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Australian VET teacher education: What is the benefit of pedagogical studies at University for VET teachers?

Abstract

In Australia, the level and nature of qualifications for vocational education and training (VET) teachers is a highly contested and political topic. VET teachers are only required to have a pre-university, certificate level, pedagogical qualification, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. They possess substantially lower level qualifications than teachers in other education sectors. But this has not always been the case. Nowadays, some VET teachers still choose to undertake university-level pedagogical qualifications. Almost all of these students study part-time while already working as VET teachers. This paper reports on work undertaken by members of the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group to provide an evidence base to argue for higher pedagogical qualifications for VET teachers. The paper draws on two major sources of evidence: data and arguments gathered for submission to a government inquiry on the VET teaching workforce; and a 2013 survey of VET teacher-education students and recent graduates in university VET-teaching qualifications. We conclude that university-level VET teacher education studies help practitioners develop the high level of knowledge and skills required for the complex work of VET teaching, as well as suggesting some further benefits resulting from the dialogue between practitioners and academics.

1 Introduction

While it might seem self-evident that VET teachers who study teaching at a higher level will be better teachers, it is not so easy to prove the assertion. This paper explains some ways in which this has been attempted in Australia. The paper reports on work undertaken by members of the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group (ACDEVEG), including a 2013 survey of VET teacher-education students. The Australian Council of Deans of Education is a national body of leaders of Education faculties at Australian universities. In 2011, a Vocational Education Group was formed, which consists of Deans' nominees from each university that offers teacher-education programs for teachers in the VET sector. The group was initially formed to provide input into a review of VET teaching by the Australian Productivity Commission, the Australian Government's independent research and policy advisory body (Productivity Commission 2011). ACDEVEG is now an ongoing working group of the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE 2014).

During the consultation period, the Productivity Commission asked members of ACDEVEG to provide an evidence base to support the claim that higher level qualifications were needed for teaching in the VET sector. At the time there was little firm evidence, even from the school-teaching sector, to support the need for degree level pedagogical qualifications. Mem-

bers of the ACDEVEG group therefore decided, later, to undertake a survey of VET teacher-education students, as an initial contribution to the future evidence base. In this paper we report on some of the findings from the survey. The paper also includes some non-survey evidence provided to the Productivity Commission in the ACDEVEG submission to the Commission and that has subsequently been further developed within the group.

This paper focuses on four major areas: A comparison of the content of university qualifications for VET teachers with the content of the Certificate IV; VET teachers' views about what they gain from university pedagogical studies; the ways in which university-level qualifications can be shown to meet identified challenges in VET teachers' work; and a discussion of the ways in which more take-up of higher-level qualifications might be achieved. The latter issue was identified during the Productivity Commission deliberations as a barrier to a more highly-qualified VET workforce.

2 Literature and background

The VET system in Australia provides occupational-related training to adults and to some secondary school students, normally those aged 16 and over. The curriculum is contained (with a few exceptions) within National Training Packages which are 'bundles' of qualifications consisting of units of competency. The VET system consists primarily of the public TAFE (Technical and Further Education) system and around 4000 private training providers. School students undertaking VET courses are mainly catered for by these providers, with a few schools registered as training providers themselves.

Growing concern has been expressed about the educational quality of the VET system, and industry is reported to lack confidence in the outcomes of the VET system (e.g. Skills Australia 2011; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). A major concern relates to reported deficiencies in teaching and assessment practices (e.g. Halliday-Wynes & Misko 2013). The policy response has, however, been to focus primarily on matters relating to training provider registration and audit, rather than on the contribution of VET teachers to students' learning outcomes. But in fact, audits of training providers by the national regulatory body ASQA (Australian Skills and Quality Authority) show that training and assessment issues are the largest area of 'non-compliance' with national standards (Robinson 2013).

In other education sectors in Australia, the contribution of teachers and trainers to system quality is acknowledged. There are rigorous requirements for lengthy and mandatory university-level teaching qualifications in other education sectors, including, most recently, early childhood education. VET teachers possess substantially lower level qualifications than teachers in other education sectors; however, this was not always the case. Until approximately 20 years ago, most full-time TAFE teachers were required to become qualified pedagogically to degree level, usually studying part-time after they were employed, and were supported by their employers to undertake these studies.

