

# **Chapter One: Introduction and Context**

## **1.1 Research Context**

This study is situated within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) context in Australia, particularly within the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector. TAFE is Australia's largest network of public VET provider spanning across all states and territories with a history of over 100 years (TVET Australia, 2010).

The study focuses on TAFE leadership and its influence on teaching, especially amidst the expectations of the national training agenda that initiated a wave of reforms that are impacting immensely on TAFE teaching units. This study seeks to analyse the influence of the educational leadership of head teachers on pedagogical practices in teaching units.

The study includes a review of literature and field work involving interviews with teachers, head teachers, and faculty management, document analysis and observations. Six teaching units from across Victoria and NSW participated in this multiple case study. Victoria and NSW teaching units were chosen for this study as these two states have the largest VET enrolments in the country (NCVER, 2015).

The dissertation is presented using seven chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study providing the organizational context of Australian TAFE. Chapter two presents a review of literature informing the study. Chapter three provides the methodology, including the design of the study as well as data collection methodologies. Data analysis is presented in chapter four. Chapter five provides the resultant findings of the data analysis. Chapter six outlines the study findings with particular reference to pedagogical practices and workplace cultures. It also draws deductions on organisational gaps, capability gaps and capability development priorities for head teachers. Chapter seven provides concluding remarks linking the study findings to the research questions and summarising findings and recommendations.

As a teacher, head teacher, a manager and faculty director for over twenty years in the TAFE sector, I am embedded in changes within TAFE. I have strived to adopt the role of a researcher casting a critical eye on the system and culture of the institutions. As a researcher, I have made a conscious effort to have an outside view of the changes and to re-examine the literature on VET in Australia and trends in the TAFE sector objectively.

The inspiration for this study was triggered by my passion as a VET educator and a range of outlooks, research observations, and insights from prominent Australian VET researchers. They include, but not limited to: Terri Seddon (Seddon, 2009, 2011, 2015; Seddon & Malley, 1999), Leesa Wheelahan (Wheelahan, 2001, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011) Victor Callan (Callan, Mitchell, Clayton & Smith, 2007), Clive Chappell (Chappell, 1998, 2001, 2003; Chappell & Johnston, 2003) and John Mitchell (Mitchell, 2011a; Mitchell, 2011b, 2016; Noonan, 2016).

Chappell (2001) claims that the marketisation of VET sector has inevitably forced TAFE teaching workforce to alter their understanding of their role. These include, but not limited to: the way they deliver training, their relationships with students, links with industry, community engagement and their role in VET. Seddon (2011) also supported this premise ten years later claiming that VET reforms are disturbing the work of teachers and managers in TAFE. According to Wheelahan (2012b), the invisible work of TAFE teachers through engagement in industries, workplaces and communities are at stake due to marketisation policies and associated reductions in funding available to TAFE. Hodge (2014a) and Davids (2012) have also supported these arguments.

There is widespread acknowledgement in the literature that TAFE head teachers play a critical role in supporting the change processes required to position TAFE with a sustainable future (Black & Reich, 2009; Rice, 2002). It is expected that this study will reinstate the importance and professionalism of TAFE teachers in contributing to Australia's productivity and innovation capacity. It is also expected that this will have a good chance of attracting the younger generation to join TAFE teaching as a rewarding occupation.

## **Significance of the Study**

Leaders exert a powerful influence on the culture of their organization (Linstead, Fulop, & Lilley, 2009). There is limited documentation about leadership practice of head teachers in a demand-driven marketised environment. There are very few studies known to the researcher on how head teacher responses to marketised reforms disturb or support the pedagogical practices in teaching units.

The progressive reforms of the VET sector have transformed the role of head teachers amidst continuously growing performance expectations. In this environment, the head teachers are expected to ‘spin all wheels’ including quality VET provision, maintain industry relationships, provide flexible services, adhere to strict compliance requirements, guarantee quality and achieve student outcomes.

Published articles on TAFE head teachers by researchers such as Rice (2003), Black (2009) and have marginally addressed some of these issues. These researchers have not addressed the core focus of this study that involves the influence of head teacher leadership practice on pedagogical practices in a marketised demand-driven VET environment.

There is an immediate need to realise the relationship between head teacher leadership, pedagogic innovation and the culture of the teaching unit. This realisation will enable the TAFE leadership to create support structures and management environments that are conducive to supporting head teachers to provide innovative pedagogical solutions necessary to meet VET reform expectations.

## **Inspiration for the Study**

Marketisation of the VET sector and associated drivers are inevitably forcing TAFE teaching workforce to alter their understanding of their role including the way they deliver training, their relationships with students, community and industry and their role in VET (Chappell, 2001). This study seeks to identify, harness and deploy head teacher capability to uphold the pedagogical expertise of teachers to be productive and innovative amidst the challenges introduced by VET reforms. In an environment where TAFE leaders are forced to assert corporate and managerial priorities, there is

a need to emphasise the importance of pedagogical values and to amplify the voice of teachers with regard to pedagogical judgments and educational practices while responding to the demands of VET reforms.

The TAFE system plays a prominent role in public education by providing practical and authentic skills for Australian workplaces, life, and citizenship. The study is framed around Seddon's (2011a) view that VET reforms are disrupting the work of TAFE workforce.

The current wave of VET reforms is changing the image of a successful head teacher and teacher to an individual entrepreneur looking for economic gain (Seddon, 2011). This disregards the occupational and pedagogical expertise of TAFE teaching staff.

The TAFE head teacher position plays a key role in responding to multiple drivers of change within the Australian VET (TVET Australia, 2010) sector within the teaching unit. The inspiration for this study is to refocus attention to the head teacher position.

## **Researcher Positioning**

I was born in Sri Lanka and completed a Degree in Civil Engineering prior to migrating to Australia. Upon arriving in Australia, I entered the workforce as an ICT professional and subsequently completed a Masters in Information Technology. Following my ICT career, I joined TAFE NSW as a teacher in ICT and then promoted to head teacher, educational manager and subsequently secured a position as a faculty director. As an educational manager and faculty director, I assumed line management responsibilities for a number of head teachers.

With respect to the context of this study, this places me in quite an ambiguous position. One might easily assume that this is a problem. However, I have chosen to work with and against this ambiguity. On one hand, I acknowledge the position of power and status that may be attached to any researcher's role. Knowledge has power, and power is actualised through knowledge. On the other hand, my role as a manager within the institution that is at the centre of this study has meant that I am always unsure of how the power that I hold in this position plays out in my research

activity. Do the people I am interviewing just tell me what I want to hear? Do they tell me what they think will advance their own cause? Do they have a political agenda that is not at all transparent to me or to someone in my position? (See Alvesson, 2011)

Following Merton (1972, p. 21), I could be considered an ‘insider’ within the context of this research as I am immersed in the subject of the study and have an intimate knowledge of the setting. I accept that my close association within the TAFE sector plays a direct role in every stage of this research. In this regard, I am able to call myself an ‘insider’ with respect to this study. By considering myself as an ‘insider’ I recognize that I am part of the wider social group of TAFE that is at the centre of this study.

At the outset of this research journey, I was conscious of the possible influence that my perceived position as an ‘insider’ would have on the research outcomes. This included recognizing the potential to influence data gathered, analysed and interpreted during the study. However, I realized that my awareness of myself as a researcher as well as the recognition of the influence of my positioning within the research began to grow as I progressed through this research.

At the commencement of the study, I expected teachers and head teachers to view me as an ‘insider’ as I am experienced in performing their role previously. My experience in the field was somewhat different to my expectation. I found that while most head teachers accepted me as an ‘insider’, many teachers seemed to view me as an ‘outsider’ as I am currently not a teacher. During the study in line with my expectations, faculty managers both in Victoria and NSW considered me as an ‘insider’ with respect to the study as it is quite likely that I share their role, experiences, and challenges daily through my work as a faculty director. Accordingly, my identity as a researcher shifted considerably depending on the situational context and the participant’s acceptance of me as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ (or something in between) within the context of this study (Milligan, 2016).

These unclear assumptions and experiences with my positioning as a researcher led me to employ a process of critical reflection to try to recognize these influences as

appropriate throughout the data gathering process. The main techniques used for critical reflection were: maintaining a researcher journal, regular discussions with a peer researcher on research activities and mapping data gathered using NVivo tool. I also ensured that focus group discussion points and semi-structured interview questions were pre-prepared in line with the research purpose and the relevant literature evaluated. As the research progressed, these techniques assisted me to recognize and be aware of my influence on limiting or expanding the topics under discussions, steering discussions in a direction that is preferable to me or adding my experiences to the mix of issues being discussed by participants.

In each stage of the research, I reflected on the following:

- What part did my positioning as a former head teacher play in the process of interpretations?
- What part did my positioning as a TAFE Manager with line management responsibilities for head teachers play during various stages of the study?
- How did the power, status and ethical dilemmas (see Glass & Newman, 2015) attached to my positioning within the context of the study shape the participant responses and outcomes of the study?

In preparing for this research, in terms of selecting participants, writing research questions, guidelines for focus group discussions, semi-structured interview questions, thematic analysis and formulating interpretations, I was mindful of my positioning within the research based on the various identities I had assumed within the context of this study as well as my personal preferences and ideologies.

In attempting to ‘objectify’ the research objects, when choosing teaching units for this study, I ensured that I did not have any immediate direct or indirect management responsibilities over the teaching units. As an insider, I have an understanding of TAFE processes and dynamics within various layers and this has helped to manage the research process, choose appropriate research methodologies, gain easy access to participants and formulate an appropriate time schedule for conducting data gathering activities. This has also provided me with the added advantage of being able to ask questions that make use of TAFE jargon and make use of some of the

cultural nuances of TAFE, which, it might be argued, also supported the interpretations of the data generated during the study.

I found that teachers who treated me as an ‘outsider’ appeared to be more frank and direct in their responses during the study. At the same time, the participants who considered me to be ‘one-of-them’ also were able to have easy conversations with me and provide seemingly frank responses to the questions. At the same time, I recognise that my familiarity with the context may have driven some participants to assume details and not articulate or elaborate on things that we perhaps all take for granted. During the data generating process, as a TAFE NSW employee that is immersed in all daily operations, I made a conscious effort to actively engage all participants in co-construction of knowledge (see Theoretical Framework).

Another ambiguity concerns the support and encouragement of the research from within TAFE NSW. As a senior manager of the organization, I was mindful of my obligations towards the organization to protect the integrity of the institution during all stages of the research. So to what extent these institutional expectations and associated pressures have influenced the ‘outcomes’ of the research remains an open question. To my mind, this is not a problem as I feel that the access I gained as an institutional insider to the workings of TAFE more than offset this potentially ambiguous position. However, the reader should read this research with my complicity as a TAFE insider and senior manager in mind.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the underlying influence of TAFE head teacher leadership on teaching practice. This is explored in the context of challenges associated with upholding the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence of teachers while responding to reforms that have shifted the Australian VET system into a marketised environment.

Based on a literature scan and researcher’s professional awareness of and experience within the Australian VET environment, the initial phase of the study was based on the research topic “A study on educational philosophy and practice of TAFE

leadership and its influence on teaching” particularly focused on TAFE head teachers. Following the assertion that qualitative research is not linear, but an iterative process (Creswell, 2006), the research topic was refined based on new perspectives gathered during data gathering activities.

Early in the data gathering phase, there was difficulty in linking the educational philosophies of head teachers to the head teacher practice within the teaching unit. During data gathering, head teachers failed to adequately articulate the educational philosophies that guided their leadership practice. As a result, the topic of the study was reviewed as “A study into the influence of head-teacher leadership on pedagogical practices within TAFE teaching units.”

This change was also initiated as a result of the frequent reflections on the research activities undertaken by the researcher throughout the study.

*Today is my last head teacher interview with head teachers. I still haven't really understood what the educational philosophy of head teachers is. The discussions I have had with head teachers are mostly about educational leadership practice rather than philosophies guiding their decisions. Throughout all head teacher interviews, I asked them to give me a statement about what their 'big picture' in the way teaching should happen, learning should happen, the role of educators, etc. A number of them said. "I try to do what the managers ask me to do". Others said that they don't have time to think about this because the daily workload is rendering this impossible. All head teachers from NSW truly believed in the traditional face-to-face delivery model and they were happy to continue with it because it worked. I didn't get the feeling that they had really thought about their educational philosophy consciously or sub-consciously.*

Figure 1 Extract from researcher reflection diary & field notes

The study explored the leadership practice of head teachers through the lens of teachers, head teachers, and faculty managers as these three roles are closest to the topic being explored. It explored TAFE head teacher leadership influence on teaching and cultural practices of teaching units as well as the head-teacher response to changing performance expectations of VET reforms that impact on the teaching unit. During the study, the tensions, interrelationships, and challenges between all these aspects were also explored.



## **Research Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to generate a substantive set of principles to guide TAFE leadership on influencing and upholding pedagogical excellence that may help produce quality educational outcomes while responding to challenges of market-based VET reforms.

## **Research Aim**

This research aims to understand the shared experiences and interrelationships amongst various constituents of TAFE by taking into account the individual experiences and collective knowledge that operate within teaching units and across the wider TAFE environment. In doing so, the study aims to understand the influence of head teacher leadership in transforming the teaching unit culture that is able to respond to the performance expectations of VET reforms.

## **Research Objectives**

The research objective is to explore how the TAFE head teachers' leadership practice influences and is influenced by the shared experiences of staff within the teaching unit.

In exploring these, the objective is to review the extent to which the shared experiences of the teaching staff within the teaching unit are contributing to a culture that upholds the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence of teachers when operating in a demand-driven marketised VET environment.

Following Sarantakos (2013), this investigation seeks to explore everyday work relations, organisational cultures, learning attributes and attitudes, expectations and apprehensions within teaching units.

The research is expected to make a significant contribution to the knowledge base about the role of TAFE leadership. The particular emphasis is on raising the knowledge of TAFE senior management on formulating organisational conditions & processes to empower head teachers. The purpose is to re-focus attention to

upholding pedagogical excellence and producing quality educational outcomes while operating in a marketised VET environment.

A secondary purpose of this research is to bridge the gap in the literature on leadership tensions of TAFE head teachers operating in a demand-driven VET environment.

This study is expected to be a catalyst for further research on: capacity for pedagogic innovation in TAFE, effects of marketisation on student learning, quality of student outcomes with technology-integrated and other alternative delivery models, quality of educational outcomes through workplace delivery, effect of funding constraints on trade delivery, employer effectiveness in skill development, and hopefully enrich the student skill development journey.

## **Research Questions**

Three research questions were used to frame this study:

- RQ1) In what ways might the leadership of head teachers influence the pedagogical practices within TAFE teaching units?
- RQ2) How might the culture created by shared experiences within the teaching unit influence the way content is taught in teaching units?  
How does this culture guide and influence the leadership practice of head teachers?
- RQ3) How does the teaching unit under the leadership of head teachers respond to VET reforms implemented by Australian government?

## **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The mechanisms of social construction processes are further theorized in Friedman (2016). At the heart of social constructionism is the notion that reality is socially constructed. This theoretical framework guided the selection of cases, types of participants to be included, the data gathering techniques, data analysis techniques,

reflection processes as well as representation of outcomes of the study (Gergen, 1985).

The study is framed under the assumption that the dynamics of the TAFE teaching units are a product of collective values, knowledge, language, and experiences of teaching staff within the unit. The collective acceptance as to “how things are done” and “taken-for-granted” practices within teaching units have historically evolved within the organisational and teaching unit contexts. They have also been shaped by a myriad of policies starting from Kangan and Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (1974). Social constructionism supports the view that patterns of behaviour that evolve over time are a product of a collective agreement within social contexts hence considered as supporting the objectives of this study.

This theoretical framework was chosen due to a number of reasons compared to other approaches that were initially considered such as constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). The social constructionist theoretical framework allows for the review of historic knowledge construction within the teaching units. Further, it provides insights as to how knowledge will continue to be constructed in the teaching units as the VET sector continues to evolve into the future.

Social constructionism signifies that individuals create knowledge through social interactions, and continue to acquire knowledge as they interact with the society. It regards participants as integral to cultural, political and historical evolution. This framework explains the process that participants use language to describe, explain and account for the world they live in (Kikooma, 2010). In the process, they increasingly better adapt to the culture and develop common beliefs, values, traditions and norms within their society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This paradigm will position the study to explore the continuing knowledge construction and realities within teaching units supported by the following assumptions as described in Burr (2015).

The first assumption is that there are taken-for-granted knowledge and understandings of teachers, head teachers, and faculty managers within teaching units that need to be critically challenged. Any biases and subjectivity in the taken-for-

granted knowledge of the participants and researcher will also be critically examined during all phases of the study.

The second assumption is that knowledge construction within the teaching units is situated within the historical and cultural background of the teaching unit, the context of TAFE, as well as the wider VET environment.

Instigated by the spirit of Kangan (Kangan, 1974), TAFE teaching units share a common set of cultural elements, including common vision, language, values, and meanings as well as some public service commitments.

Many TAFE teachers predominantly perform their duties within a teaching unit. The social realities constructed by teachers in their teaching practice are strongly influenced by the context of their teaching unit. Teaching units operate as semi-autonomous organs within the parent culture of TAFE institutes. This is due to variations in management styles of current and previous head teachers, historical factors, industry influence, public service, cultural influence and the influence of work cultures of the specific vocational areas (Cedefop, 2004).

The cultural norms that are unique to the teaching unit's particular industry area and "mateship" especially in trade areas contribute to the 'reality' and collective knowledge that is constructed within teaching units.

Within the sub-cultures of the teaching unit, knowledge construction continues to happen collaboratively in the social setting of the teaching unit under the unique leadership qualities of a head teacher.

Social constructionism acknowledges the relationship between knowledge and social action (Burr, 2015). The teaching staff constantly interact and engage with each other and produce a variety of possible social constructions of events. According to Burr (2015), each of these constructions will invite different kinds of action from the participants. Teaching units sustain some patterns of social actions of the parent TAFE culture and exclude others. The power relations within teaching units between teachers, head teachers, students, employers, faculty managers and external forces may also introduce certain social actions. They also specify how various participants may legitimately treat others.

The realities and directions imposed by leaders and external forces, irrespective of their merits, will receive acceptance or resistance by teachers depending on the extent to which those directions align with the current sub-culture. The head teacher, as the most trusted leader of the teaching unit, is in an influential position to shape the sub-culture of the teaching unit through the construction of new knowledge. Rashman, Withers, and Hartley (2009) suggest that leaders play a critical role in creating environments that are conducive to learning and bringing people together to create organisational knowledge. In line with this suggestion, head teachers play an important role in bringing teachers together and creating environments conducive to co-creation of knowledge within teaching units.

From this position, the research aims to explore multiple constructions within teaching units. This is explored with a view of ascertaining the leadership influence that is needed to bring the cultural change required to operate in a marketised environment. Another aspect of the study seeks to establish the influence of leadership on upholding the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence of teachers while co-constructing knowledge to bring social actions that are conducive to the current VET environment.

The use of the social constructionism theoretical framework enabled participants' subjective reality based on their own experiences to be considered within the social context. This subjective reality appears to individuals as objective reality based on their sensory attentiveness or inattentiveness (Friedman, 2016). Their work practices are fundamentally driven by this subjective reality that may contradict the subjective reality of TAFE senior leadership.

The priority of the study was set out to explore and understand the dynamics within teaching units relevant to the topic of study rather than to measure, evaluate and check for accuracy of their statements. This theoretical framework has enabled the design of a meaningful study that takes the subjective realities of faculty managers, head teachers and teachers and explores the tensions within the realities of their environments. Prominence has been given to the voice of participants' and their views throughout the study. Data gathering methodologies supported the participants to provide the interpretations of their own realities with regard to the study objective in a number of settings.

All cases that were selected for this study represented a number of contextual domains situated in two Australian states, including regional and metropolitan settings with common historical origins, purpose and value systems integral to the TAFE sector. All cases that operated in a wider VET environment enabled the study to consider how social constructions within each teaching unit co-created by common factors as well as variable contextual elements such as head teacher influences, faculty manager expectations, stakeholder expectations and unique cultural norms of each teaching unit.

This theoretical framework acknowledges the researcher's influence on reaching the outcomes through their past and present experience. The researcher's experience in the TAFE sector provides richness to this study. It helps to minimise assumptions and ensures the breadth and depth of information gathered.

A metacognitive awareness of the researcher's interactions throughout the entire study in mobilising dialogues is critical for minimizing undue bias and interpretations (Noble & McIlveen, 2012). This is achieved through researcher reflection throughout the study to externalise and critique the intuitive knowledge and assumptions that influenced the study.

## **Key Assumptions and Beliefs**

A number of philosophical assumptions and beliefs outlined by Biesta and Stengel (2016) informed the writing of this section of the study as they support the default assumptions and beliefs related to teaching practice held by the researcher.

The prominence of the TAFE system as a public VET provider in providing practical and authentic skills for Australian workplaces is acknowledged throughout this study. The study also makes the assumption that TAFE teachers, head teachers, and managers are integral to quality VET provision in Australia. The VET reforms disturb (Seddon, 2011) the work of TAFE educators and the long-established customs and practices. I support the views of Wheelahan (2012b) that the disturbance caused by VET reforms, challenge Australia's future prosperity and threaten the social cohesion.

Australian VET sector creates a strong distinction between traditional and other training approaches. Robertson (2009) makes the claim that in the Australian VET context, traditional ‘face-to-face’ delivery is used as the benchmark when describing innovative pedagogies or progressive practices. This is an inherent assumption in VET policies.

This study takes the view that in the current TAFE environment the preferred delivery approach has a risk of separating the role of the teacher from co-constructing knowledge and diluting the traditional teacher-student relationship and support models.

As outlined above, marketised VET environment is creating a dominance of alternative delivery models in VET and challenging the view presented in Biesta and Stengel (2016) that teaching is an intentional intellectual effort, actively thinking together with students.

Biesta and Stengel (2016) discuss self-understanding, natural development, communication, emancipation, authority and relations as an important set of concerns with regard to teaching. They depict teaching as something other than the simple transmission of information.

The study assumes that the ultimate aim of teaching is not just oriented towards gaining a qualification. According to Biesta and Stengel (2016), teaching and learning are not instantaneous processes but are activities that involve the co-construction of knowledge over a period. Competency-based training concept support that the duration of training that is necessary to achieve competency is not always predictable (Hodge, 2016).

Conceptual definitions are given below to outline any unexpressed and implicit assumptions of the elements of the research and to provide an understanding of the contexts within which these phrases/terms are being used in this document.

These assumptions have informed and framed this study, including its purpose, aim, and objectives. Throughout the data gathering and analysis, these assumptions are articulated through reflective field notes and memos.

## **Conceptual Definitions**

### *Environmental Context*

The environmental context of teaching units has rapidly changed due to various internal and external influences. The majority of participants of this study joined the TAFE workforce when the environment was very different.

TAFE and teaching unit environments have gone through major disruptions due to rapid changes in technology, telecommunication, globally connected economies, market reforms, VET policies, funding models, school and university environments, learning environment (Stallard & Trood, 2007), organizational structures, customer base, multiculturalism, stakeholder expectations and industrial relations conditions.

VET reforms that introduced fully marketised demand-driven environments in the Australian VET sector have institutionalised unprecedented changes to the TAFE environmental context.

### *Organisational Culture*

According to Schein (2004), the culture of an organisation is defined as assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members that are manifested in ‘taken from granted’ actions by members operating ‘unconsciously’. Haneberg (2009) says that leaders must understand the organisational culture if they are to adjust practices, programs, and projects to be in line with new environments. Haneberg (2009) asserts that organisational culture is socially constructed and therefore change is primarily achieved through ‘conversations’. These conversations will build upon or challenge the cultural assumptions and beliefs that are ‘taken for granted’ by members.

Ellis-Gulli and Carter (2010) also confirm that cultural change within organisations with long-established cultures will happen through change leaders who use conversation to bring changes to observable actions individually and collectively by challenging, destroying and/or building upon cultural norms and beliefs.

The organisational culture in this study has been particularly conceptualised along the customs, traditions, and relationships governing the way of thinking and acting



within TAFE teaching units. The current culture of the teaching unit is observed primarily using the pedagogical behaviours and response of performance expectations of teachers inferring their conscious or subconscious beliefs, values, and attitudes.

The teaching unit culture that is expected in a marketised environment is conceptualised within the discourse of Neoliberalism (Lam, 2001; Stokes, 2014) that moved public service institutions from their social responsibilities to market-style business environments. Under this discourse, the cultural components that are expected within teaching units are entrepreneurship, customer-centric, innovation, creativity, operating under global imperatives and compliance.

In line with attributes or organisational culture in Schein (2004), if teaching units are to be prominent in VET delivery in a marketised environment, the current cultures of the teaching units need to be shaped by solving the problems confronting it and adapt to effectively respond to these external forces. When adapting to expected cultures under a marketised environment, teachers need to perceive, think and feel solutions to the pedagogical problems created by the marketised VET environment.

The cultural identity of a teacher within teaching units is an integration of identity created through the teachers' occupational background and the social practice within the context of the teaching unit.

The cultural identity is situated within the context of cultural practices of the teaching unit, including pedagogical practices, administrative practices and customer-service centric practices that can vary between different teaching units. The cultural identity of the teacher in this regard is embedded in the society created within the teaching unit rather than directly with individual teachers (Hedegaard, 2000). The pedagogical practices of individual teachers are dominated by the everyday activities of their teaching units.

### *Delivery*

Sir Michael Barber (Barber, Rodriguez, & Artis, 2010) conceptualized the implementation of public service policies through a term called 'Deliverology'. The

basic principle behind this conceptualisation was that public sector organisations are not optimized for delivery of results such as quality educational outcomes for several reasons. Public organizations such as TAFE, have a wide range of somewhat competing and long winded goals that are difficult to quantify (Barber et al., 2010). Since the inception of TAFE under the Kangan initiative (Kangan, 1974), TAFE teaching units traditionally have serviced the needs of the individuals and societies with governments being responsible for funding these efforts. The trend in teaching units, under the government funding models that maximised funding based on the supply of services, where to maximize the supply of training, offer training to increase student numbers and attract increased budgets. Barber et al. (2010) referred to this as public service principles where the focus was on supply and services rather than producing measurable outcomes due to those services.

In the current marketised environment, governments have moved their focus into outcomes based training utilising demand-based funding. The government has outlined a number of performance expectations that link the training provision to specific outcomes such as completion of qualifications and quality of training provision. The Government has appointed regulators to monitor and control the training provision.

Following the assertion by Barber et al. (2010), when governments move into market-based reforms in the VET sector and propose outcome based approaches, the public providers will need to turn their focus from ‘supply’ to the performance expectations that are presented as outcomes.

A number of risks can be identified when delivery is linked to outcomes within the TAFE environment. When public educational institutions deliver education focused on outcomes, there is a risk that leaders are expected to be economic managers as opposed to educational leaders. Furthermore, this may pose a threat to achieving the social obligations of TAFE in a competitive demand-driven system that is funded based on the delivery of outcomes. Head teachers as the educational leaders of the teaching units need to be the key to managing this tension between meeting the performance expectations of VET reforms while upholding the values of the TAFE sector to build productive individuals in the community.

## *Pedagogical Practices*

VET teachers play a key role in the so-called ‘delivery’ of VET; motivating students, pursuing the achievement of outcomes and aiding the conceptual development of individuals (Louw, 2013). Changes introduced within the VET sector through reforms have significant implications for the VET pedagogical practices. As a result, contemporary VET pedagogy is becoming more learner-centred, work-centred (Chappell, 2004), and focused on quantifiable outcomes.

Louw (2013) in a study of Carpentry students in Denmark reported that a direct teacher approach where the teacher is at the centre of all instructions motivate students in many dimensions. First of all, during teacher-led ‘delivery’, the teacher has established and learners have accepted the hierarchy in the social order, and hence give due attention and respect to the teacher. The teacher also has established credibility in this instance, as a self-employed carpenter and therefore students trust and accept the teacher as a role model. Due to the teacher directed activities, the teacher is present throughout the lesson and this leads to motivation and student engagement. In this mode, the teacher also controls the sequence of the activity and plans the engagement of students. Accordingly, Louw (2013) reports that direct teaching approaches that utilize indirect methodologies to sequence the lessons and set the context, do result in motivation, engagement, and development of independent professional competencies in students.

As outlined above, the traditional model of VET is associated with trade-based occupations with teachers being at the centre of teaching demonstrating, modelling and instilling skills in learners. In this mode, the learners observe, imitate and undertake guided practical activities that are directly linked to an occupation (Brown, Withers, Figgis, Down, & McManus, 2011).

In contrast to these ‘direct’ or teacher-centred approaches, Chappell (2004) discusses the emergence of contemporary VET practices, stating that new demands and expectations due to VET reforms require pedagogical approaches and strategies that vary from those traditionally used in the VET sector. In this environment, the focus is on learner expectations and desired outcomes. It does not pay much attention to learning, teaching and assessment processes to achieve those outcomes (Brown et al., 2011).

However, based on findings from the study, Louw (2013) claims that the outcomes of VET are inherently embedded in everyday pedagogical practices. For example, this researcher claims that lower completion rates experienced by VET are not only due to weak students, but also due to the pedagogical practices not clearly meeting the expectations and demands of the students. In this regard, the researcher claims that student achievement, motivation, and completions are essentially linked to pedagogical practices of teachers.

Figgis (2009) outlines six trends in contemporary VET practice. They are the use of authentic learning tasks, promotion of collaboration and peer learning, incorporating e-learning technologies in delivery, using the workplace as the primary site for learning and skills development, provision of personalised learning and delegating the teaching and learning to the influence of the practitioner. She further states that practitioners need to align their practices to the contemporary models by using reflection, being responsive to learner needs, engaging with local enterprises and collaborating with other practitioners. The question remains if this will lead to pedagogical excellence in contemporary VET practice?

### *Pedagogical Excellence*

Pedagogical Excellence is the capacity to adapt learning and teaching strategies to suit individual students, and the depth of pedagogical understanding that offers access to a wide range of learning theories and techniques. This also involves understanding and applying new pedagogical approaches that promote deeper learning, including inquiry-based learning, personalised learning strategies, collaborative learning, coaching, mentoring, informal learning, learner-centred, self-directed learning, and learning at work (Dryden, 2003)

VET teachers are expected to possess generic skills in pedagogy that provide them with the ability to perform training needs analysis, program design to suit student needs, and the ability to deliver the programs and assess them to ensure that outcomes of training are achieved.

In addition to generic pedagogical skills, TAFE teachers typically have a higher level educational qualification and have a broad knowledge of learning theories and

pedagogical structures. They possess expertise in adult education and are able to create quality-learning environments.

As Seddon (2009) asserts, the higher level qualifications held by TAFE teachers provide a clear occupational distinction between TAFE teachers and industry trainers.

### *Occupational Expertise*

Seddon (2009) states that an occupation possesses set activities and an ongoing system of identities. There are social structures and cultures attached to specific occupations based on the work, the context and the conditions of that work.

TAFE teaching units typically involve teachers from one specific occupational background with substantial experience in that occupation. They are expected to have a high level of expertise in that occupation. Seddon (2009) asserts that expertise is anchored in occupational identity. This expertise is underpinned by extensive experience in that occupation, licensing and recognition within the professional bodies within that occupation.

### *VET Quality*

The concept of VET quality is complex and multi-faceted, due to its multiple intersecting objectives, multiple stakeholders, loosely defined standards, and lack of adoption of a standardized set of indicators for directing practice as well as measuring and monitoring operation (European Training Foundation, 2014). In the absence of defined standards, multiple stakeholders will have varied perceptions of quality of VET.

There are frequent references to TAFE as the ‘quality benchmark’ in Australia. Benchmarking is a reference by which others can be measured. In this regard, TAFE as the ‘quality benchmark’ needs to meet all stakeholder expectations to a standard that is acceptable to all. However, due to the fluidity of standards and frequent changes in expectations fuelled by changing demands in global industries, this quality benchmark is not an effective ‘point of reference’ for measuring quality (see Mackenzie, 2015).

Mackenzie (2015) says that Australian VET quality is measured, controlled and monitored through strict enforcement of regulation, defined standards for RTOs and provision of information. However, in a system that has a number of stakeholders, there are a number of dimensions to the perception of quality in VET (see Lassnigg, 2003). These different actors comprising of system level, institutional level as well as individual stakeholders use varied indicators to determine the quality (Blom & Meyers, 2003; Lassnigg, 2003). They are:

- Quality is defined based on how well the policy objectives are achieved to meet the expectations of politicians, industry, employer, community, and learners.
- Quality according to some stakeholders is linked to input factors that relate to the quantity such as revenue, participation rates, infrastructure and student numbers. Quality is associated with outcomes and results by a number of stakeholders (employment, completion rates etc.). Stakeholders such as educators and learners also associate quality with the modes of delivery and the process of converting the inputs into the desired outputs. These are related to elements such as: delivery strategies, delivery modes, the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, class sizes, duration of training, administration and management of programs, learner support services, and infrastructure used.
- There are ‘hard quantitative’ as well as ‘soft qualitative’ indicators of quality. These soft indicators relate to the ability of individuals to be productive citizens of the society, development of conceptual and higher order thinking skills, self-confidence, and innovative capacity etc.

