Development of adult and vocational teachers in Europe and Australia: a comparative analysis

Michele Simons and Roger Harris, Centre for Research in Education, University of South Australia, Australia

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Introduction
The work of teachers in adult and vocational education has undergone considerable change in recent years. Teachers’ roles have been expanding and the link between the quality of education in those sectors and the quality of teachers and trainers firmly established (Cedefop 2004). They play a critical role in shaping policy and implementing reforms (Lipinska, Schmid & Tessaring, 2007). Now viewed as change agents, teachers are important actors in economic and social development. Policies aimed at dealing with a range of issues such as unemployment, skills shortages, deficits in basic skills (language, literacy and numeracy), reducing inequality and enhancing access to education have all, over time required a response from the adult and vocational education sectors in both EU countries and Australia (Gill, Dar and Fluitman 1999, p. 405).

The directions being taken to support teacher development are, in many respects, very different in the European Union (EU) and Australia. Reform initiatives in the EU are focused on raising the profile of adult and vocational teaching as a profession, while those in Australia have been working to meld a disparate workforce into a coherent whole, united by common entry level qualifications and maintenance of a diverse workforce to drive skills development in a variety of contexts. This paper examines the policy initiatives and strategies being developed and implemented to support the adult and vocational education workforces in the EU and Australian contexts. Analysis of relevant literature generated the foundational information for this study, supplemented with selected data gleaned from 30 European informants from 18 countries for another research study (Harris, Simons & Maher 2008). While there is increasing attention being paid to adult and vocational teachers in each context, both are wrestling with common issues related to recognition, status and the value of teachers’ work, with each taking somewhat different approaches to these matters.

The European Union context
The Copenhagen Declaration (November 2002) introduced a European strategy for enhanced cooperation in VET, underlining the contribution of VET to achieving the Lisbon goals and formulated priorities for improved cooperation on VET systemic
reform. This policy direction was then reinforced through successive policy statements from the Communiqués of Maastricht (2004), Helsinki (2006), Bordeaux (2008) and most recently Bruges (December 2010). However, despite these significant statements of strategy, the crucial role played by VET teachers and trainers, have not attracted due attention in policy reports. Leney et al. (2005) reported to the European Commission that:

‘one of the core problems of vocational educators’ search for professional recognition is based on a paradox: while vocational teachers and trainers are essential to supporting skill development in the workforce, they are not high status for this role’ (p.153).

Similarly, Misra (2011) recently concluded that:

‘it is remarkable that its practitioners so lack the level of social recognition needed to establish it as a well-regarded profession’ and that while teachers are key to a successful VET system, ‘remarkably little is known about patterns and contrasts of VET teacher training across the EU’ (p.31).

Though detail may have been underplayed in official EU reports, advocates have been furiously paddling under the policy waters. Here, three of the most recent initiatives are mentioned. First, in May 2009 a Peer Learning Activity was held in Bonn to examine what was meant by professionalisation of VET teachers/trainers, how it is made visible and how it can be developed and enhanced. The forum concluded that the professionalisation of VET teachers/trainers could be supported through appropriate initial preparation and qualifications, and through continuing professional development; as well as through measures such as teacher/trainer registration, accreditation or licensing and the quality assurance of VET programs (EU 2009, p.12).

Second, Cedefop has continued to trumpet the significance of VET practitioners in the outworking of EU policy. Cedefop’s Fourth Report in 2009, Modernising VET, in furnishing the case for teacher and trainer competence and effectiveness as ‘the cornerstone of European VET reforms’ (p.28), highlights the dual role of VET practitioners:

VET teachers and trainers play a dual role in changing, reforming and modernising VET systems. They may shape and implement reforms and they may generate their own changes and innovations. To achieve this, VET professionals must be partners and stakeholders in change and reform, and innovation agents at ground level … (Exec Summary, 2009, p.28)

As such they are heralded as ‘indispensable partners in reform’ (Full Report, p.111), where implementation of reform requires not only providing teachers and trainers with appropriate training but also winning their commitment to the objectives of the reform. As Descy and Tessaring (2005, p.156) state, if they do not understand the purpose of a new policy – what it implies for their organisation or them personally,
and how it affects their role, functions and responsibilities, new policy will face logical resistance and risk failure. Such rhetoric in the EU is a stark contrast with the reality of the positioning of VET practitioners in the Australian VET reform of the 1990s, when, in the first flushes of installing an industry-led VET system, teachers were purposefully kept out of decision-making processes relating to such matters as competency standards development and provided with minimal professional development to effect change to a competency-based training regime with the resulting outcome that teachers and trainers felt disempowered and disengaged from the change process (Harris, Simons & Clayton, 2005, p.70).

