

REPORT ON VET/TVET SURVEY.

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The NSW Teachers Federation undertook a survey of all VET/TVET teachers in NSW Secondary Schools, Central Schools and TAFE Colleges regarding workload and other issues or areas of concern relating to the teaching of VET/TVET subjects. An email was sent to all Federation Representatives informing them that a VET/TVET Survey was available on-line at the Federation's website.

The survey was in response to a Council Decision which stated:

“Regardless of the VET subject taught there are additional tasks and responsibilities that VET teachers have on top of the work they do teaching non-VET subjects. Given there are a large number of Teachers Federation members affected by these issues a survey by Federation of all VET teachers in High Schools will allow Federation to take effective action in support of these teachers.”

Questions specifically related to:

- Hours spent teaching VET Courses.
- Additional paperwork involved.
- Responsibility for work placement
- Difficulties in organising work placements
- Funding for resources and equipment
- Source of funding
- Training issues
- Number of consultants
- Frequency of audits.
- The audit process.
- Upgrading qualifications
- Class sizes

VET/TVET teachers were also asked to outline other issues they may have with their position. Five hundred and sixty five VET/TVET teachers responded to the survey. Eighty-seven percent of these were permanent teachers.

When asked to estimate the number of additional hours spent per week in delivering a VET Course in contrast to a traditional subject, thirty-nine percent responded 6-10 hours, thirty-six percent 1-5 hours and seventeen percent responded 11-15 hours. Many teachers outlined all the time consuming duties involved in delivering a VET subject:

“Workplacement organisation and supervision, monitoring and assessing competencies, developing assessment tasks and mapping these against the training package, keeping and recording industry currency....and the list goes on”, was one typical comment.

When comparing the additional paperwork created by VET subjects in comparison to other subjects thirty-four percent responded it was 100% or more, thirty-three percent said 75% or more and twenty-two percent said 50% or more. A typical response outlined the following in terms of paperwork:

“You still have all the normal paperwork, reports etc. but on top of this is all the ASQA paperwork requirements as well as multiple paper trails for competency achievement, work placement, competency entries on BOS, regular student notification of competencies achieved, documentation of practical skills, constant update of subject content when framework changes etc. There is also the annual paperwork around facilities and compliance for course being delivered.”

Forty-seven percent of respondents stated that the main source of additional paperwork was the Registered Training Operator with thirty three percent of teachers stating that the main source was their regional or district co-ordinator. One respondent summed up the feelings of most of the VET teachers with the following observation:

“The paperwork is provided by the RTO but it is not their requirement as such. It is the threat of ASQA audits that have made the RTOs go this way. The need for compliance has become overwhelming, whereas, before ASQA there was VETAB who would audit RTOs but there was a more lenient approach. Now there is continuous improvement with ASQA threatening fines and non-compliance for the delivery of these courses. The blame can also be placed on the so-called shonky RTOs who were delivering qualifications without quality training, in some cases none at all. This is the reason the Federal Government has handed ASQA more powers.”

Several questions related to the organisation of work placements in the school or college. Fifty-seven percent of respondents stated that a private provider was responsible for placements with twenty-four percent stating that they looked after work placements themselves. Comments ranged from the private provider being *“totally useless”* to *“they do a fantastic job and take a huge amount of pressure off us”*. A commonly repeated comment is summarised in the following observation by one respondent:

“Private provider secures the placement. However we have to consult with student and liaise with consultant. We train students, print off and explain paperwork, help them phone employer, photocopy and sign documents and visit them at their workplace.” Many commented that these visits took place outside of school hours due to the nature of industry hours. The VET teachers own vehicle also has to be used often over large distances checking on students.

Many expressed concerns around the lack of background checks done on the staff members at the work places we send students to. As one teacher commented:

“The compliance requirements for teachers, cleaners, admin. staff etc to prove they are allowed to work with children is mind boggling. And yet we happily send out young men and women anywhere that will take them basically.”

Fifty-eight percent reported that it was moderately difficult to organise work placements with twenty-seven percent stating that it was extremely difficult. Many commented that it had become more difficult in recent years due to students being forced to return to the school environment (17+) One comment captured the views of many:

“This has tended to escalate the workload in follow-ups or fixing problems created by lethargic students with poor communication skills and limited enthusiasm.”