### *Influence*

As the leaders of their teaching units, this study attributes head-teachers a certain level of power to influence teachers within the teaching unit. Lucas and Baxter (2012) define influence as compelling a behaviour change within their circle of power without the fear of punishment or expectation of a reward. This study adopts the position that head teachers have the capacity to change the behaviour of teachers due to the power attributed to them within the organisation. An effective head teacher

will practice this power to influence the behaviour of teachers to adapt to the changing internal and external environments.

## **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study involved four trades based teaching units and two services based teaching units from NSW and Victorian TAFE in sectors. Limiting the number of disciplines may have constrained the breadth of issues gathered across a wider cross section of the teaching units, but this has increased the depth of information gathered. Teaching units that share synergies and greater dynamics were chosen for the study.

The cultures within trade based teaching sections compared to service-based teaching sections are known to be very different within TAFE environments. In the current study, only a limited number of teaching units participated and hence the cultural differences between these sectors may not be fully explored.

Other limitations of the study related to funding and time constraints as well as restrictions to the geographical reach covered.

The findings in this study are presented as indicative of general patterns of behaviours and are not presented as definitive trends or generalisations within the TAFE sector. It is admitted that the findings reported and conclusions are created specific to the context of the selected teaching units (Charmaz, 2006).

Incorporating representation from Victoria and NSW provided an appreciation for the differences and similarities in VET models between the two states. However, the study was limited to the influence of these VET models on teaching units. No attempt was made to provide a comprehensive comparison of the two VET models as that was outside the scope of this study.

The initial stages of this study aimed at exploring the characteristics of each individual teaching unit. However, during the study, it was observed that many issues and challenges confronting TAFE teaching units had a common theme. Therefore a decision was made to report the study findings collectively.

## **Enhancing the Trustworthiness of the Study**

The strategies described below were taken to ensure that the findings accurately address responses to research questions. These strategies also enhance the validity of findings in the future. They set very clear, transparent and comprehensive explanations of data gathering and analysis. Therefore, the findings from this study may be applied to similar situations and context.

While acknowledging that the researcher is currently functioning in TAFE NSW as a faculty director, a number of strategies were used to ensure that the knowledge construction process during this study was authentic and trustworthy.

Throughout the study, the researcher used the self-reflective process of bracketing as outlined in Tufford and Newman (2010). This process was used to assist the researcher to be conscious of any preconceptions during the research process. The process ensures that the findings accurately represent the knowledge that is co-constructed during the study.

Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 127) encourage researchers to acknowledge and describe any preconceptions, beliefs, and assumptions. The key assumptions and beliefs that have influenced this study were outlined and considered throughout this study.

The researcher has acknowledged her closeness to the topic of the study due to her association with TAFE NSW at all stages of the research.

A reflective journal was maintained to examine and reflect upon the researcher engagement throughout the research journey. The journal assisted with continuous self-checking of interpretations.



Reflections on the observations 10/11/2010  
 Setting: Practical carpentry class: setting out for  
 and pit

Students are not using notes and a lot of valuable information shared by teachers. How do they capture this information? I asked the teacher this question, I didn't get a good answer. I asked if they are using a Moodle? Teachers answered that they are not using a Moodle and once you do a number of practical tasks the students would remember.

I felt that it makes sense to have a Moodle addressing summary of practical activities and important tips for activity (I will need to ask this question from the head teacher). Teachers cannot rely on student memory or they need to repeat the exercise to remember important things. With funding restrictions this may not be possible. Even though group work was done teachers managed to get all students involved in the learning process. Interesting observation considering during the interviews teachers felt that group work is compromising learning and assessment ability of individual students.

Little gems of information given by the teachers throughout the practical activity but not all students were listening. Pity, because they are worth capturing. May need to be captured for further enforcement and uploaded to Moodle. Anyway, a lot of this valuable information is unique to the teacher - it is his occupational expertise. This teacher is 75 years old and said that he has 60 years experience in the industry. Moodle cannot capture this experience and stories he tells these students. Teacher said that his class time is cut down - no time for stories as he needs to get through the material.

Class was very unstructured. I think a bit of structure could be helpful. Students could benefit from having a check list for students need to perform for each activity. This includes preparing and learning out. There are very loose control in the classroom - it is a practical workshop. Mobile phones allowed and sometimes teachers use them as well.

Figure 2 Extract from reflective journal

Data gathering activities involved teachers, head teachers, and faculty managers from each location. Data was also gathered using a combination of methods that provided credibility, and dependability to the data. This multi-pronged approach to data collection using several means and layers provided triangulation and validity.

While in the field, a preliminary data analysis was conducted on the gathered data while the participant was present to clarify issues, discuss possible misinterpretations and inaccuracies (Stake, 2006).

### *Evaluating Criteria*

To evaluate the methodological rigour of this study, a number of questions in line with suggestions by Stake (2006) and Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002), with regard to evaluating multiple case study design, were used.

In evaluating the research, it was confirmed that the methodology used during the study fitted the research issue. The methods used for data gathering fitted well with this methodology and they informed the research question being addressed. A multi-pronged approach to data gathering as described above provided the variety of data required to give credibility to this study.

All data and reports that informed the analysis and study findings are available to provide an audit trail.

## **Chapter Two: A Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review covered in this chapter is conducted with the purpose of contextualising this study, shaping the exploration of research questions and identifying issues that need further investigation. The review explored a number of key articles on a range of topics relevant to the research. They include Australian VET system, Australian VET policy context, VET reforms, VET pedagogical models, TAFE sector and contextualising key themes within VET systems.

The literature review commenced with exploring Australian VET System and its composition to provide the wider context for this study. Crossman and Hughes (2012), Keating, Medrich, Volkoff, and Perry (2002), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), Wheelahan (2012a) and (Wheelahan, 2012b) constitute some of the literature that informed this review.

A detailed review of Australian VET reforms and the policy context is also explored as part of this review. It provided insight into the flow of policies, since the inception of Kangan agenda, that has impacted on the TAFE sector in Australia. The review provided insight into the evolution of market-based reforms within a system that was initially established as a service-based organisation with a focus on individuals and communities. Commonwealth of Australia (2014), Dawkins and Holding (1987), Forde (1995), Department of Trade Australia, Australian Council of Trade Unions, and Trade Development Council Australia (1987), Hermann, Lansbury, Ryan, and Horsfield (1985), Davids (2012), Hodge (2014b), Uzunboylu and Mouzakitis (2010) and Zoellner (2011) are some of the literature that contributed to this review. This review also provided insights into a range of performance expectations attached to VET reforms that may have an impact on TAFE teaching units.

A number of documents on the government role in VET were also explored as part of the review. Kangan and Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (1974), McGrath-Champ, Fitzgerald, Parding, and Rainnie (2015), Seddon (2015) and Heimans (2012) were some of the literature explored in line with this topic. The

literature highlighted the challenges and tensions that are present when educational issues are addressed by formulating political solutions through VET reforms.

In order to understand the influences of external environments on the Australian VET system, a review of the literature on globalisation issues that have contributed to the VET reform agenda was also explored. A number of publications, including the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015), Downes and Stoeckel (2006) and Frey and Osborne (2013) are explored to gain insight into globalisation issues. The issues explored are expected to provide further insight into the expectations of VET reforms and the impact of external influences on TAFE teaching units. The review also provided insight into global drivers influencing VET reforms, especially in the light of automation, technological advancement and globally-connected economies.

A series of documents on pedagogical models and TAFE sector are also explored in this chapter. Some of the topics that informed this segment of literature scan were: VET pedagogy (Misko, 2011), TAFE response to VET reforms (Department of Education and Training, 2016; Seddon, 2011; TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators, 2009; Wheelahan, 2012b), VET practitioner response to VET reforms (Australian Education Union, 2013; Parker, 2014), learning spaces (Biesta & Stengel, 2016), VET leadership (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014; Callan, Mitchell, Clayton & Smith, 2007; European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2006; García-Granero, Llopis, Fernández-Mesa, & Alegre, 2015; Hodgkinson, 1991), VET concepts (Seddon, 2011) and vocational training systems (Wheelahan, 2015b). The literature cited above drove the research beyond surface level discussions into issues that are confronting teachers deeply within their practice due to changes in the VET environment.

Wheelahan (2011), Wheelahan (2012b), Williams (2011), Curtain (2005), Hobart (1999), Simmons (2010), Tan (1998) and Uzunboylu and Mouzakitis (2010) also contributed to the literature review discussing the global and local drivers that have influenced the TAFE landscape.

This segment also explores some concepts and systems that are currently confronting TAFE teaching units by contextualising key themes within VET systems. They include competence & competency-based system (CBT) (Curtain, 1994; Mulcahy, 2003; Mulder, Weigel, & Collins, 2006; OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003), contemporary VET issues (Misko & Robinson, 2000; OECD, 2014; Tran, 2013), organizational cultures (Foley, 2011; Haneberg, 2009; McGing & Brown, 2014) and organizational performance (García-Granero et al., 2015; NG & Feldman, 2009; Staniforth & West, 1995).

The literature explored in this segment supported the framing of the data gathering methods and tools used. The topics explored identified tensions and challenges faced by TAFE head teachers when operating as educational leaders in a marketised VET environment. This literature review and the initial TAFE institute based document analysis set the context and framework for research.

## **2.2 The Australian VET System**

The Australian VET system provides further education and training options for students enabling them to gain qualifications for employment and support the development of knowledge, skill, and capabilities within the Australian workplaces (Crossman & Hughes, 2012). Since 1974, the Commonwealth and state governments in Australia have jointly funded the VET system (Noonan, 2016).

The Australian VET system plays an important part in building the workforce along with schools and Universities (Noonan, Brown, Long, McKenzie, & Chapman, 2010). VET in Australia is central to skill development of the labour force. It contributes to participation in work, increasing productivity as well as support the individual, economic and social development (Noonan, 2016).

For decades, the Australian VET system has not only been maintaining links with economic issues but also social issues that linked training for employment (Keating et al., 2002). As Noonan (2016) points out, the Australian VET system through its central role in the development of skills for the Australian workforce is also expected to make a critical contribution to social issues with regard to preparing individuals

for employment. The VET system is currently at a crossroad where a string of reforms that are primarily driven by economic imperatives are currently impacting on the system. These may potentially overshadow the social obligations of VET.

## **Composition of the VET Sector in Australia**

There are almost 5300 registered training providers delivering VET programs in Australia. Around 4300 of these providers are private training providers even though the majority of students are enrolled in publicly funded VET programs. TAFE is the predominant provider of public funded VET training with 59 TAFE institutes across Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010; Wheelahan, 2012b).

VET prepares students for nationally recognised basic to advanced qualifications in technical and vocational training. They include apprenticeship for traditional trades and traineeships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

### *The Australian National VET System*

The ‘National VET System’ that is underpinned by the ‘National Skills Framework’ comprises of two major parts.

- Training Packages

Training packages are integral to Australia’s VET system developed through national consultation with the industry. Training packages are built on CBT system. They provide a standard framework for industry-specific competencies (Mulcahy, 2003).

- The VET Quality Framework

This is aimed at achieving greater national consistency in registrations and monitoring of training organizations. This consists of standards for RTOs, Australian Qualification Framework, Fit and Proper Person requirements, data provision Requirements and financial viability risk-assessment requirements (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016c).

### *Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)*

The ASQA is the national regulator for Australia's vocational education and training sector (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016c). Any training institutions that intend to deliver accredited VET qualifications in Australia must be registered with Australian Skills Quality Authority. Some states such as Victoria and Western Australia have appointed state-based regulating authorities to fulfil this function (Korbel & Misko, 2016).

### *Industry Reference Committees (IRCs)*

IRCs are responsible for the development of training packages ensuring the qualifications reflect the needs of industries and priorities. The committees comprise of people with extensive industry experience, knowledge and skills (Australian Industry and Skills Committee, 2016).

### *Skills Service Organisations (SSOs)*

There are six SSOs appointed to provide technical, operational and secretariat services to their IRCs and support them in the review and development of qualifications and skills standards.

### *State Training Authorities*

The provision of VET in Australia is managed through a network of eight state and territory training authorities. They are responsible for the functioning of the VET systems within the state and territory jurisdictions. In NSW this function is performed by Training Services NSW and in Victoria, the function is distributed across Department of Education and Training and Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority (Australian Apprenticeships, 2015).

## **2.3 Australian VET History, Policy Setting, and Reforms**

Vocational Education & Training (VET) in Australia began during the mid to late 1800s. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, technical education was restricted to traditional

trade apprenticeship contexts within a master-apprentice relationship model supported by somewhat poorly funded state technical colleges (Darwin, 2007).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, technical education experienced a substantial growth in Australia. This was due to the government making a considerable investment in public infrastructure, and education (Shaw, 1980).

During this period till the late 1960s, the emphasis and focus of vocational education in Australia were on teachers and teaching methods: learners and learning methods were not at the forefront (Harris & Morrison, 2011).

During the last two decades, the VET system in Australia has been confronted by a range of policy implementations influenced by a number of external factors that have kept the sector in constant turmoil (Zoellner, 2011). Accordingly, a string of reforms that started in the late 1980s commenced the transformation of this system into a market-based environment (Huber, 2010).

The latest wave of reforms that impacted on the VET system commenced in 2009 when the Australian government introduced sharp changes to VET policy in pursuit of economic growth, productivity and full market design (Council of Australian Governments, 2012; Skills Australia, 2011a).

Over the last two decades, competing policy developments and increasing pace of policy change has changed the VET landscape in Australia (TVET Australia, 2010). In addition, variations to funding arrangements, modifications to governance arrangements and accountability, and constant refinements of regulatory standards are also some major factors that have continuously altered the VET landscape in Australia (Coates et al., 2010; Dempsey, 2013; Department of Education and Training, 2016; TVET Australia, 2010).



## **Ideological Influences on VET Reforms**

### *New Vocationalism*

‘New vocationalism’ deduces that a country’s public education system should be relevant to the needs of the industry and the economic performance of a country (Grubb, 1996). According to this view, educational opportunities to individuals are of secondary importance.

In the late 1970s, a research conducted in a number of OECD countries found that educational institutions were failing to produce workers with the necessary industry skills for the economic progression (Papadopoulos, 1996). This was the driver for a ‘new vocationalism’ strand that demanded educational provision to be driven solely by the requirements of employers and 21<sup>st</sup>-century labour force. This required all public and private educational institutions contribute to economic imperatives (Grubb, 1996). The ‘new vocationalism’ permit economic discourses to dominate and drive the formulations of educational policy (Chappell, 1998; Grubb, 1996).

Many countries have found that injecting money into public educational institutions has not produced the new skill sets necessary for changing economies. This has resulted in many countries beginning to explore new approaches to skill acquisition and teaching (Grubb, 1996). As a result, in line with the new vocationalism economic discourse, a number of OECD countries began to formulate educational policies with a view to achieving economic growth by promoting market competition and increasing choice in vocational training (Grubb, 1996).

In Australia, a substantial change was introduced between 1987 and 1989 within the ‘new vocationalism’ view, to promote industry-driven VET systems. This was the result of the Department of Trade Australia et al. (1987) report concluded that improvements in the national skill base are needed to bring adjustment of the economy to respond to international conditions.

### *Neoliberalism*

Neoliberalism is the second major universal economic discourse that influenced vocational education in Australia and many other countries. This is responsible for driving and shaping the global education reforms (Lam, 2001; Stokes, 2014).

This discourse moved governments away from their social responsibilities of state-driven services. Instead, this discourse suggests the creation of market-style and commercial business environments and providing services from within and outside public service. This discourse calls for entrepreneurship cultures within public service environments. It imposes performance expectations in terms of financial efficiencies, cost reduction, returns on investments, visible evidence of increased productivity, unambiguous system of accountability & realising outcomes, quality, and competitiveness (Chappell, 2001; Lam, 2001). Neoliberalism has also resulted in private ownership of public assets and services. It also drives reduced budget allocations to the public sector services (Chappell, 2001).

### *Globalisation*

The Australian VET system is plagued by numerous challenges of globalisation. The government has confirmed in the Commonwealth of Australia (2014) that this phenomenon has contributed to reforms and policies that are introduced to raise the economic status of Australia.

Chappell (2001) asserts that employers and enterprises expect that educational systems are reformed to fully align to economic adjustments required by nations to improve Australia's global competitiveness (Uzunboylu & Mouzakitis, 2010). Economic adjustments are said to be needed to respond to what is portrayed as technology infiltration, the growing significance of ICT systems, emergence of fully competitive global capital markets, the rise of consumerism of education, increased outsourcing opportunities and falling transport, mobility and communication costs (Chappell, 1998; Downes & Stoeckel, 2006; Hyland, 2014). The literature reviewed suggests that these elements have influenced VET systems locally and globally.

## **Technological infiltration**

Technological advancements are forcing rapid market changes resulting in changes to the nature of jobs (Mark, 1988). Misko, Yufen, Dayuan, Quanquan, and Zerong (2005) claim that widespread and rapid changes in technologies and telecommunications continuously demand better productivity, efficiency, and output from industries. If Australia is to gain the competitive advantage in a rapidly changing industry, a highly skilled and educated workforce is needed to continuously adapt the industry practices to new technologies (Adult Learning Australia Inc. and The Australian Education Union, 2011).

There is widespread acceptance that a large percentage of current jobs are at risk of being replaced by automation and digitisation within the next two decades and skill needs of the future will be significantly different (Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2015; Frey & Osborne, 2013)

The Commonwealth of Australia (2014) claims that skill needs of Australia need to continually reform as new markets emerge, falling trade barriers and rapid advancements of technologies. This is supported by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015) where it is suggested that Australian educational policy should be adapted to enhance its innovation ecosystems and operate at the technological frontier.

With the onset of the Internet, most of the world has simply become a “global village” (Crane, 2002). Access to the Internet has extended the boundaries of communication and business transactions beyond national boundaries in a time efficient manner.

## **Emergence of fully competitive global capital markets**

Since Australia expanded its integration in global economies in the mid-1980s, it has seen rapid changes in industries and occupational structures in labour markets (OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003). If Australia is to seize the new opportunities of rapid markets, especially in Asia and maintain its dominance in existing markets, it will need to compete with the best in

the world. In performing so, Australia will need to competitively enter into new markets, especially amidst the rising economic powers of Asia. A highly skilled labour force with skills to innovate and ability to identify and respond effectively to global opportunities is one of the four focus areas of the competitive agenda of the Australian government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

To ensure economic competitiveness in a global environment where needs for skills continue to evolve, Commonwealth of Australia (2014) declares that reforms of VET systems are becoming inevitable to Australia's future as a high wage economy in the face of vastly more competitive economies around the globe.

Toner (2004) posits that multinational companies play a significant role in the economy of Australia. VET sector needs to contribute to attracting multinational companies through building a domestic workforce that caters to the international needs (Coates et al., 2010; Toner, 2004). Equipping Australian workforce with skills that are favourable according to international benchmark will raise the confidence of multinationals on Australian workforce (Toner, 2004).

### **Rise of consumerism of education**

Parallel to commodifying vocational knowledge, there is a rise of consumerism of education globally where the role of students is changed to 'consumers of education'. In this environment, the viability of the educational institutions will ultimately be dependent on satisfying the demands of these consumers (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005).

The spatial compression between nations due to increased transportation options and advancement of telecommunication technologies has opened global education markets in VET (Toner, 2004). International confidence in Australian qualifications is a factor that determines Australia's attractiveness within global education markets (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015a)

### **Falling transport, mobility and communication costs**

The integration of national economies and interdependence across nations is increasing competition for products and skilled labour. There has been a rapid

decline of transport costs and advancement of communication technologies that has led to increasing cross-border mobility of workers (Downes & Stoeckel, 2006).

The compression of spatial differences between nations due to technological and communication advancement will enable innovative nations to establish niche markets and compete globally for economic gain. This provides incentives for the national authorities to take measures to ensure that spatial differences compared to other nations are minimized especially with respect to richest nations. These incentives are achieved by authorities through the introduction of policies and reforms in order to gain a competitive advantage globally. This leads to an increase in homogeneity among the richest nations of the world (Agnew, 2001).

## **Flow of Policies**

### *1972 – 1987 Establishment and the Development of TAFE*

#### **The Whitlam Era 1972 - 1975**

The seminal report by Kangan (1974) was instrumental in the establishment of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) throughout Australia that provided a new identity to vocational education. This institution was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State governments and was underpinned by the value system of lifelong education (Harris & Morrison, 2011; Noonan, 2016; Ryan, 2011). Kangan report resulted in governments inducing major funding to TAFE. During this era, TAFE enjoyed near monopoly on Australia's vocational training system (Ryan, 2011).

Kangan Report arguably was the beginning of setting the educational philosophy for vocational education in Australia. During this era, TAFE services were seen as the right of the community and duty of the government. In this regard, the coordination, planning, financing, and delivery of training was considered to be the total responsibility of the State (Chappell, 2001).

The Kangan report emphasised that technical education should be planned with the purpose of developing individual people. This report stated that vocational skill

development of learners needed to be at the centre of technical education. It claimed that industry needs must provide contexts for the training of individuals rather than driving course outcomes (Kangan, 1974). This positioned TAFE as an educational institution that is catering to the skill needs of industries through the development of individuals (Chappell, 2001).

### **The Fraser Era 1975 - 1983**

The Fraser government in 1975 further strengthened the TAFE system by expanding its role in social policy to include skill development for Aboriginal people, migrants, long-term unemployed, and the youth (Ryan, 2011).

From 1976 - 1979, a government inquiry into education and training in the form of the Williams Committee report recommended strategies for strengthening the pre-employment training provision through TAFE as well as the provision of supplementary trade training. The report also called for TAFE to provide solutions for teenagers risking unemployment (Williams, 1979).

### **Hawke Era 1983 - 1991**

The Hawke government in the mid-1980s took a sharp change in policy directions towards microeconomic reforms (Ryan, 2011).

In 1985, the Kirby report significantly changed the direction of training and education in Australia. Kirby recommended that VET should be catering to all sectors of the community while meeting the skill requirements of the industry and economy. This led to the formulation of a traineeship system that extended the traditional trade apprenticeships into other service areas. This increased employment opportunities for all groups, including women promoting equity in the labour market (Hermann et al., 1985).

## *1987 – 1991: Towards a National Training System*

### Skills for Australia Statement – The rise of competitive training market

Supporting the findings of the above report, Dawkins and Holding (1987) called for a paradigmatic shift in the Australian VET system to move away from public institutions solely controlling the training provision into a competitive training market. This was seen as paramount to the economic effectiveness and international competitiveness of Australia in line with the new vocationalism approach.

Skills for Australia statement presented by Dawkins and Holding (1987) had a number of the major implications for TAFE.

Dawkins and Holding (1987) promoted the notion that public funding for vocational training must be linked to achieving broader economic, labour market and industry development objectives. This report linked education and training programs to employment and economic prosperity (Dawkins & Holding, 1987).

The report also placed a strong emphasis on the development of TAFE. It called for greater accountability for outcomes and completions within the provision of funding rather than injecting finances to merely provide education and training.

This report acknowledged the fact that technical currency of teachers and up-to-date facilities are paramount for TAFE integrating its training within the industry. It cautioned that the rapid advances in technologies that constantly disrupt industries were posing further challenges for TAFE. As a solution, the government expected more private sector & industry investment in the Australian training system. They included: curriculum development, sharing of equipment, sharing of facilities and greater involvement in training provision (Dawkins & Holding, 1987).

Dawkins and Holding (1987) summed up the objectives of the proposal as: a flexible & responsive industry-based trade training system, increase employer contribution to training, development of skills based on achievement of competency rather than the traditional time-served approach to training.

In line with these recommendations, during the 1988 funding round, the near monopoly of TAFE sector on ‘labour market programs’ was ended and training opened to other private providers to foster a more competitive environment through a tender process. Under this funding system, funding that was available to TAFE was linked more closely to its national priorities and objectives (Dawkins & Holding, 1987).

The facets of competition and linking of funding to outcomes challenged the TAFE sector to link training to the specific needs of a changing industry, employment, workplace, and technologies. In addition, it further challenged the TAFE sector to incorporate flexible and responsive systems that will recognise various other forms of acquisition of learning, including the recognition of prior learning (Chataway, 1991).

However, the government also acknowledged that TAFE had a charter that extended well beyond narrow-based skills training required for meeting the needs of the industry (Dawkins & Holding, 1987).

#### *1991 – 2005: Training markets*

The ‘National training reform agenda’ was at the forefront of major educational policy reforms from 1990 – 1994 and effectively replaced the Kangan philosophy and programs within the vocational education system (Ryan, 2011).

The National competition policy for Australia report (Hilmer, 1993), argued for the infiltration of the competition agenda into government-owned entities and also argued for the abolition of the monopoly of government institutions in the provision of services. This was applied to the TAFE sector (Knight & Mlotkowski, 2009).

The Hilmer Report resulted in a proportion of Commonwealth and State government recurrent funds being disbursed competitively between public and private training providers (Hoeckel, Field, Justesen, & Kim, 2008; Knight & Mlotkowski, 2009). This began to further shape the ‘training market’ within the Australia VET system. The training provision, then became the responsibility of an efficient and productive network of publicly funded, but not fully public providers (Anderson, 1996).



This introduction of a market driven training system supported greater industry involvement in the training provision and responsiveness of training providers to industry needs (Anderson, 1996).

### *2005 – 2007: Skilling Australia's Workforce Act*

The 'Skilling Australia's Workforce Act' further emphasized a national approach to the delivery of VET through collaboration and cooperation between the Commonwealth, the States, and the industry. The aim was to strengthen Australia's economic base through providing a highly skilled workforce to meet the current and future needs of Australian businesses, industries, communities, and individuals. In addition, it aimed at reducing skill shortages and increasing the productivity of industry and enterprises (Attorney General's Department, 2005). The act further supported high quality and nationally consistent VET including the introduction of flexible and accelerated delivery options (Attorney General's Department, 2005; Noonan, 2016).

### *2008 – 2016: Intergovernmental Agreement of Federal Financial Relations*

The COAG National Reform Agenda in December 2007 introduced the latest wave of reforms in the Australian VET system. The reforms are designed to put industry and students at the centre of VET. It achieves this by introducing competition to encourage high quality, responsive, equitable, socially inclusive and efficient training and outcomes that strengthen the Australian skill base (Council of Australian Governments, 2012). Under the COAG intergovernmental agreement, all Australian states and territories were expected to move to variations of market-based reform models (Council of Australian Governments, 2012) impacting on many public service organisations including the TAFE sector.

### **National Agreement on Skills Reform**

The national agreement on skills reform agenda that focused on addressing the goals of COAG was motivated by concerns about unmet demand within higher-skilled occupations. It also addressed the need for Australia's international competitiveness

through the development of an innovation-focused economy (Productivity Commission, 2012).

The Council of Australian Governments (2012) outlines the following as the intentions of skills reforms for the public provider, implemented through the national agreement for skills reform:

- Operate effectively in an environment of greater competition.
- Recognise the important function in servicing the training needs of industry, regions and local communities.
- The role that spans high-level training and workforce development for industries.
- Improved skill and job outcomes for disadvantaged learners and communities.
- Strengthening the capacity to deliver training and support people in training.

### **State Government response to COAG agreement**

NSW Government response to COAG agreement was titled the ‘Smart and Skilled’ reforms. They outline a range of transformations in the VET sector with a staged introduction that commenced in 2014. The ‘Smart and Skilled’ reforms of NSW run parallel to the Victorian Training Guarantee model which was the Victorian Government response to COAG agreement introduced between 2008 and 2011.

Subsequent to the introduction of the Victorian Training Guarantee Model, the TAFE sector in Victoria faced short-term and long-term financial risks (Auditor-General, 2015). Though the NSW government had not fully embraced the reforms introduced in Victoria, the reforms in NSW could potentially generate similar issues in TAFE NSW unless proper measures are taken to achieve market satisfaction by meeting customer and government expectations (Bowman & McKenna, 2016).

### **Competitiveness Agenda**

The Australian VET has moved into a market-driven system where the training is commodified and supplied in line with the demand for training guided by the

industry. Downes and Stoeckel (2006) argue that these changes are being introduced for the VET sector to position Australia to take advantage of global opportunities. Uzunboylu and Mouzakitis (2010) justify the reform imperatives stating that accelerated technological change and global economic trends have influenced these reforms. They continue to assert that these reforms are necessary to position Australia with the ingredients to compete on a global stage. Wheelahan (2012b) criticizes this approach, stating that the Australian training system that is influenced by these policy trends have narrowed the focus of VET to meeting immediate needs of the industries.

The Statement of the objectives of VET reforms by the Department of Education and Training (2016) posits that reforms are essential to position the VET sector to support Australian industries. These industries need to cater to the continuous disruptions imposed by external forces and adapt to future skill needs. The Australian government plans to achieve this through elevating the quality, job outcomes, and status of VET (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

VET policy makers need a continuous feedback loop from industries with intelligence on current and future skill needs to continuously renew and update VET policies (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015b). If Australia expects to secure an economic advantage, the Australian VET system cannot be an exclusive national system but needs to evolve with global markets (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2015 & Agnew 2001).

## **2.4 Australian Public VET Provider - TAFE**

TAFE as the public VET provider has been servicing Australia for over a century. TAFE established its initial identity as the non-professional technical education provider, adult further education provider, and second chance education provider. In the early 1970s, TAFE was considered as the public education provider that catered to the learning needs of adults (Kangan, 1974). During this era, TAFE was considered to be making a valuable contribution to the Australian economy by building societies and individuals.

Market reforms that introduced competition for public funding in the late 1990s have gradually changed the TAFE landscape in Australia. Gordon and Gillespie (2006) state that competition is not considered favourably in pedagogical dialogues within many educational institutions. Since public funding became fully contestable, TAFE market share that was 100% in pre-1990s has moved down to 27% in 2014 (Seddon, 2015, p. 2).

However, the TAFE sector is continuing to provide services that are not matched by private providers. These services extend to: skill shortage areas, disabled students, indigenous population, multicultural people and regional and rural footprint (Stone, 2011). These services that are framed as community service obligations of TAFE are encapsulated in building local skills and capability, increasing workforce participation, providing ‘second chance education opportunities’ and participating in local planning and development activities in the community.

Rashman et al. (2009) argue that the TAFE sector as a public service organisation is subjected to the same pressures as a private training organization when operating within a demand-driven marketised environment in Australia. In addition, pressures and constraints as a public service institution make many aspects of reforms challenging for the TAFE sector.

## General purpose of TAFE Sector



Figure 3 Conceptual View

The purpose of VET in Australia is multi-faceted. It is designed to provide learners with the opportunity to get skills to participate in the workforce. Skill development through VET is delivered to a number of segments of the society. They are:

- Young people entering the workforce (Jorgensen, 2015; Woods, 2007).
- Adults re-entering the workforce, existing workers upgrading their skills or retraining for new opportunities (Australian Council of Trade Unions, 2012; Bathmaker, 2013).
- Workers who are seeking recognition of prior learning (RPL) based on their work/life experience to gain higher level qualifications.  
(National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007).

The increased emphasis on competition and contestability in the VET training market, promote and encourage employer and industry bodies to engage with the VET sector (Stanwick, 2009). Government policy directions are transforming the TAFE sector to respond to greater competition and be highly reactive to specific industry needs (Mitchell, 2016).

Wheelahan (2015a) asserts that a VET sector that is tightly linked to industries is compromising the fundamental mission of the public VET provider in building the

productive capacity of the society (Wheelahan, 2015a). TAFE Directors Australia (2013) supports this view stating that TAFE is initially established to achieve broader economic and social objectives through training and education.

## **Expectations from TAFE**

VET educationalists believe that the purpose of the public VET provider should be to provide academic education to individuals for living in a democratic society. They believe that VET should have a broader approach to skill development (Bathmaker, 2013). Wheelahan (2015b), Wheelahan, Buchanan, and Yu (2015) and Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) assert that the current VET qualifications have a narrow focus due to the following reasons: they are too task specific, too tied to specific job roles and fall short of the integrity of a tertiary qualification.

However, government expectations for the VET sector range of performance targets, financial effectiveness and productivity measures with a view to improving qualification attainment, increased completions and preparing workers to respond to the varying skills demands of the industry (Productivity Commission, 2012). TAFE, as the public VET provider, is forced to adjust their business strategies to respond to these expectations and as a result head teachers and teachers are forced to make major adjustments to their pedagogical practices (Ellis-Gulli & Carter, 2010).

In order to be competitive and relevant in the current VET environments, TAFE teaching units need to be able to deliver agile, flexible and high-quality training products that are responsive to the requirements of the customers irrespective of the mode, time and structure of delivery (Ellis-Gulli & Carter, 2010).

In addition, as a government regulated RTOs, TAFE is expected to adhere to government operational policies, procedures, and systems. This constrains the ability of staff to have agile processes quickly respond to customer demands in the way that is expected in the current environment (Ellis-Gulli & Carter, 2010). They stated that in government regulated RTOs complex government processes, procedures and systems tend to constrain the ability of staff to have agile processes to quickly

respond to customer demands in the way that is expected in the current VET environment.

## **Impact of VET Reforms on TAFE**

Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) and Harris, Simons, and Clayton (2005) claim that policy makers assume that moving to marketisation, commodifying education and increased competition amongst providers will positively drive training providers to incorporate customer-focused practices within their places of work. Williams (2011) asserts that even though the competition may promote better customer service practices, it has little emphasis on quality educational outcomes. The Standing Committee on Education and Employment (2014) counters this argument stating that competitiveness will improve quality and innovation in VET delivery provided the competition is well planned and carefully implemented.