A third initiative is the Training of Trainers Network (TTnet), a European forum for key players and decision-makers involved in the training and professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. At their 12th Conference, the focus was on supporting the professional development of VET teachers and trainers, and common priority issues including changing roles and competences of VET teachers and trainers; changing roles and competences of VET teachers and trainers; professional development of in-company trainers; updating vocational knowledge and skills, mentoring in VET and leadership in VET were identified.

In addition, many other activities have been undertaken by national networks. The thematic group on Mentoring elaborated a preliminary overview of mentoring in the EU countries. A draft outline for a Handbook on Mentoring in VET across EU in both initial VET teacher training and in-company training has now been developed. The thematic group on Leadership analysed the challenges and changing roles of leaders in education and training with emphasis on VET, mapping the situation across the countries and identifying thematic areas for further work. The working group on In-company trainers focused on TTnet’s main achievements in this field – professional development, accreditation of trainers, identification of core competences and creating a competence framework. A compilation of good practices in the field was distributed. Further work for the group was to involve comparison of trainers’ qualifications across Europe, formation of guidelines for a European reference certification/accreditation system, and furthering the notion of a Euro Trainer Pass. The three main themes for 2011 were announced as the professional development of in-company trainers and accreditation procedures, mentoring and VET leadership. Potential other working themes were enunciated as (a) mobility becoming part of the professional development of teachers and trainers, (b) inclusive teaching, and (c) involvement of VET professionals in implementing EU principles and tools. That the third theme was mooted is perhaps a sign that progress in terms of VET teacher engagement had not been a rapid as some would have liked.

While this EU discourse is visionary and encouraging, it needs to be recognised that some of this is no doubt still rhetoric, and the reality may be quite different. Reports do acknowledge that there is only slow progress being made overall (CEDEFOP
Briefing Note, Dec 2010, p.3), though lack of useful international definitions and statistics – as in Australia – continues to make comparisons very difficult. It is also the case that change in these directions has been to date extremely variable and patchy across the EU countries, and that evidence of teacher engagement in modernising VET is ‘limited’ and in the case of trainers, ‘non-existent’ (Full Report, 2009, p. 121). Included in the Bruges Communique’s vision for VET for 2011-2020 is the strategic objective of improving the quality and efficiency of VET and enhancing its attractiveness and relevance, through inter alia enhancing the quality of teachers, trainers and other VET professionals. This is to entail improving initial and continuing training for them by offering flexible training provision and investment, and identifying best practices and guiding principles with respect to changing competences and the profiles of VET teachers and trainers.

The European Commission has also been active, and in its 2010 Communication to the European Parliament, responded to the call of the Europe 2020 Strategy to reinforce the attractiveness of VET, in which teachers and trainers were to have a key role (Communication, the European Commission 2010). The aim of this Communication was to propose a vision for the future of VET. It claimed that the Copenhagen process launched in 2002 had supported the Member States in modernising VET systems. The role of teachers and trainers was deemed crucial in the modernisation of VET with a special focus on how they are recruited, their professional development and status in society. It message was that the future, dominated by change, presents new challenges for both teachers and trainers in VET, involving new pedagogies, curriculum design, quality assurance, management and administrative tasks.

One of the key attempts to raise the professionalism of the VET workforce is the establishment of teacher standards. This is a contested issue, but some European countries have moved in this direction. One is the UK, with the FENTO standards – FE teachers were required in 2001 to hold a qualification based on these standards, with the target of having a fully qualified workforce by 2010. Since then there have been at least three policy documents relating to the professionalisation of VET teachers and principals in England (Cedefop 2010b, p. 76):

- ‘Success for all’ (2002) – to raise the number of qualified staff and to allow VET teachers and trainers time for CPD

- ‘Equipping our teachers for the future’ (2004) – sought to establish a VET teacher qualifications and standards framework to be in place by 9/2007, together with the registration of all VET teachers with their new professional body, the Institute for Learning (IFL) – this would confer on all VET teachers/trainers full professional recognition as QTLS (Qualified Teacher in the learning and Skills Sector)
• ‘Further education: raising skills, improving life chances’ (2006) – to introduce a requirement that all staff would undertake a minimum of 30 hours CPD per year, and that all VET principals and aspiring principals would have to complete gain a leadership program managed by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.

