delivered programs

✧ off-site courses

✧ industry-negotiated skill development activities

✧ training mediated by information communication technologies

✧ mentored activities.

There were also consistent views across the various forums that, for the VET workforce to be seen as credible, they need to be technically well trained and have skills that are commensurate with the best in industry. For teachers and trainers, currency is a crucial issue. A range of strategies for maintaining skills and knowledge were presented by participants. These included:

✧ short-term secondments to industry

✧ job-sharing between registered training organisation and enterprise personnel

✧ enhanced approaches to industry release

✧ project-based return to industry.

The following quote reflects the importance that many participants placed on being able to access ongoing training in industry:

> In the future there needs to be much more training in industry, using their equipment and staff so that training roles and skills change significantly. This addresses the problems associated with ageing equipment and ageing knowledge. Return to industry and industry currency needs a whole new way of thinking and working.
>
> (Western Australian TAFE participant)

Of particular interest to many participants was the development of managers and leaders for the future. Considerable emphasis was placed on 'genuine' succession planning, on the identification of a new generation of leaders and on the development of management skills. Mentoring of younger people by older, more experienced people, coaching on the job and development of specific competencies are perceived to be critical activities for providers now.

Western Australian participants emphasised that targeted training must replace the common 'accidental rise' of managers. It was suggested that:

> Management skills are not necessarily held by people that progress naturally in their field. Most managers cannot manage people—in fact they are only required to focus on $$$$. Managers need to be trained in people skills and effective management and change management skills. (Western Australian TAFE participant)

There were a number of comments, however, that suggested that participants were looking beyond these narrow views of maintaining the professional skills of the VET workforce, particularly those of teachers and trainers. These participants spoke of a greater focus on higher-level qualifications, on the professionalisation of the workforce, on raising the level of entry-level teaching qualifications and of raising the profile of careers in the sector. These views are well represented by the following comment:

> Greater investment will be needed in the full professional formation as teachers—not just trainers and industry practitioners, not just 'PD', not just skills and knowledge but professional lifelong learner–educators—greater management as knowledge workers.
>
> (State training authority participant, Victoria)

*Establishing and maintaining the registered training organisation as employer of choice*

Many participants across the forums noted the need for their registered training organisations to become an 'employer of choice'. A TAFE NSW human resource manager developed a succinct set of criteria for the building of such a profile. These criteria included:

✧ attracting highly skilled people

✧ retaining highly skilled people

✧ retaining organisational knowledge through re-contracting

✧ developing highly flexible human resource practices

✧ recruiting softer skills—adaptability, self-motivation and attributes such as resilience

✧ using diverse ways of working to build capability, including using a mix of permanency and casualisation

✧ allowing 'reflection' time

✧ putting in place 'useable' employee development strategies

✧ supporting mentoring and networking.

The issue of attracting people into the VET workforce was seen by many as a major problem for registered training organisations. Industry representatives confirmed that high wages in many industry areas militated against providers capturing highly skilled and specialised people from the field. However, a number of participants considered that more targeted marketing would help, while others noted the importance of VET as a 'career'. Significantly, participants from regional areas in Western Australia and New South Wales stressed how difficult it was to attract and retain people in regional institutes, when rural infrastructure is economically and socially under threat.

Rewards and incentives were identified as the major solutions to attracting and retaining staff in registered training organisation, regardless of type or location. Salaries commensurate with industry, flexible work arrangements that acknowledged the importance of a work–life balance, enhanced technological support, and individually negotiated professional development opportunities were identified as reasonable 'perks' for dedicated, innovative and highly skilled registered training organisation staff.

In summing up, the following statement confirms the majority of views expressed by a full range of forum participants:

> Structure, rewards and identifying excellence should become the focus for RTOs. The need to identify staff with the vocational qualification requirements may need to be reviewed as will wages and resources for staff. Additional fringe benefits (rewards) may be required to attract the appropriate people to TAFE. The ability to be flexible with hours worked/working from home and allowing for flexible time off work for personal reasons will need to become the norm for an institute to become an 'employer of choice'.
>
> (Western Australian TAFE participant)

## Focus question 3: Foundations for the future

Those participating in each of the forums were asked to identify examples of current good practice occurring that were likely to position their organisations well for the future. Many of those who responded to this question provided information in general terms. Only a small number outlined specific activities and the key contact people associated with them.