In this environment, VET reforms not only direct TAFE institutes to adopt a more customer-centric processes but also to change to more entrepreneurial cultures and engage innovative and creative approaches in teaching (TAFE NSW Commission, 2016).

The combination of new vocationalism and neoliberalism discourses that fuelled the market-based reforms of VET sector have substantially altered the role of TAFE teachers and their work practices (Chappell, 2001). Marketisation and associated VET reforms are forcing a cultural shift within TAFE institutes (Foley, 2011).

Mulcahy (2003) claims that this cultural shift is moving head teachers to be business managers and training entrepreneurs and compromising their role as the educational leaders. Seddon (2011) and Tyler (2009) make similar claims about VET teachers asserting that marketisation based VET reforms are fundamentally minimising the role of teachers to “industry trainers” and changing their role from being liberal educators. The downgrading of minimum VET teacher qualifications to a Certificate IV qualification in workplace assessment further contributes to this. This is forcing a change in status, values, priorities, and motivations of the TAFE teaching profession (Anderson, 2006). Gelade (2008) and Guthrie and Clayton (2010) posit that personal,

philosophical and ideological views of some TAFE educators are preventing them from fully embracing the expectations of market-based reforms within the TAFE sector.

Marketisation has the potential to challenge highly central bureaucratic organisations (McGrath-Champ et al., 2015) such as TAFE. This is proven in the TAFE sector, where redesign and reconfiguration of the VET market have resulted in a rapid decline of market share at varying rates across every state within this sector (Seddon, 2015). This is most significant in Victoria (Wheelahan, 2015a) as the state moved to market-based reforms prior to all other states. This trend can potentially threaten the sustainability of TAFE all over Australia (Seddon, 2015).

Anderson (2006) asserts that competition fuelled by marketisation has moved the focus of providers away from pedagogical issues. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) highlight the negative effects of marketisation stating that the market redesign has led to lower standards of educational delivery. They claim that some training providers have used less than educationally sound practices to achieve economic gain.

The government has responded to the negative outcomes of marketisation, by tightening regulations and enforcing more arduous compliance requirements on VET providers (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). Despite this, the VET system has been plagued by 'shonky' VET providers (Mitchell, 2012). The collapse of some of these providers due to less than acceptable practices that were reported widely in the media has brought the reputation of respected VET providers under scrutiny (Evans, 2011). Wheelahan (2012b) summed this up by stating that the structure of VET markets, marketised system and the rorts associated with VET have undermined TAFE.

### *Tensions of VET Reforms*

Parker (2014) claims that a massive drop in funding to the TAFE sector associated with VET reforms has placed great efficiency pressures within TAFE institutes. They raise concerns about the quality, equity, relevance and the ability of the sector to innovate and attract diverse learners under this funding environment.



A large-scale push for new learning spaces that are demanding more flexible, user-friendly and work related training with localised solutions are constantly challenging teachers.

Simons, Harris, and Clayton (2005) claim that educators are grappling with the long-term implications of these new learning spaces in terms of in-depth theoretical understanding of students as well as strong practical exposure necessary. They continue to say that some consequences of marketisation will have long-term negative effects on the TAFE sector if not managed properly. These will potentially diminish the prominence of TAFE in the Australian VET sector over time. There is a danger that these negative effects will devalue the crucial role the TAFE sector plays in the community (Australian Education Union, 2013).

Seddon points out that innovation is not able to flourish due to short-term resource constraints, systems and compliance priorities that have diverted the resources and time away from innovation (Seddon, 2009).

### *Effects of VET Reforms on Educational Leadership*

Seddon (2011) claims that the current wave of VET reforms is changing the image of success of the TAFE head teacher to an individual entrepreneur disregarding the occupational expertise and pedagogical leadership they possess. Educational leadership is at the core of TAFE head teacher position. Mulcahy (2003) questions whether head teachers can develop and sustain the educational leadership qualities in an environment that are increasingly focusing on business and profitability. Furthermore, Mulcahy (2003) stipulates that operational pressures and priorities will take head teachers away from what they believe to be their core mission of supporting learning and teaching.

There is much controversy about gaining consensus on the primary task and the core mission of TAFE amongst all stakeholders as it moves into the reformed environment (Davids, 2012; Misko et al., 2005; TAFE NSW, 2008). There are cultural anxieties, tensions, and conflicts created when a unit that is primarily working with service-oriented professionals is expected to operate in a competitive business environment. Coates et al. (2010) suggest that senior leaders such as head

teachers, who have line management responsibilities for teachers, will be expected to influence their teaching unit to adapt to the changing educational requirements while balancing conflicting demands of the rapidly changing VET environment.

### Educational Leadership of TAFE Head Teachers

Head teachers are pivotal not only to the operation of the teaching unit (Rice, 2003) but also for the success of TAFE. The survival of the teaching units in the midst of VET reforms to a greater extent will be influenced by the head teachers' ideologies and their level of resistance or acceptance of the rationale of these reforms (Crossman & Hughes, 2012).

Block (2003) asserts that many corporations operating in a competitive and technologically complex global marketplace are looking for leaders that can create work and cultures that are more innovative and entrepreneurial in order to achieve and sustain a competitive edge. A number of current VET publications have identified business management, business planning as well as business development as core skills that are currently required by VET leaders (Adams & Gamage, 2008; Callan et al., 2007). Callan et al. (2007) assert that in the current environment, traditional educational leadership has been replaced by the need for leaders with industry knowledge, broader management skills in addition to pedagogical and vocational competence.

In the current TAFE context, head teachers are the most influential educational leaders positioned to fulfil this role.

TAFE NSW (2013) in a document called "statement of owner expectations" outlined that TAFE NSW will continue to set the benchmark for quality of VET in Australia. It is difficult to ascertain placement of the quality benchmark when the government has not specified any specific quality outcomes in terms of students, businesses, industry, and communities (Mackenzie, 2015).

### **Positioning TAFE for Globalisation Imperatives**

According to Seddon (2015), TAFE has traditionally identified itself as an educational provider that operates within the national and state boundaries.

However, decades of VET reforms are forcing the TAFE sector to play a major part in Australia's economic competitiveness globally. Seddon (2015) points out that TAFE as the public VET provider has set up all its structure to respond to local and national needs rather than international imperatives. It will be a challenge for the TAFE sector to position its cultures and structures to operate under global imperatives. Further, Seddon (2015) claims that this trend is also disrupting the nation building objectives of TAFE and is forcing it to shift its focus onto responding to global challenges (Seddon, 2015).

TAFE institutes need to work through these complexities of the influences of external forces and re-discover their identities to respond to VET reforms by catering to the expectations of all stakeholders. This presents a passport for innovation for TAFE institutes (Chappell, 2001; TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators, 2009).

### **Challenges in Responding to Globalisation**

The TAFE sector is now expected to operate within an economic system that is shaped by global forces. This sector has traditionally worked within the borders of the nation since its inception. Due to local and global influences, this sector is now required to respond on many different fronts to changing skill-needs of local industries as well as international markets (Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2015; Hetherington, 2009). The challenge for the Australia VET system is to anticipate the skill requirements of current and future workforce for not only the domestic market but also for the international markets (Hobart, 1999).

It is also a challenge for VET policy makers to establish national training products with full international transferability. As Egetenmeyer and Rueffin (2011) outline, the TAFE sector will need to cooperate with employers in terms of transferability, adaptability, and internationalisation of training. Global integration has also provided great opportunities for the TAFE sector to export its expertise in VET (Barnaart, 2006 - 2007).

The advancement of telecommunication and other technologies has also resulted in growing interest in distance learning in the training market. Many private VET

providers are entering into this market at a rapid pace (Hobart, 1999). The TAFE sector is required to have the capability to cater to the unique requirements of national and international customers in terms of content, timeframe, and structure to attract and retain students globally. These may call for changes to the current pedagogical structures and practices (Sahlberg, 2004; Tran, 2013).

Decades of reforms in the Australian VET system are said to have positioned Australia better to take advantage of global influences (Seddon, 2015; Van Der Linde, 2006). In order to successfully position VET to respond to these external influences, Hobart (1999) outlines a number of essential elements within VET systems. They are flexibility, market-based VET provision, recognition of competencies achieved through formal and informal learning, absorb economic changes in qualifications, integration of VET in the world of work, ethical and social considerations, cultural diversity, changing work practices due to modernization, transferability, mobility, and innovation. The objectives of Australian VET reforms, as outlined in the Department of Education and Training (2016), incorporate all elements outlined by Hobart (1999).

While the benefits and efficiency of online distance programs are always discussed favourably in literature, there are many debates around the effectiveness of online delivery (Schell & Janicki, 2013). This is particularly applicable for the VET sector as a development of authentic, practical skills are a major part of VET and is of critical importance to the labour force (Dempsey, 2013). The TAFE sector needs to manage these tensions when operating within an international market.

Moodie (2006) asserts that VET institutions have a role in the national innovation to respond to global developments in a timely manner and ensure that the local workforce is equipped with the skills to promote innovation and gain competitive advantage. The TAFE sector due to its geographic reach within Australia is in a good position to identify opportunities and work across the nation to stimulate innovation in every region (TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators, 2009)

## **New challenges for TAFE teachers**

Rapid changes in national and international skill needs are creating new challenges for VET practitioners to re-define their pedagogic models and content to suit an unstable VET landscape (Tran, 2013).

Tran (2013) further asserts that as Australia expands the boundaries of VET to international markets, contemporary VET practitioners must adopt pedagogies that produce quality student outcomes within these markets. They include, but not limited to: following learner-centred training model, technology integrated pedagogies, inclusive pedagogies, transnational skills, pedagogies that cater to mobility factors and cultural diversity. This means changes to teaching and learning environments, new industrial relations structures and cultural transformations to alter workplace practices, career mobility across disciplines and coping with demands for continually updating with new knowledge and technologies. This requires VET providers to reposition their entire structures, including workforce, pedagogies, delivery, customer connections, and programs in response to global forces influencing VET (Tran, 2013).

## **2.5 Australian VET Concepts**

The segment explores various views, underlying assumptions and ideologies about TAFE and VET sector in Australia. The purpose of this segment is to integrate a cross-section of the literature on topics that inform this study as well as illuminate the conceptual framework for this study.

Public VET providers in the past have been riddled with low completion rates, poor responsiveness, inflexible processes and systems, inadequate resources, outmoded technical skills of teachers, fixed delivery models, low curricular relevance and a reputation for being a highly inefficient sector (McGrath, 2012). As Hyland (2014) observes, the VET system in Australia has gone through unending policy changes with bandage solutions to address these perceived deficiencies in the VET system as they surface. Heimans (2012) portrays this approach to ‘fixing’ the education system

as a salutary reminder of the power of politics assuming that solutions to problems within education systems could be provided by educational policies.

This segment of the literature review considers a number of factors. It addresses the general purpose of VET, the purpose of public VET provider, marketisation, labour market, the world of work, CBT, skill ecosystem, VET regulator, government control, industry, employers, labour & occupational group influences and TAFE teacher & capability framework.

## **Competence, CBT & Training Packages**

### *Competency-based Training (CBT) Systems*

CBT is at the centre of a policy framework that was introduced by the federal government to respond to the influences of global economies and improve the competitiveness of Australian industries (Curtain, 1994).

Corbel, Wheelahan, Forward, and Darwin (2014) and Hodge (2016) continue the argument that industry-led VET driven by CBT system is a minimalistic approach to the VET curriculum. They assert that the capability of VET graduates should go beyond competency and proficiency. Corbel et al. (2014) also emphasise that capability should not peak at competency but should strive for expertise in the field of study. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) also agree that competency should extend to the learners' ability to apply the skills and knowledge in new contexts as well as creating new knowledge (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011).

### **CBT-based Training Packages**

Chappell (2001) states that CBT has introduced radical changes to the way TAFE teachers conceptualise and undertake their work. The implementation of training packages has become a complicated process for teachers due to the management of complex requirements for flexibility, frequent changes to regulatory requirements, catering to various delivery modes and inconsistencies in the structure of different training packages (Barrow, 2006).

Training packages do not give any teacher instruction or curriculum and could be merely represented as packages for assessment (TAFE Directors Australia, 2001). They do not outline how a learner should be trained or what training and assessment strategies to use (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016b). Instead, training packages are made up of units of competencies, qualifications framework to package units of competency to meaningful groups and provide assessment criteria and guidance (Department of Industry, 2014).

The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015) and Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) claim that vocational education that uses public money should be instilling broader competencies rather than the narrow based focus of the training packages. They claim that training packages do not adequately prepare individuals to adapt to future occupations and instead the focus is on atomistic skills that are currently needed by specific industries. TAFE institutes that delivered broad-based competencies since its inception are now being challenged by marketisation and implementation of Neoliberal CBT models (Hodge, 2016).

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) and Hodge (2016) argue that this narrow focus on competencies is plagued with a number of dangers. First of all, it has the danger of minimising the process of learning. It isolates the learning to achieving a particular outcome in a particular work context as it currently exists. It does not provide any due consideration to the integration of learning in the chosen industry job role. It results in the learner obtaining a limited set of situational skills and knowledge that are not adequate to apply their learning to changing circumstances, situations, and contexts. A narrow focus on skills dis-integrate work into a distinct set of tasks and fails to realise that work is interconnected.

Hodge (2016) supports these arguments stating that knowledge creation according to CBT-based training packages emphasises observable and explicit aspects of practice, however, it overlooks the tacit and embodied knowledge within work practices. He continues to assert that under the marketised environment where VET educators are expected to deliver 'just enough' skills to be competent, the system ignores the occupational expertise of teachers, the very reason they were employed as TAFE teachers in the first place. He continues to argue that TAFE teachers who typically

draw on both their tacit and explicit knowledge when they pass on stories, moral codes, and images to provide authentic opportunities for knowledge construction within their occupation are restricted by the current training package structures.

Wheelahan (2001) asserts that learning should not be limited to learning current work practices but also critique current ways of doing things and improve on them. Mulder et al. (2006) support this stating that the development of CBT should be based on a lifelong learning concept where competence is continually developed as the technologies, persons, and situations evolve. Heerwagen (2010) states that the changing nature of work requires workers to concentrate on continuous competency development, develop the ability to see alternative perspectives and have the capability to continually analyse and make professional judgments.

In line with these arguments, TAFE Directors Australia (2001) asserts that CBT-based training packages do not necessarily prepare new prospective workers adequately for the workplace.

### *Concept of ‘Competence’*

Competence and competency imply ‘sufficiently capable’ and allowed to be left alone to perform certain tasks (Mulder et al., 2006). They confirm the ability to use the knowledge, skill, and attitudes that are integrated in the professional practice accurately within the correct context to perform a function. Baartman and Bruijn (2011) state that achieving vocational competence is not limited to acquiring skills, knowledge and behaviours, but also integrating these to carry out a professional task successfully. Baartman and Bruijn (2011) conceptualise ‘integration’ as the process of learning and ‘competence’ as the outcome of learning. Units of competencies within training packages are concerned with outcomes of learning rather than the process of learning (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011).

On the other hand, there are many criticisms that integrating knowledge, skill and attitudes to competence is atomistic, individualistic, and does not fully capture the entire behavioural and mental activity of an occupation (Ashworth & Saxton, 1990; Forward, 2008; Hodge, 2016; McMillan, 2007; Wheelahan, 2005). Furthermore, integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes into competence may over-simplify the



theory-practice relationship (Ashworth & Saxton, 1990). Wheelahan (2005) continues to claim that ‘learning for work’ needs to be oriented to an occupation operating in various contexts and go beyond a specific work context that the concept of competence is linked to.

### *Learning or Assessment*

Training packages that focus on outcomes without any due reference to the learning process (Mulder et al., 2006) raise confusion amongst TAFE teachers, especially in teaching units delivering trade qualifications (Southren, 2015). Oats (2004) and Mulder et al. (2006) point out that outcome based training systems ignore the skill ‘formation’ role of training. It stops workers from moving to new levels of learning. They continue to argue that separating the learning process from assessments overlooks the importance of gathering purposeful data and improvements achieved throughout the learning process. It ignores the continuous progress of competence that occurs through the learning process that leads to innovation and new levels of competence (Mulder et al., 2006; Oats, 2004).

### *Competence vs Performance*

Based on the arguments outlined above, the following segment considers the direct link between competence and performance.

Mulder et al. (2006) claim that the two workers who are at the two ends of the performance scale could be deemed competent under different work contexts without any discrimination of their performance under the CBT model.

Department of Industry (2014, p. 14) states:

*Competency is the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.*

This definition denotes a concept that is substantially different to other writers and claims that concept of competence is much broader than the ability to perform individual atomistic tasks. It also denotes that competency should demonstrate the

ability to apply the workplace knowledge and skills consistently over time in a sufficient range of work contexts (Department of Industry, 2014).

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) argue that irrespective of how competence is defined, it is still based on the performance of distinct tasks and ignores the intrinsic expert knowledge of occupations and practice.

This has implications for assessing competence within teaching units. Assessment of competencies needs to be done over a period of time throughout training and practice (Department of Industry, 2014). This denotes that the validity of competency assessments will depend not only on the assessments done throughout the learning process but also throughout a student performance at the workplace.

Bashook (2005) makes a distinction between assessing competence and assessing performance at work. He asserts that competence is measured through assessment during training in controlled situations. However, assessment of performance should happen in practice situations over a period.

Baartman and Bruijn (2011) links the two together arguing that competence assessments should measure applications of knowledge, skill, and behaviours together in the performance of a professional task.

Competency-based assessments of competence and performance have altered the pedagogical practices within teaching units. This has particular implications when training institutions operate in a demand-driven marketised environment.

### *Completion of Qualifications*

A study on education contribution to job performance by NG and Feldman (2009) found that while education positively influences core job performance it also enhances the creativity and citizenship behaviours. Hodge (2016) claims that training package qualifications that are based on confirming competence do not necessarily support the notion that education and training will lead to better job performance as well as enhance and promote skill development.

## **Concept of ‘Skill’**

Baartman and Bruijn (2011) conceptualise skill as a ‘doing’ or ‘acting’ in practice that involve cognitive as well as motor skills. Vocational education places a greater emphasis on motor skills that are normally less explicit in academic education.

Skill development, skill shortages, and skill mismatches have been at the forefront of governments around the world over a number of years. Skills are associated with productivity, competitiveness, and innovation. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) assert that skills are also about social integration. Rigby and Sanchis (2006) support this position stating that the development of vocational skills is not only a technical process that uses motor skills but is also a social process. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) support this argument stating that various forms of skills, including occupation-specific skills, generic skills, employability skill and foundation skills cannot be developed independently of the occupations.

Skills Australia (2011b) claimed that there is a structural mismatch of emerging job opportunities and the skills of those who are available to take up these jobs. This is represented as the ‘skill mismatch’. Overcoming this mismatch requires specially tailored training programs that incorporate the development of a broad-based set of skills including, foundation skills (Skills Australia, 2011b).

In many advanced economies and developing nations a substantive percentage of workers are found to have qualifications that do not fully match the job that they perform (World Economic Forum, 2014).

## **Implementation of Training Packages**

Mulder et al. (2006) point out that when moving from curriculum-based instruction to CBT, organizations must appropriately adjust their workforce and processes to support the new approach. Smith (2002) claims that this should have been an opportunity for teachers to collaboratively devise innovative training solutions to cater to the requirements of the training packages. Mitchell (2011b) asserts that based on analysis of data from a number of TAFE institutes who participated in the

VETCAT survey, there is a scarcity of practitioners that are classified as VET learning and assessment specialists in Australia.

Hodge (2016) posits that VET educators lost control over the curriculum development process through the introduction of CBT-based training packages. Mulder et al. (2006) assert that TAFE institutes have not paid attention to competency development of teachers and managers when implementing CBT-based training packages.

The implementation of training packages has imposed substantial changes to the focus, purpose and practice of TAFE teachers (Chappell & Johnston, 2003). Despite moving from curriculum based training for CBT, the daily functions of TAFE teachers, recruitment methods, and work expectations have not seen substantial changes. Chappell and Johnston (2003) assert that it is not uncommon for teachers in TAFE institutes to continue to use the educational discourses such as ‘teachers’, ‘students’ and ‘classrooms’. They further claim that TAFE teachers fall short of the standards required for conducting workplace delivery and assessments.

Mitchell (2011b) claims that conducting workplace assessments requires teachers to develop skills other than traditional classroom delivery, provide recognition processes and assess generic skills. Harris and Simons (2008) contribute to the argument stating that workplace assessment requires a different set of skill sets other than what is developed through classroom teaching. Giving up classroom control and relying on workplace tasks and contexts to manage training will be a challenge to many TAFE teachers (Mitchell, 2011b).

The implementation of CBT-based training packages in its true form will require institutions to provide personalised learning services. The study by Ellis (2005) on personalised learning demonstrated that implementation of this requires modified teaching practices, improved learner engagement, changed administrative systems and adapted technology. Callan et al. (2007) posit that VET organizations need teams that are committed to developing their capabilities in order to take advantage of the current VET environment.

## **Organisational Risk Cultures**

The risk culture of an organisation is described by McGing and Brown (2014) as the degree to which the culture of an organisation encourages or limits the taking of risks and the opportunities that arise from those risks.

McGing and Brown (2014) illustrate that in an organisation with a reactive risk culture the individual behaviour meets the minimal compliance requirements and ignores compliance until reporting time. In this risk culture, the organisation uses a very top-down approach with a risk averse mindset. Compliance is the risk function of a reactive risk culture.

An organisation with a mature risk culture will have the mindset that risk is an opportunity to demonstrate strategic behaviours across the organization and individuals. In a mature risk culture, the workforce drives risk assessment and shares its insights across the organisation. The risk function is the co-operative responsibility of managers and teams and is forward-looking (McGing & Brown, 2014).

García-Granero et al. (2015) suggest that there is a positive relationship between managerial risk taking and innovation. They further elaborate that the managerial risk taking will positively influence a mature risk taking culture.

### *The Culture of Compliance*

Under the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, there is a responsibility of every RTO to comply with the requirements specified in regulation and contractual arrangements for public funds (Council of Australian Governments, 2012). Commonwealth funded or state funded programs are normally associated with detailed compliance and reporting expectations (Holland, 2015). The VET reform agenda focusing on training package reforms and quality of VET provision is increasingly changing the environmental context of teaching units to operate within a culture of compliance (Wheelahan, 2015a; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). This stands in tension with “culture of questioning” (Seddon, 2011a) that support innovation.

Wheelahan (2011) asserts that the demand for more regulation and compliance due to marketisation and subsequent establishment of ASQA as the national regulator has increased focus on compliance than previously. As the national regulator for VET, the quality mandate of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (2016c) imposes strict standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTO). According to Australian Skills Quality Authority (2016c), the standards are used to ensure that VET system produces high-quality training and assessment.

These standards underpin all accredited VET delivery in Australia. ASQA as the national regulator is mandating VET providers to follow strict processes and implement systems to monitor training activities. The RTOs are closely monitored to assess the compliance with regulatory framework as well as form judgments on the quality training and assessment (Victorian TAFE Association, 2015). The ‘culture of compliance’ is primarily attributed to this quality mandate of the national regulator.

Seddon (2011a) argues that VET reforms disturb the work of VET teachers and managers. She calls for models that utilise the expertise of VET teachers in productive ways to build capacities for innovation in the Australian workforce.

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that a nation’s ability to rapidly adapt to the technology and capacity of the workforce to innovate is paramount for current and future economic success (Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2015; Sung, 2010). TAFE teaching unit contribution in building the innovative capacity of Australia will be further explored during this study.

Many stakeholders in the sector have raised concerns about the layers of the VET reforms and the constant rorts. The Government has responded to these matters by revisions to regulations tightening conditions in order to contain the damage of these rorts (Leahy, 2015). In that document, Leahy urges the government to rethink the funding and regulatory models. She urges the government to implement sustained improvements to VET sector and ensure that any future policy directions refocus on the fundamental idea and purpose of the VET system in Australia.

A number of researchers have previously reported on the impact of compliance and audit driven culture on teaching units in TAFE institutes (Black & Reich, 2009; Davids, 2012; Rice, 2005).

Marketisation which has resulted in over 5000 RTOs across Australia entering the VET market, has led to greater quality control measures being introduced as a means of regulating a high number of RTOs.

*Since 2012, Victoria has built up its contract compliance program. In 2013–14, it conducted 71 audits of RTOs focused on areas of high risk. At 30 June 2014, it was withholding \$25 million in payments, investigating 15 complaints and actively case-managing 20 RTOs to address inappropriate behaviours. In October 2014, it withheld a further \$20 million from one of the larger RTOs that was providing sub-standard training through sub-contracted providers (Audit Office New South Wales, 2015, p. 27).*

As Wheelahan (2015a) emphasizes, the strong, compliant and audit cultures that are currently visible in TAFE institutes are a result of governments continuing to tighten the compliance rules to deal with inappropriate behaviours by many RTOs who have entered into the market due to marketisation.

Based on 2011 course enrolments in VET qualifications, Wheelahan (2012b) makes the claim that Australia has constructed the regulatory and quality assurance frameworks in VET to police 98% of providers that deliver less than 20% of all training just because the government believes in the primacy of the market.

Compliance regulations, policies, and processes are constraining TAFE teaching units from being responsive to changing customer needs as making quick operational changes to meet changing needs of customers is impossible under the compliant driven VET culture (Ellis-Gulli & Carter, 2010).

TAFE NSW (2008), in response to consultation into “Doing Business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, documented the commitment to a number of transformations with regard to compliance. Through this document TAFE NSW committed to transforming the internal compliance and quality assurance processes and systems to support a risk-

managed, serviced focused culture. This document acknowledged that a mature risk-based audit approach is needed in TAFE institutes to encourage innovation and new ways of doing business.

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) stated that tightening the process will only lead to a culture of compliance and will not support innovation.

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) declare that trust in outcomes of other providers will not be guaranteed by tightening the specifications of learning outcomes to finer levels of detail as is the case in the current VET framework.

## **VET / TAFE Teacher**

VET trainers in Australia are required to meet pedagogical skills, vocational competency and industry skills that inform their training and assessment practices (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016a). In addition, TAFE teachers are expected to have substantial experience in the labour market.

There are claims that the status of TAFE teachers has been systematically eroded over the last two decades due to casualization of the workforce, strict compliance requirements, lowering the minimum qualification to deliver VET and changes to the role of TAFE teacher (Simons et al., 2005; Wheelahan, 2015a). Seddon (2009) claims that VET reforms have given a stronger voice to industry and excluded the voice of educators.

### *Teacher Recruitment and Training*

The minimum requirement for teaching and assessing within the VET sector in Australia is a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Unlike general education teachers, nursing and many other occupations that are service industries, there are no registration requirements for one to become a VET teacher or conduct training or assessment within VET (Robertson, 2008). However, TAFE teachers are encouraged by the TAFE leadership to obtain tertiary level educational qualifications at a level higher than the minimum requirement for a VET teacher. This is important, especially if the teachers have aspirations to become head teachers within this sector.



Smith (2010) argues that the minimum qualification to become a VET teacher does not adequately equip teachers for the complexities of the role. He further asserts that this qualification does not adequately develop the essential pedagogical skills that are required to implement CBT effectively. On the other hand, a model where teachers are recruited primarily based on technical competence creates teachers who do not have the necessary pedagogical skills to teach for changing workplaces (Education International, 2009).

TAFE teachers who were recruited based on their industry experience and their expert discipline knowledge bring substantial occupational expertise to the training provision. Teachers with occupational expertise in the same field are usually placed within one teaching unit led by one or more head teachers. This has led to strong occupation-based identities and sub-cultures in teaching units within TAFE Institutes (Education International, 2009). These sub-cultures are predominantly driven by localised occupational values that sometimes may take precedence over parent TAFE Institute values and directions.

## **Trends in Contemporary VET Practice**

### *Need for Pedagogic Innovation*

VET practitioners are regularly challenged by constant changes to technology, influences of global economies and associated changes to work habits within a rapidly changing world economy. Barlow (2007) declares that VET pedagogical practices will need to not only to be relevant to the changing world but also to cater to the evolving learning styles of a new generation of learners. Mitchell, Clayton, Hedberg, and Paine (2003) assert that pedagogic innovation is significant in the contemporary VET environment where customer-focus should be at the centre of training.

The rapidly changing economic, technological and social conditions are directly impacting on work practices. At the same time the VET environment is continually evolving to respond to these changing conditions. Kirkwood and Price (2006) and Mitchell et al. (2003) assert that in rapidly changing environments, VET practitioners

need to revise their traditional practices with innovation in their educational delivery to respond to these changing conditions with agility. They claim that the responsiveness of teaching practice to external changes is paramount in the current VET environment. They claim that preparing learners with broad-based occupational skills with the conceptual development must be at the centre of VET training. This ensures that students are prepared to not only secure a job immediately but to be relevant to the current and future needs of the industry.

In order to achieve this within changing VET environments, practitioners will need to embark on wider, deeper and more frequent innovation in their teaching and learning practices (Mitchell et al., 2003). Reeson, Mason, Sanderson, Bratanova, and Hajkowitz (2016) assert that any business that requires urgent cultural transformation will embark on innovation and disruption at the centre of their business strategies and vocational education should not be any different.

Pedagogic Innovation requires that teachers draw on their occupational expertise (Seddon, 2009), develop capability in a range of pedagogical strategies (Mitchell et al., 2003), increase technological aptitude, have an innovative mindset (Clayton, 2004) and engage in deep thinking informed by research, thought and action. TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators (2009) call for stronger technology oriented pedagogical practices to support learning and assessment of young apprentices within teaching units. This is crucial for achieving changing performance expectations of VET reforms, customers and changing needs of the workplaces.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was utilised to answer the following questions (RQ):

- RQ1) In what ways might the leadership of head teachers influence the pedagogical practices within TAFE teaching units?
- RQ2) How might the culture created by shared experiences within the teaching unit influence the way content is taught in teaching units?  
How does this culture guide and influence the leadership practice of head teachers?
- RQ3) How does the teaching unit under the leadership of head teachers respond to VET reforms implemented by Australian government?

The study expects to achieve the research objectives through formulating the answers to the questions above. This involved a number of main activities:

- 1) A review of contemporary literature on the research topic.
- 2) Qualitative research in the form of a multiple case-study approach. This includes semi-structured interviews, document analysis, focus group discussions and observations of six selected teaching units from Victoria and NSW.
- 3) Comparison of leadership practice of head teachers with the current organisational culture of the six cases studied.

### **3.2 Justification of Methodology**

This study used a qualitative research design. The purpose was to understand, describe and answer specific questions and instances of social reality within TAFE teaching units focusing on head teacher leadership, pedagogical practices, and VET reforms.

Snape and Spencer (2003) state that research design needs to be informed by an understanding of nature and environmental context, the purpose of the study and characteristic of research participants. These factors contributed to the distinctive approach used in this study.

Qualitative inquiry (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Stake, 2010) that were based on an interpretive approach to social reality lends itself well to this study. This methodology centres around the way individuals make sense of their subjective

realities and attach meanings to them (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). Stake (2010) asserts that a qualitative researcher will take an ongoing subjective interpretive role throughout all stages of the study starting from planning, data gathering, data analysis and write up.

*“The best interpretations will be logical extensions of the simple description, but will also include contemplative, speculative, even aesthetic extension. They are contributions of the researcher, written so as to make it clear they are personal interpretations. All people make interpretations. All research requires interpretations. Qualitative research relies heavily on interpretive perceptions throughout the planning, data gathering, analysis and write-up of the study (Stake, 2010, p. 55)*

Planning stages of the research drew on the framework that Stake (2010) provided for novice researchers to plan their qualitative research. This included the entire process of qualitative research starting from formulating the research problem, review of literature, gathering data, analysing and synthesizing gathered data and ending with writing up of the study findings (Stake, 2010).

Refining of the research question continued throughout data gathering and reporting stages of the study as new themes and knowledge were constructed (Stake, 2010). The iterative development of conceptualization of this study included a process that shifted the focus from drafting a question to qualitative research methods, TAFE environment, teaching unit dynamics and back to research questions.

This exploration used multiple data sources to ensure multiple perspectives. The aim was to gather a comprehensive view of the phenomenon under study. Throughout all stages, the researcher worked closely with the teachers, head teachers, and faculty managers who are the major participants in this study. The purpose was to explore, plan and draw conclusions based on their experiences and actions related to the study.

Stake (2006), Yin (2003) and Stake (2010) suggest that researchers formulate a data collection plan to identify the data necessary to address the research questions,

categorise data sources and sampling strategy. This suggestion was implemented during this study.

This research was guided by the social constructionist theoretical framework (Burr, 2015). Gergen (1985) depicts social constructionism as providing a framework for people to articulate, describe, explain and account for the current and historic world they live in. It also allows for what that world could become if creative attention is devoted to it. Guided by this theoretical framework, the experiences, thoughts, ideas, and meanings articulated by participants about their current and historic world were captured as indicative of realities within the teaching units.

This study is based on historical developments within the Australian TAFE sector as well as the external forces (as described in previous chapters) that are continuing to influence and shape the VET sector in Australia. This qualitative study was framed by a literature review that explored major topics, issues, and themes that influence the VET & TAFE sectors in Australia. It was also informed by the achievements and challenges encountered during my extensive experience in the VET sector.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This was a qualitative study specifically set within the TAFE environment that operates within the Australian VET environment. It used a multiple case study design (Stake, 2000). It involved data collection and analysis from six different teaching units from Victoria and NSW. It also involved secondary data analysis that involved examination of annual reports, analysis of findings from other relevant research, organisational records as well as analysis and synthesis of the contemporary literature.