Teachers who have joined the sector since 2007 must have, or obtain within five years, a recognised teaching qualification. There is no time limit for those employed prior to that year, but they must fulfil the CPD requirements. Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council for education and training, develops, assures and promotes these national standards for the training of trainers and teachers in the public FE colleges and private training sectors. The professionalisation agenda and accompanying reforms were introduced to raise the general standards of teaching in the VET sector, and in an attempt to bring greater parity of esteem with teachers in general schools, who already have a professional status (ReferNet United Kingdom, 2010, pp.81-83).

The Australia experience
The advent of the Kangan Report in 1974 signalled the beginning of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector in Australia and along with it the development of a distinctive workforce which had at its core the task of developing vocational expertise. This policy direction consolidated teacher education programs for TAFE teachers in universities. By the early 1990s, however, the TAFE teaching workforce was swept up in the tidal wave of training reforms which acted to transport them into a large and diverse VET sector. This changing context was the impetus for a report by a working party of the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC) *Staffing TAFE for the 21st Century* (VEETAC Working Party on TAFE Staffing Issues 1992, 1993). This report signalled that the monopoly of universities in providing teacher education for sector’s employers was numbered as calls were made for TAFE to be more involved in all aspects of the design and delivery of courses for their staff and the development competencies for TAFE teachers to be defined (Guthrie 2010a).

As noted above, the earliest days of these reforms were also characterised by a strong preference to down play the importance of teachers working in the TAFE sector and a rapid expansion of the numbers of teachers and educators working in organisations other than TAFE who were able to deliver nationally accredited VET. These actions were due, in part, to ensure that the productivity of the VET sector would not be limited by the availability of suitably qualified staff or unnecessary bureaucratic processes. The result of these early policy initiatives was that the previously well defined occupations of TAFE teacher became blurred within a VET workforce that grew to include staff working in a variety of other settings including enterprises, industry associations, commercial training organisations, adult and community education organisations, secondary schools, universities and various government departments. This increasing diversity in the VET teacher and trainer
workforce posed considerable challenges for those concerned with the quality of VET teaching and training. On the one hand, efforts needed to ensure that all educators, regardless of their context and title, were provided with relevant and effective training for their role. On the other hand, this effort needed to reflect the reality that, for many people this work only comprised a proportion of their work role.

One of the first set of competency standards for any occupational group to be developed was for workplace trainers (CSB-Assessor and Workplace Trainers 1994). The purpose for the development of these standards was essentially practical, focusing on assisting those responsible for hiring and training workplace trainers (Garrick and McDonald 1992) and addressing the needs of trainers located in workplace environments (NAWT, 2001, p. 23). Although these standards were not explicitly designed to describe the work of teachers employed in TAFE institutes, the division of standards into two groups paved the way for these to become the de facto standards for these teachers. The first group (designated Category 1 standards) were designed to describe the work role of people providing training in the workplace but for whom the training function was not a major part of their job. The second group (‘Category 2’ standards) were for people for whom training was a large part of their job (Workplace Trainers Ltd, 1992 cited in NAWT 2001, p. 23; CSB Endorsement submission to NTB 1992 cited in NAWT 2001, p. 23). Competency standards for assessors were subsequently developed and endorsed in 1993. These workplace trainer and assessor standards were revised in 1994 and 1995 respectively.

The next iteration of the competency standards for Assessment and Workplace Training were developed after the advent of Training Packages. Two fundamental shifts occurred at this time—the two categories of Workplace Trainer disappeared and the units were packaged into designated qualifications - a Certificate IV and a Diploma (NAWT 2001, p. 26). The new Certificate IV represented a combining and significant revision of the units of competency that previously comprised the Category 1 and Category 2 qualifications. Two further iterations of the Certificate IV qualification have since been produced and the structure of a new diploma is currently being developed to better articulate with the changing Certificate IV qualification. Each of these iterations of the Certificate IV in particular have had their own groups of supporters and critics (see Guthrie 2010a). What has not changed through these all these developments has been the firm belief that a competency-base certificate level program (a para-professional qualification) coupled with relevant vocational qualifications provides a sound basis for professional practice as a VET teacher or trainer regardless of their job role or context. Debates around the Certificate IV qualification have been heightened by the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the VET workforce (2011). This inquiry concluded that necessary reforms to support the development of the VET workforce should include: a wider base of the VET workforce that has at least basic educational capabilities, more consistent delivery of the foundational qualification (the Certificate
IV), more teachers and trainers holding this qualification, and more professional development (p. xxxiv).