The mandatory pedagogical qualification for VET teachers in Australia is currently the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. This qualification was declared as the minimum for

teaching in VET under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) which was introduced in 2002 as the national regulatory framework for VET (Smith & Keating 2003, 48). It was at that point that TAFE colleges began to withdraw from their requirements for VET teachers to have teaching degrees.

The Certificate IV is at the moment in its second iteration (the two versions are known, respectively as 'TAA' and 'TAE' after the names of different versions of the Training Packages), and prior to that, it held the name 'Assessment and Workplace Training'. The qualification has always been problematic. It is generally agreed that it is usually poorly delivered (Smith and Keating, 2003). Many have concerns, too, about the adequacy of a Certificate IV (sub-Diploma) level qualification to equip people involved in the complex and demanding job of VET teaching. However, there is some belief that the qualification content itself is adequate, at least for beginning VET teachers, if it is delivered well (e.g. Clayton, Meyers, Bateman and Bluer 2010).

For these reasons, the issue of VET teacher qualifications has raised a great deal of interest over the past five years in Australia. Several reports (e.g. Wheelahan & Moodie 2011; Guthrie, McNaughton & Gamlin 2011) have contemplated this question, but so far the status quo has remained. It is widely recognised, however, that it is not a coincidence that concerns about VET quality have escalated at the same time as the proportion of the VET workforce with degrees has fallen. Logically, then, a more highly qualified and professionalised teaching workforce, in both the public provider (TAFE) and private training providers, should be expected to lead to improvements in VET quality. This topic has been raised constantly in recent government reports (e.g. Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2013).

Some recent research from the United Kingdom provides a limited amount of evidence for the utility of high-level qualifications (e.g. Simmons and Walker 2013). Their research compared views of the 'market value' of initial teacher-education programs offered in universities compared to those offered in the further education sector, and found that the teachers undertaking the higher education qualification and their teacher educators alike perceived the qualifications delivered in universities to be more intellectually rigorous, and that they related theory to practice. Also in the UK, Bathmaker and Avis (2005) and Lucas and Unwin (2009) in research with 'pre-service' and in-service trainee Further Education (FE) teachers respectively, found that trainee FE teachers thought that their expertise was developed better at universities than within FE colleges themselves. A small-scale Australian study (William 2010) reported similar conclusions.

3 Research method

As explained above, the data in this paper are primarily drawn from two sources: selected questions from the survey of students in university-level VET teaching qualifications and analysis that was included in the ACDEVEG submission to the Productivity Commission and subsequently.

The on-line survey was carried out in late 2013. Ethics approval was gained for the research. Six universities agreed to circulate an email, with a link to the survey, to students currently enrolled in a relevant qualification, and those who had completed such a qualification from 2011 onwards. This represents around half of universities currently offering VET teacher-education qualifications. 135 responses were received, from an estimated population of around 840, an overall response rate of 17.3%. Response rates varied from 40.7% to 12.9% among universities. The population of 840 in these university courses is thought to be around 50% of the total population of currently-enrolled university VET teacher-education students.

The survey was adapted from an existing 'learner satisfaction' survey used widely in the VET sector to satisfy VET-sector regulatory requirements for gathering student feedback, as it was thought that using this well-known survey as a basis might add credibility to the findings. The survey was adapted for the higher education context and included demographic questions and questions about their current job role and previous industry experience. In addition a number of qualitative questions were asked, including: reasons for enrolling, skills, knowledge gained and additional experiences undertaken, as a result of their university qualification, comparison with learning from the Certificate IV, and further study intentions. Frequency data were produced for each question, as well as a listing of qualitative answers. The data presented here come from the questions on skills and knowledge that the respondents said they had gained from their university qualifications.

The other major data source, the submission to the government inquiry (Australian Council of Deans of Education 2011), drew together available data on VET teacher qualifications. The submission had five major parts. The sixth part was minor and comprised comments on some specific points in the draft Productivity Commission report. The five major parts were as follows:

1. University VET teaching qualifications and pathways from Certificate IV TAA.
2. Evidence about the benefits for practitioners of undertaking a university VET teaching qualification compared with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
3. The changing VET environment and the contribution of university VET teaching/training qualifications.
4. Evidence about the different characteristics of degree-qualified people compared with Certificate and Diploma qualified people.
5. Potential barriers to VET practitioners accessing university VET teaching qualifications.