The study closely followed and explored Australian VET reforms during 1970 – 2016 that continue to influence, challenge and exert pressure on the TAFE teaching units.

## **Study Phases**

After the initial planning, the study commenced with a literature review that set the context and framework for the exploratory research within the TAFE context. Next, written applications were submitted requesting permission to conduct research within teaching units in a number of regions in Victoria and NSW.

The next phase involved field work in Victoria, Regional NSW and Metropolitan NSW where face-to-face data were gathered. This phase involved focus group interviews in each region followed by semi-structured interviews with faculty managers, head teacher, and teachers. It also included observations of daily practices within participating teaching units. A number of secondary data were gathered during field visits. During these visits, discussions with administration and technical officers also supported the data gathering process through sourcing documents relevant to the study from within teaching units. At the end of each field visit, all interview audio recordings were transcribed and emailed to individual participants for verification.

At the conclusion of each field visit, data gathered was imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software. All transcribed interview data, journal entries, emails received, documents and observation records were also uploaded to NVivo.

A systematic analysis of data was carried out to aid with interpretations and to conclude the study findings.

The final phase involved reporting on the study findings and finalisation of documentation.

## **Profile of Participants**

Research findings that are presented in this document are based on the data gathered from six teaching units chosen for the study. The occupational context of the four teaching units was related to construction-related trade occupations. The other two teaching units provided training in services-based occupations.

The number of case studies was limited to six to minimize the loss of individual characteristics of each case to a few comparable variables enabling individual cases to be adequately explored. This strategy is in line with the suggestion by Creswell (2006).

Data gathering commenced in April 2015 and continued until February 2016.

Four faculty managers, seven head teachers, and thirty teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. The average age of participants was 48 years. The length of employment of participants within the TAFE sector ranged from one to thirty years. Most participants had been employees of TAFE for over a decade. Most participants were male except for two faculty managers, one head teacher and one teacher who were female.

In Victoria, heads of departments, senior educators, and teachers participated in the study while in NSW, head teachers and teachers from teaching units participated. For the purpose of reporting, responses from heads of departments from Victoria and head teachers from NSW were combined and reported as head teachers. Senior educator responses were combined with responses from teachers.

## **Profile of Cases Studied**

Case One: The teaching unit was led by one full-time head teacher with five full-time staff and a number of casual teachers. The teaching unit delivered technology-based qualifications from lower level certificates to degree programs.

Case Two: The teaching unit was led by one head teacher with one full-time teacher and a number of casual teachers. The head teacher managed a wide range of disciplines in creative industries, offering lower level to advanced diploma level qualifications.

Case Three: The teaching unit was led by one head teacher with five full-time teachers. The section primarily delivered apprenticeship-based training in a construction related discipline.

Case Four: The teaching unit was led by two head teachers managing six full-time teachers and a number of part-time teachers. The teaching unit primarily delivered apprenticeship-based training in a construction related discipline.

Case Five: The teaching unit was led by one head teacher with one full-time teacher and a large number of casual teachers. The teaching unit primarily delivered apprenticeship-based training in a construction related discipline.

Case Six: The teaching unit was led by one full-time head teacher with one full-time teacher and a number of casual teachers. The teaching unit primarily delivered low level to diploma level qualifications in construction related discipline.

## **Sampling**

The head teachers, faculty managers and nominated teachers from each teaching unit participated in this study.

The six teaching units were very different in composition and therefore a decision as to who and how many participants should be included in the study was dependent on each teaching unit. Each teaching unit had unique characteristics in terms of the number of faculty managers, head teachers, senior teachers, full-time teachers and part-time teachers as well as the range & types of qualifications offered. These unique characteristics determined the sample population of participants from each teaching unit.

## **3.4 Data Collection**

The process of identifying the data gathering tools for this study involved a number of steps as recommended by Gray (2009). The first step involved identifying and defining the object of the study and then creating a data collection plan to define what data needed to be gathered to support the objective. The next step involved linking and framing the data needs of the study within the social constructionist theoretical framework. Throughout the study, this framework represents knowledge as co-constructed with the involvement of the major actors in the teaching units. The



tools and methodology selected to support the premise that knowledge within the world are not observed objectively as an external reality (Gergen, 1985) but it is constructed and understood with others.

All data collection methods were built to capture knowledge construction from participants' everyday experiences. In this regard, focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were used to facilitate this. The study used a semi-structured approach to data collection to draw from the actions and experiences of participants. This approach allowed new ideas to emerge during the interview and new themes to be co-constructed in line with the theoretical framework guiding this research. This approach supported the nature and purpose of this study.

During data gathering, attention was paid to participants' experiences, knowledge and insights as the primary source of data. This not only helped to gather the explicit knowledge of participants, but also the tacit knowledge constructed due to their association with the teaching unit. Multi-pronged data gathering methods and a semi-structured nature enabled capturing of the participants' voice and collective knowledge effectively.

Gathered data were stored and organized using a qualitative data analysis software called NVivo.

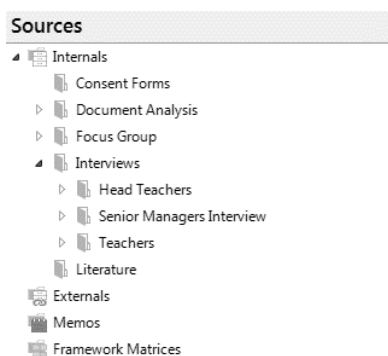


Figure 4 NVivo storage file structure

## **Data Gathering Process**

During March 2015, Institute Directors and CEOs of a number of TAFE institutes were contacted to obtain permission to conduct the research. After the formal application and ethical clearance from each institute, a faculty manager from each institute was nominated as the contact person. An initial phone conversation with the contact person was organised. The purpose of the phone call was to discuss the objectives and the logistics surrounding the study. The contact person was also given a copy of the “Information sheet for participants” and the “consent forms” that were to be given to each participant of the study. It was explained that participation in this study was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. The field work commenced in April 2015 and continued until February 2016.

Several visits were made to each location for the purpose of conducting interviews, gathering documents and performing the observations. Most interviews, including all focus group interviews, were conducted face-to-face. Six teacher interviews and one faculty manager interview were conducted via telephone. All other semi-structured interviews with individual participants were conducted face-to-face. The average length of semi-structured interviews was approximately one hour. Each focus group interview was 2.5 to 3 hours.

The field visits started with a focus group interview. The faculty managers and head teachers from teaching units in that region participated in a focus group interview. A PowerPoint presentation prepared by the researcher was used to guide the discussions during the focus group interviews.

Following the focus group interviews, faculty managers, head teachers and interested teachers from each teaching unit were interviewed. Faculty managers that were interviewed had direct line management responsibility of head teachers. In order to ensure the consistency in the interviewing, a set of standard questions was prepared in advance. These questions together with participant information sheets and consent forms were emailed to all participants prior to their interview.

All focus group discussions and the semi-structured interviews were recorded (with the permission of the participant). The recordings were transcribed and the researcher's field notes and the participants de-identified.

All transcribing was done by the researcher herself. This was done to help identify any clues for improvements with any subsequent data gathering activities as suggested by Barbour (2008). Transcribing immediately after the interviews also enabled clarification of any information with the participants. It also helped to identify and act upon emerging unplanned themes. A transcript of each interview was emailed to the relevant participant. Participants were asked to make any amendments if needed to accurately reflect their view in the transcriptions and then sign and return within a reasonable time.

The transcripts were then imported into a qualitative data analysis software package NVivo.

## **Theoretical framing of data collection**

Prior to gathering data, an outline of key issues and information that needed to be gathered was formulated. At the end of data collection of each case, a summary and outline of data gathered were recorded in a research journal where a clear description of the context under which the data was collected as suggested by Stake (2006) was included. The research journal also recorded the thoughts, impressions, and observations prior to, during and immediately after data gathering.

## **Scope of Data Collection**

The researcher, together with the participating faculty managers and head teachers, determined the scope of the data collection for each case. As Stake (2006) suggests, data gathering and reporting of individual cases were planned separately.

A common set of interview questions (see Appendix 1) was created for each cohort involved in the study. The questions were based on a pre-prepared outline of key issues and information that were determined as required for each case during pre-

planning. The scope of data collection also involved paying attention to issues that were discovered at the onset as they provided useful insights into understanding the dynamics of the teaching unit and their parent organisation.

## **Data Gathering Methods**

Practicalities, cost, and timing were prime concerns in determining the structure of data gathering for each case. The researcher planned to allocate sufficient time between data collection activities to ensure adequate time for documentation and reflection. A preliminary analysis of the data was undertaken immediately after data gathering. This provided the opportunity to clarify responses and seek further information if needed.

A combination of data gathering techniques as suggested by Yin (2003) and Stake (2006) was used to collect qualitative data in a systematic manner and to ensure consistency. The inclusion of a range of data gathering methods also ensured a greater representation of the target population and validity, accuracy, and reliability of research findings (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

### *Focus Group Discussions*

Data gathering activities in each region started with a dynamic focus group discussion among participating faculty managers and head teachers of that region convened by the researcher. Each focus group discussion had between 5 to 7 participants. Participant selection was based on the teaching units nominated for the study – all participants in focus group discussions had leadership responsibilities. The location of each focus group within their region was determined by the faculty managers in consultation with the participating head teachers.

An environment conducive to relaxed but intense discussions was created within the interview room. A PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 2) to guide the discussions was also projected to a screen in the room. Butcher paper and Post-it notes were used to record participant responses. Focus group discussion protocols were discussed at the start of discussions. General guidelines for focus group discussions

were used when conducting the focus group discussions. These approaches are in line with Barbour (2008).

Kitzinger (1994), posits that focus group discussions are used to explore a specific set of issues that relate to the study in a setting moderated by the researcher. A key feature of the focus group discussion is the active interaction amongst participants (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). This allows for a discussion of issues that are relevant to the study in their particular setting and cultural context.

Due to the nature of the research topic, all participant contributions were accepted as their reality and majority consensus was not sought. Participants were actively encouraged to share their views and contribute to the group interactions. This helped to appreciate their context and cultural settings and to understand the tensions and dynamics within their context. The focus group discussions presented richness and colour (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999) to the data gathered due to the dynamic interactive nature of the discussions. This richness created thorough discussions of shared experiences among the participants supported the research aim and provided insights into the shared experiences of head teachers and faculty managers with respect to the study.

As a VET educator with two decades of experience within the TAFE sector, the researcher was fully immersed in focus group discussions and interacted with the participants by promoting rich discussions through considered questioning. The aim was to capture the participants' authentic experience by promoting and directing discussions leveraging on the researcher's experience within the TAFE sector.

All discussions were recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed subsequently. Butcher paper, Post-it notes and other note taking tools were also collected and typed later.

At the end of each focus group interview, a researcher reflective diary was updated. The updates included researcher's thoughts, immediate observations, group dynamics, issues that may need further exploration and reflection of assumptions & impressions. Following Barbour (2008), the reflections were used to refine other data

gathering tools that were subsequently used for semi-structured interviews and observations.

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with middle managers, head teachers and teachers of each case using a standard set of questions. The questions were contextualised to the role of the participant as well as the context of their individual teaching unit. The interviews were informal and conversational in nature. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, the researcher was able to probe and discuss issues beyond the participant responses to each question.

Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours and was conducted in person at location except for the few interviews that were conducted over the telephone.

During the interviews, the researcher took field notes and audiotaped the interviews with participant's consent. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Interview protocols were discussed with each participant at the start of the interview.

In line with the chosen research paradigm for this study, all interviews were conducted with the premise that knowledge is situated and contextual (Sivan, 1986). The purpose of the interviews was to focus on individual contexts and understand situational knowledge co-created with individuals in the particular teaching unit. Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to support this premise.

All interviews were conducted using the “responsive interviewing” model as introduced by Rubin and Rubin (2005). This model recognises that qualitative interviewing is a dynamic iterative process. This model allows the questioning style to reflect the personality of the researcher, questions to evolve as the purpose of the interview evolves and treatment of the interviewee as a conversational partner (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In line with this model, initially, a broader set of questions was used for each interview (see Appendix 1). Further questions were asked if the responses from the interviewee prompted new issues that needed further exploring.

### *Observations:*

Observation of staff meetings, classroom delivery, practical classes in workshops, collections of documents, observation of things as they happen that involved head teachers, teachers and students as well as casual discussions with clerical and technical staff were conducted in order to understand the daily lives of participants in their own setting. These lasted for 3 to 6 hours at various times. These systematic observations were informed by a general observation checklist created based on the research questions. These observations provided insight into the teaching unit environment. They helped to understand the multiple and at times competing priorities teachers and head teachers face when performing their daily duties. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as a prolonged engagement where the researcher spends sufficient time to orientate themselves to the situation and observe aspects that are relevant to the study.

### **Recording Observations**

Observations were used to systematically record teaching unit dynamics in conducting daily activities in the researcher's field notes using 'memoing' with the aid of the observation checklist (Appendix 5) that was used throughout the observation. The field notes included what was seen, heard, felt and experienced during each observation. Observations were not audio taped or video recorded.

### *Document Analysis*

During field visits, a number of relevant documents were collected such as student induction packs, employer packs, course information, teacher delivery schedules, teaching & assessment strategies for qualifications, assessment validation records, annual reports, marketing information, good news stories, meeting agendas and relevant emails.

All documents were scanned and any identifiable data were deleted. All original documents were returned to the teaching section.

Table 1 Summary of Data-Gathering Activities

	Regional NSW		Victoria		Metropolitan NSW	
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
<b>Number of days spent in the field</b>	3		3		6	
<b>Number of participants in focus groups</b>	4		4		6	
<b>Number of interviews conducted</b>	7	6	7	6	9	8
<b>Observations</b>	6 documented Hours		4 documented hours		3 documented hours	4 documented hours
<b>Documents Reviewed</b>	10	5	5		6	6

## Researcher Reflection

Throughout the study, a self-reflective journal was maintained using field notes, ‘memoing’ and reflections on data, process, feelings, and experiences. This process was expected to add rigour to the inquiry and to facilitate ‘reflexivity’. These notes were dated and linked to the specific context.

Groenewald (2004) outlines ‘memoing’ as an important data source in qualitative research. ‘Memoing’ was used in this research to immediately record thoughts and impressions linking them to themes in this research. ‘Memoing’ also highlighted



further issues and themes that may need investigating to obtain a full appreciation to the context and cultural setting within the teaching unit.

The reflective journal was updated throughout data gathering activities. The reflective activity supported the continuation of discussions with participants through follow-up questions to clarify discussions during the semi-structured interviews.

In many cases, this led to refining the research questions to match the participant's reality and the reality of the teaching section.

### **3.5 Data Storage**

All focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were given a unique code representing the region, case studied, classification, date, and position (eg: NSWRPFG12NOVT, VICITI11DECHT).

All electronic data were stored as encrypted files on the computer to prevent unauthorised access. These included raw audio files, transcripts, documents gathered from the field, observation checklist and field notes that were coded and uploaded to encrypted folders.

### **3.6 Management of Gathered Data**

'NVivo 11' software was used to assist with management of gathered data. All consent forms, gathered data, and transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo where it was organised into sub-folders based on the type of data and the case location identifier. This facilitated individual case analysis as well as cross-case analysis and made it possible to aggregate data from each data collection methodology.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

It was explained to participants that participation in this study was voluntary and anonymity would be protected at all times. General public service protocols were used when communicating with all participants at all times.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

As this study involved human beings in work contexts and three staff layers, ethical considerations were at the forefront of all research activities. Confidentiality, privacy and maintaining anonymity were respected at all times in adhering to ethical research practices.

As Creswell (2007) suggests, the research was conducted by being sensitive to internal politics and power imbalances within teaching units and being aware of the effect the study could have on the dynamics of the unit.

#### **Informed Consent**

All demographic forms, questions for focus groups, interview guides, and field note observation guides were prepared and distributed to participants prior to any interviews, meetings or observations. Each participant was given an information sheet explaining the purpose and overview of the study. Participant's consent was sought prior to starting any research activity. Participants were also informed that they had the freedom to withdraw from the research without any consequences.

## **Chapter Four: Data Analysis**

### ***4.1 Introduction***

A thematic data analysis using theme formulation was used for analysing data gathered during field visits within a social constructionist theoretical framework.

Within the constructionist theoretical framework, the experiences, meanings, realities, and events that emerged from participants' voices were considered to be the effects of a range of dialogues within the teaching unit. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the objective of the thematic analysis should be not just to explore the reality as described by the participants. In line with this, the thematic analysis for this study sought to get below the surface to reveal realities within the context of the study by acknowledging the collective meanings constructed by teaching staff and faculty managers.

#### **Theme Identification**

During thematic analysis, topics that captured an important phenomenon related to the research question as well as topics with greater representation of data items were identified as themes. An important consideration was determining the validity of the theme in terms of its 'size'. In identifying themes, the study established the view that more instances of a theme alone do not necessarily mean that the theme itself is important though this was one factor that determined the prominence of a theme (See Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher's judgment, guided by the reviewed literature on the topic, was used to determine the prominent themes that emerged from the data. The themes were ultimately identified as crucial if they were determined to be capturing something important related to the research questions.

## **Process of Theme Identification**

Rubin & Rubin (2005) presents a model for interviews called ‘responsive interview model’ where data gathering and analysis are intimately linked. In following the guidelines suggested by Rubin & Rubin (2005), during this study, initial themes and concepts were derived during data gathering activities itself. Further data were sought from the participants to clarify and add to the emerging themes where necessary. Evidence and phrases that were visibly linked to the objectives of the study were identified, compared and contrasted with the realities of teaching staff and faculty managers.

This approach to thematic analysis was considered by Braun and Clarke (2006) as ‘theoretical’ or ‘deductive’ as the analysis is more explicitly driven by the researcher and guided by the specific research question.

The data analysis for this study was an iterative process and included a preliminary analysis of each data gathering activity. An in-depth analysis of each case was conducted independently as well. A cross analysis of all cases was also carried out with a view to developing abstract ideas into meaningful themes and to classify data into conceptual categories (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).

Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig (2007) emphasise the importance of explicitly stating the process of coding and the derivation and identification of themes to gain credibility to the findings. A detailed outline of the data analysis process is given in the following section.

## **4.2 Role of NVivo**

NVivo software was used to store, index, sort and code qualitative data gathered during this study (Morse & Richards, 2002). Various tools that are available in NVivo to analyse and explore data as well as reporting features assisted in comparing categories and codes in a very short timeframe.

Welsh (2002) asserts that computer-aided data analysis software such as NVivo not only provides an accurate and transparent picture of data, but also provides an audit

of the data analysis process as a whole. Welsh (2002) argues that the validity and reliability of a data analysis process can considerably be improved by combining computer-aided data analysis software with manual data analysis.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that the researcher is the main tool for analysis. This principle was adopted in analysing data in this study where main analysis, thematic formation, and interpretations were manually done by the researcher with NVivo providing data search and mining capabilities. The volume of data that was collected during data gathering was manageable. However, the data querying and categorising capabilities of NVivo helped to easily extract phrases that were categorised into themes using the node facility.

### **4.3 Preliminary Analysis**

As suggested by Bryman and Burgess (2002), a preliminary analysis was conducted while in the field at the time of data collection. The activities included a reflection of daily data gathering activities using researcher reflective journal, refinement of interview questions, reviewing of field notes leading to narrowing of the focus of study when warranted and also writing memos about discoveries on various issues relevant to the study (Bryman & Burgess, 2002).

### **4.4 Analysis of Individual Transcripts**

Once gathered data were uploaded to NVivo, a direct interpretation of this data was conducted whereby meanings were drawn from every single instance. The data was manually pulled apart and put back together in a more meaningful form for the purpose of the study. Node creation and node tree creation in NVivo supported this process. From these node trees, patterns that provide data related to the study topic were established as main categories.

Name	Sources	References
<b>Administration</b>	26	67
Compliance	42	264
ASQA	20	32
Gate keeper	3	7
Risk	1	1
<b>Challenges</b>	33	127
<b>Culture</b>	21	76
Autonomy	8	19
Change	45	597
Collegiality	7	23
Communication	35	142
Control	24	131
History	7	11
Society	3	7
Stability	3	7
Team	20	69
Trust	3	8
Work Practices	4	8
<b>External Influences</b>	44	266
Competition	11	54
Responsiveness	12	19
Employer	33	150
Government	3	13
Industry	40	281
Schools	19	74
<b>Students</b>	47	940
Feedback	18	44

Leamers	36	166
Literacy and Numeracy	1	1
Student Achievement	7	19
Student Feedback	3	9
Student Outcomes	7	25
Completions	3	7
Student Services	4	15
<b>TAFE</b>	43	439
Mission	9	25
Innovative	45	1189
Entrepreneurship	7	19
Qualifications	24	47
Services	26	85
Staff	3	23
Coaching	9	18
Mentoring & support	16	27
Competitive Strengths	1	5
Competitive Weakness	1	5
Head Teacher	32	221
Capability	1	1
Managing Expectations	37	158
IR	9	18
Management	48	435
ROI	4	10
Faculty managers	1	1
Support Staff	5	10
Teachers	6	16
Capability	7	27
Capability Development	2	4

Professional capabilities	7	13
Casualisation	9	41
Conditions of employment	1	5
Delivery	46	296
Delivery hours	1	1
Delivery strategy	21	65
Resources	2	6
KPIs	6	20
Organisational structure	1	5
Teacher Education	3	7
Professional Development	2	6
TAE	10	23
Workload	17	34
<b>Teaching</b>	44	632
Assessment	30	67
Advanced Standing	4	32
Competence	20	24
Contemporary	6	13
Pedagogy	19	68
Education	48	2026
Educational Planning	5	9
Higher Education	10	50
Passion	12	27
Personalisation	36	159
Student Interaction	10	14
Workplace Delivery	5	9
Quality	44	347
Benchmark	5	11
Resources	31	81



Training	4	8
<b>VET</b>	42	170
Funding	42	187
Class size	9	97
Cost	29	218
Affordable	9	15
Disability	8	84
Duration	34	122
Financial Objectives	2	6
Income Streams	11	91
Monitoring	12	31
Overheads	10	15
Market	20	88
Politics	10	21
Privatisation	21	92
Public Education	5	11
Training Package	24	49
Course Structure	3	7
VET Environment	14	32
Reform	7	18
Regulations	5	16
Smart and Skilled	9	9
Victorian Training Guarantee	1	85

*Figure 5 NVivo Node Tree identifying sources and number of references*

Initially, a detailed examination of each individual transcript was conducted to make sense of the participant's views and experience and to interpret their meaning. This was done by reading, perusing and examining each transcript one by one looking for ideas, experiences, events, quotes, views or phrases that revealed a theme related to the study.

As a new concept/theme emerged from the data, a new node was created in NVivo and the phrase that outlined the concept or theme was linked to that node. Each new node was given a name and a detailed description that best describe the relevant information was also added. As transcripts from field visits were analysed and linked to nodes, memos were also created to reflect on discoveries. These memos contained the research reflections, decisions about focal points of the transcripts and views on how the content of the transcript fits with the research questions.

As new transcripts were added to NVivo, a similar process was used to either create new nodes or add new phrases/quotes from the transcript to existing nodes. If the theme had already emerged from previous transcripts, the phrase from the transcripts was added to the existing node to categorise similar concepts under the same node. The memos that were linked to that node were updated with any additional reflections.

This approach enabled the researcher to listen to the voice of each individual and draw out themes that are relevant to the study. Throughout this analysis, notes were made on how all these elements link together as suggested by Welsh (2002). The focus of the analysis was to link the main categories that emerged from data on the topic of study. The themes captured individual as well as collective perceptions and experiences.

In analysing the transcripts, it was found that some phrases and quotes contributed to more than one theme and others stood alone by themselves. As transcripts were coded, the node list on NVivo was revised and related notes were grouped to create tree nodes. This was done by looking through the nodes and the text that were coded to identify similar themes with a view to aggregating them into a tree node.

Name	Sources	References
Administration	26	66
Challenges	33	127
Culture	21	76
External Influences	44	266
Students	47	940
TAFE	43	439
Teaching	44	632
VET	12	170

Figure 6 NVivo Node Tree

## 4.5 Analysing Individual Cases

Immediately after conducting a field visit, a contextual description, setting and a summary of each case were documented to aid with analysis. At the same time, a ‘collection set’ reflecting the case details was created in NVivo. All transcripts, documents, memos or any other gathered data connected to each case were linked to this ‘collection set’. The sources from each case were also added to a ‘source classification’ identified by the same name as the ‘collection set’. Each case was also assigned a colour in NVivo for easy identification. An individual case analysis was made easier by this method of aggregating as various data, analyse, query, reporting and explore tools were then used to further identify trends within a collection.

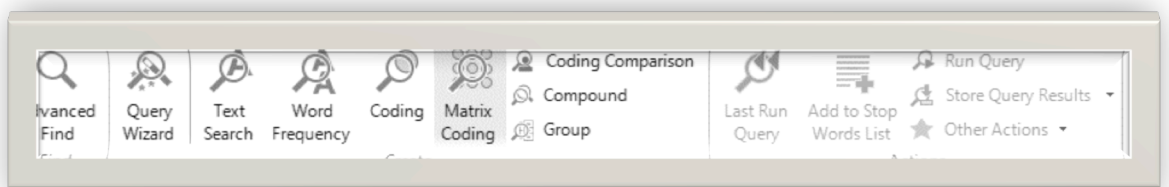


Figure 7 NVivo tools

After the analysis of each individual transcript, common themes and patterns emerging from each case and subsequently across cases were discovered through a process of coding and theming. To compare participant response based on the standard questions used during interviews, the ‘auto coding’ feature of NVivo was used. This feature enabled the aggregation of all responses from each case and helped analyse the themes that were emerging from each case.

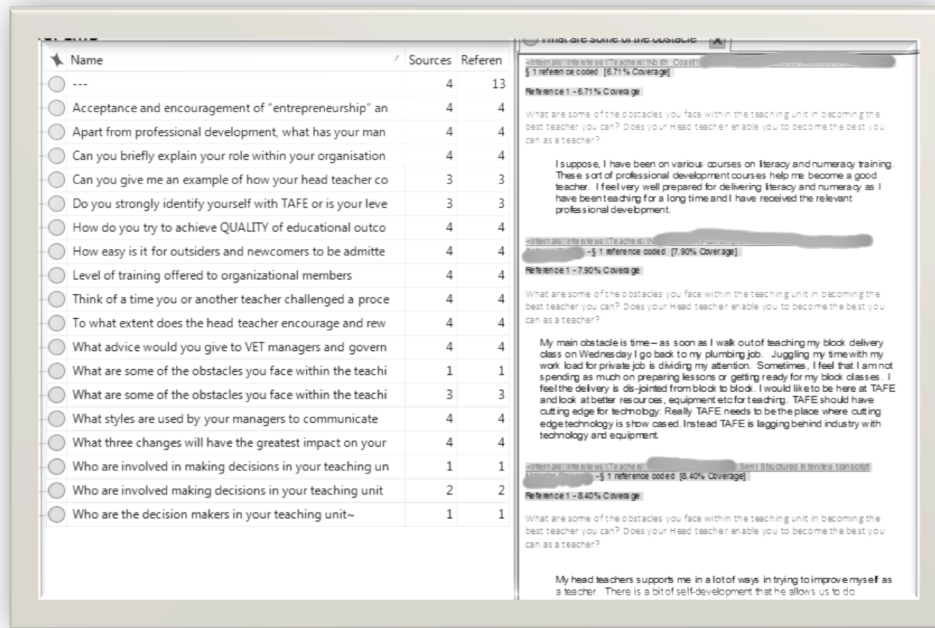
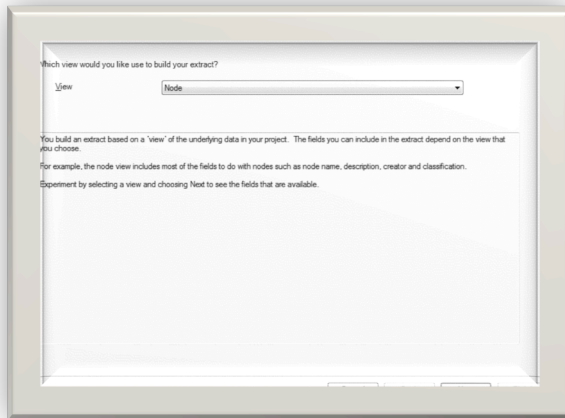


Figure 8 Use of Auto Code feature

As displayed in Figure 8 Use of Auto Code feature, all teacher responses under each interview question were aggregated to discover common themes across the entire case. For example, the question that related to teaching raised a number of themes across the five teachers who participated in the study. A similar analysis on another case, also supported the theme “reduced funding and delivery hours” as an obstacle for teaching as these themes were repeated in all interviews.

Throughout the analysis, the NVivo model Explore tool was used to produce various graphical representations and tabulations of coded data to identify trends and themes within each case. A summary of each node was included in the node properties and a description and reflections in a memo were linked to the node through NVivo (see

Welsh, 2002). This made it easier during tabulation and mapping. The NVivo explore tool “new extract feature” provided a number of useful excel spreadsheets that supported data filtering as required for analysis.



*Figure 9 NVivo extract wizard*

Constant comparison analysis as suggested by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) was used to analyse how nodes are coded and to identify strongly emerging themes from within the datasets. Once strongly emerging themes were identified for each case, a node report was created that was used together with source data for further analysis. Various features of NVivo such as coding strips, word count, word frequency and comparison tools were used to assist with identifying themes that were emerging from the data.

Name	Sources	References
Case DV	10	110
Case ITV	6	72
Case NCC	4	51
Case NCP	7	102
Case SPMB	11	117
Case SWF	7	81

Figure 10 Node Tree for Individual Case Studies

While these tools were used to aid the identification of themes, manual methods were also used to examine the entire dataset to identify codes and relationships within the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). To help with the manual analysis, keyword-in-context query feature through ‘text search’ tool in NVivo was used to aggregate phrases from all data within the case. This was carried out to get an overall view of the case on the theme.

#### 4.6 Cross Analysis of Cases

In order to identify both uniqueness and commonality across cases with a view to getting an insight into the central phenomenon, a cross-case comparison table was created outlining all major themes that emerged from the analysis of individual cases (Yin, 2003). The NVivo Explore tool ‘new extract’ feature was used to support this function. For analysing the tabulations, the “merging case finding” procedure as described by Stake (2006) was used.

This was a fully iterative stage where tabulations were used to re-visit findings from each case in order to facilitate the merging of findings. In this stage, main categories highlighted in the cross-case table were compared against each case context to explore similarities and variations. Some of the key issues from individual case analysis were also re-evaluated to fit better with the merging of the findings. During

this stage, the common issues in all cases were identified and recorded with the aid of NVivo produced tabulations and reports.

Name	Source Name
Administration	ITV Teacher 1
Administration	ITV Teacher 2
Administration	ITV SM
Administration	NCC Focus Group
Administration	NCPLMB Focus Group
Administration	SPLMB Focus Group
Administration	SWFT Focus Group
Administration	ITV Focus Group
Administration	DV Focus Group
Administration	Victoria Institute Annual Report
Administration	NCC Head Teacher 1
Administration	NCPLMB Teacher 1
Administration	SPLMB Head teacher 1
Administration	Email - ITV Head teacher
Administration	Email - NCPLMB Head teacher
Administration	ITV Teacher 3
Administration	DV Teacher 1
Administration	SWFT Teacher 1
Administration	SWFT Head teacher 1
Administration	NCC Faculty manager

*Figure 11 Part of the Tabulation report created by NVivo*

Any issues that were unique to cases were also examined as suggested by Stake (2006). The memos that were linked to nodes in the tabulation tables were further revised to reflect the merging of themes. There were very few findings that stood alone within one individual case and did not merge with findings from other cases. There were a few themes that had commonalities across a few other cases but not all cases.

Once common and case-specific themes across all six cases were identified, all sources with raw data were examined again as it could possibly explain the theme commonalities or variations based on the contexts.

The study findings were compared and contrasted with published literature on the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2006).

## 4.7 Research Rigour & Relevance

Rigour in data analysis during this multiple case study inquiry was ensured using a variety of strategies. Throughout the data analysis process, detailed memos and reflective accounts of the analysis process maintained to add rigour to the process, maintain transparency and facilitate ‘reflexivity.’

Modelling features in NVivo also helped with rigour by enabling the researcher to sketch ideas and reflect on data.

All documents were uploaded in a systematic manner into designated folders in NVivo with date stamps. Throughout the process of analysis, memos were updated to facilitate researcher reflection. All critical decisions were recorded in a memo and attached to the relevant themes. These provided an audit trail that contributed to the methodological rigour of the research.