Other reforms to the ways in which the Certificate IV is delivered have also been offered as means of better supporting VET staff. Clayton et al. (2010) suggest that the Certificate IV could be ‘markedly improved’ with more application of teaching and assessment skills, increased program flexibility, continuing professional support, and appropriately experienced and qualified teachers acting as mentors to newly qualified staff (pp.8-9). Mitchell et al. (2010) and Guthrie (2010a, 2010b) have emphasised the need for higher skills and knowledge, despite the fact that university-level qualifications have received little attention in the research and policy literature. Reforms suggested by Skill Australia include greater regulation around who is able to deliver the Certificate IV qualification; making language literacy and numeracy a core part of the qualification and increased assessment requirements for Certificate IV candidates including mandatory external assessment of supervised training sessions as part of the assessment process (Skills Australia 2011, pp. 14-15). While efforts to ensure that these initial qualifications are fit for purpose, these proposed reforms remain embedded in the assumption that a unified approach to the initial development of VET teachers is able to address the diversity of work roles that are filled by those working to deliver vocational education and training. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) have countered this assumption with a number of suggestions including a return to categorising teachers and trainers on the basis of their level of responsibility, with relevant entry level qualification requirements attached to these categories.

While it is laudable that much of the recent research has promoted policy options including more extensive use of continuing professional development and the notions of qualification and career pathways as a means of promoting the development of VET teaching sector, there is not a lot of encouraging evidence to suggest that these solutions will find fertile ground in which to yield results. A number of professional development initiatives such as Reframing the Future have come and gone as initiatives to assist VET teachers to deal with the continual wave of reforms. A study of career pathways in VET (Simons, Harris, Pudney and Clayton 2009) showed that while large numbers of VET staff participated in formal, structured and informal professional development in the three years preceding the study, teachers reported less access to formal professional development than did their managers. In addition, teachers seemed to receive less access to professional development overall. Teachers in this study also expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the encouragement they had received and the access they had to professional development. Levels of satisfaction with the quality of professional development they attended were also lower – particularly when compared to that attended by their managers. If these data are translated across the sector, then a policy direction that rests on lower levels of qualifications (albeit regulated more tightly as proposed)
being coupled with professional development as the answer to enhancing the quality of the VET teaching workforce, it may find it hard to deliver the needed results.

Other issues that find resonance with the EU experience are the lack of systematic data on the nature of the VET workforce and the existence of a distinctive VET profession. While the former issue continues to be the focus of calls for action in both contexts, the question of a VET profession in Australia seems to sit outside of current policy considerations. In some respects the continuing debate over qualification levels obliquely addresses the status of VET teachers. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) have raised the potential of strategies such as the registration of VET teachers and accreditation of VET teacher education programs as mechanisms to address this issue.

**Conclusion**

Both Australia and the EU are working towards the development of vocational education and training systems that will be able to deliver a range social and economic policy outcomes. Both are building VET workforces out of sets of historical conditions which presage particular issues and pathways to be travelled in order to accomplish these goals. Many of the EU initiatives are of interest to Australians because they are centrally focussed on enhancing the professionalism of these teachers, rather than blurring the boundaries between the various groups in the workforce who might contribute to adult education in a wide range of contexts. However, in both settings, these strategies are predicated on some agreement being reached on the prior conditions that can give rise to the defining of VET educators as some form of coherent group — perhaps as a profession. Issues such as the capacity to articulate a clear mission and vision for VET educators and the claims that can be made about the existence of a common core of knowledge that is central to the work of VET educators need to be considered. Arguably, in both settings the quest to conclusively come to some agreement on these questions remains a work in progress which, perhaps with the adoption of international perspectives generated through a considered analysis of policy and practice in Australian and EU countries, may be facilitated.

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