The paper uses data from parts 2, 3 and 5 of the submission. Part 2 of the submission provided data from routine evaluations of students in the university VET teaching qualifications at four universities. These were analysed and gathered under three major headings, addressing the university qualification's contribution to depth of understanding, its role in transforming practice, and its role in engaging with complex work and initiating improvements. Part 3 provided information about university VET teacher-education courses mapped against the draft

Productivity Commission report's own statements about the demands placed upon VET teachers; and part 5 listed barriers to higher levels of qualification among VET teachers together with strategies for addressing them. In addition, subsequent work was carried out by the authors to analyse the body of knowledge in university VET-teaching courses compared with the Certificate IV.

4 Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the participating universities' courses, provided by the relevant academic contacts. All of these courses were offered flexibly (i.e. by distance and predominantly on-line).

4.1 Survey findings about the benefit of university-level studies in VET pedagogy

Table 1 provides an overview of the participating universities' courses, provided by the relevant academic contacts. All of these courses were offered flexibly (i.e. by distance and predominantly on-line).

Table 1: **Overview of courses surveyed, by university**

Univer- sity code	Names of courses	Approximate student nos. 2013	Nature of student cohort(s)
C	Associate Degree, Degree and Graduate Diploma in Adult and Vocational Education; Graduate Diploma in Language, Literacy and Numeracy in VET teaching; Bachelor of VET	400	Mixture of experienced and new VET teachers and some people who want to become VET teachers.
D	Masters of Professional Education and Training Graduate Diploma of Education (Applied Learning)	120 80	As above plus human resource development people from industry and professional educators. 'Pre-service' teacher training mainly for trades-people wanting a career change.
B	Associate Degree in Training and Education	50	Mostly experienced VET teachers, mainly in TAFE
S	Bachelor of VET	40	Mature aged, already working in VET or as trainers, mainly from trade background
T	Bachelor of Adult and Vocational Education; Bachelor of Education (applied learning)	130	Mostly in-service TAFE teachers, 75% female
W	Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas and Masters in VET and in Adult Education.	80	From training providers including TAFE, health industry, and defence forces

All questions received more than 80 responses, with some receiving almost 100. In general, analysis of students' responses (Smith, Hodge and Yasukawa 2014) showed that they noticed, as a result of undertaking their course, six main areas of skill improvement: academic writing skills, ICT skills, personal skills, skills related to the VET sector, pedagogical skills and general business and industry skills. They identified the following contributions that the qualification made to their knowledge: self-knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, ICT knowledge, and content knowledge. In terms of VET-sector specific knowledge, they mentioned VET curriculum practices, general VET sector knowledge such as 'working more effectively with industry', and VET specific language, literacy and numeracy issues. Pedagogical skills included delivery skills, capacity to improve teaching practice, assessment and understanding learners.

On the whole, students were very happy with their courses, with most items scoring over 90% satisfaction on average across the respondents. The areas where students showed relative dissatisfaction were: matters relating to the mode and patterns of delivery; lack of specific VET content in some university subjects (where subjects were shared with students in teacher-training courses for other sectors); and matters related to assessment of learning, especially around expectations.

These findings indicate that students are clearly able to identify the benefits, for them, of pedagogical studies at university.

4.2 Evidence about the benefits for practitioners of undertaking a university VET teaching qualification compared with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

One way of finding out what 'added value' is gained from a university-level qualification compared with a Certificate IV-level qualification is to see what students say about that comparison. Four universities provided comments from their students on this topic, as a contribution to the submission to the Productivity Commission. Comments were obtained in most cases through routine evaluations; students were not asked to compare the two qualifications, but offered comments as part of general evaluation responses. The comments are gathered here under three major headings. Salient points from each comment have been highlighted.

A university qualification offers depth of understanding

- 'My journey so far has provided a deeper appreciation of the reasoning **behind why, how and what an educator's role is**. This is certainly not something the Cert IV offers.' (2011)
- 'From my perspective I see my university qualification giving me a **broader knowledge base to work with** instead of the more specifically vocationally based aspect of the Cert IV.' (2011)

A university qualification transforms my practice

- 'The university qualification encompasses **a variety of instructors**, who all make you critically think about; not just what you are doing, but why you are doing it and all the possible implications for the learner (and broader society) based on your approach...