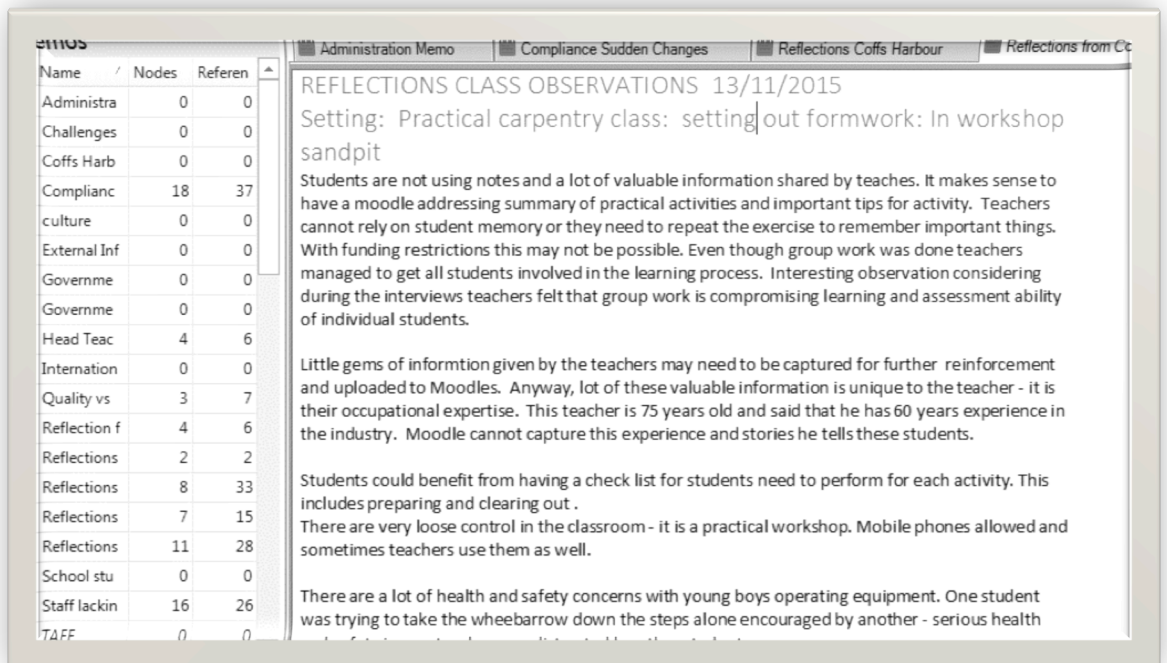


Figure 12 My Research Journal - Reflection



## **Chapter Five: Study Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings based on data analysis with a perspective of linking those findings to the research questions guided by the literature reviewed previously. The study findings commenced with a report on the leadership role of head teachers within teaching units, particularly with regard to internal and external stakeholder expectations from this role. The report then further analyses the enduring role of head teachers and classifies the role into distinct sub-roles based on all stakeholder expectations. This approach is expected to highlight the depth and the breadth of the capability required to perform this role. These sub-roles are then compared with the statement of duties that was used at the time two of the participating head teachers (one from Victoria and one from NSW) were nominated for their role. These statements provided a benchmark for estimating the extent of alteration of the function of head teacher since their first appointment to the office.

The next section explores the impact of diverse aspects of VET reforms on pedagogical practices within teaching units. This segment particularly pays attention to the influence of leadership of head teachers on pedagogical practices amidst the expectations of VET reforms.

The chapter then traces the teaching unit response to VET reforms, especially paying attention to the changing role of teachers, implications for pedagogical models and challenges to established cultures within teaching units.

The following section analyses the challenges and stresses faced by head teachers when upholding the pedagogical excellence and occupational expertise of teachers while operating in a marketised environment.

## 5.2 Head Teacher Leadership

### *Competing Priorities and Managing Expectations*

Throughout the study head teachers articulated that their daily routine is regularly interrupted by a band of unrelated and unpredictable expectations from several stakeholders. Evidence from the study reveals that the teaching units are under ceaseless pressure to achieve performance objectives that include achieving financial efficiency, increasing productivity, achieving completion rate targets, adhere to compliance expectations, respond to community service expectations and produce work-ready individuals for industries.

*Prioritisation of competing tasks is a major challenge for head teachers. There are a lot of internal and external influences expecting that we drop everything and give main priority to their task. Managing all expectations and prioritising important tasks is challenging (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Across all teaching units, head teachers claimed that new pressures are continuously being added to the list of daily internal and external expectations that are competing for their time. Examples of the competing expectations include, but are not limited to: student pressures, industry demands, faculty management expectations, pedagogical demands, industry demands, employer expectations, quality and compliance demands, staff issues, marketing issues, competitive pressures, commercial pressures, system issues, TAFE and public service policies, delivery issues, administrative functions & a myriad of reporting functions. They claimed that these expectations create an environment that makes it difficult for them to give priority to pedagogical and educational issues. Head teachers assert that they are forced to respond to myriads of continuous changes ‘on-the-run’ taking the attention away from educational leadership.

Head teachers claimed that responding to the needs of industry, employers, students, and community is proving to be challenging amidst mounting and frequently changing expectations from governments.

## Increased Administrative Load

A new term that emerged from the data was ‘admin-centric’. This term was used to refer to TAFE and compliance processes that force teaching units to restrict their practices to be within the administrative processes outlined by the institutes.

Teaching staff claimed that the introduction of tedious administrative processes has infiltrated not only administration duties but also teaching practices.

Teaching staff claimed that strict admin-centric processes are inhibiting their ability to be customer centric. It is evident that complex processes, procedures, and systems introduced by TAFE institutes limit the ability of teaching units to have agile processes and quickly respond to customer demands in the way that is required.

*We have very adaptable customer service approaches in our teaching unit, but within TAFE sometimes you come across very rigid essential processes (Head teacher).*

*We have very rigid systems implemented in an environment where we require a lot of flexibility (Head teacher).*

*Our systems are not built for flexibility or innovation. (Head teacher).*

*It is difficult to provide a good flexible, adaptable customer experience when our processes are so rigid. (Head teacher).*

Head teachers identified the following external processes as moving them away from their core business. These include, but are not limited to: Increased demand for quality assurance processes, compliance requirements, stricter reporting requirements, eligibility, records management and enrolment processes enforced by regulators, rigid student management systems and practices, push for providing customer services through online platforms, strong industrial relations conditions attached to teaching staff. In addition, the reporting requirements of demand-driven funding models are resulting in numerous strict time critical data entry, continuous monitoring of student’s financial status, documentation and reporting requirements for head teachers and teachers. Evidence from the study suggests that these strict processes and systems are inhibiting the ability of head teachers to be agile in their responses to

customers.

*We are doing a lot of administrative work merely for compliance. They don't add any value to my teaching (Teacher).*

*You might as well add 'debt collector' to the duties of a head teacher (Head teacher)*

*I feel that I am losing skills in the profession that I studied because I am more consumed in administration and compliance work than concentrating on maintaining my industry skills. When I started as a teacher, I was expected to perform very little admin work and now I am experiencing increased emphasis on administration (Teacher).*

*Customer service sometimes needs to be rigid when I have to follow strict legislative guidelines such as ASQA processes or work cover (Head Teacher).*

They continued to claim that some TAFE systems are dictating not only educational processes but also the teaching strategies and timetables that should be adopted. In addition, the 'Government funding regimes' in Victoria and NSW and associated strict administrative restrictions are interfering with educational practices within teaching units.

*Now teaching needs to be organised to solve the funding issues rather than student needs, industry needs, and student capabilities. We are now going to organise the teaching to match the funding model. What happened to organizing teaching to support student's learning? (Teacher).*

A sub-theme that emerged from the data within the theme 'compliance' was labelled 'administrative burden of compliance'

*Administration burden due to compliance is taking my time away from resource development and other educational priorities (Teacher).*

Evidence from the study established that head teachers are experiencing tensions when governments and senior managers are calling for more learner-centres approaches while sticking to strict admin-centric processes that are enforced by authorities.

*Today's learners are expecting personalised services and we are expected to be learner-centric in everything we do. But our administrative demands are so high that it is a challenge for to be learner-centric. (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

The response from faculty management was that as a public registered training organization that is regulated by the government, TAFE institutes like many other government organizations are expected to adhere to somewhat complex and essential processes.

Data gathered from case studies suggested that competition in the VET market and efficiency imperatives for the public provider have forced many TAFE institutes to rationalise staff engaged in customer and administrative services.

*Our college customer service processes are not good for trade students so teachers have to get involved in administration issues (Head teacher).*

*Flexibility for customers doesn't mean not having any staff to assist them and give them all services online. I call it more rigid than flexible (Head teacher).*

Teaching units also claimed that in responding to reforms, TAFE managers have redefined the roles of customer service officers, counsellors, outreach coordinators, teaching and learning support officers, student support officers, technical assistants and administrative staff. Teaching staff claimed that this has pushed more administrative responsibilities to the teaching units.

*I am challenged in my job because of the changing roles of the administrative staff - they are no longer sitting there enrolling and providing customer service (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*They are breeding out commitment to the students from the teachers (Teacher).*

Interviews with teachers and head teachers suggest that they are constantly being disturbed (Seddon, 2009) by increasing expectations to carry out administrative duties associated with compliance, reporting, and recordkeeping.

*We are moving away from learner centred delivery to admin-centric delivery in the current environment (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*The extra level of administrative work required to be done by teachers due to compliance and auditing. As an educator, I have to comply with increasing audit requirements that distracts from my teaching. Private providers satisfy audit requirements but don't give much to students. I am committed to teaching, but audit requirements are limiting this (Teacher).*

The head teachers are increasingly experiencing difficulty in balancing administrative expectations of their work with many other competing priorities of their job. The evidence from this study suggests that this role has been expanded into absorbing many administrative duties that are overriding their educational leadership obligations.

*The head teacher function is so complex that this role really needs to be split across two people: one person dedicated to business development/administration and an educational leader to provide leadership to teach sections (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

The head teachers and teachers expressed the view that many of the functions that are expected of the teaching staff could be performed in a more efficient manner using trained administrative officers that are placed in the teaching sections.

*You can't keep putting admin duties on teachers because it is going to affect the quality of their teaching. You get to a point where we do a lot of admin duties during our personal time: a lot of systems are administrative heavy. It is not affecting the actual teaching – this is our trade and we can do it automatically. This is taking us away from resource development, streamlining resources and other educational priorities (Head teacher at focus group interview and senior teacher at interview).*

*We don't have any input into administrative procedures... head teacher directs us in the administrative work – updates are immediately sent to us... the focus for enrolments this year was very tedious – in fact, we had a teacher on duty to perform administrative duties for two weeks following official enrolment period (Teacher).*

*This was not a very efficient use of money as teachers were paid at our hourly rate to do mundane administrative tasks (Teacher).*

All four teaching units from NSW reported that the administrative positions at their colleges have been rationalized and reduced as part of an overall strategy to gain internal efficiencies. Teaching units reported that due to restructuring and high turnover of administrative staff, many administrative duties that were previously performed by these staff are now devolved to teaching sections.

*It is the craziness of more things coming down to section level when things used to get done elsewhere previously. They expect you to be an account manager, a business manager, an educator, a super teacher, a clerical officer, an admin manager and expert in everything (Head teacher).*

Teaching at the coalface is guided, coordinated and supported by a range of roles in TAFE institutes ranging from educational managers, finance managers, business managers, compliance officers, counsellors, student support officers and administrative managers. Participants of the study stated that many of these leaders are making decisions about the work of teachers and teaching units without a true appreciation for teaching philosophies whereby tipping the balance from teaching to administration. These officers, according to teaching units often measure teaching excellence using financial, economical, administrative and compliance factors.

The introduction of unworkable and tedious student management systems such as EBS in NSW and to a lesser extent SMS in Victoria have created not only a massive administrative workload, but also dictating educational processes, including in some cases how training should be structured and sequenced to fit the system and the funding models.

*Now I am expected to do everything, including making changes in the system that used to be done previously by administration staff (Head teacher).*

*In the current busy environment, head teachers do not have a great deal of time and ability to be innovative and come up with new ways of doing things while dealing with the public, dealing with compliance and carrying out general day to day duties*

*that are expected of them. Compliance is taking so much from head teachers' time and this is taking innovation away from them (Faculty manager).*

The introduction of the EBS in NSW coincided with the introduction of Smart and Skilled reforms. Head teachers claimed that any opportunity for teaching sections had to explore innovative pedagogical solutions to respond to the reforms were railroaded by the introduction of this system that has consumed most time available to TAFE NSW employees.

*We have very rigid systems implemented in an environment where we require a lot of flexibility. Systems are implemented in a very haphazard manner (Head teacher).*

Evidence from this study suggests that teacher expertise and energy is wasted and re-directed to mundane administrative duties driven by various internal and external factors.

### *Managing Government Expectations*

A prominent theme that emerged from the data was the effect of revenue based funding model and the amount of funding determined by governments across NSW and Victoria. Data gathered from the study suggest that teaching units have been forced to make major modifications to their pedagogical practices to respond to these government expectations effectively.

Teaching sections reported that they are constantly being disturbed by senior management to remediate data according to government requirements to claim revenue from student enrolments. The problem in NSW has been exacerbated by the Student Management System EBS. This caused a massive data remediation effort by TAFE NSW that exponentially grew the administrative burden on TAFE head teachers and teaching units.

### **Competition**

National Training Reforms and marketisation no longer provide the autonomy for TAFE leaders to make educational decisions. They now operate under heavy competition from other providers and are expected to undergo the same regulation



rigour as for-profit providers.

The study findings suggest that at the time of this study Victorian TAFE teaching units have seen the full effect of the market competition and NSW teaching units are yet to fully experience the results of competition within their teaching units. It was evident that TAFE student base has decreased due to market-competition.

*Competing with private providers and uncapped places at Universities have driven our markets down (Faculty manager).*

*In the past, prospective students came along and we chose the ones that had the aptitude for the course, but now we can't choose as we are competing for students (Head teacher).*

*Reduction in student numbers experienced by my teaching section primarily caused by the government's decision to increase private RTOs (Teacher).*

## **Quality Benchmark**

Arguments emerging from the study highlight that government is specifying the success of VET in terms of input and output factors such as costs, student numbers, and completions. According to study participants, the determinant of the quality should be attributed to the process of training delivery rather than inputs or outputs.

*The core mission of TAFE is to provide quality training. Sometimes in TAFE, we agree to do too much to ensure quality and it may not necessarily be something students or industry value (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Our regulatory bodies don't really measure quality accurately. We try to achieve quality by providing excellent education by providing a reasonable amount of time to students so they can absorb the material. .... Quality education should not be measured by statistical factors that regulatory bodies are using during audit time. Funding inhibits the quality of teaching. What enables quality is our wonderful group of staff that are driven towards helping students to achieve their goals (Head teacher).*

It is the view of the teaching units that ASQA and individual State compliance frameworks do not support quality educational outcomes. The themes that emerged

from data analysis suggest that compliance, in fact, diminishes the achievement of quality in educational outcomes within teaching units.

### *Managing Faculty Management Expectations*

An aggregated theme of ‘expectations of faculty managers’ during data analysis pointed to an exhaustive list. These expectations were from head teachers and teaching sections. They include but are not limited to: achieving excellence in teaching and learning, maintaining quality standards, creating new sources of income, engaging in entrepreneurial activities, mentoring teachers, providing responsive customer service, producing excellent student outcomes, managing budgets, attracting and enrolling students, maintaining administrative systems, maintaining contact with learners and employers, consulting with employers and industry, handling complaints, complying with health and safety requirements, providing up-to-date reports, responding to any requests for information/data by Institute, conducting assessment validation, participating in Institute-wide activities and industry events, generating revenue and effective management of quality practices for compliance ensuring minimum risk to the Institute’s reputation.

A theme that emerged from discussions with head teachers was the frequency at which new expectations are added to their workload on a daily basis. The head teachers expressed that quick solutions have not been possible as some of the expectations threaten the traditional cultures of the teaching units. Head teachers also claimed that the faculty management needed to acknowledge the time required to achieve any cultural transformations as teaching units are bound by strict industrial relations structures.

### **Manage budgets in line with Revenue**

A common theme that emerged across all six cases was the strict enforcement of revenue-based budgets by TAFE managers. This expectation forced teaching units to strip their expenditure on training to be in line with the revenue generated by each learner within the government funding allocations.

*Our industry wants us to maximise the delivery hours, whereas our faculty management wants us to minimise the delivery hours, but still achieve the highest quality and completions (Head teacher).*

A strong theme that emerged from teachers and head teachers was the reduction in effective teaching hours per qualification enforced by management. This was achieved through cutting down face-to-face teaching hours, reduced course durations, reduction in weekly attendance hours and diminished class support hours. The faculty managers claimed that high-cost structures attached to teaching positions render these reductions essential. However, teachers from four teaching units claimed that a large proportion of the revenue is directed to non-teaching activities outside teaching units leaving limited funding for direct teaching activities.

*We cannot adequately prepare students for assessments. You get to a point where you have no choice but to reduce the quality (Teacher).*

*Faculty management basically communicates the changes and expect the teaching staff to make it work. These changes cannot be implemented in teaching sections without negatively impacting on teaching (Teacher).*

## **Lead with innovation and entrepreneurship**

A theme that was common to all cases, but stronger in trade teaching units was the effect of revenue based budgets on the quality of educational delivery and outcomes.

In response to these claims, faculty managers claimed that teaching units need to move to the cultures of ‘innovation and entrepreneurship’ to ensure that quality outcomes are achieved while keeping the expenses within the allocated budgets. Simply injecting additional money to teaching units is not considered the solution by management though this appeared to be the expectation from teaching units.

It is the expectation of managers that head teachers explore a range of contemporary delivery strategies using the technologies available to enable quality educational outcomes within the restrictions of budgets, time and compliance guidelines. They claimed that head teachers must be enablers of pedagogic innovation. According to

faculty managers, it is the responsibility of head teachers to drive and sustain innovation within teaching units.

One faculty manager claimed that some head teachers are actively hindering pedagogic innovation within teaching units. According to this manager, head teachers are taking the known and preferred traditional ways and is actively resisting any pedagogic innovation. Head teachers claimed that their inherent values and beliefs about public education at times stand in tension with the expectations of faculty management.

At the same time, faculty managers also pointed out that strict compliance priorities, rigid systems, and financial constraints are preventing teaching units from embracing pedagogic innovation.

*With the reduction in the budget available to teaching sections, some good innovative teaching designs and ideas cannot be encouraged as they cannot be sustained (Faculty manager).*

During semi-structured interviews, faculty managers acknowledged that their expectations are driven by many factors other than educational leadership and quality.

*As a faculty manager, I need to ensure a whole lot of control to manage the financial performance of the teaching units that are in my faculty. I expect a return on investment (ROI) in everything the sections do: teaching sections may have great innovative programs that are pedagogically sound, however, if it does not give a return on investment it cannot run. ROI is the control mechanism. You may have a course with three students that is 100% compliant, but I need to ensure that ROI for these classes as well (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

Faculty managers also claimed that teaching units must diversify their income streams for financial survival amidst changing market conditions.

## **Cultural Transformations within Teaching Unit**

*The driver for head teachers is that you have to perform as a leader and get the buy-in from your teachers in your teaching section. There are a number of control mechanisms in the Institute and head teachers need to enforce all those controls to*

*get the required behaviour change from teachers (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

It was observed that within all six teaching units, traditional face-to-face classroom delivery is the predominant mode of delivery and this is strongly embedded in their pedagogical practices. Evidence from the study established that VET reforms are challenging the traditional pedagogical models of classroom delivery. Based on study findings, it was established that performance expectations of VET reforms are challenging the inherent values, norms and practices that were co-created within the teaching unit over a long period and shaped by previous VET funding models, managers, head teachers and teachers. A sub-theme that emerged from the data suggested that traditional teacher-student relationship is also threatened by the expectation to treat students as customers in the current environment.

There is an inherent expectation of faculty managers that head teachers would provide leadership to transform their teaching unit cultures to be in line with the expectations of the current and emerging VET environment. A list of cultural transformations articulated by faculty managers was: a culture that promotes learning, innovative culture, result-driven culture, outcome-focussed culture, flexible and agile culture, a compliance-focused culture, entrepreneurial culture, budget-focused culture, quality-focused culture and customer-centric culture.

*They expect you to be accounts managers, business managers, educators, super teachers and experts in everything. I don't consider myself to be an expert in anything except the knowledge of my field.... there is only so much we can do at section level (Head teacher).*

Evidence from the study established that faculty managers are calling on head teachers to move away from 'locked-in' practices and to embark on innovative practices throughout the teaching unit. They claimed that a failure to do so will lead to the diminishing of the market position of TAFE and consequently threaten the sustainability of teaching units and teaching positions.

## *Managing Customer Expectations*

### **Customer Wants and Needs**

A sub-theme that emerged under the main theme ‘Quality’ was labelled ‘Customer expectation for quality’ during thematic analysis. There were a number of common views that emerged from data with regard to quality and customers. One view was that quality, as determined by the customer, is not always the quality that industry and society require to produce workers that are able to support the economy of Australia. Furthermore, customers in many cases may be driven by factors other than quality.

*End-to-end quality throughout the student life cycle is important. Sometimes, the quality that they are expecting is not in training, but in the quick service they provide and the cost. Sometimes the idea was not to learn but to get the piece of paper in the shortest possible time (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Another view was that the quality model within TAFE institutes may interfere with the customer expectations rather than support them.

*Three of my students left TAFE for private RTOs - where they can quickly get the qualification. But better builders will want TAFE to be able to teach the skills and have the knowledge as that would benefit them in the long run (Teacher).*

### **Professional Services**

During data analysis, a sub-theme that emerged under ‘customers’ was labelled ‘professional services’. During the study, faculty managers claimed that customers expect all TAFE teachers to be professionals and provide them with professional and timely advice. The evidence gathered from the study confirms that TAFE teaching units are not particularly designed to provide these professional services effectively. Head teachers stated that providing timely services to customers is challenging amidst myriads of demands that are competing for their time. The teachers confirmed that while they attempt to provide good customer service within their classrooms, they have limited time available to provide professional services to external customers.

Another sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘customers’ was ‘competing demands’. This was highlighted by head teachers and teachers who stated that they have competing demands during their non-teaching duties. Teachers claimed that the following activities are expected of them during the non-teaching hours (that is limited to 10 on-site hours in NSW): preparation for classes, marking assessments, maintaining student records, attending meetings, undertaking professional development, developing resources, assisting with administrative tasks such as timetabling, assisting with compliance documentations and any other tasks delegated to them. The teaching staff is usually unavailable for contact during TAFE vacation period, which is the peak period for customer enquiries and is not equipped to address customer inquiries during this time.

### **Personalised Services**

Another sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘customers’ was labelled as ‘personalised services’. The head teachers in Victoria reported that customers are now expecting personalised and immediate services and in some cases demanding that TAFE teaching unit matches the provisions of private providers. They demand options with regard to not only how, when and where they learn but also the duration and cost of training to match the private providers.

NSW head teachers also said that some apprentices have moved to other providers possibly due to less rigorous customer service processes as well as educational processes that are being utilized by other suppliers.

*Students that come to TAFE have changed over the years. Now they demand instant knowledge. They are less worried about how learning prepares them to problem solve & develop their innovation capability – they are more about passing their subjects. I believe quality should not be restricted to passing or failing a subject. CBT also makes this very difficult (Teacher at semi-structured interview).*

One faculty manager stated that driving flexible and personalised learning to improve customer experience has been a strategic direction of TAFE institutes for a number of years. This dates back to when training packages were first introduced within the VET sector. Faculty managers confirmed that flexible and personalised learning

needed to be at the forefront of educational service provision within TAFE teaching units.

Faculty managers claimed that in the current environment, customers expect to be involved in making decisions about their training options. They stated that in the absence of innovative delivery strategies, offering personalised services to students will be an expensive and unmanageable option for teaching sections. However, it was confirmed that some teaching units are trialling technology-driven options such as Google classrooms and Google hangouts to supplement their delivery, especially in rural areas, however, these have not replaced or altered the predominant delivery strategy of face-to-face training.

*Providing a service to each individual student is time-consuming and challenging (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Evidence from the study suggests that teaching units have not fully embarked on innovative delivery strategies with highly modularised and technology integrated approaches that are needed for successful and efficient implementation of personalised learning for customers. Data gathered also demonstrates that TAFE institutes do not have the flexible systems to support and administer personalised learning and monitor progress.

### **Learner-Centred Teaching**

Another sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘customers’ was the ‘learner - centeredness’.

During semi-structured interviews, teachers maintained that their student cohort is unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their own learning and therefore cannot be expected to drive learning. According to teachers, if TAFE teaching units reconfigure their services to cater to personalised learning, then completion rates and quality will inevitably suffer. Completion rates and quality were two major themes that emerged from the study as important aspects of VET reforms.

*They expect to come to class and learn from their teacher not do it on their own (Teacher).*



The views from faculty managers were unanimous but somewhat contrary to the views of teachers. They claimed that in the current environment pure face-to-face delivery is not sustainable and does not suit the current student population. They called for more learner-centred pedagogical models where training provision matches when, where and how students want to learn.

*As you know, so much of our delivery now is not traditional face-to-face programs- it is now about delivering in industry and partnerships, identifying the needs of the community and industry (Faculty manager).*

Views emerged from within this sub-theme alerted to tensions within trade teaching units when delivery is fully learner-centred as teachers believed that teacher-directed training provision is essential to ensure that licensing requirements are met. Besides, they believe that employers and students expect to be taught using a teacher facilitated mode. This view was more prominent in NSW than in Victoria. Teachers indicated that this view was formulated based on their experience, informal conversations with students and meetings with employer groups.

A sub-theme categorized under the sub-theme “learner-centeredness” was ‘online delivery’. This term found its place under learner-centeredness because teachers who participated in the study viewed ‘learner centred teaching’ merely as ‘online delivery.’ This highlighted a capability gap in teachers with regard to learner centred teaching.

Focus group interview discussions supported the idea that better processes are needed to educate students in new ways of learning and the benefits it will bring to their learning experiences. Faculty managers also maintained the view that teaching units and TAFE institutes also need to have more formal and informal campaigns to educate teachers and employers of such benefits.

To probe further on the lack of commitment from teaching sections to provide personalised learner centred teaching, teachers, and head teachers were asked to reflect on the following:

- Does face-to-face teaching produce the best quality outcomes above all other

delivery methods?

Trade teachers that were interviewed for this study unanimously believed that face-to-face delivery produces better quality outcomes for their student cohort.

*We still get students who primarily learn better with a face-to-face teacher and they will suffer under a fully technology integrated delivery. We got to be careful when trying to be flexible and be smart enough to attract all learners (Trades head teacher).*

*Everything we do has to be in a face to face environment. (Trades teacher).*

*TAFE does a lot more face-to-face training than private RTOs and we all get funded the same (Teacher at semi-structured interview).*

Observations and findings during the study suggest that TAFE teaching staff is more nervous than excited about teaching environments that are rich in technology, digitization, and blended learning models.

Two other sub-themes that emerged under ‘learner-centeredness’ was “expensive” and “time-consuming”. A number of head teachers claimed that providing personalised services is not always the cheapest and the most efficient financial model. They claimed that in the absence of flexible, responsive systems, head teachers are struggling to provide personalised services in the way the industry and customers expect while ensuring financial viability at the same time. Faulty managers articulated that modularised innovative approaches to teaching is the solution to this problem.

## **Managing Industry Demands**

During data analysis, a sub-theme in the category under ‘industry’ emerged as ‘apprentices’. The head teachers from trade based teaching sections summed up the expectations of employers for their apprentices as:

- Provide skills that are needed to perform the job role immediately.

- Maximize delivery hours and utilize the entire 8-hour work release given to apprentices for face-to-face training.

The themes emerging from data suggest that teaching staff, especially in trade areas identified with their industry. They are committed to their industries and generally believe that the three to four year face-to-face delivery model for apprentices is the best way to service their industry.

Two trades based teachers suggested that any employer who expects alternative delivery models should choose another provider that is more responsive to their expectations.

*The industry expects TAFE students to come out with superior skills (Teacher).*

*We are the industry standard for training. The industry considered the apprentices that had come to TAFE as getting the industry standard apprenticeship training.*

*This is only achieved through face-to-face teaching (head teacher at focus group interview).*

Themes emerged from data suggested two different points of view with regard to the focus of skill development. A group of teachers and head teachers, particularly from trade based teaching units claimed that learners must be trained to competently perform the job that they are employed to do immediately. Other teachers argued that TAFE teachers should tailor the pedagogical practices to provide broad-based skills with conceptual skill development and prepare them for current and emerging environments.

It is a challenge for teachers to train young people with generic and transferable skills and at the same time provide occupational specific skills that industry requires to meet its immediate needs (OECD, 2011) especially in an environment where expenditure is curtailed to match with revenue allocated to each learner.

*The industry may not want the learners to go through conceptual development but merely being able to do the job they have for them. They want learners to get in and get out with the qualification and the licenses. There is a tension between teachers who are driven by pedagogy and industry that is driving vocational education. In smaller regional areas, if you can't do the core job, then they don't have a job.*

*(Head teachers at focus group interview).*

*But when we have to be lean and efficient, you can't respond to every employer in the way we should. In five years' time, the industry will say that we haven't trained the students with the breadth and the depth of the skills required. We get a lot of feedback from employers about reducing delivery as not acceptable for licensed trades (Head teacher at semi-structured interview).*

## **Off-the-job vs On-the-job Training**

A theme that emerged from data with regard to on-the-job training varied across service-based and trade-based teaching units. Trade based teaching units claimed that on-the-job training as the only form of training is not an option for these occupations. They also claimed that most small businesses are not able to provide the breadth of experiences students need for on-the-job training.

*These students rely on TAFE to learn their trade. These students need more time in TAFE. Reducing the delivery is impacting on these students (Head teacher).*

Teachers claimed that employers of apprentices are mostly small business owners. As small business owners, they are limited by the number of trade-persons working within the organisation. Bednarz (2014) found that a higher percentage of apprentices that failed to complete their apprenticeship claimed dissatisfaction with on-the-job-training than off-the-job training (Bednarz, 2014, p. 18). Teachers who participated in this study confirmed this stating that moving to a fully on-the-job training model within their demography will be detrimental to the apprentice completion rate and quality of trade persons.

The trade teachers who participated in the study articulated the importance of providing off-the-job training to apprentices across the entire contracted training duration using strict teacher controlled learning environments. They insisted that this is necessary to ensure that TAFE continues to produce tradespersons that are competent to perform the trade without posing any threats to the health and safety of the general community.

A sub-theme within 'on-the-job' training was labelled 'experience'. A number of teachers confirmed that they have had very limited involvement in conducting

teaching or assessment at the workplace. This highlights a capability need in teaching staff, especially in trade areas in workplace delivery.

*The industry needs a certain skill set and it is not reliant on individual students – so why are we trying to make the course fit the students (Head teacher at semi-structured interview).*

Faculty managers urged teaching units to explore a good mix of off-the-job and on-the-job assessment options for financial viability as well as to ensure that students are exposed to a greater breadth and depth of experiences.

### *Managing Teacher Expectations*

#### **Cultural Expectations**

*We are expected to do everything from debt collecting, admin work, computer work and now to whatever the teaching section needs to get the students (Teacher).*

*I am relatively new to the teaching unit, but most teachers would say “this is the way we have done it for the last 20 years” (Teacher).*

All six units that participated in the study demonstrated distinct cultures that were established over a long period of time. These teaching units shared common cultural attributes where teachers considered conducting classroom training as their priority and treated all other teaching unit duties as secondary. Most aspects of the teaching unit, including customer service, financial management, business development and administrative duties were considered to be the predominant responsibility of head teachers.

Two head teachers articulated that any attempt to extend the teachers’ responsibilities to include other teaching unit services is responded with discontent by teachers. In the current VET environment, head teachers stated that the traditional model where head teachers provided room for teachers to primarily concentrate on classroom teaching is not sustainable in the current environment. The head teachers commented:

*“I can be the leader in the section and have all the headaches as a manager, other teachers can come in and sit in front of their computer for 30 hours and go home without achieving anything but I can’t do anything about it”.*

A strong sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘teacher’ was ‘key performance indicators (KPIs)’. This was raised by a number of head teachers and faculty managers at semi-structured and focus group interview. The head teachers articulated that in the absence of formal KPIs for teachers, changing the teaching unit culture to respond to suit the current VET environment has proven to be an impossible task. The head teachers believe that they do not hold any formal authority to impose major changes to the work habits of teachers.

Amidst changing expectations and demands from customers, industry, employers, faculty management, government and other competitive pressures, four head teachers expressed that they desperately need to make teachers come to terms with the changing nature of their role as a TAFE teacher.

*This comes back to teacher expectations – do they just expect to go into the classroom and come and mark attendances? Or do they expect to do RPL and compliance? Some people will take it and others will not do it or want to be part of it. I think it is better for me to do it myself rather than getting the aggravation from teachers. I find it extremely frustrating because I can’t pull a guy in and say that you haven’t met your expectations as I really don’t have the authority to do that (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*While some teachers are very resistant to change, I find that there are other teachers who work very closely with me to make the changes happen. These teachers are very innovative in their approach to teaching (Head teacher).*

A sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘teacher’ was labelled ‘disagreements’. There were at least 67 instances where head teachers and teachers who participated in the study disagreed with the implementation of reforms within TAFE teaching units particularly with regard to financial efficiencies imposed on them.

Head teachers articulated that there are two major reasons for this disagreement about the reduction of face-to-face delivery hours to gain financial efficiencies. The

first reason is the pressure to get through the material in a shorter amount of time with larger class sizes and the second reason is the loss of personal income for teachers due to reduced overtime hours.

Another sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘teacher’ was labelled ‘teaching conditions’. Head teachers claimed that any changes to current work practices are perceived by teachers as an effort to lower their employment conditions attached to the role of teacher. The head teachers articulated that this perception is the major cause of the reluctance of teachers to embrace alternative pedagogical models.