Not surprisingly, many of the activities identified as being good practice were similar to those outlined by other participants as requiring attention if their registered training organisations were to enhance their capability for the future. The key themes covered the following:

✧ highly valid and timely workplace teaching, learning and assessment

✧ enhanced client focus, flexibility in delivery modes and locations, together with customised training which encouraged a change in industry perceptions of training and trainers

✧ environmental scanning, futures thinking and associated strategic planning to better place registered training organisations in the context of new and emerging training demands

✧ development of strong strategic alliances and partnerships with key stakeholders in order to enhance flexibility, responsiveness and training outcomes

✧ a global focus: accessing overseas markets, strategic international positioning and international exchanges of staff

- an increased investment in workforce development through targeted professional development activities, knowledge management and knowledge-sharing activities, mentoring and management/leadership training
- a greater focus on quality and accountability through infrastructure, information technology systems and quality systems
- a greater commitment to innovation and excellence: rewards and incentives, support for risk-taking and failure, together with support for innovative and forward-thinking projects.

Thus, while participants in these forums understood the significant challenges and imperatives that they and their organisations were facing in the next few years, many considered that a firm foundation of good practice was already in place from which to launch future registered training organisation activities.

# Invitation to participants

## Will you participate in VET research?

Opportunities are on offer for VET practitioners to take part in a major new VET research program.

This program of research—Supporting VET providers in building capability for the future—is being undertaken by a consortium of high-level researchers. The two-year program is funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

The program aims to provide practical research which will support individual registered training organisations (RTOs) to implement workforce change effectively. The research will develop not only reports, but a range of usable products as well, for example:

✧ tools such as PD support kits

✧ models of good practice in organisational change management which can be tailored to suit different needs

✧ useful insights into the workforce, its cultures and practices.

The first research activity is a set of focus groups across Australia to look at the challenges for both organisations and work teams. Groups will discuss how recruiting, managing and training workforces might change, and what is happening now that will position registered training organisations well for the future.

We expect this research will also prompt the rise of fresh networks and connections in the sector and encourage ongoing working relationships.

Berwyn Clayton and Pauline Robinson will be facilitating. The three key questions that you could reflect on prior are:

✧ How do you think the imperatives/challenges (raised in this session) will play out in terms of structures at whole-of-organisation level and at work-team level?

✧ How do you think recruiting, managing and training our workforces will change?

✧ What are some examples of things happening now that you think will position your organisation well for the future?

Date:    Thursday 26 May

Time:    9.00 am–12.00 pm followed by a seated lunch to 1.00 pm

Venue:  Port Jackson Room, Carlton Crest Hotel, 169–179 Thomas Street, Sydney

# Consortium forum activities

The following provides an outline of the format for consortium forums in Sydney and Brisbane.

## Activity 1: Introduction

Introduction to the forum participants (PR)

*Who is here?*

Explanation of the organisations, roles and functions of people participating in the forum

*Why?*

Explanation that the emphasis is being placed on organisations and work teams and how challenges and imperatives might impact upon organisational structures, cultures and processes

*What we do today?*

Emphasise that it is the start of the research process, and participants will have a chance for ongoing contributions

Brief overview of the consortium research program (BC)

## Activity 2: The current VET environment

This session is about mapping the environment, looking at drivers for change in the current environment, identifying some of the big imperatives you face over next five years. Acknowledge different organisations and that different types of organisations may have different drivers and issues.

In groups, participants to do two things, gather data on how the current environment seems to you. The types of words which describe your current working world e.g. calm, predictable … Each group to try to come up with some words which describe this, put on post-it notes (colour X).

Next participants are to identify the big ideas, imperatives, issues which are impacting on your working world and which you think will shape your organisation in the next five years (e.g. changing demographic of the workforce, increasing use of technology in learning). Put a brief summary of each of these 'big ideas' on a post-it note (colour Y).

Allow 20 minutes for this activity.

Bring groups back to plenary—two people from each group to come up and put their post-its onto the 'maps' we are making of the VET world. If they duplicate ones already there, just put them beside or on top of the one they duplicate. (Do one VET world map for each of the colours of post-it note.)

PR to do a quick summary of what is on their respective map and see if anyone from the plenary wants to add anything.

## Activity 3: The consortium research program

More detailed presentation on the consortium and its research program supported by PowerPoint/OHTs.

## Activity 4: Challenges and imperatives

Participants to move into groups based on organisational types.