This has **transformed my teaching** through the critique of my work from a broader perspective than before. I certainly wasn't inspired to do this following my completion of Cert IV.' (2011)

A university qualification allows us to engage with complex work roles and initiate improvement

- ‘A university qualification validates my observations and reflections over years of working in the VET sector, providing credibility when operating at senior management and government level. It also equips me to **design, critique and benchmark learner resources and learning strategy design at a level significantly greater than one who has only completed a Cert IV**. Researching skills, reporting research results and academic writing is another significant benefit of the higher qual.’ (2011)
- ‘On a professional level, Cert IVs produce workplace and industrial 'drones' that often perpetuate and promote the lack of **critical thinking** in others - they ask us not to examine, discuss, analyse or question. ... (The degree qualification) allows the educator to develop a strategy that is **inclusive of the diversity** within cultures and society rather than the dogma of Cert IV training and competencies.’ (2011)

The 2013 survey included explicit questions comparing outcomes from the Certificate IV with outcomes from higher education qualifications, but those data are not yet fully analysed.

4.3 The role of university qualifications in meeting challenges in VET teachers' work

The Productivity Commission's draft research report (2011 p.6.1) listed a number of demands upon the current and future VET workforce. In the submission from ACDEVEG, these were listed, together with a brief explanation of how these demands are addressed in university VET teaching/training qualifications, following analysis of available evidence about the content and nature of those qualifications. This analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: **The ways in which university qualifications can be shown to meet identified challenges in VET teachers' work**

Identified challenges	Suggested contribution of university VET teaching/training qualifications
a. Deliver a higher volume of training	The University sector has the capacity to supply large numbers of highly qualified VET practitioners into the VET workforce, particularly in the new demand-driven higher education environment. As many university programs embed the Certificate IV, they also add to the number of people at entry-level in VET.
b. Respond to unpredictable fluctuations in demand for training in a climate of policy change, economic volatility and	All degree courses in VET teaching qualifications include a study of the policy context as applied to VET. Students gain not only a sophisticated understanding of those factors that influence and drive policies, but develop the skills and knowledge

shifting international ties	to engage actively with policy.
c. Deliver more training at higher levels of qualification	University-trained VET teachers understand what it means to develop depth of knowledge, to study a discipline as a coherent body of knowledge rather than as a collection of competencies, to engage in analysis, evaluation and critique of knowledge
d. Deliver more training in foundation-level language, literacy and numeracy skills	University VET teacher qualification courses address these needs of vocational teachers and trainers, with subjects developed by academics with specialist expertise in LLN pedagogies.
e. Handle a more diverse student population, including diverse ethnicity, backgrounds and location.	VET teacher education courses address issues of student diversity and difference, and inclusive pedagogies through specialised subjects developed by experts in VET sociology
f. Engage in more flexible modes of delivery, including e-learning, online delivery and distance education	University VET teacher education courses provide the skills and knowledge to design and implement programs in flexible modes but also by helping the student teachers develop a capacity for a critical approach to some of the flexible approaches
g. Develop stronger ties to industry and engage in more employment-based delivery	University VET teacher education courses require their students to hold the relevant vocational qualifications and have a number of years of industry experience, and many subjects require students to undertake extensive assignments within industry.
h. Adapt to overlapping boundaries with schools and higher education	This is an important area that university based VET teacher education courses can address more effectively than other sectors can. All universities offering VET teacher education programs are also involved in secondary teacher education. All universities also have Graduate Certificate programs in higher education teaching and learning. Many currently offer, or are working towards, overlap among these programs.
i. Undertake a greater volume of recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competency.	All VET teacher education courses include at least one subject on assessment that develops student teachers' knowledge of a range of theoretical and philosophical approaches to assessment and their practical implications. These subjects include the assessment of VET learners through recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competency.

Table 2 indicates (in the first column) that the Commission identified a great number of challenges in the work of VET teachers. The second column shows the arguments that were

made by the ACDEVEG group to show that university courses are more likely to meet these challenges than a lower-level qualification.

4.4 How can the uptake of higher level qualifications be increased?

As noted above, higher-level qualifications are not mandatory for Australian VET teachers and in fact only a small proportion of teachers currently choose to undertake them. This issue was analysed for the Productivity Commission report.