*For example, we used to have a student: teacher ratio of 12:1 in the past, but now we have moved to 15:1. Teachers immediately react to this by stating that they now have 20% more workload due to the higher student: teacher ratio (Head teacher).*

*I feel that full-time teachers in my section are more passionate about their working conditions than the students (Head teachers).*

Analysis of transcripts of head teacher interviews suggests that there is an overwhelming belief that TAFE policies and procedures are obstructing the efforts of head teachers to transform the teaching unit cultures.

### **Autonomy**

A common sub-theme that appeared under ‘teachers’ was ‘autonomy’. The study data revealed that teachers expect to be left alone to perform their teaching duties and should be protected from all other expectations.

*As a head teacher, it is my responsibility to respond to performance expectations from faculty management, I shield my teachers from this (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*The job of a head teacher is to fight our battles with faculty management and leave us to deal with our classroom teaching (Teacher).*

During the study, head teachers confirmed that in the past, teachers were given full autonomy within their classrooms. Interviews with teaching staff confirmed that they continue to expect that all managers respect their professional freedom within

classrooms. Teachers expect the head teacher involvement within classrooms to be limited to, mentoring new teachers, handling management issues and dealing with behavioural & disciplinary matters.

The themes emerging from data suggest that due to the demands of the current marketised environment, head teachers are no longer prepared to provide full autonomy and provide professional freedom to teachers within their classroom. Increasingly, head teachers are experiencing the pressure of compliance requirements and other tedious monitoring processes that must be implemented within teaching units.

Head teachers expressed the view that complex pedagogical issues within teaching units could only be resolved by collaborating with teachers. Teachers who refuse to engage with head teachers to actively explore innovative solutions are inhibiting the success of the teaching unit in a marketised environment.

One teaching unit that was involved in the study claimed the existence of an active collaborative culture within the teaching unit. Head teachers stated that the teachers who were not accepting of this culture already exited the organisation and found alternative employment. The staff in this teaching unit were confident that they are progressively transforming the teaching unit culture to the culture expected to successfully meet the performance expectations of reforms.

*Compliance is harder because we have reduced delivery. But we are keeping up with things because we work as a team in our section (Teacher).*

Three head teachers from trade based teaching units shared that they have very minimum involvement with the classroom practices of teachers. All head teachers have stated that they have very 'loose' controls with regard to teachers' pedagogical practices with the exception of budget allocation and documentation relating to compliance expectations.

*We don't micro manage. My view is that these people are hired as educational professionals; they say that they know their job; so I have to trust their abilities; we put a program in front of them and we outline the expectations: they are then expected to use due diligence and put a program in place for their cohort of*



*students. Problems arise usually at the end of the term when they haven't produced the results as expected (they sometimes don't deliver one unit and we find out at the end of the semester – the excuse is I didn't have time). This comes back to the KPIs – I can't do anything about it – can I threaten him with the job? Can I make it known that it is not good practice and if it continues there will be repercussions? I can refer them to management, they still are prepared to play the game – they know what the ramifications are and they are happy to risk that (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

## **Most Trusted TAFE Leader**

The study data revealed that teachers, both full-time and part-time consider their head teachers to be the most trusted leaders and their primary contact with the TAFE senior leadership.

Eight trade teachers articulated that face-to-face communication was their favourite way of communication. These teachers expressed that they did not pay much attention to email communication from senior management and prefer to communicate with head teachers.

More than half of NSW teacher participants claimed that senior managers had not confirmed the teaching units through the changes imposed on teaching units due to reforms to the VET sector. Senior managers claimed that despite all actions carried by them to develop teaching units for imminent changes, this was dismissed by teachers.

It was evident that some teachers show a professional distrust of senior and middle management in TAFE. All teachers, except four participants, did not believe that faculty managers understand the issues and problems of teachers.

*(I have a) high level of distrust on my managers to the stage of being dis-functional. Very difficult to work in an environment with this level of distrust (Teacher).*

All teachers except one who participated in the study demonstrated a high level of trust on their head teacher.

## **Innovative Leadership Skills**

During the thematic analysis, a sub-theme that emerged under the theme ‘head teacher’ was labelled ‘leadership skills’. A number of leadership expectations from head teachers were outlined by teachers. They are: cooperative leadership skills, manage finances to maximise spending on teaching, get the buy-in from teachers, protect the team, choose ideas that produce positive results, influence senior management, communicate teacher concerns to management, preserve the rights of the team, move away from autocratic leadership to more participative leadership styles, mentoring and driving innovation.

The head teachers are dealing with negative reactions from teachers to the changes that are already implemented in terms of reduced face-to-face delivery hours, increased student numbers and shorter class times. One head teacher expressed that maintaining staff morale under these heavy workloads is challenging.

Another head teacher expressed that changes to teacher conditions and work patterns are affecting the motivation and morale of teachers.

## **Changing Role of Head Teacher**

In a changing VET landscape, competing priorities and many internal and external influences and expectations as outlined above are continuously placing new demands on head teachers. This is constantly adding to the complexities of the role. The role is continuing to change at an accelerated pace with the introduction of the current wave of Australian VET reforms.

*We are finding it difficult to keep up with the changes and expectations. Goal posts are also moving constantly (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

The themes emerging from data gathered during the study aligns the changing role of head teacher primarily with TAFE shifting from being a predominantly liberal educational institution to a commercially focused educational institution operating in a marketised environment. The accelerated pace of change in head teacher position could be attributed to the impact of decades of reforms that have confronted the VET

sector. This role has moved from primarily providing educational leadership within a teaching unit to a role that leads teaching units with entrepreneurship, innovation and business acumen in order to operate in a demand-driven marketised environment.

The following sub-themes were identified during thematic analysis under the theme ‘head teacher’:

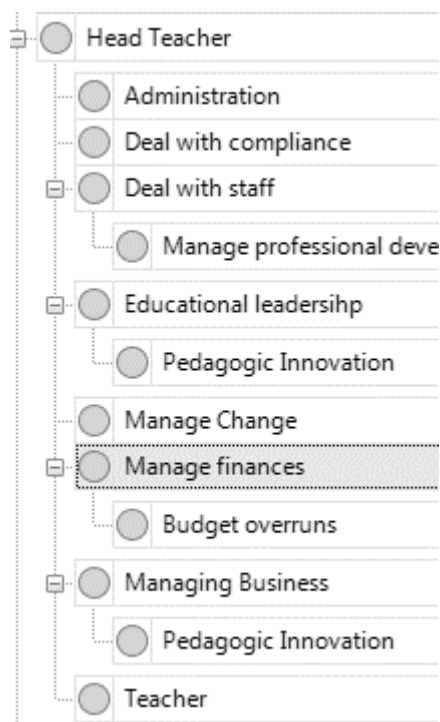


Figure 13 Thematic Analysis: Head teacher

The following section compares the current expectations of the head teacher “statement of duties” from NSW and Victoria with the current expectations of the position.

### *Expectations of the Current Head Teacher Role*

#### **Teacher**

NSW statement of the duties of a head teacher outlines that one of the major duties of a head teacher as “to perform the teaching role in the most effective manner”.

A sub-theme ‘teaching’ was derived under the main theme ‘head teacher’ during the thematic analysis. The themes that were related to ‘head teacher teaching’ indicate

that teaching has moved to the least priority in the work of head teachers. Head teachers expressed that the metrics that measure head teachers' performance in the current environment do not account for performing the teaching role in the most effective manner. They claimed that there is a blurring of teaching and non-teaching duties in the daily work of head teachers. According to head teachers, non-teaching duties assigned to them are overshadowing the teaching duties. The daily routine of head teachers is filled with dealing with 'spot fires', particularly addressing staff, student, employer and administration issues that are mundane but a necessary part of the job.

The evidence from the study suggests that urgent and competing expectations on the head teacher role render it impossible for head teachers to give any priority to matters related to teaching.

### **Educational Leader**

The head teacher 'statement of duties' identifies educational leadership within the teaching unit as a critical component of the role both in NSW and Victoria. The educational leadership role of head teachers includes influencing and supporting the pedagogical excellence of teachers by challenging and guiding their teaching practice. Key components of educational leadership as articulated by study participants were: contribute to the development of training and assessment strategies, teaching resources and assessment procedures as well as provide guidance, assistance to staff on educational and administrative issues, shared educational goals within teaching units, program design, culture of collaboration, improved student outcomes, validation of processes and complement the business imperatives.

Educational leadership also includes efficient management of all resources to maintain high educational standards while providing a rewarding learning experience for students. This includes the responsibility for end-to-end experience for students, including enrolment and graduation processes. The head teachers claimed that this is being overshadowed by providing leadership for achieving compliance and other performance expectations.

## **Administrative Manager**

‘Managing administration duties’ is not exclusively outlined in the TAFE NSW head teacher statement of duties. Instead, it includes a broad statement related to administrative management stating that head teachers should exercise all appropriate delegations as detailed in the TAFE Administrative Manual. Victorian statement of duties includes a statement on managing compliance, however, is much more heavily oriented towards educational leadership than administration.

Administrative duties include general teaching unit management functions as well as reporting, enrolment, and records management duties. The head teachers and teachers stated that many tasks that were previously performed by clerical officers have now been delegated to teaching units. The head teachers commented that they do not have the passion or the capability to be administrative managers even though a major part of their job now involves administration.

## **Business Manager**

Increased competition for public funds due to marketisation and greater emphasis on self-funding of teaching unit operations are calling for head teachers to be business and entrepreneurial managers in addition to their various other roles.

Faculty managers articulated that head teachers need to develop the ability to approach every part of their work in a ‘business-like’ manner to be successful in this VET environment. The study observed that the statement of duties for TAFE NSW or Victorian head teachers do not include any statements that relate to the role of a business manager though both head teachers and managers agreed that this was a critical requirement of the job.

*Now TAFE tries to diversify its income streams and not rely solely on government core funding (Faculty Manager at focus group interview).*

The business management duties that were outlined by participants were: diversify income streams, plan business activities, form business relationships, develop business, embark on entrepreneurial activities and commercial ventures. Head

teachers commented that their core business is increasingly becoming focused on ‘business and service’ rather than ‘teaching and learning’.

Evidence from the study suggests that managing the teaching unit with a business lens is challenging the head teachers.

*They expect you to be accounts managers, business managers, educators, super teachers and experts in everything (head teacher).*

The faculty managers also contributed to this discussion stating that head teacher capability in business management skills is fundamental to the business success of the teaching units.

A number of head teachers from trade based teaching unit asserted that while as trades persons they have run small businesses they do not possess any comprehensive skills as business managers.

*I am a good tradesman. I am also a good teacher. I am certainly not a business manager (Head teacher).*

*TAFE cannot expect that we suddenly operate as business managers. Head teacher job has become more of a management job – one of the pre-requisite for being a head teacher should be some form of accounting or business management qualifications. TAFE has introduced the changes, however, they have not kept up with the ramifications of those changes (Teacher).*

According to faculty managers, the ‘business focus’ in teaching models must involve: developing business acumen of teaching staff and teaching unit displaying a ‘business-like’ approach in all operations.

Faculty managers outlined a number of strategies for building the business management capability within the teaching unit. They included: more focused coaching for head teachers to develop business skills and basic business literacy training for all teachers.

Head teachers stressed that it is a challenge to find the right balance between educational leadership and business leadership. A number of head teachers

commented that these two leadership practices are competing with each other during their daily work practices.

As illustrated in Figure 13 Thematic Analysis: Head teacher, ‘pedagogic innovation’ emerged as a sub-theme within the theme of business management. Faculty managers claimed that educational leadership and business leadership can complement each other if head teacher has implemented pedagogic innovation in their delivery.

The study provided limited evidence of broader management skills or some exceptional capacity for innovation in educational leadership in head teachers.

### **Finance Managers**

TAFE NSW ‘statement of duties’ for head teachers does not make any direct reference to managing finances. On the other hand, the Victorian Institute ‘statement of duties’ for the ‘Head of the Department’ identifies managing financial resources within the approved budget as a key role.

During the study, head teachers expressed concern that the level of financial management skills required to cope with the complexities of financial issues within teaching units is beyond their capability or interest.

There were two sub-themes ‘budget cuts’ and ‘budget overruns’ that emerged from data under the theme ‘financial management’.

Three teaching units that participated in this study had experienced considerable budget overruns in the current funding model. The reasons for budget overruns were stated as: inadequate levels of funding allocations to support the level of intensity in training for trade areas, failure to transform long-established cultural practices, traditional pedagogic processes that rely on time-based training for achieving outcomes.

This is a challenge for head teachers and one that has changed the traditional role considerably.

*My biggest challenge is still meeting great outcomes with a really reduced budget (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Victorian head teachers expressed that they constantly needed to grapple with sudden changes in financial allocations and had to dynamically adjust their delivery programs to cope with funding fluctuations imposed by the government.

*There were over 2000 changes to the funding contract last year, including what courses are funded at what level. Once you have advertised for the courses with a specific fee, TAFE is facing serious challenges when the funding body changes rules for that course and in some cases, this may be one week before the commencement of an advertised course. Last year there were three sets of major changes to the funding model in Victoria. Change has been constant from the Victorian State Government (Faculty manager and head teachers at a focus group interview).*

## **Compliance Gatekeeper**

Both TAFE NSW and Victorian statement of the duties of a head teacher include the statement “ensure WHS and comply with the requirements and regulations of appropriate legislation”. The Victorian position description for ‘Head of the Department’ also adds that the position must ensure compliance with the institute systems and the requirements of relevant external bodies. It was noted that compliance is not exclusively described as a duty of a head teacher in the NSW statement of duties.

Interviews with participants recorded the word ‘compliance’ 316 times. The evidence from the study proves that a major part of head teachers’ role involved compliance with ASQA standards, institute processes and other expectations related to compliance. Two head teachers identified compliance expectations and gatekeeping regulations as one of the main challenges of their job.

*In terms of the overall workload when changing training packages, everything has to stop and compliance always takes priority (Head teacher).*

Compliance requirements in the VET sector have been dynamic and new expectations are added regularly as shortcomings of the system are identified by the



regulators (Harris & Simons, 2012). Compliance in TAFE goes beyond ASQA, ISO, and WHS into various other acts and legislations applicable to public institutions. This topic will be analysed further later in this chapter particularly in the context of tensions between educational leadership, compliance and professional judgement of teachers.

### **Staff Relations Manager**

Head teachers articulated that maintaining staff relations conducive to a productive work environment is becoming increasingly challenging. The word change was mentioned '445' times by various participants during the interview process.

Evidence from the study revealed that in all six teaching units there is a disconnection between the culture that is expected by faculty management and the culture that is prevalent in teaching units. Semi-structured interviews with teachers revealed that there is a sense of silent resistance to the cultural change expected within teaching units and a fundamental disagreement with the drivers of these changes.

Evidence from the study suggests that this is not sustainable and contributes to the high stress-levels of head teachers. Amidst these cultural disconnects, maintaining staff relations conducive to a productive work environment has been a challenge for head teachers.

### **Manager of Professional Development**

Head teachers claimed that there hasn't been any systematic development of teachers to prepare them for the current VET environment. TAFE teachers require continuing professional development in a number of key VET teaching and learning aspects if the teaching units are to survive in a market-based VET sector.

*Stronger investment back within the section levels, faculty or TAFE management level: give us some investment to do some project work to re-invest rather than keep cutting. We need funding to bring innovation into the section - continuing to cut down on resources is not going to achieve that (Head teacher).*

Under the current funding environment, faculty managers confirmed that teachers have limited opportunity to being sponsored for external training events and any such investments should demonstrate a clear return.

*What we got to do is to build these professional development activities into their work situation (Faculty manager).*

Incorporating professional development within the 70:20:10 professional development within teachers' work practice, puts the accountability for creating professional development opportunities within the teaching unit to the head teachers. The head teachers are not only expected to provide these opportunities for teachers, but also bring the cultural change within the teaching units to integrate professional development into the daily activities of the teaching unit.

These expectations are not fully outlined in the statement of duties of a head teacher.

### **Change Leader**

*In many sections, particularly in trade areas, teachers are very resistant to change (Faculty manager & Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Evidence from this research suggests that teachers consider head teachers to be the most trusted managers in TAFE. They declared that a head teacher is the best position to understand the issues faced by teachers. Due to the high level of trust and mutual respect generally held by head teachers, they are pivotal to changing long-established cultures within teaching units. TAFE managers expect head teachers to shape the culture of teaching units by actively engaging in conversations, giving accountability to teachers and introduction of systematic change.

During the study, head teachers expressed fear that teachers trust and respect towards them may change if they start to question the established cultures and practices of teachers. Without advanced skills as change leaders, head teachers expressed a lack of confidence to effectively challenge, destroy or build cultural norms and beliefs within teaching units.

The study confirmed that head teachers have managed to make pockets of change within their delivery practices by having conversations with teachers and exploring solutions to financial problems presented to them. The study did not provide any substantial evidence that head teachers are capable of effectively leading the change within the teaching unit.

*We brought in some change in delivery and assessment: teacher brought a case where we needed a term or block assessment: we sat down and had a bit of a chat with that teacher and then brought the whole team together and went through the pros and cons: most teachers didn't think that was a good idea because of complications with block release and classes (Head teacher).*

Haneberg (2009, p. 3) asserts that if you don't change the conversations to what is expected in the new world, the culture will not change. Head teachers highlighted that some conversations are difficult when the external influences through union interventions and past cultural practices of the organization gets in the way of their change efforts.

### *Head Teacher - Capability Gaps*

Comparison of the major expectations of the current head teacher role with the statement of duties for NSW and Victorian head teachers confirmed that the current role assigned to head teachers was substantially different to the role that they were originally appointed to.

The study highlights that more systematic approach to developing the leadership of existing and aspiring head teachers is urgently needed in all TAFE institutes. As a result of the analysis, it was established that the statement of duties for head teachers, both in NSW and Victoria do not adequately cover the breadth and depth of capability that is required to successfully lead a teaching team in the current environment. During this analysis, significant gaps were identified with regard to business acumen, business leadership, financial leadership, change leadership, managing teams, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

*I have a very supportive work environment, but there is no support to build my leadership skills. I became a head teacher probably because I was a good teacher, a*

*good administrator, got along well with my peers and put my hand up for the job  
(Head teacher at focus group interview)*

In this rapidly changing VET environment, challenges faced by head teachers are common to experienced head teachers as well as new or acting head teachers. The study found common capability gaps across all including more experienced head teachers.

A number of participants raised the requirement for implementing structured continuing professional development programs for teachers and head teachers that are linked to key performance expectations. In an environment of rapid change, TAFE teachers need to be guided and coached to strive for excellence in contemporary VET pedagogies including CBT models, personalized learning options, facilitating learning using whatever mode that fits the student and using 'one size fits one' strategies to support students. The faculty managers believe that innovative teachers are capable of achieving excellence even in environments with limited budget and time.

*We have provided room for innovation in the current employment conditions of our teachers. The time where teachers are able to perform their related duties on-site and off-site will provide them with time to formulate innovation in the teaching. The off-site hours where teachers are not required to report to work on-site gives teachers the opportunity to go out explore – this is much encouraged by faculty management (Faculty manager).*

Following were the head teacher capability development needs as identified by the participants as part of this study:

- Business, business leadership, and financial management skills

This skill set includes business acumen, financial management, creating a culture of high business performance and responding to external influences with agility and adaptability. In addition to this, participants identified other capability gaps that need addressing include project management, planning, budgeting, and monitoring, incorporating new technologies in practice as well as business development skills.

- Educational Leadership

This skill set includes capability development to provide innovative educational leadership in contemporary pedagogies while providing business leadership to gain competitive advantage.

- Change Leadership

The head teacher capability should be developed to create a vision for change within teaching units and to take teachers along the journey of change by building change capable cultures within teaching units. Head teachers need the ability to become catalysts for change as teachers are vital stakeholders in implementing VET reforms.

- Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The skill set includes: adopting new technologies, creative innovative cultures, managerial courage and risk taking.

- Managing teams

The skill set include: ability to articulate the vision of the organisation and get the ‘buy-in’ from teachers, ability to take more disruptive and widespread steps to achieve sustainable changes in cultural habits, managing resistance, stronger skills in managing performance, building high performing teams and adopt leadership duties across the team.

- Adaptive leadership skills

The competing expectations of various stakeholders as outlined above require head teachers to be much more adaptive in their role within this ever changing VET environment. This adaptive capability of head teachers will increase their potential to lead an adaptive culture within the teaching unit.

- Coaching and Mentoring Staff

The study findings suggest that a systematic plan to develop head teacher and senior teachers to mentor and coach teachers to develop pedagogical expertise and respond to demands of VET reforms with pedagogic innovation is needed.

### 5.3 Impact of VET Reforms on Pedagogy and Teaching Practice

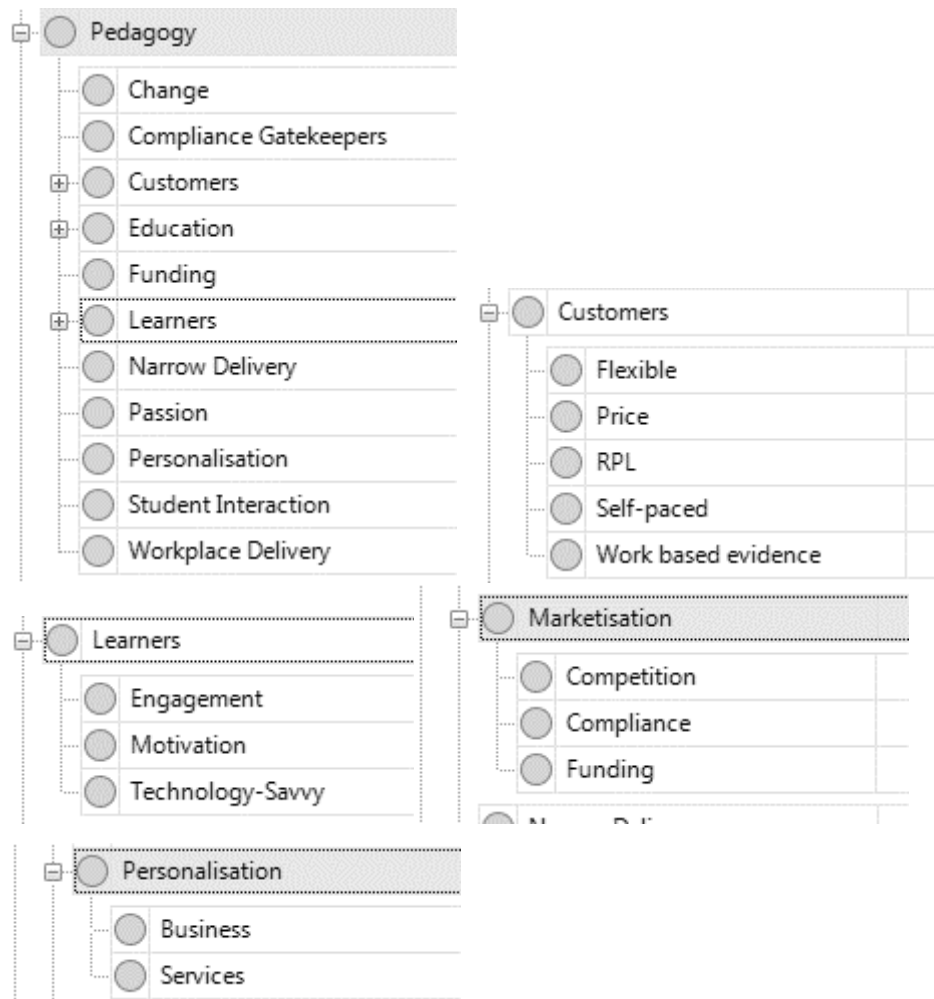


Figure 14 Thematic Analysis: Pedagogy

During the data analysis, “change” emerged as a persistence sub-theme when discussing the theme ‘pedagogy’. Faculty managers articulated that change in pedagogical practices is unavoidable if TAFE is to survive in a demand-driven environment. Head teachers claimed that this is difficult to achieve amidst long-established traditional pedagogical models. Teachers did not fully embrace the need

for change, stating that the expected changes are economically driven rather than pedagogically driven.

The evidence from this study suggests that TAFE teaching units have seen a greater upheaval through the latest wave of reforms in the form of the National Agreement for Skills Reform than the upheaval caused when CBT was first introduced to teaching sections in the form of training packages in the 1990s. The main reason for this upheaval points to changes to the funding regime that strictly linked training efforts to implementation of CBT-based training packages in the exact format as it was intended. The funding regime introduced under the latest wave of reforms expected teaching units to narrow their delivery ‘just enough’ to meet exact competency guidelines. The faculty managers and head teachers articulated that customers in a Neoliberal CBT model have the freedom to prove their competency using a variety of available forms, including recognition of prior learning (RPL), work-based evidence, self-study or classroom training. The funding regime under the “National Agreement for Skills Reform” forces teaching units to recognize the achievement of exact competencies at minimum level using any of the above methods within the shortest timeframe possible. Teachers claimed the new funding regime that is allocated to teaching units is linked to the lowest common denominator and does not cater to the range of support that is required by their students. The faculty managers claimed that maintaining the level of support to students that TAFE teaching units are accustomed to being difficult under the current marketised environment.

*We have some gaps in our practical training. Not that we can't fulfil the requirements of the unit guides to what we are currently doing, but I don't think what we are doing is worthwhile for the students. I don't want to just deliver to ensure that I am compliant with the content of the unit guide (Teacher).*

Teachers claimed that this funding regime is restricting the freedom of educators to augment training to incorporate their occupational expertise or modelling their tacit knowledge on the occupation during the delivery of training. They further explained that TAFE institutes are expected to compete with for-profit training providers who are using inventive strategies to maximise their profit and attract customers. Teachers

articulated that these providers are delivering qualifications using the minimum possible time using pedagogical strategies that are cost-effective and just-enough to demonstrate the required outcomes. In this environment, TAFE teachers are confronted with having to shift ‘what’ to deliver, ‘how’ to deliver and ‘who’ to deliver to in response to external influences. Teachers who have enjoyed deregulated freedom within their classroom under the previous models showed resentment towards the external control on pedagogical practices.

*I find that training packages and compliance requirements are controlling what we can deliver to students (Teacher).*

According to faculty managers, the CBT-based training packages are designed to guide educators with prescriptive learning outcomes that guide ‘what’ educators should deliver and in which contexts. The teaching staff claimed that by giving prominence to employers, industries and customers and expectation that teachers strictly adhere to the criteria prescribed in units of competencies, training packages are inevitably forcing the abandonment of expert industry knowledge and experience of teachers. They also claimed that the current funding regime and compliance expectations are designed to support these expectations.

*I have been in the trade for 60 years. ... Compliance officers are trying to tell me what to teach and how to teach it based on their interpretation of the training package. I don't know how my head teacher is coping with this (Teacher).*

*I feel that we are over assessing and not teaching enough what they need to know (Teacher).*

The data analysis inferred a number of outcomes of a marketised VET environment that are disturbing the current pedagogical practices of teaching units. The three major outcomes are changes to funding regime, tightening of compliance requirements and increased competition.

The faculty managers stated that the impact of VET reforms on teaching units goes beyond the reduction of the funding allocated to teaching units. The reforms impact



on all teaching unit operations, including pedagogical practices, teacher confidence and quality of student outcomes.

The study evidence suggests that teaching sections had not seen any need to revise their delivery practices until the latest wave of reforms were introduced in 2009 in Victoria and 2015 in NSW. It was evident that decades of previous reforms, though had some impact on teaching units had not directly threatened the teaching unit structures, cultures, and pedagogical models. These were threatened with reforms that are directly altered the funding available to the teaching units.

All participants expressed that government in trying to give a stronger voice to industries and employers essentially dampens the voice of VET educators. The evidence from the study established that these factors are forcing TAFE teaching units to change their entire teaching practice and values to suit the demands and priorities of external stakeholders.

A number of teachers were of the view that TAFE, which has dominated the VET sector for decades, need not change due to external pressures. They claimed that the tried and tested pedagogical practices within teaching units have continued to produce high-quality workers for the industries over a long period.

Discussions with study participants confirmed that there has been very little pedagogy based transformations emerging from teaching units due to market reforms. Instead, the head teachers reported that they are consumed by responding to changes imposed on them due to compliance, competitions, systems, and funding.

### *The Impact of Funding on Pedagogy and Teaching Practice*

During the interviews, participants were asked to respond to the following question:

Are VET reforms pedagogically or economically driven?

All participants unanimously responded that VET reforms were economically driven. Due to the impact of VET reforms on funding, head teachers articulated that they have responded to reform expectations by minimising training to the lowest common denominator and altering the duration of training to fit within the funding allocations.

Head teachers claimed that the new funding regime coupled with the pressures of marketised environment is compelling teaching units to shift their focus from teaching and learning for business and services. Four head teachers stated that TAFE teachers with a long-established commitment to their students are now expected to give priority to industry needs rather than the needs of individual students.

Participants identified funding regime that is linked to a national entitlement system and increased the availability of income contingent loans as one of the main causes of the upheaval in teaching units and barriers for continuing traditional pedagogical practices both in Victoria and NSW.

*Key factor that we can't get away from is funding changes. We are getting money based on the number of apprentices, completions, and commercial offerings: what we are responsible for now as managers is how much money comes into the section and how we spread that money now becomes a pedagogical issue (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

All head teachers that participated in the study confirmed that in the current environment, the effectiveness of their job is mainly measured by their performance against revenue-based budget allocations and quality agenda has moved to the background. Teaching staff claimed that the funding was insufficient to address the competing demands from various stakeholders while maintaining the quality of delivery that TAFE is renowned for.

*My main challenge currently is obviously the reduced funding level. It has been very difficult to get my team to change their mentality – Getting my team to change their delivery to be within the budget yet achieve the same or better quality outcomes to previous years has been difficult (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Due to the reduction in actual delivery hours, now I am expected to deliver the same material in a significantly shorter time frame (Teacher interview).*

*We are struggling to deliver a very quality product to the same standard as we did in previous years with a much-reduced level of funding (Head teacher focus group interview).*

The expectations and demand for teachers in the current climate within teaching units go beyond teaching and learning. The study findings suggest that there has been very little pedagogic solutions implemented in teaching units in response to reforms. They confirm that most solutions implemented in response to reforms have been economically driven with a view to reducing teaching unit costs.

*It is about money, in my opinion, it is less about quality (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

One head teacher shared that TAFE has decades of history and long-entrenched ways of doing things and yet it was expected to move from old to new in a matter of months.

*Delivery hours for Cert III qualification has been cut by 30% from 18 weeks to 14 weeks. We are expected to make adjustments to our delivery to fit it into the reduced hours available. The adjustment I had to make in the way I deliver was not easy (Teacher).*

### **Funding Regime – Disrupting the Traditional Training Models**

All six teaching units involved in the study had predominant pedagogical models that could be called traditional. Training is predominantly teacher-driven, face-to-face, skill, and knowledge-based and delivered at set times and days with limited flexibility. The teachers claimed that TAFE training is known for quality and deeply trusted by the community. They further articulated that this training model has served the industry well for decades and was the most suitable model for their student cohort. Head teachers warned that any disruptions to this training model are treated with resentment by teachers within their teaching units.

Teaching units that participated in the study confirmed that they are being forced through VET reforms to re-think their long-established ways of doing things and to undertake cultural, process and organisational transformation. In preparing for the impending reforms, the faculty managers had articulated to teaching sections that the new funding model under the latest reforms will not stretch to support the strict time-based traditional delivery model that is engaged by teaching units. The faculty managers articulated their expectation that head teachers will have to lead the

teaching units to move away from traditional ‘locked-in’ training practices into more innovative pedagogically sound practices when responding to these ‘top-down’ impositions.

The teachers from trade-based teaching units maintained that this funding model had not taken a number of important pedagogical factors into account. They are: the vast language, literacy and numeracy skills gaps of students, requirement to train apprentices in a strict teacher-led manner and health and safety implications of sub-standard training being offered to apprentices.

*I find it frustrating when the Institute managers say that you can't use 20<sup>th</sup>-century methods in the 21st century – but this is frustrating because you know that this is driven by cost savings rather than educational outcomes. Guys who need more time, TAFE is saying we don't have money anymore. (Teacher).*

*The current reforms are about funding, which is driving reforms in educational practices. Funding is a good motivator and a good driver (Faculty manager).*

The study data also pointed to an added concern of teaching staff regarding the funding levels that threaten the ability of slow learners to succeed as the funding levels do not cater to augmenting training to support these learners within the normal classroom practices.

*I do not have time to provide extra support to students who are on the borderline (Teacher).*

The faculty managers articulated that, unlike the demand-based funding model, the previous supply-based funding model supported augmenting training to deal with student needs. Head teachers claimed that the demand-based funding model places restrictions on pedagogical models within teaching units and indirectly influences the pedagogical approach to training.

*As managers, now the only pedagogical freedom we have is how we spread the revenue within our delivery model. (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

During the study, when prompted if global economic influences, changing behaviours of learners, technological advancement or changes in industries are

forcing a change in pedagogical models, the majority of teachers responded stating that in the current environment the economic factors are the main influences for changing pedagogical models. The teachers further claimed that as VET educators they should have the freedom to determine the pedagogical models that they would use within their classrooms.