In the next 45 minutes each group will be exploring each of the focus questions:

1   How do you think the imperatives/challenges discussed in this session will play out in terms of structures and ways of working at whole-of-organisation level and at work team level?

2   How do you think recruiting, managing and training our workforces will change?

3   What are some examples of things happening now that you think will position your organisation well for the future?

(Stress that we can't predict the future but we have identified some drivers of change and we can work out from this something about the types of workers, the types of organisational structure, and the practices which may be more robust in a changing world.)

*Instructions for groups*

✧   As you do this exercise, feel free to get up and check the maps to make sure you have responded to the imperatives you have identified in the last session.

✧   Each group will need to appoint a recorder and someone to report back—encourage groups to make overheads as well as taking notes.

✧   Move people into groups—give a location for each group, either read a list of each group or use the designation on the name badges.

*Reporting back*

Encourage people in each group to add anything they think is important.

Invite comment across the three groups.

Each participant to complete the data collection/fax back sheet focusing their responses on their own RTO and their own work team.

BC to thank participants and reiterate opportunity for ongoing engagement in the project, answers any questions.

## Activity 5: Lunch

# Participant list

## New South Wales focus group

| Name | Organisation |
| --- | --- |
| Alison Makin | TAFE NSW |
| Anthony Tyrrel | Centrelink |
| Ben Velduis | Hunter Institute of TAFE |
| Carmel Ellis-Gulli | South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Cath Mannix | Qantas |
| Chris Butler | Insurance Australia Group Ltd |
| Colleen Carmody | TAFE NSW |
| David Russell-Jones | OTEN, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| David Tibbs | Western Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Delma Smith | North Coast Institute of TAFE |
| Diane McAdam | Western Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Donna Hensley | TAFE–Schools Partnership Unit, TAFE NSW |
| Gregory Heard | TAFE Teaching and Learning Support |
| Jacqui Dehn | Hunter Institute of TAFE |
| Jenny McCarthy | Group Colleges Australia |
| Jim Jameson | North Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Judith Bowler | Workplace Australia Group |
| Kathleen Iacurto | Illawarra Institute of TAFE |
| Kerry Murphy | Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Leon Cowen | Academy of Applied Hypnosis |
| Lesley Holland | New England Institute of TAFE |
| Liz Goldfinch | Australian Broadcasting Commission |
| Lynne Stallard | ICVET, Illawarra Institute of TAFE |
| Maret Staron | ICVET, Illawarra Institute of TAFE |
| Margaret Dix | North Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Marina Kendal | OTEN, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Michael Barkl | Illawarra Institute of TAFE |
| Michelle Van de Mortel | Hunter Institute of TAFE |
| Nick Westley | TAFE–Schools Partnership Unit, TAFE NSW |
| Patricia Thompson | North Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Richard Hord | Sydney Institute of TAFE |
| Robin Booth | Sydney Institute of TAFE |

# Queensland focus group

| Name | Organisation |
| --- | --- |
| Arlene Dadd | Queensland Ambulance |
| Ashley Ward | Enabling Queensland Group |
| Bob Lamb | Department of Employment and Training |
| Carmel Thompson | Study Gold Coast |
| Chris Sutton | ACPET |
| Deb Fox | Centre for Innovation and Development, DET |
| Greg Harper | Logan Institute of TAFE |
| Janine Schubert | Centre for Innovation and Development, DET |
| John Blakeley | Open Learning Institute |
| Judith Slack | Open Learning Institute |
| Judy Thomson | Logan Institute of TAFE |
| Karenne Muston | RACQ College |
| Kathy Bannister | Open Learning Institute |
| Louise Strode-Perry | Open Learning Institute |
| Maureen Sullivan | Brisbane North TAFE |
| Noel Mullin | Queensland Ambulance |
| Paul Collings | Southbank Institute of TAFE |
| Paul Schlanger | Yeronga Institute of TAFE |
| Peter Skippington | Centre for innovation and Development, DET |
| Philippa Martin | Specialised Training Services |
| Robyn Dyer | Wide Bay Institute of TAFE |
| Sue Lund | Brisbane North TAFE |