The potential barriers to VET educators gaining university teaching qualifications can be summarised into three main categories: the nature of the VET workforce and its career pathways; the attitudes and priorities of members of the VET teaching workforce to their own qualifications and professional development; and the perceived suitability of the current structure of university teaching qualifications for the VET teaching workforce.

The VET workforce has characteristics that are distinctive compared with the workforces of other education sectors. Most VET educators in Australia move into VET teaching after establishing themselves in a career within another industry, (Dickie, Eccles, FitzGerald, McDonald, Cully, Blythe, Stanwick and Brooks 2004, 84). These ‘second career’ educators transition into VET teaching from a wide variety of organisations including small and large business enterprises, industry associations, adult education organisations, schools, universities and government departments. (Simons, Harris, Pudney & Clayton 2009). They tend to be older than their other education workforce counterparts. They may have significant family responsibilities. Throughout and often beyond the transition period to VET teaching, most VET educators keep strong professional connections to their original occupation (Simons, Harris, Pudney and Clayton, 2009 45). They may therefore value development in their industry area more highly than that in teaching/training. One solution to this issue is to have a staged progression to higher level qualifications. Thus, building clear articulation pathways from the Certificate IV, through to a Diploma, Associate Degree and then a Bachelor’s degree, or alternatively, having a Bachelor’s degree with early exit qualification points would enable higher qualifications as more achievable for many student teachers.

The attitudes and priorities held by the VET workforce to professional development and qualifications and the level of access to professional development may also create a barrier. Guthrie (2010) has noted resistance to higher-level qualifications among VET teachers. He maintains that the emphasis on learning in the workplace, for VET learners, may transfer into a perception that off-the-job learning for VET teachers themselves is inferior to on-the-job learning. There may also be an element of inter-sectoral rivalry in a reluctance to undertake higher education qualifications, which might be underpinned by a perception that in former times university VET teacher-training courses were of variable quality (Guthrie 2010). For historical reasons, there may also be an expectation, amongst the TAFE workforce in particular, which is heavily unionized, that higher-level qualifications should be paid for by the employer and that time release for study should be provided. These perceptions and expectations suggest that there is a need for more consistency about messages sent at national,

State, and training provider level about the need for more formal learning leading to higher-level pedagogical qualifications. There are clear benefits at all levels, and these could be more strongly explained. More education is also needed about the shared responsibility for higher-level qualifications, as in other professions.

There may be a need for better communication about the nature of university VET teacher-education programs. VET educators who are unfamiliar with the programs may think that they do not have time to undertake what they may imagine are traditional higher education courses of study, undertaken full-time on campus. They may be unaware that VET teaching/training qualifications are tailored for the VET workforce and are generally offered flexibly, often at a distance, and with credit available for the typical qualifications that VET practitioners have. Thus the barrier may not be the actual structure, but rather perceptions of the structure. Also, those entering the profession with industry qualifications at a lower level may feel that the academic requirements of a university course are beyond them. Again, university VET teaching/ training courses do offer provision and support for such students, but this might not be widely known. Finally, they may be confused by the perceived lack of consistency and nomenclature among the university qualifications. To address all of these perceptions, improving communication and information flows between the VET sector and higher education sector will be a key. The formation of ACDEVEG has itself helped communication by enabling the ACDEVEG members to communicate as a group to major VET stakeholders with a single voice.

4.5 Comparison of content of university courses with the content of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

Comparison of the content of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and higher education VET teacher qualifications highlights notable differences that could contribute to differences in the quality of work of graduates. The differences include the scope of content, the level of complexity, and application of the content. Work was undertaken by ACDEVEG to identify a VET teacher body of knowledge through a comparative analysis of the curricula of University VET-teaching qualifications. This analysis highlighted ten elements common to Australian higher education VET teacher curricula:

- Context: the multiple contexts of VET, from international developments, national demographics, economic settings and policy frameworks to national and state systems.
- Curriculum, program and learning strategy: the practice and theory of curriculum, including CBT and its alternatives.
- Teaching and learning: learning theories and application and instructional theories and application.
- Literacy and numeracy: the critical area of learner and worker literacy and numeracy.
- Learner diversity: the multiple challenges and opportunities of learner diversity in VET and other post-compulsory learning contexts.