Teachers in NSW teaching units were firm that they must be allowed to maintain their traditional teaching practices, claiming that all external influences should be kept out of the classroom. Evidence from the study suggested that teachers look to head teachers to protect their solitude within their classroom walls. The head teachers expressed that this has been very challenging to them as they are pressured by the faculty management to respond to external influences efficiently.

### Resistance in Moving to Contemporary Pedagogical Practices

Discussions with the faculty managers indicated that TAFE institutes are placing new expectations from teaching units in response to a rapidly changing VET environment. Faculty managers and some head teachers believe that these transformations are necessary to place teaching units in a sustainable position to cope with challenges of marketised environments. The transformation expectations include the need to adopt: more contemporary VET pedagogical models, personalised learning practices, customer responsiveness, technology integrated delivery, fully compliant practices, work-integrated learning and blended learning models. These expectations are forcing teachers to extend their safe classroom environment into workplaces, open learning spaces, open workshop environments and the industry.

During the study, teaching staff claimed that a number of processes and economy driven transformations were enforced in the teaching unit by faculty management as a result of market-based VET reforms. The teachers claimed that they are forced to compromise educational quality for economic efficiencies and compliance imperatives.

*The hierarchy has done nothing as far as I am concerned to facilitate the change: all they have done is told us to teach more with less time (Teacher).*

The head teachers articulated that any attempt to change the current pedagogical practices within teaching units is proving to be challenging. There is active resistance within teaching units to moving away from the traditional classroom delivery into more contemporary VET practices. In addition, the head teachers claimed that teachers are portraying any changes in pedagogical practices as a means of impeding on their conditions of employment. This has been presented as one of the main inhibitors of moving to contemporary pedagogical practices.

*... Lot of people want to confuse industrial relations (IR) issues with educational issues and they use the educational issues to support their IR arguments (Head teacher at focus group interview)*

The study highlighted the following summary of concerns that are driving the resistance to moving to contemporary VET pedagogies: perceived impacts the changes may have on the current teaching conditions, teaching hours and opportunity for overtime; concern that new pedagogical models may compromise the quality of teaching; changes are unnecessary as the traditional proven and tested methods have produced quality workers for the industries for decades.

The head teachers also explained that moving away from the safe walls of the classroom is challenging and confronting to teachers. The senior managers and head teachers articulated that teachers lack the capability or confidence to embrace any new pedagogical models as they have been comfortable with their traditional pedagogical practices.

Some teachers encounter active resentment and contempt by other teachers when they attempt to incorporate contemporary pedagogical models within their teaching practice. This was confirmed by one teacher who said:

*I believe that teachers cannot continue to teach what they know currently as it has to be relevant to a rapidly changing future. My biggest issue is I have to meet the expectations of other teachers and work within their constraints because they don't want to change. I have pushed for what I believed as the right thing and incorporated these in my delivery. This is causing a lot of trouble for me in the teaching section. One teacher wants to make it a union*

*issue - I believe he is trying to keep things in the dinosaur ages, so it is easier for him (Teacher)*

A head teacher reported that small incremental changes have been possible with some teachers. However, even these small changes have not been achieved as quickly as expected. They reported that implementing any major changes to pedagogical models has not been supported by teachers.

### *Impact of Competition on Pedagogy and Teaching Practice*

Victorian TAFE teaching units that participated in the study claimed that competition is forcing teaching units to reconsider not only the teaching content, but also the modes of delivery, timing, program durations, flexibility, intensity of training, assessment rigour, location of training, program schedules, customer service practices and many other aspects of program delivery.

It was discussed at focus group interview that Victorian government implementation of VET reforms promoted competition based on 'price' by removing minimum and maximum course fees for providers. Both teaching sections in Victoria confirmed that the competition has forced the price and the availability of the product to take the predominant place in delivery decisions moving the quality and preparing students for occupations to the second place.

*Quality now has become a marketing exercise to attract students. Now students don't have a measure of quality except the marketing hype. (Faculty managers and Head teachers at focus group interview).*

*To maintain quality, I now need to know a lot about regulations and our competitors rather than focusing on quality of education. Quality for them could be something totally different to what VET educators call quality (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Competition across Victoria and NSW was not limited to private registered training organizations but extended to other TAFE institutes as well as the university and school sector.

*The increase in competition from the higher education sector due to uncapped places is challenging us: universities have driven our markets right down (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

NSW teaching sections had not experienced the full impact of competition as the study was conducted shortly after the introduction of the Smart and Skilled reforms.

Study participants in Victoria particularly stressed that the competition in Victoria was not well planned and the implementation has been haphazard. In addition, the frequency of changes to funding contracts is continuing to exacerbate these challenges in Victoria.

*There were over 2000 changes to the funding contract last year, including what courses are funded at what level. In some cases, changes were announced one week before the commencement of an advertised course. Last year there were three sets of major changes to the funding model in Victoria. Change has been constant from the State government (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

The head teachers expressed that they are struggling with having to transform the teaching unit cultures to be in line with a marketised environment on the run, especially in an environment where goals posts are moving frequently at an accelerated pace. A head teacher commented that this fast pace of change is humanly impossible to deal with.

The faculty managers also reported that strict and complicated industrial relations structures associated with public service organisations bring a number of challenges to the training delivery in a competitive market. The peak of these challenges is the competitive disadvantage TAFE industrial relations structures bring to TAFE institutes due to generous teaching and pay conditions compared to private RTOs.

The study participants claimed that many ‘for-profit’ RTOs that they are competing with, are predominantly using minimalistic compliance-driven approaches to training with a view to maximising profits. These providers are negotiating generous, attractive benefits for customers that encourage them to undertake training at their institution. There is a perception that these providers do not adequately teach nor assess the skills required for the qualification. One Victorian head teacher stated that



it was difficult for TAFE with its education-based value system to compete in this environment. In Victoria, the main competition is based on price and the benchmark for quality is set at the lowest common denominator of assessing competence. It was evident that TAFE teachers have a fundamental disagreement with this trend.

*Our competition in the marketplace has very much a “tick and flick” mentality into training and assessment. In many cases, customers have received qualifications based on a few conversations. I am hopeful that the industry will recognise that those people are not equipped for our workplaces, but they will accept students with the TAFE brand as quality - we confirm the integrity of the students (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Teachers said that industry has high expectations from TAFE teaching units and therefore their training programs should not be minimized to the lowest common denominator. Industry expects high standard training utilising high-end equipment and methodologies within TAFE teaching units. They claimed that many private providers have opted not to get into the training areas that require high level extensive time-based training. The teachers commented that TAFE has a long-established relationship with the industry sector and is obliged to provide relevant, high-quality qualifications that are often used for licensing purposes. The teachers believe that compromising the quality of trade based licensing qualifications in the name of competition not only produces less quality outcomes but also poses a great threat to public safety.

Due to mishaps of many RTOs, teachers expressed that there is a lack of confidence in the quality of VET qualifications in the employment market. Unless measures are taken to restore this confidence in VET provision, teaching staff fear that TAFE will also fall into the minimalistic training approach of many competitors.

*The challenge is for TAFE to increase or maintain the market share by maintaining high-quality delivery while ensuring the financial sustainability. I believe ultimately our quality and integrity will get us through. We don't need to reduce our quality to gain market share (Head teacher).*

## *Impact of Compliance on Pedagogy and Teaching Practice*

It was apparent through discussions that recent reforms in the VET sector have brought a massive compliance burden on TAFE teaching units.

*Compliance expectations are having the greatest impact on me as a head teacher  
(Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Participants claimed that the continuous tightening of compliance requirements in response to the poor practices of some “for-profit” providers is hurting the TAFE sector.

*Lots of compliance requirements are a result of what happened with private providers  
(Head teacher at focus group interview)*

All participants viewed compliance as a burden that is restricting their ability to service their students or the industry, as they believed it prevented them from capitalising on their occupational expertise and pedagogical skills to bring quality to training provision.

Teaching staff claimed that compliance guidelines that though introduced to preserve quality are in fact diminishing quality in their teaching practices.

Head teachers expressed their view that the purpose of compliance documentation is to confirm adherence to contractual obligations and conditions of registrations whereas the purpose of teaching is to influence changes in behaviour in students with regard to identified competencies in training packages for a particular occupation. Teachers saw a very little connection between teaching and compliance documentation, thereby putting head teachers in a very difficult position when managing compliance.

*Teachers have communicated in a number of occasions that these days adhering to the compliance have nothing to do with quality. There is a belief that compliance is in fact, making the quality lower. My staff would say that they have got their students engaged, achieve great outcomes and made an amazing product and this is quality - everything else such as compliance is irrelevant to quality. There are so many things that are outside the training package that adds value and quality with real engagement and*

*prepares the student for employment - but this is not considered and discouraged when we are focused on compliance. Compliance does not value many aspects of quality (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*There many things that would contribute to quality according to teachers, industry, and students, but not allowed to incorporate into our training as they don't fully fit into the compliance framework (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Another thing I observed in my role is compliance requirement. I believe that if we are going to have innovative teaching practices that ensure quality, compliance should be a by-product of that practice. I do not think we need to spend a lot of time making our teaching complaint - now we spend a lot of time ensuring that we follow all processes and guidelines in a very controlled manner. We do not have time to be forward thinking or time to be innovative in this current environment (Faculty manager).*

*We need to satisfy every element of competence irrespective of its relevance to industry. Otherwise, they deem us not competent (Teacher).*

The study confirmed the findings that every change to the contractual or monitoring arrangements resulted in further strengthening of compliance culture and invention of another template. Analysis of head teacher and teacher comments during interviews suggests that there have not been any apparent improvements in quality of education or innovation in training and assessments within teaching units due to the strengthening of the compliance processes.

Compliance expectations are also placing massive demands on the time of teachers and head teachers. Teachers claim that they are not only expected to conduct valid assessments but also justify the assessment practices through elaborate documentation that are required by compliance units for satisfying the auditors.

*We are expected to do a lot of paperwork to explain our assessments to cover ASQA requirements (Teacher)*

*Teachers don't see that compliance is their job (Faculty manager).*

The institutes that were involved in this study have appointed compliance officers and entire teams to manage compliance across institutes at a great cost to the

institutes. Teachers believe that this has resulted in a larger proportion of revenue generated by teaching activities been siphoned off to pay for these units. The complex paper-based processes created by institutes to respond to compliance requirements have resulted in teachers spending excessive time on paperwork associated with compliance.

The teachers are of the view that if the time spent on compliance paperwork is redirected to activities that would support innovative teaching practices that would result in ‘real’ compliance rather than compliance based on paperwork.

*Government compliance and paperwork have, in fact, tripled my workload (Teacher).*

*In the last three months, we have gone through a re-registration audit with ASQA, a process audit, VET Fee Help audit, safety audit and ASQA audit for delivery of courses in China (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

Teachers and head teachers claimed that despite time spent on paperwork mapping delivery to training package elements, conducting mapping of assessments, standardising practices across delivery, validating assessments, completing risk matrices and conducting risk assessments, teachers have not seen any increased student outcomes attributed to compliance. Instead, some teachers reported that time spent on compliance is reducing the quality of student outcomes as delivery is compliant driven rather than pedagogically driven. In addition, a number of teaching staff claimed that the compliance practices are paper driven and not practice driven. They claimed that the paper driven compliance may not actually reflect the practice. Furthermore, excessive time spent on compliance is robbing the time available for preparation of learning material, resources and training activities.

*Compliance has taken up a huge part of teachers, co-ordinators, and head teachers’ time (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

Teaching units claimed that institutes have imposed a ‘zero-risk appetite’ attitude to compliance.

*I have very tight controls around compliance in the section, as the institute is very prescriptive on the requirements. They are not negotiable (Head teacher).*

This is restricting the pedagogic freedom of teachers to utilize the occupational expertise of teachers to produce quality and authentic student outcomes.

*Due to strict compliance requirements, teachers do not have the pedagogical freedom to change their focus to provide authentic learning skills to learners that will prepare them for a position in this industry. This is more useful than the tick and flick method of getting signed off for individual competencies as suggested by our compliance officers (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

In order to comply with the standards of ASQA and fulfil the obligations under the conditions of registrations of RTOs and obligations under the Victorian Training Guarantee and Smart and Skilled, TAFE institutes have introduced centrally controlled prescriptive compliance processes and templates for teaching units to follow to eliminate any risks of non-compliance. These processes outline very strict timelines and prescribe training structures that teaching sections must adhere to prior to approval given for conducting any training in identified products. There is ongoing monitoring of product delivery as well as other compliance aspects such as transitioning to new qualifications, completions and assessment practices.

*I am a very practical 'hands on' person and not a very theoretical person – this is the same with most of my students in the class. I know what they need to know and need to do to be qualified as a plumber – I am currently working as a plumber – this is not taken into account in compliance regulations. But the compliance requirements are very prescriptive and is not giving me this freedom – the paperwork I need to do is taking me away from teaching and preparing for my classes. The compliance officer is now prescribing what I should teach to plumbing students. Aren't I the best person to know what to teach plumbing apprentices? (Teacher).*

Teachers shared that institute based compliance officers who are purely concentrating on compliance expectations are mandating teaching section approach to training through compliance. They are shaping and influencing educational

processes in teaching sections. The following story from a teacher illustrates the effects of the compliance culture that is confronting TAFE teaching sections.

*In the past, as a tradesman, we have introduced practical projects that are very useful for students, but now we are questioned by auditors and are told that we are not compliant in delivery. When we try to do anything that is innovative in teaching, we feel like we got our hands tied: I have been accused of 'over teaching' and 'over-delivering': I sometimes make decisions based on my experience as a licensed plumber and understand the current requirements of the local industry. I am a licensed plumber working in the industry on a daily basis. I know what the standards industry is expecting and I know what is needed for the apprentices. Therefore, I try to put in extra efforts to teach the apprentices what their employers are going to ask them to do. Nevertheless, in the current environment, I do not have the freedom to make such decisions as compliance and budget restricts what I teach and how I teach (Teacher and current plumber)*

Faculty managers and teaching staff expressed that compliance is limiting the delivery of training to a compliance checklist and assessing competency-based on the achievement of an atomistic set of skills.

*Strict compliant guidelines do not give them the flexibility to think and be innovative in their teaching practice. It is going through the motions of filling-in templates and ticking the boxes to ensure that our auditors are satisfied. We do not develop teaching products the way we need to develop it best for our teaching area, industry, and our learners. They get into to a much 'boxed' controlled situations because of compliance. They are not seeing that they have any freedom or flexibility to exercise professional judgment in their delivery (Faculty manager).*

Evidence from this study suggests that, in order to manage and mitigate the burden of non-compliance, teaching units are opting to use safer delivery options by narrowing the elective offerings and choosing delivery strategies that are low-risk in terms of compliance.

*Now under ASQA, we have compliance and non-compliance. This has changed the mindset of teachers from continuous improvement and innovation to compliance (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

*I was providing real world authentic learning experiences for students through giving them the opportunity to work with real clients on real projects. However, it is difficult to ensure that all competency elements are covered through these projects with full confidence and therefore this mode of delivery may not pass a compliance audit. This compliance issue has now forced the teaching unit to move away from this delivery strategy and take up much safer options with a compliance point of view as too many non-compliances will affect the Institute in a bad way. I feel that students will lose out in this (Teacher).*

During a teacher meeting that was observed as part of the study, a discussion took place about an industry-based project. At the end of the meeting, the head teacher had abolished this project due to risks associated with compliance. Upon prompting for the rationale for cancelling the project, the head teacher explained:

*With the changes in the granularity of compliance checking, I believe it is impossible to run a compliant project. The reason I will not run projects in the future is compliance. I want to be able to walk into an audit without doubts. In this instance, I am giving compliance a higher priority over what I believe to be quality education (Head teacher after observation of meeting).*

During the study, a number of teachers shared experiences of compliance processes altering their training and assessment strategies that worked well for their occupation.

*Due to strict compliance requirements, teachers do not have the pedagogical freedom to change their focus to provide authentic learning skills to learners that will be very useful in the industry and prepare them for a position in this industry. This is more useful than the tick and flick method of getting signed off for individual competencies (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*At the moment, teachers are only concerned about if what they deliver and assess are adhering to compliance requirements and if it would stand an audit (Head teacher).*

This study exposed that a compliance-driven culture is devaluing teaching and

education and no longer trusting the professional judgment of teachers. A compliance view of quality is taking precedence over education. Teachers are concerned that compliance is taking top priority in TAFE institutes and pedagogical practices and teaching skills are being viewed as secondary.

*We are not encouraged to take any risks: compliance issues have nailed everything down: everything we do has to be vetted so heavily and there is no opportunity to take any risks. This stifles development and improvements (Teacher)*

*If I was an employer, I would be very reluctant today to put on an apprentice through TAFE. The emphasis is all on computers and paperwork and this is what we are directed to do – this is a very narrow-minded approach to training – no consideration for general industry and students – paperwork is individually set, assessed and interpreted based on compliance rather than what happens in the industry (Teacher)*

Many TAFE institutes have appointed ‘quality assurance staff’ that is driving the ‘compliance agenda’ for the institutes. They provide internal control checklists, numerous templates, and very rigid processes to support teaching sections to be compliant in the case of an audit. Trade sections have further compliance control with WorkCover and other licensing bodies.

*Managers impose certain restrictions on the decisions due to compliance, funding, and training package rules (Teacher).*

*There are so many influences both internal and external but our priority is student matters: we need to ensure that we teach and students get results above everything else. ... Other things such as compliance issues should be secondary (Teacher).*

## **Continuous Tightening of Compliance**

Participants of focus group interviews discussed that as the number of private providers grow and governments uncover various issues associated with the practices, further quality control measures are continually being introduced into the sector by compliance gatekeepers. One example of such measures is the changes to VET Fee Help regulations due to numerous evidence of some VET providers



inappropriately attracting students to maximize funds utilising inappropriate practices.

*Lots of the compliance requirements are a result of what happened with private providers (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Teaching unit participants from Victoria and NSW expressed frustration that as regulators introduce new compliance requirements, institutes are forced to respond to these requirements immediately. A number of teaching unit interviews confirmed that these changes are frequent and sudden. The teachers claimed that compliance was the primary driver in determining the training assessment strategies. Pedagogy is taking a secondary place amidst much more urgent and controlled compliance expectations.

*We have tried to give templates to staff to ensure that there is a standard way of doing things. But these templates keep changing as our environment is forcing things to change quickly - so the templates keep changing and teachers are spending a lot of time constantly updating to suit the new guidelines. We have a quality improvement unit and they ensure that everything is compliant. We have a control department who makes sure that we are compliant. We also have corporate Improvement units (Service Departments) that bring control in the teaching sections. We regularly outline expectations to staff through meetings (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

## **Risk Cultures**

Amidst mounting compliance expectations, it was apparent during the study that head teachers are taking a risk-averse approach to educational leadership. The head teachers and teachers also shared that institute “zero risk appetite” responses to compliance requirements and associated complex processes have created a dominating culture of compliance. This compliance culture has plagued all operations of teaching units that were involved in the study.

Teaching staff who participated in the study asserted that faculty managers and compliance officers are creating a culture that is driven by fear. Teaching unit participants of this study claimed that an audit culture has infiltrated the TAFE institutes and is influencing the behaviours of faculty managers and compliance staff

and many non-negotiable demands are being placed on teaching units. This is inhibiting pedagogic innovation, minimizing the occupational expertise of teachers and reducing their influence to following a checklist created to meet compliance expectations.

*I fear that some of the managers are primarily driven by compliance and losing sight of what we are here to do as VET educators (Teacher).*

*I believe the assessments from twenty years ago were just as compliant as they are today, but we have gone from one extreme to another. We have added so many extra stuff into the daily lives of teachers and increased their administrative burden that is hindering innovation (Faculty manager).*

Analysis of study data points to teaching staff being cynical of the compliance processes within TAFE institutes. A number of head teachers and teachers commented that compliance is not at the forefront of their day to day operations and they only attend to compliance during the reporting and scoping of qualifications for obtaining authorization to deliver the qualification. Evidence gathered also suggest that TAFE currently has an organizational mindset that is total ‘risk averse’. This means that TAFE leaders expect that all systems, behaviours and risk functions to be fully compliant. These findings suggest that TAFE institutes have fully moved into a ‘reactive risk culture’.

*In the past, we have taken reasonable risks with compliance, however, in the current environment that is not encouraged. For example, the industry projects in some cases have produced excellent results, but other times haven't quite achieved what they should. We cannot take that risk anymore (Teacher).*

The study findings establish that though there were previous commitments from TAFE sectors to move to more mature risk cultures, this has not been materialised at the time of the study. Instead, teaching units claim that TAFE, in fact, has moved further into stricter cultures of compliance within the last decade.

## Learner Experience

According to teachers, the audit requirements are negatively influencing the teaching experience in classrooms.

*Private providers satisfy audit requirements but don't give much to students. I am committed to teaching, but audit requirements are limiting this (Teacher).*

Many teachers believed that if the money that is invested in compliance is directed to teaching and learning within teaching sections, greater student outcomes with increased quality could be achieved within teaching units.

*In line with government's expectations, they are wasting millions of dollars trying to comply with the requirements for validation and paperwork (Teacher).*

Compliance regulations and resulting policies and processes in TAFE institutes are restricting the ability of teachers to be responsive within classrooms. Head teachers also claimed that taking educational leadership decisions in response to changing student needs is impossible under the current compliance-driven culture. This has resulted in a poor and rigid learning experience for students.

*Pedagogic Innovation is difficult with very prescriptive compliance guidelines. Most industry opportunities come up with a lot of short notice and teachers can't respond to them effectively and take advantage of these due to compliance risks. Teachers now feel pigeonholed into what compliance dictates (Head teacher and teacher at semi-structured interview).*

*I feel that they are pressuring teachers to decrease their commitment to students and instead forcing us to do the minimum to achieve compliance. Most teachers are not committed to their students and student outcomes anymore (Teachers).*

Teachers expressed that there is a community expectation that TAFE offers broad choices in qualifications to students to meet local industry and individual student needs. However, TAFE teaching units are deliberately forced to scale back on

flexibility and educationally sound delivery strategies and replace them with compliance-safe methodologies to ensure full confidence in achieving compliance standards. Head teachers and teachers stated that reduced flexibility in packaging and delivering qualifications do not serve all areas of the industry well.

*They need to stop limiting our training down to crossing T's and dotting I's and compliance. It should be engaging and interesting to the students: think about how a young man operates and make sure you deliver to that: then they will be the greatest advocates for TAFE training and the industry: students then will come out feeling good that they have achieved something. Our training now feels a bit stingy and just-enough for compliance (Teacher).*

## **5.4 Teaching Unit Response to VET Reforms**

According to teaching staff, faculty managers are driving transformation within teaching units through 'top-down' approaches to funding constraints, strict compliance guidelines, prescriptive administrative procedures and clearly outlined business rules.

The teachers claim that this could not be a long-term sustainable solution as the 'goodwill' of teachers will soon run out. They expressed negative views of the transformations enforced by TAFE leadership. The teachers claimed that the imposed changes do not align with the established and proven 'ways of doing things' within their teaching unit.

It was evident that teachers are failing to see the bigger picture and the implications of wider VET context for TAFE and rather perceive that they are making 'good will' decisions to support management imperatives. The lack of trust in leadership, stress, anger, and anxiety on top-down directions as well as the absence of commitment to management expectations to effectively respond to the demands of external environments was obvious in teaching units. It was apparent that management directives and approaches have failed to establish supportive cultures that are required within teaching units to respond effectively to the expectations of VET reforms.

Evidence from the study indicates that many teaching units have elected to ‘just do’ enough to satisfy the expectations of management rather than actively working towards or against the directions. Any reduction in delivery hours is also seen by teachers as a threat to their job. This is because the number of teaching hours in the unit is a direct determinant of the number of teachers and head teacher positions available in the teaching section.

*You cannot be the best teacher you can when I am not even sure if I have a job within the next few months (Teacher).*

Two teaching units that had a higher proportion of casual staff claimed that the casualization culture is also posing challenges in achieving innovation in teaching units.

*It is impossible to achieve innovation that is required with sessional staff who come in, do their class and go home - they have not embraced the values & ethos of the teaching section and most of them are working for private RTOs as well as TAFE (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

During the discussions, a number of teachers linked any suggestions for alternative delivery practices with merely a mechanism to cut costs. They expressed that the culture that TAFE managers expect is not the culture that should be promoted in teaching units to achieve educational quality.

*Is 21<sup>st</sup>-century teaching methods suggested by the Institute (TAFE) Managers give you better outcomes or are they designed for budget reductions? They are trying to sell it to the teachers as if this is good for the students, but in reality, it is not good for the students. They say we need to cut the hours back otherwise we are not going to be here – this is a fear mechanism (Teacher).*

During the study, a teacher claimed that strong established sub-cultures of the teaching units are now moving into countercultures to work against any ‘top-down’ directions imposed by management. It is a challenge for TAFE management to deal with these ‘countercultures’ as well as promote strong teaching unit leadership to

transform the teaching units with the cultural elements that are needed to meet performance expectations of VET reforms.

## **Impact of VET reforms on educational quality**

Teaching staff that participated in the study emphasised that the core mission of TAFE is to provide quality training. According to the participants of this study, there are a number of factors that are now threatening the quality provision of training within teaching units. Many teachers who participated in the study stated that all change-focused conversations within the teaching units have commenced with funding restrictions rather than quality imperatives or student outcomes.

*Victoria and NSW are reducing the budget and reducing delivery hours – this is hurting the quality of apprentices that we are producing. I blame the government for this. I think there has to be more funding to deliver a quality product (Teacher at semi-structured interview).*

A teacher articulated the problems that are associated with TAFE response to VET reforms stating:

*I feel that now TAFE is trying to do everything to compete with other RTOs and trying to fit their model. I have had experience with some of the RTOs, they assess either on computers or on-the-job – how can you assess trade skills on computers? On the job, they do not get widespread access to all practice areas as they normally specialise in one area. Here at TAFE, we give them a broad-spectrum experience: a bit of everything from landing and setting out of the site to finishing the building and handing over. When RTOs conduct on-site assessments, they do not cover everything but they somehow seem to tick off everything. How can they expect them to end up being good all round tradesman if they are assessed for only one area that is relevant to the current employer? TAFE is now gradually moving out this way. We have different teachers in TAFE and students get experience and expertise from their boss and three to four different teachers. Students can learn from all these people. I find that when it is narrowed down to just comply with paperwork they are ‘dumbing them down’ the trade training. This does not produce good trades people. ... Most of our teachers feel this way. They are breeding out commitment to the students from the teachers (Teacher).*

Marketisation and demand-driven funding have assigned more power to customers rather than educational institutions.

*Students want best price, convenience, and flexibility. Most students don't pay much attention to quality. If I can get a certificate in six weeks with a private provider why should I spend six months with you is a question that one student asked me (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

TAFE has a long-standing expectation from government, community, employers and its own workforce to be the benchmark for quality within the Australian VET sector (TAFE NSW, 2013). Under a marketised environment where funding is linked to the customer rather than the provider, it is a challenge for TAFE to be the 'quality benchmark' as teaching units may be obligated to treat customer expectations as the priority. Head teachers also commented that marketisation gives less emphasis on developing individuals in its entirety for occupations.

High-cost structures, community service obligations, support structures for disadvantaged groups and other obligations of being a public VET provider are threatening the competitive advantage of TAFE institutes.

*We can't only rely on historic standing and general perception of TAFE as the benchmark for quality training (Head teacher at focus group interview)*

*I think we are forgetting the customers and students: quality training definitely has had an impact, I have the feeling that hierarchy and government keep forgetting about our clientele. At the end of the day, TAFE should be breaking even – it is a public institution. (Head teachers at focus group interview).*

*I have quality teachers and they provide quality in delivering programs. Some of my teachers are extremely good teachers, however, they achieve this quality at the expense of budget overruns. Due to funding issues, the time available for teachers to deliver to students is now limited and sometimes this inhibits quality educational outcomes (Head teacher).*

Evidence from the study confirmed that the quality of VET outcomes will have long term implications when governments expect to increase the outcomes of training with reduced VET funding.

*Training is underfunded now. The training budget we get is just enough to fulfil compliant obligations of training (Teacher).*

*TAFE is trying to put the best students with quality out there with the least amount of money (Teacher).*

*We are breaking down our educational planning to try and meet the needs of the budget. We are expecting students to do some self-study in our trades courses – this is something new. In a few years, we will see what this is doing to the quality of the workers we produce (Head teacher).*

### *Pedagogic Innovation*

During the study, the theme ‘innovation’ emerged in all discussions with faculty managers and head teachers. This theme, on the other hand, was sparingly used by many teachers unless prompted by the researcher. Even when prompted by the researcher, the innovation in teaching was referred to as online delivery by most trade teachers. The discussions and thematic analysis suggested that pedagogical innovation was not at the forefront of the teaching unit response to reforms. Teaching units have responded to reforms in three main ways: reducing the direct teaching hours allocated for delivering training, increasing the class sizes and linking pedagogical practices to compliance requirements.

*We have rigid cost structures and volume of delivery. Funding that we get is not adequate to deliver in TAFE institutes for most qualifications (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Expectation to produce the best quality with the least amount of resources is unreasonable and unachievable. The impact of uncapped university places and poor student outcomes at the school level has also lowered the quality of students that are attracted especially to trade areas (Teacher).*

When asked if head teachers and teachers saw VET reforms as an opportunity to innovate, all teaching staff responded stating that the current teaching unit environments are not conducive to innovation and the immediate need is to curtail the costs of delivery.



Participants reported that every increase measure of quality control is further pushing TAFE institutes into a compliance-driven culture that are inhibiting any pedagogic innovation. Victorian teaching units discussed many examples of how teaching units were forced to alter proven quality delivery practices due to risks with compliance.

*We have completely changed the delivery of our Diploma to meet the compliance requirements of the VET Fee Help. These changes are not pedagogically driven. (Head teacher).*

This study revealed that teaching units are suffocating under the control culture created by compliance and is inhibiting pedagogical innovation. Strict enforcement of compliant practices prevalent in TAFE institutes is limiting any pedagogic innovation within teaching units.

*Innovation at the teacher level is very difficult when training packages and compliance guidelines are so prescriptive. The teachers that are innovative are leaving because the current compliance processes are inhibiting innovation - great teachers are looking for other options (Faculty manager).*

The study found that there is very little room for pedagogic innovation within this culture of control. The faculty managers also expressed that a number of current practices are hindering innovation in teaching units.

*ASQA, HESG, TEQSA all bring controls to faculty and teaching sections. Now under ASQA, we have compliance and non-compliance. This has changed the mindset of teachers from continuous improvement and innovation to compliance. Previously, the Institute had money to provide professional development to learn the parameters – now this is not happening with enormous changes to funding mechanisms (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

*Head teachers don't have a great deal of time and ability to be innovative and come up with new ways of doing things while dealing with the public, dealing with compliance and carrying out general day to day duties that are expected of them (Faculty manager).*

*Compliance requirements, the volume of learning and level of prescription of what staff can deliver and funding levels is hindering innovations (Faculty manager).*

Head teachers and teachers expressed that current reactive culture in TAFE teaching units inhibits innovation as the command and control culture enforced by TAFE institutes is not conducive to taking risks. They claimed that there is no room for failure in a ‘zero risk appetite’ environment that is prevailing in TAFE institutes.

*How could you strive for innovation and take risks when you are trying hard to maintain your job, teach students and make sure you get student outcomes (Head teacher)?*

*The professional judgment, professional knowledge, and pedagogy of a true teacher is now totally under-valued (Head teacher at focus group interview)*

*Managers impose certain restrictions on our educational decisions due to compliance, funding, and training package rules (Teacher).*

A number of head teachers and faculty managers expressed that it is a core mission of VET to build innovative capabilities of the learners. However, the conditions that are currently in TAFE teaching units are not conducive to creating or sustaining pedagogic innovation in teaching practices. Faculty managers who participated in the study supported the need for innovative pedagogical practices but expressed their inability to actively create these conditions due to the immediate demands of the current environment and a range of external pressures. The study noted that there are pockets of innovation happening in various teaching units around TAFE institutes despite the negative conditions.

A faculty manager reported on a teaching section that had transformed their delivery strategy to provide personalised learning options for all apprentices. This was audited by State training services twice and each audit had come through without any non-compliances. The faculty manager shared his observation that this approach has sharpened the teaching unit’s ability to be compliant due to the personalised approach that this program takes in delivering training. This example was presented by the faculty manager to support the idea that innovation and compliance are not mutually exclusive. Despite this, there was the general agreement amongst participants that strict compliance will not drive innovation.

Teaching units that were involved in this study claimed that reduced budgets, prescriptive training package guidelines, strict compliance processes, systems issues, administration processes and increased documentation requirements are inhibiting pedagogic innovation within teaching units.

*Innovation at the teacher level is very difficult when training packages and compliance guidelines are so prescriptive (Faculty manager).*

*Innovation levels are probably down in our Institute because of the system issues that we have been experiencing and the massive increase in admin tasks that are assigned to teachers (Faculty manager).*

*We need funding to bring innovation. Continuing cut down on resources is not going to promote innovation (Head teacher).*

*In the current busy environment, head teachers don't have a great deal of time and ability to be innovative and come up with new ways of doing things while dealing with the public, dealing with compliance and carrying out general day to day duties that are expected of them (Faculty manager)*

Teachers stressed that college administrators and program managers should support teaching sections to perform their core function of teaching rather than placing more demands on them that are not necessarily related to teaching. They claimed that this will release teachers to be reflective practitioners and transform teaching practices with innovation.