# South Australian presentation

| Name | Organisation |
| --- | --- |
| Alexis Watt | Kaylene Kranz |
| Anne Horne | TAFESA |
| Anne Marie Godden | TAFESA |
| Barbara Burton | DOME |
| Bernard Meatheringham | Department of Correctional Services |
| Brendan West | SAMFS Training Centre |
| Brian Cramond | DFEEST |
| Brian Pudney | TAFESA |
| Cheryl Bald | Reframing the Future |
| Christine Medlin | TAFESA |
| Dan Nicholas | Quality, DFEEST |
| David Jones | TAFESA |
| David Launder | SA Metro Fire |
| Debbie Reed | TAFESA |
| Eddie Howlett | Bridgestone |
| Elizabeth Owers | DFEEST |
| Elke Unger | Green Triangle Workplace Training |
| Fee Lee | TAFESA |
| Fernando Delgardo | TAFESA |
| Jackie Tipping-Schutt | TAFESA |
| Karen Plane | CREEW |
| Kathryn Jones | OPDS, Department of Education and Children's Services |
| Katie van du Wall | TAFESA |

**South Australian presentation (cont.)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Kerryn Smith | Food, Tourism and Hospitality Skills Council |
| Kim Coffey | TAFESA |
| Kim Edgar | education.au limited |
| Kristen Banks | Training Packages @ Work |
| Leon Saven | Regency TAFE |
| Lolita Higgins | OPDS, Department of Education and Children's Services |
| Lori Hocking | DECS – Futures Connect |
| Malcolm Lobban | Career Systems |
| Margaret James | DFEEST |
| Mark Carroll | University of Adelaide |
| Mark Croft | TAFESA |
| Michael O'Sullivan | ASK Employment and Training |
| Michelle Donnelly | ESP |
| Mike McInerney | PEER Tec |
| Natalie Kourtidis | University of Adelaide |
| Pat Alexander | TAFESA |
| Paul Klepczynski | TAFESA |
| Peter Bryson | SA Police |
| Peter Daley | TAFESA |
| Rachael Budimir | TAFESA |
| Rhia Vines | Employment Directions |
| Rob Drysdale | EEAGTS |
| Robin Wilden | TAFESA |
| Sally Krips | TAFESA |
| Samatha Byrnes | OPDS, Department of Education and Children's Services |
| Sandra Neville | TAFESA |
| Silvia Morris | Shermans Hairdressing |
| Tara Frame | Workright Australia |
| Tarsha Franklin | Coles Myer |
| Tony Adey | TAFESA |
| Vanessa Mitchell | Retail SA |
| Wendy Perry | Wendy Perry & Associates |
| Werner Lousberg | TAFESA |

# Victorian presentation

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Alistair McCosh | South West TAFE |
| Alma Ryrie-Jones | TAFE Development Centre |
| Anthea Merewether | Gordon Institute of TAFE |
| Barry Anderson | Anderson Training |
| Bev Heddles | William Angliss Institute of TAFE |
| Brian Spencer | Community Services & Health ITAB, Victoria |
| Caroline Alcorso | NSW DET |
| Catherine Brigg | East Gippsland TAFE |
| Cliff Rundle | Kangan Batman TAFE |
| David Benson | Holmesglen TAFE |
| Elizabeth Johnstone | Bendigo and Region Institute of TAFE |
| Ian Gribble | OTTE |
| Joan McCulloch | Bendigo and Region Institute of TAFE |
| Julie Kean | South West TAFE |

**Victorian presentation (cont.)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Julie Leahy | Key Training and Personnel |
| Kevin Antony | University of Ballarat, TAFE Division |
| Larry Foster | Holmesglen TAFE |
| Leonie Barber | Centre for Adult Education |
| Linda Wilkie Bell | South West TAFE |
| Liz Wright | Department of Human Services, Victorian Government |
| Lorant Stary | Kangan Batman TAFE |
| Marc Brierty | Latrobe University Language Centre |
| Maureen Brown | AMES Industry Training |
| Max Newton | Holmesglen TAFE |
| Michele Jackson | Racing Industry Training Consultant |
| Nikki Reichelt | e-Works |
| Pat Thorburn | Mildura and District Education Centre |
| Paul Oprean | South West TAFE |
| Peter Lanbud | North Melbourne Institute of TAFE |
| Raui Renjen | William Angliss Institute of TAFE |
| Robyn Jones | Gordon Institute of TAFE |
| Stan Pietsch | Sunraysia Institute of TAFE |
| Sue Chisholm | Gordon Institute of TAFE |
| Sue Hamence | Mildura and District Education Centre |
| Sue Henderson | South West TAFE |