- Assessment and evaluation: the wide range of theories of assessment and evaluation, including assessment practices in Australian VET.
- Workplace and organisational context: workplace, workforce and organisational learning, development and policy.
- The VET profession: the complex issue of the nature and development of the VET professional, including industry knowledge and teaching capability development.
- Research: quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and data collection and analysis methods.
- Leadership and management: organisational leadership and management theories and application.

The core units of competency that make up the current Certificate IV in Training and Assessment areas follows. (There are also three elective units.)

- TAEASS401B Plan assessment activities and processes
- TAEASS402B Assess competence assessment validation
- TAEDEL401A Plan, organise and deliver group-based learning
- TAEDEL402A Plan, organise and facilitate learning in the workplace
- TAEDES401A Design and develop learning programs
- TAEDES402A Use Training Packages and accredited courses to meet client needs

When the content represented by the ten elements in university courses is compared to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment units of competency, we find the following. The Certificate IV units can be grouped into three key areas: assessment, pedagogy and curriculum. These align to three elements within the ACDEVEG VET teacher body of knowledge: assessment and evaluation, teaching and learning, and curriculum, program and learning strategy. Beyond this partial alignment, the ACDEVEG qualifications cover a further seven substantial content areas, such as the social and economic contexts of vocational education and professional identity. The wider content scope of these higher qualifications suggest that students in these programs will gain a broader sense of what is involved in VET teaching and will also encounter more complex and challenging forms of knowledge.

In the submission to the Productivity Commission, the level of the qualifications was also discussed, i.e. whether higher education VET teacher qualifications incorporate more challenging and complex knowledge and types of application. To do this, generic outcome descriptions contained in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (AQF Council 2011) for Certificate IV and bachelor degree level qualifications respectively were compared. All Australian qualifications are required to comply with the broad descriptors of the relevant AQF level. The analysis showed a large difference between the two levels. For example, according to the AQF, skills outcomes at Level 4 (Certificate IV) are expected to enable graduates to:

- complete routine and non-routine activities; and

- provide and transmit solutions to a variety of predictable and sometimes unpredictable problems.

In contrast, skill outcomes at Level 7 (Bachelor degree) allow graduates to:

- analyse and evaluate information to complete a range of activities;
- analyse, generate and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems; and
- transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others.

As is explained earlier in this paper, VET teaching (as confirmed by the Productivity Commission report) is complex and challenging work. It definitely involves analysis of information, facing ‘unpredictable and sometimes complex problems’ and the ability to ‘transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others’. These are outcomes linked to qualifications at AQF level 7. It was argued, therefore, that the challenges and complexity of VET teaching are such that AQF Level 4 outcomes are not as appropriate to the work of VET teachers as Level 7 outcomes.

5 Conclusions

The VET sector will continue to be influenced and challenged by social, economic and political changes. This means that in addition to the capabilities identified by the Productivity Commission, there must be a critical mass of VET professionals who are able to adapt to future changes. Even considering only those challenges outlined by the Productivity Commission, the analyses above show that university VET-teaching qualifications are more appropriate than the current mandatory Certificate IV. These are not simply arguments mounted in self-interest by academics; they are supported by the views and comments of students in the courses, some of which are recorded above.

Further, we consider that academics and VET practitioners alike benefit from VET practitioners studying at university. VET academics in universities, because they are not working directly within the VET sector, can identify aspects of VET practice that practitioners embedded in the everyday practices within the sector take for granted and do not question. The practitioners enrolled in the universities’ courses are familiar with their sector and bring professional insights and understanding of current concerns. Through constructive dialogue, new knowledge, practices and policies can emerge. Universities provide an environment where VET teachers can discuss the challenges they are facing in their workplaces with fellow professionals and their academic lecturers. During their course, university academics conduct supervision visits in the teachers’ workplaces to observe and give feedback on their teaching practice or have close relationships with local practitioners who share in this task. These matters would be fruitful areas for further research,

Currently there is still a critical mass of universities offering degrees in VET teacher education, and a critical mass of academics within these institutions who specialise in VET and adult education. However, many of these academics will be retiring over the next 10 to 15

years, and there is a need for serious attention to the renewal of this workforce if higher-level qualifications are to continue to be available to VET teachers. Also a strong body of academics is needed to ensure that Australian VET will continue to be informed by national and international research.

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