Over ninety-two percent of respondents reported that they received no time in lieu for organising work placements. Eighty-eight percent of VET Teachers reported that they were the contact person for work placements. A typical comment from respondents was:

"We are not even given time off to visit students on work placement. We are supposed to visit students in the periods we would normally have them or in our personal time."

Adequate funding for resources and equipment was a major issue for VET Teachers with seventy-three percent of teachers reporting that the funding was inadequate. The main source of funding was the school budget (62%) and student fees (36%) with the P&C and industry sponsorship negligible. A typical response from teachers referred to the inability to meet industry standards on the funding provided from the school's global budget. With no separate allocation for VET Courses many teachers admitted to bringing in their own equipment and materials so that students are able to complete a task so they can be deemed competent. Funding is a major issue for almost all the VET Teachers who responded. A lucky few reported how wonderful their Trade Training Centres are but for most VET Teachers lack of funding is a major source of stress. Almost all responded that collecting student fees was a real struggle with as little as 10% of students paying fees. Many reported that lack of funding for equipment would lead to courses not being offered in the future.

In regard to the training for VET, over seventy-five percent of respondents reported that it was adequate. Most respondents made comments about the constant need for retraining however. One respondent commented: *"The course changed, and changed again and keeps changing, so we have to continue to jump through hoops."* And another responded: *"The continuous retraining to do the same job is ridiculous as if we teachers can't update programs without redoing the same basic training."*

When asked about how they were required to upgrade their qualifications, fifty-two percent responded that it was online with twenty-five percent reporting through coursework. On-line training was reported as often unsatisfactory because of not having the ability to ask questions face to face as well as the ability to network with others. The lack of recognition for prior learning (RPL) was an issue with most VET Teachers. Most shared the view of a respondent who asked: *"Why am I being asked to complete retraining for things I already know and can do?"*

With regard to the availability of consultants in the VET area, fifty-three percent reported that there were enough whereas forty seven percent reported there were insufficient consultants in the VET area. Most respondents were fearful that with the number of RTOs reduced to four under the new structure, the same level of support they currently receive would not be available. A typical comment made by one VET Teacher summarised the feelings of many: *"Our consultancy has been drastically reduced and those that are left do their best in terms of documentation and support but it is too little. It seems ridiculous that as the workload and expectations increase, the degree of support decreases."*

Most of the VET Courses appear to be taught in Stage groups (81%) with eleven percent in mixed stages. The average class size taught was reported to be between fifteen and nineteen (39%), five to fourteen (34%) and twenty to twenty-four (25%). Most commented that even with 15-19 students practical classes were extremely difficult. Many respondents commented also that teaching combined year 11 and 12 classes posed many difficulties.

The Audit process was described by most respondents as a source of great stress within the school. Eighty seven percent of VET Teachers reported that the frequency of internal audits was every 12 months with external audits occurring every 2 years. Fifty six percent described the audits as “inspectorial” whereas forty four percent regarded them as “supportive”. Words such as “terrible” and “brutal” were used frequently in comments on the nature of audits however. One VET Teacher likened the internal audit to the “Spanish Inquisition” and commented that it was always done in timetabled non-teaching time. Many commented that until ASQU came on the scene the audit process was supportive but now it is threatening and intimidating: “*The thrust is if you fail, the whole region will be unable to deliver your framework*” was one comment.

Most VET Teachers availed themselves of the opportunity to raise additional issues in regard to workload. These included:

- *The fact that no funding or relief is provided for visiting students on work placement.*
- *The amount of work in terms of collating VET competencies.*
- *The need to keep records of students assessment tasks with no storage facilities to do this.*
- *Little empathy or support given by the Principal.*
- *Making the decision to “axe” VET from the school.*
- *ASQUA have taken everything over the top for teachers and students.*
- *Teachers and Students having to record ongoing evidence of work in class.*
- *The need by VET Teachers to enrol students on the BOS website when non VET subjects are entered by administrative staff.*

The following comment captures the feelings of most of the VET Teachers participating in the survey:

“It’s insane. Well over and above realistic levels. Between teaching, assessing, collecting evidence and reporting, VET takes up at least 60% of my time while only being only 20% of my official teaching load”.