# Western Australian workshops

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Abigail Makotsa | Curtin University |
| Alison Wright | Australian Broadcasting Commission |
| Angela Pui | Australia-International Institute of Workplace Training |
| Anne Mitchell | Hungry Jacks |
| Anne Osborn | Great Southern College of TAFE |
| Anne Simpson | Department of Education and Training |
| Annelieske Noteboom | Challenger TAFE |
| Brenda Micale | Department of Education and Training |
| Carol Darbyshire | St Brigid's College |
| Carol Howe | Kimberley College of TAFE |
| Carrie Roche | Department of Education and Training |
| Cheryl Fahey | South West Regional College of TAFE |
| Chris Gordon | West Coast College of TAFE |
| Chris Hannan | Swan TAFE |
| Danni Sgro | JobTrain WA |
| Denise White | Swan TAFE |
| Dianne Dwyer | NSHS |
| Doug Lievense | Rockingham Senior High School |
| Fay Budd | Challenger College |
| Faye Jones | Challenger TAFE |
| Fritzi Krojel | Central College of TAFE |
| Geraldine Jeffery | Central College of TAFE |
| Glenn Jennings | Pilbara College of TAFE |
| Guy Truss | South West Regional College of TAFE |
| Helen Burgess | Central College of TAFE |
| Hilary Gill | Edith Cowan University |

**Western Australian workshops (cont.)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Jackie Finnegan | Swan TAFE |
| Jane Lorrimar | Challenger TAFE |
| Jane Worsley-Allott | South West Regional College of TAFE |
| Janusz Zesdler | Consultant |
| Jayne Duncan | Worklink |
| Jenny Harwood | Department of Education and Training |
| Joe Kilbane | Swan TAFE |
| John Fisher | WA Academy of Performing Arts |
| John Potter | Central College of TAFE |
| Jude Chalmers | Pilbara College of TAFE |
| Judy Williams | Albany Senior High School |
| Julie Wasu | WA Academy of Performing Arts |
| Karen Hackett | Morley Training |
| Kate Guthrie | Department of Education and Training |
| Kathy Pollard | CY O'Connor college of TAFE |
| Kay Gerard | Pilbara College of TAFE |
| Kevin O'Connor | Challenger TAFE |
| Kim Grijiesch | JET Employment and Training |
| Lee Morton | Australian Trainers' Association WA |
| Liz Shilcock | CY O'Connor College of TAFE |
| Lyn McClellan | WA College of Agriculture, Cunderdin |
| Lynn Farrell | Swan TAFE |
| Mairead Dempsey | Assessment, Training & Research Consultancy Services |
| Maret Staron | TAFE NSW |
| Mark Burt | Challenger TAFE |
| Marty Sale | Royal Life Saving Society of WA |
| Merrilyn Wilson | VET Policy, Department of Education and Training |
| Michael Dillon | RAAF |
| Michael Martin | St Mary's College, Broome |
| Michael Snadden | Challenger TAFE |
| Michele Campbell | Curtin University |
| Michelle Hoad | Swan TAFE |
| Mike Eastman | WA Academy of Performing Arts |
| Neil Allen | Pilbara College of TAFE |
| P. Mercer | CY O'Connor College of TAFE |
| Pam Bettison | Notre Dame University, Broome |
| Paul Hayman | Challenger College |
| Peter Klifunis | Department of Education and Training |
| Peter McClew | CY O'Connor College of TAFE |
| Phil Jones | Maranatha Christian College |
| R. Closel | Great Southern College of TAFE |
| Rae Durham | Central College of TAFE |
| Rebecca Brown | Department of Education and Training |
| Robert Couzens | Challenger TAFE |
| Robert Munce | Royal Life Saving Society of WA |
| Robert Petheridge | TAC |
| Rod Jones | West Coast College of TAFE |
| S. Cooper | Central West College of TAFE |
| Sandy Faber | Notre Dame University, Broome |
| Sharee Hogg | Swan TAFE |
| Shauna Zani | Department of Education and Training |
| Sonia Bunic | TAC |
| Sue Brand | Central College of TAFE |

**Western Australian workshops (cont.)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sue Cantelo | Department of Education and Training |
| Sue Thompson | Central College of TAFE |
| Susan Jacobs | Central College of TAFE |
| Tania Ceccoin | West Coast College of TAFE |
| Therese De Juie | Brightwater |
| Tim Riessen | Central College of TAFE |
| Yvonne Hart | SDEO, Department of Education and Training |