*A lot of systems are requiring a lot of administration by teachers. This is taking us away from resource development, streamlining resources and others. But currently, we are creating resources and other documents needed for compliance. A lot of sections are using twenty years old resources, and have never updated them because they are busy doing other things (Teacher).*

Teachers stated that they primarily rely on head teachers to support and guide any innovative practices. 95% of teachers interviewed consider head teachers to be the most supportive leader within their teaching environment.

*I am a very progressive teacher. I want to keep my eyes on the future technologies and bring innovation into the teaching section. I get a lot of encouragement from my head teacher (Teacher).*

A faculty manager claimed that TAFE being the largest network of RTOs in Australia, due to its size and the number of teaching units within each institute is in a great position to network and learn from innovations in other teaching units:

*I think TAFE provides great opportunities for networking and the opportunity to find out what the innovative practice looks like. TAFE teachers have access to a variety of expertise ranging from business to engineering, including IT etc. (Faculty manager).*

### **Innovative ‘Delivery’ Strategies**

The head teachers from all six teaching units discussed that currently, the primary method of bringing efficiencies into their ‘delivery’ has been through the reduction of face-to-face delivery hours. According to them, this was the most straightforward and quickest way to achieve efficiencies. In the majority of the cases, there have not been any adjustments to the training and assessment strategies to compensate for the reduction in teaching hours.

The expectation of faculty management and head teachers was that teachers would adjust their training practices through innovative strategies to accommodate the new delivery hours. However, the majority of teachers who participated in the study confirmed that they continued to deliver the same amount of information, in the same format, using the same learning resources to larger class sizes in fewer hours. The major change that was implemented by teachers was the pace at which they covered the material as they needed to get through the material in a shorter time frame. Head teachers were aware of the lack of pedagogical focus when achieving the changes required, but stated that this was the quickest and easiest method to achieve the required cost savings.

*You can't get quality through minimalistic training. (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Surely at some stage, we need to say we are here to educate people, so governments should work out some way of funding education rather than expecting teachers to police these harsh rules with regard to funding (Teacher).*

*We pretty much stick to the compliance guidelines when we are delivering. If something is not in the critical aspects of the unit, then we normally avoid spending a lot of time off on them – we don't think it is worth it (Teacher).*

During discussions, teaching staff admitted that the reduction of delivery hours has inevitably reduced the quality of training and quality of student outcomes. The teachers attributed this reduction in quality to a negative outcome of VET reforms.

*Students suffer and I can't be the best teacher because there is only so much you can do in the time that is allocated to us (Teacher).*

Performance expectations of VET reforms go beyond cost efficiencies to improved student outcomes, customer responsiveness, flexibility, completion rates, better student experiences, and producing workers that are industry-ready (Council of Australian Governments, 2012). The study highlighted that while head teachers are aware of these expectations, the focus was on cost efficiencies while the secondary focus was given to other expectations.

*Teachers are not getting sufficient direction about pedagogical issues as managers are under so much pressure and their workload has substantially increased. Managers are under enormous pressure to reduce costs and they are now looking after much bigger departments. They do not have time to concentrate on teachers and teaching issues (Teacher).*

Apart from reducing delivery hours with minimal attention to pedagogy, integrating units for delivery and assessment and limited utilisation of workplace assessments, teaching staff did not discuss any other innovative delivery practices within teaching units. The examples quoted by participants as innovative delivery practices were atomistic and had not totally transformed the teaching units to completely fit the expectations of the current environment.

*I don't think a lot of things have been done to facilitate that change – change has been done to us, but very little has been done to facilitate that change (Teacher).*

## **Change Management**

The teachers who participated in this study expressed that reforms are proving to radically alter their role as teachers. In addition to VET reforms, teaching roles are impacted by changes in learner expectations, technological advancements, funding regimes, changes in school and changes in university educational landscape.

The participants of this study claimed that the VET reform agenda has not fully recognised the contribution of TAFE teachers to the economic development of Australia. At the same time, faculty managers and some head teachers articulated that both the government and the TAFE sector have failed to build the capacity of the TAFE teaching workforce to appropriately respond to the expectations of VET reforms.

This research found that the capability gaps of teachers in contemporary pedagogical practices, unpacking training packages, CBT, work-based delivery, compliance processes, technology integrated training, educational systems and various other related factors impede the ability of teachers to embrace VET reforms.

NSW Teachers reported that the changes expected of them were immediate and were not well planned.

*This is a major change and smart and skilled pricing continues to have a massive impact on my teaching section. We are still grappling with it (Head teacher):*

A number of head teachers from NSW shared that their teaching units would have been better prepared for the latest reforms if the required cultural changes were imparted through organisational changes prior to the reforms being introduced. A head teacher claimed that teaching sections would have been in a better position to take risks and try innovative practices under the former supply based model prior to the introduction of the demand-based reforms.

*We are chasing our tail a little bit now because I believe when the teachers had conducive conditions for innovation they didn't see the need to innovate. Now that we are in an era where innovation is imperative, they don't have time for innovation (Faculty manager).*

*At the moment managers have too many restrictions - they need to be given the freedom to take some risks. Managers need to be relieved of some admin paperwork. Work that they are producing is immediate due to regulatory and compliance requirements. TAFE is currently not addressing these issues in just the same way as a private organisation (Teacher).*

During the discussions, a few teachers admitted that despite reforms and changes introduced by TAFE institutes, they continue to deliver training with minimum deviation from previous pedagogical models and practices. The only variation in pedagogical practices has been in the reduction of effective teaching hours available to deliver the same content.

*Some teaching sections are a law unto themselves. Some of the trade sections are not open to working with the organisation and conditions are non-negotiable. The enrolment patterns are very rigid and not open to change at all (Head teacher).*

A number of changes have impacted on teaching sections simultaneously in the recent past and head teachers are struggling to manage all these changes at the same time. Teachers expressed that these changes that were imposed on them were really a change for students rather than teachers. They claimed that students are now expected to absorb the same material in much shorter time.

*We haven't really changed what we did for the last ten years in our courses: it may feel like we have but we really haven't (Two head teachers at semi-structured interview).*

VET reforms are forcing teachers to move beyond the classroom and into communities, industries, and virtual environments. This is a shift in pedagogical practices of many teachers who have primarily delivered training in a traditional classroom environment. Study findings established that five out of the six teaching units had not made any attempts to extend their classroom into any other

environment. One teaching unit that had extended some of their practices to the workplace but was forced to abandon this model due to risks with compliance.

### *De-professionalization of Teachers*

A number of participants expressed that if TAFE institutes had less emphasis on compliance and regulations and instead empower teachers as professionals, they will be able to trust the professionalism of teachers to make compliance decisions in an innovative manner. It is challenging for teachers to produce pedagogically sound training and assessment strategies that are student centred while meeting the requirements of the training package and occupations as well as achieve all compliance expectations.

Analysis of teacher interviews reveals increased feelings of disempowerment by teachers. Compliance was portrayed as the biggest contribution to this disempowerment. At the same time, teachers also pointed to the casualization of teaching workforce and threats to job security due to the continuing reduction in delivery hours as contributing to this. Teachers claimed that continuing constraints created by compliance expectations are de-professionalising the teaching professional are minimizing the importance of their occupational expertise.

*Compliance being at the forefront of everything that I am teaching is stopping me from being the best teacher I can (Teacher).*

*Compliance doesn't make me a good teacher. I am trying to teach a plumber to be a plumber – where I have huge experience in the trade. I know the work that students need to be able to do to be a plumber. Now that is taken out of my hands and limited teaching to ticking boxes – I quite often tick boxes and I say that according to the paperwork he is a competent plumber, but when looking at the work he performs I can't say that he is a plumber. They have taken away our ability to judge the students – our professional expertise is not recognised and someone who doesn't have any idea of what we do, tries to assess whether we are compliant by the boxes we tick (Teacher).*

This study highlighted that TAFE teachers continue to be committed to their students and student outcomes. Reforms are widening the tension between their loyalty to



TAFE and loyalty to students as survival of TAFE as an RTO is essential for teachers to service students. Adhering to expectations of compliance and achieving the performance expectations of VET reforms are seen by teachers as a necessary way to protect TAFE and preserve its market share.

*Now the way you deliver your course is informed by compliance not by the best educational outcomes or learner needs: the professional judgement, professional knowledge, and pedagogy of a true teacher is now totally undervalued - too bad you want to do that, but you need to adhere to strict training plans, very prescriptive training package rules, delivery outlines and very strict guidelines. Professional teachers with a lot of experience are now feeling powerless and under-valued. For example, design teachers get many opportunities to get students involved in special exhibitions to expose them to many authentic learning opportunities: due to strict compliance requirements teachers do not have the pedagogical freedom to change their focus to provide authentic learning skills to learners that will be very useful in the industry and prepare them for a position in this industry. This is more useful than the tick and flick method of getting signed off for individual competencies (Faculty managers and Head teachers at focus group interview).*

### **Trust in the Professionalism**

The study provided evidence that teachers are of the view that shared sense of purpose established within the teaching units is currently being eroded by the strict compliance, regulatory, reporting and system expectations that have plagued the teaching section. The processes and procedures implemented by TAFE institutes in response to reform expectations demonstrate a lack of trust in the professionalism of teachers. The teachers' view was that teaching sections should focus on teaching and emphasise less on regulation and compliance. Teachers feel disempowered in the current environment as their pedagogical insights and occupational expertise is pushed to a side to give prominence to implementing strict compliance, regulations and reporting requirements. Teaching sections are reporting that every change in regulations and VET policies, results in another layer of compliance being introduced to TAFE teaching units demonstrating a total lack of trust in the professionalism of teachers.

*Compliance has definitely hindered innovation. What used to be able to be done in one or two-paged document has now gone to a 20 – 25 page document for the sake of compliance (Teacher).*

The teachers expressed that the professionalism of the teaching staff is being destroyed and ignored by compliance officers and TAFE leaders. The faculty managers and head teachers articulated that the professionalism of teachers and innovative capacity is compromised when teachers enter into a reactive culture that merely responds to management imperatives.

### **Reflective Practice**

It is the expectation of faculty management that teachers are reflective practitioners who regularly review, improve and adapt their teaching practices to ensure relevance to changing environments.

Amidst cuts to delivery hours and cuts to teaching conditions as claimed by some teachers, teaching units are continually trying to keep up with responding to changes and urgent expectations from various stakeholders. When asked about reflective practice, teaching staff expressed that in an environment where teaching units are constantly reacting to intense, urgent demands that are primarily administrative and compliance-driven, there is no room for reflective practice.

### **Ageing Workforce and Increased Casualization**

Three teaching units that participated in the study have experienced a number of senior teachers with decades of pedagogical experience exiting the organization and being replaced by casual teachers with minimum trainer qualifications. The faculty managers, head teachers and teachers in all teaching units were concerned with the ageing workforce and knowledge management of the older workers.

*We have an aging workforce who had the great pedagogical expertise and now we will be replacing them with teachers who are coming only with a certificate IV in TAE – not the best qualification to develop pedagogical expertise (Faculty manager at focus group interview).*

At the same time, a number of head teachers supported the view of the following head teacher who stated that getting the ‘buy-in’ from ageing full-time teachers to transition teaching section culture into what is required in the current marketised environment has been challenging. They reported that long-established patterns of behaviours were difficult to change, especially in teaching units with long-serving teachers.

*One of my biggest challenges is the ageing workforce with a large number of staff lacking knowledge and skills required in the current environment (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Three of the teaching units involved in this study had primarily a casual and seasonal teaching workforce that has presented added challenges to these head teachers.

Teaching units are finding it difficult to get some casual teachers fully engage in any Institute activities and to get the time commitment required outside classroom activities. Scheduling staff meetings have been challenging when there are a high number of casual teachers. Institute-wide professional development activities are not easily accessible to casual teachers and some are not interested in attending training as they are unwilling or unable to make the time commitment. In some instances, casual teachers are not interested in participating in anything that is not directly associated with their teaching practice.

*Casuals share hours across a number of locations and their availability is limited to be involved in wider teaching unit activities. Many casuals leave work after their teaching and they are not available to work as a team within the teaching unit (Teacher).*

*I have been told many times that my job is very temporary as a part-time casual teacher, but I am still working. As a part-time teacher my job constantly feels like it is going to be very temporary (Teacher).*

Head teachers expressed that the casualization of the teaching workforce has further restricted the freedom of teachers to make professional judgments and participate in critical discussions in the workplace.

*It is impossible to achieve innovation that is required in the current environment with sessional staff who come in, do their class and go home - they have not embraced the values & ethos of the teaching section and most of them are working for private RTOs as well as TAFE (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

Casual teachers who participated in this study also expressed that the ‘lack of job security’ is driving them to be cautious about how they contribute to the wider teaching section discussions on education and other issues.

*Part-time casual teachers say that if you annoy someone you may not be there next term. The teachers who rock the boat are not very popular even if you are full-time – so as a part-timer we wouldn’t want to rock the boat and become unpopular – because this may impact on our work next term. We don’t want to risk our position as part-time teachers (Teacher).*

### **Minimum Qualification for VET Teacher**

Until the early 2000s, there was the public investment for TAFE teachers to obtain a University level pedagogical qualification that equipped new teachers who were experts from industry with an appropriate pedagogical foundation. This requirement is now downgraded to a Certificate IV level qualification preparing them as an industry trainer that is not focused on pedagogic expertise.

*TAE has nothing to do with pedagogy: we have an aging workforce who has a great pedagogical expertise and now we will be replacing them with teachers who are coming only with a Certificate IV in workplace assessment (TAE) – not the best qualification to develop pedagogical expertise (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Great teaching techniques are not at the centre of TAE. TAE does not have a focus on pedagogy. But the regulations say that what is needed to be a great teacher is TAE. We are replacing great teachers who have great pedagogical expertise with industry personnel who may only have the TAE qualification. These industry professionals haven't got any idea of pedagogy. TAE qualification that is offered by the private providers are cheap and you can get it quickly (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*The quality of our teaching staff is important to ensure compliance and quality student outcomes. The quality of teachers with varied skills and capabilities needs to be enhanced to support the delivery – as a head teacher, we try to match the teachers to deliver based on their strengths, experience, and qualifications (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

One head teacher shared with the focus group that TAFE lost quality in teaching when they stopped providing high-level VET qualifications for teachers. He expressed that the training they received through University assisted them to be reflective practitioners and continuously improve delivery and be flexible to the needs of students. The head teachers stressed that TAFE will need to invest in some form of incentives for teachers to pursue higher level VET qualifications rather than accepting the minimum workplace assessor qualification mandated by compliance.

### **Succession Planning**

With an ageing workforce and increasing casualization, head teachers are seeing the need for TAFE to take active measures to ensure pedagogic expertise of its teaching workforce is continued forward to the new generations. Faculty managers and head teachers who participated in this study warned of the possible repercussions of changes to minimum qualification for VET teachers in the current environment. TAFE will be replacing teachers with great pedagogic expertise with young teachers without any pedagogical training and this could slowly diminish the competitive advantage of TAFE over private providers. The status that TAFE enjoys as an educational institution also will begin to diminish.

All focus group interviews of this study raised the need for TAFE to adequately invest in building the capacity of new teachers with appropriate VET pedagogical expertise that is critical for innovation. Failure to do so will threaten the capability of the TAFE workforce to train students appropriately with the innovative skills that are needed for the Australian workplace.

*I find that better teachers are now getting out. Devaluing of teachers and the lack of security in their employment is driving them away from TAFE even though they are very passionate teachers. Our quality heavily relied on these experienced trainers (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

## *Quality of Students*

The head teachers and teachers claimed that the obvious capability gaps in literacy, numeracy, and language are an added barrier for quality provision of training.

*A lot of our students struggle with basic literacy and numeracy. Sometimes you can't rush them through.... Cutting the hours of the course doesn't help students that much – if you look at the whole picture it is designed to save money (Teacher).*

*I find that the quality and capability of students coming to TAFE have dropped in the recent years - they are coming with major literacy and numeracy issues (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*If students fail assessments, we try to support our students. .... We try to detect language, literacy and numeracy issues and try to help students, regardless of our funding levels – we want to see them be successful in their career. In the current environment, we don't get much room to move in these directions (Head teacher).*

Data gathered at focus group meetings and semi-structured interviews suggest that in an environment where teaching hours are limited due to funding restrictions, head teachers are forced to cut down on teaching hours devoted to developing the foundation skills of students. One head teacher demanded that if they are to operate within strict budgets, then the issue of foundational skills needs to be rectified by schools prior to students entering TAFE.

*One of our groups of students is struggling with calculating basic area. They teach higher level maths and missing out on teaching students the basic maths that they need if they want to work for the building industry. Now the onus has come to VET to provide courses and fix the problems (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

The head teachers also claimed that 'uncapped' university placement is hurting TAFE. Students who would have chosen TAFE in the past are now being attracted to Universities. This generally leaves students with the low capability to attend TAFE.

*The experience at the teaching section is that the literacy, numeracy and capability level of students that TAFE currently attracts is well below the standard required (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

## *Addressing Capability Gaps*

*TAFE should receive funding to re-educate its workforce to enable them to provide industry specific quality education to the students (Head teacher).*

This study highlighted a number of capability gaps that are preventing TAFE teachers from fully embracing the changes. The faculty managers suggested that TAFE institutes must establish targeted modern structured capability development plans for all teaching staff within TAFE institutes. In addition, they should be linked to teacher's annual reviews and KPIs must be established to monitor the progress of teachers with regard to capability development. The faculty managers also called for teaching units to integrate capability development opportunities into work-based projects.

*Compliance and the 'units of competence' focus primarily on hard skills and these skills are easier to measure (it is my opinion that ASQA calls this 'quality'); to prove that a learner has achieved the minimum requirements to complete the unit, but it is the soft skills that ultimately separate one student from another and helps them engage with employers (Head Teacher).*

*As this organisation does not have KPIs for teachers, some things are not just done and there is no accountability (Teacher at semi-structured interview).*

*Communicating performance expectations is one thing, but the people on the ground need to execute and work towards these goals. Currently, in teaching units, goal setting is the easiest part, but the delivery of the goals do not have clear timelines. There need to be key performance indicators (KPI) given to teachers so there are accountability and work according to more defined quality standards. The KPIs should be extended to teachers, head teachers, and executives. This is the only way that missing knowledge, shortfalls and performance gaps can be identified (Teacher).*

One faculty manager stated that teaching units need to have the capability built from within themselves to understand institute strategies and formulate business plans that appropriately respond to the performance expectations.

The faculty managers highlighted the need to re-focus on developing the capability of teachers to deliver training effectively in a marketised environment.

Data collected during the study highlighted substantial capability gaps in the ability of head teachers to lead a teaching team in a fully demand-driven competitive VET environment.

The competing expectations of various stakeholders as outlined above require head teachers to be much more adaptive in their role within this ever changing VET environment. This adaptive capability of head teachers will increase their potential to lead an adaptive culture within the teaching unit.

In an environment where head teachers are facing unmanageable workloads and trying to deal with competing priorities, faculty managers claimed that head teachers must distribute this leadership to other teachers. According to faculty managers, the current model where all leadership functions are assumed by the head teacher cannot be sustained into the future.

Head teachers either do not believe or are not confident in the ability of teachers to perform any leadership roles.

## **Suggested strategies for improving quality**

### **Enforce Entry Requirements**

During a semi-structured interview, one head teacher called for more strictly enforced entry criteria for qualifications to ensure that only capable students are admitted into qualifications and others should be directed to lower level qualifications. The faculty managers did not demonstrate any support for this as they are cautious about limiting the customers in a competitive environment.

From January 2016, latest reforms introduced by the government for VET Fee Help scheme included an amendment to establish minimum pre-requisite and prior education qualification, including demonstrated literacy and numeracy requirements.



While VET Fee Help funding is not relevant to trade courses, teachers felt that this was a change in the right direction.

The head teachers are of the view that their training and assessment practices should not be watered down to absorb students who are not capable of performing at that level, especially when the effective dollar per student contact hour has been substantially decreased. They claimed that it is a tension between entry requirements, quality, funding, completion rates and customer satisfaction.

### **Limit the Products to Market**

Another head teacher also argued that TAFE should be more selective in what and who they offer to and let other RTOs deal with less attractive or less profitable areas. The faculty managers expressed concern that as the public VET provider TAFE needs to not only be business focused but also balance the expectations of various stakeholders, including the provision of training for a breadth of Australian industries, training in thin-markets, rural areas and comply with its community service obligations.

### **Integrating Literacy and Numeracy Skill Development with Applied Learning**

During the study, faculty managers stated that if TAFE is to maintain its market share, it will need to find solutions for tackling literacy and numeracy issues from within itself as any efforts to curtail its training provision to only selected cohorts will eventually lead to the diminishing of the TAFE market.

Faculty managers claimed that literacy and numeracy skill development should be integrated to occupation specific applied learning contexts within teaching units as this will overcome the literacy and numeracy barriers. Teaching staff did not welcome this idea during the study as they claimed that funding cuts are restricting their ability to make major changes to delivery practices.

The head teachers outlined various challenges with integrating applied learning as suggested previously. Evidence from this study indicates that there are substantial capability gaps in existing teaching workforce to implement contemporary

pedagogical practices. Head teachers are also finding that the ageing teaching staff, who are accustomed to ‘locked-in’ traditional delivery styles, are not easily transitioning to new training models.

*We are very set in our ways: a lot of staff are older and not many young staff is coming through. Taking risks aren't an option for certain people: no ability to take risks or willingness. Another issue is the compliance side as well. I am relatively new to the teaching unit, but most teachers would say “this is the way we have done it for the last 20 years”. I worked with the foundation skills, teaching section for the SEE program and I enjoyed working with the head teacher who incorporated some innovative delivery strategies (Teacher).*

An increasingly casualised workforce that is only available to teach at specific times delivering specified units is resulting in teachers that are not interested in investing additional times to work with other colleagues to provide opportunities for applied learning.

### **Engaging Students in a Digital Age**

Faculty managers claim that there is a greater diversity of students attending TAFE institutes in the present times. This includes students from varied cultural backgrounds with a spectrum of academic abilities partly due to the variations of secondary education they may have received. They claim that technological advancement and globalisation is not only influencing teachers in the way they should teach but also the way students learn.

During the study, a number of faculty managers raised concern on the validity of utilising traditional delivery strategies with the younger generation whose learning styles appear to be very different to their teachers due to technological advancement. During focus group meetings, faculty managers and some head teachers agreed that the teaching methods that were used ten years ago may not be relevant and as effective for today’s learners.

A number of trade teaching sections that were involved in this study confirmed that they are continuing to use delivery strategies they used decades ago with minor modifications to cater to the changes in funding model. It was evident that the

expectation from many teaching units is that all students would need to adapt to the methods used by the teaching units rather than require teaching sections to change delivery to suit the requirements of the students.

*My view is if the student is not capable of achieving from day one, then that is not for us to be concerned about (Head teacher at focus group interview).*

*Our trade has not changed over the years (so why change what and how we deliver). We now have less time to deliver – students are not going to learn any quicker so we will have challenges with assessing them and deeming them competent within the short period (Head teacher).*

It was the faculty managers' view that in an era where digital technologies have transcended every facet of life, teaching units will be able to produce better student engagement and outcomes by incorporating delivery strategies that are facilitated and enhanced by the use of digital mobile devices. Faculty managers have stated that there are hundreds of educational and trade-related digital products that can be used to enhance delivery and overcome some of the limitations of face-to-face delivery that teachers are experiencing. This is particularly with regard to dealing with poor literacy and numeracy skills of students. While some head teachers supported this idea others supported maintaining traditional delivery strategies within classrooms.

The study did not find any evidence that teaching sections have truly leveraged digital technologies or students' competence in digital technologies apart from engaging in online learning management systems to supplement learning and occasional use of video conferencing facilities in regional areas, especially in trade teaching units. One faculty managers supported the view of Taylor (2010), if traditional methods are not producing traditional outcomes as expected, then teachers should be considering alternative approaches to engaging students in learning.

## **5.5 Advice to Policy Makers**

During the semi-structured interviews, the following question was asked of all participants of the study:

How do you think educational reforms need to be formulated in order to result in more innovative teaching practices? What advice would you give to policy makers and government?

Below is a summary of responses from faculty managers, head teachers and teachers to the above questions.

### *Quality of Tradespeople*

A number of trades based teaching staff warned the policy makers on the impact of the current reforms on the quality of tradespeople produced due to the reduced funding model. They claimed that the reforms that affected training duration of apprentices will negatively affect the building industry as the quality of outcomes cannot be guaranteed under this model.

One teacher wanted to warn authorities that the Victorian building industry has already seen the negative implications of the reforms within the building industry. He further claimed that Victorian employers are now recruiting plumbers from NSW due to sub-standard tradespeople produced by the Victorian training system. They warned that this is inevitable in NSW in a few years as they follow reforms that are very similar to Victoria. They further warned that due to Australian VET producing poor quality trades people, Australia will be forced to import them from overseas. Teachers also warned that poor quality trade practices can have detrimental effects on health and safety of people.

*Tradespeople that are produced by the current VET system will have the qualifications, however, they will not be able to perform the job to the quality that is expected. "Don't hire a tradie if they are under 40" is a familiar saying in the industry as there is a perception that young tradespeople are not trained adequately due to funding cuts (Head teacher).*

This reflects the view that the community has lost faith in new tradespeople that were trained under the present VET environment.

## **Entry Requirements for Apprenticeships**

The head teachers from trade based teaching sections called for more rigorous entry requirements for apprentices as they lack the foundation and employability skills for trade practices.

*Plumbing apprenticeships used to be about learning distinct technical skills with regard to plumbing, but now we are expected to teach communications, social skills, working in the industry, etc. These things should have been covered before they come to the plumbing apprenticeships – these should be side issues rather than the main focus of the qualification (Head teacher).*

*The students need to work at the level we expect them to or what the industry requests them to. Unfortunately, we can't screen students, we have to accept all apprentices into the course. There need to be strict entry requirements for apprenticeships (Head teacher).*

### *VET Reform vs Education*

Educational reforms need to be well planned. Authorities need to incorporate more long-term and medium-term planning rather than bring continuous reactive changes as were seen in Victoria and to a lesser extent in NSW.

*Currently, educators do not have any direction as to where education is heading (Head teacher).*

A constant theme that emerged from semi-structured interviews were that VET educators need to provide input into reforms that affect the VET sector.

*Decision-makers need to consider engaging educators while planning reforms. If this happens the educators will need not be in a constant reactive place and attend to issues in a more innovative and proactive manner (Teacher).*

Participants claimed that government, industry, and educators need to come together when making decisions about the VET sector. They claimed that currently educators

are excluded from contributing to these decisions. Study participants claimed that economic as well as educational issues are important for social cohesion.

Teaching sections stated that industry is not interested in providing pastoral care to individuals as they are driven by economic imperatives whereas educationalists are interested in the individual. The study participants claimed that the VET sector needs to get this balance right and therefore both industry and educationalists need to come together in policy making.

### **Protect TAFE**

Teachers asserted that governments should review the funding allocated to TAFE as it is predominantly an educational institution that goes beyond assessing student competence in atomistic areas. The current funding model that funds ‘just enough’ to prove competence is not geared towards teaching for high-level educational outcomes.

A number of participants asserted that TAFE has been the premium apprentice trainer for decades and should be left alone to perform this great work. They claimed that governments should realize the importance of TAFE as an educational institution and fund them accordingly. Private for-profit RTOs should not be given the same status by government funding arrangements. Providers that deliver atomistic training to satisfy licensing and legislative requirements should be funded differently.

They claimed that TAFE not only prepare apprentices for their immediate task at the workplace but also for their future positions with skills that are needed to climb the ladder into higher level managerial positions. TAFE provides educational opportunities that are not offered by other private RTOs. Therefore, it should be funded to provide the additional contribution that it makes to the society.

### **Fund qualifications based on training strategy**

Participants proposed that governments should review the funding mechanisms to promote different pedagogical approaches. Pedagogical approaches that require high levels of engagement by teacher needs to be funded at higher rates than self-paced or gap training models.

Funding also could be used to drive innovative pedagogical approaches in training. The study participants agreed that if the government wanted to bring about performance efficiencies, funding needs to be linked with various delivery models to achieve the desired efficiencies and quality outcomes.

## **Message for TAFE Leaders**

### **TAFE Policies and Processes**

The head teachers called for more support from faculty management to transform the cultures of teaching units to be conducive to a marketised environment. Head teachers are constantly confronted with resentment, bullying, formal complaints, apathy and industrial issues when trying to implement change. TAFE policies and processes do not support what is required to implement change by head teachers.

### **Invest in Teaching Units**

Teaching sections felt that though they bring the main source of income into TAFE through providing training, there is minimum investment back into teaching sections in terms of capability development, research and resources. The teachers claim that there is no room for innovation within the current funding structures.

*Institutes need to invest in research and development on VET pedagogies and make sure they pass this on to all teaching sections. Looking at grants that support innovation: looking at showcasing innovation – these that were once supported have been abandoned due to changes in systems and environment (Faculty manager).*

### **Better Support for Head Teachers**

The head teachers called for some consideration of their workload and positive measures to support them in their jobs. The head teachers claimed that goal posts are continuously moving and there need to be better support structures for head teachers to deal with this exponential growth in expectations.

### **Concentrate on Quality of Courses**

Various semi-structured interviews with head teachers and teachers raised a number of issues with the effect of funding cuts on the quality of the programs offered by the teaching units. A summary of these issues is:

- TAFE needs to protect the integrity of its provision of training and qualifications.



- Tradespersons and apprentices need to have high-level problem solving and cognitive skills that are required. Reduced funding levels that are only adequate for teaching and assessing atomistic job functions will not achieve this.
- The impact of reforms in NSW and Victorian economy will only be fully realized decades later. The tradesmen that are produced under these levels of funding will not have the skills or breadth and depth of conceptual development that is required to thrive in a rapidly changing work environments.
- Reducing the face to face delivery in teaching sections will inevitably lead to reduced quality of the graduates from TAFE courses.

### **Ease Administrative and Compliance Burden**

Due to strict administration processes imposed by funding bodies, TAFE teaching units reported that the Admin within their institutes has now become very structured but at the same time rigid and inflexible. In an environment where marketisation is demanding more responsive to customers, the strict and rigid administration processes are rendering it very difficult to be responsive to customers at the teaching unit level.

Ongoing tightening and snowballing of compliance expectations are unmanageable at teaching units. The teachers, head teachers, and managers reported that the effect of compliance with pedagogy needs to be considered by policy makers.

### **Process and Systems to Support Teaching Units**

The systems and processes that are introduced by TAFE to support the teaching units are in fact inhibiting progress and quality pedagogical practices in teaching units.

*Before implementing a product, the managers should ensure that the product is fully understood. We were expected to adjust our processes to support the system (Head teacher).*

### **Funding versus Educational Practices**

Teaching units expressed the view that current reforms related to funding are driving reforms in educational practices. The faculty managers stated that teaching sections had lost the opportunity to change their teaching, learning and assessment practices

in line with CBT when training packages were introduced. This was a good opportunity to change educational practices and implement innovative pedagogies. TAFE leadership should have seen the opportunity to bring in the changes in delivery and pedagogical practice at that time. They articulated that in future, TAFE leadership must consider the long-term implications of all decisions and formulate strategic responses to changes that are introduced due to external and internal forces.

## **Chapter Six: Summary of Findings**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The study found that despite changes to the VET system and marketisation, TAFE as the prominent public VET provider in Australia has a culture across state boundaries that is committed to building communities and individuals through education and training. This was evident in discussions with managers, head teachers and teachers of TAFE institutes and confirmed that the mandate set by the Kangan report in 1974 continues to dominate the culture of the TAFE sector.

Evidence from the study suggests that the TAFE sector is experiencing great challenges in balancing what used to be its core mission of building individuals and communities (Kangan, 1974) with fulfilling performance expectations of VET reforms. These reforms are shifting the focus and funding of training from the educational and social imperatives that TAFE has traditionally serviced to supporting the economic imperatives of the government.

Despite decades of reforms driven by a range of factors, particularly perceived to be influenced by economic imperatives, the TAFE teaching sections continue to be driven by the value of delivering benefits to individuals, employers, and communities.

This exploration of the head teacher leadership when operating on a demand-driven marketised environment uncovered a number of leadership dilemmas, new demands on leadership and teachers, capability development needs, pedagogical tensions within teaching units, counter cultures and organisational challenges, environmental challenges, innovation imperatives and innovation gaps of teaching units.

The research within the six teaching units established that they are constantly being challenged by the requirements enforced on them by the government, industry, community, customers and from within TAFE. These requirements have constantly shifted their focus away from the core mission of teaching and learning. The review

highlighted that head teacher capability is constantly being stretched and challenged when expected to balance educational imperatives with business imperatives that have driven the current TAFE environment.

In line with the objective of the study, this chapter attempts to generate a substantive set of principles to guide TAFE leadership on influencing and upholding the pedagogical excellence within the teaching unit.

This current research brings to light internal and external influences and impositions that have disturbed and diverted the focus of head teacher leadership practice from educational leadership imperatives. In doing so, this enquiry attempts to restore the confidence in the provision of VET by TAFE teaching units under the leadership of head teachers. The objective is to re-focus attention to upholding pedagogical excellence and producing quality educational outcomes while operating in a marketised VET environment.

## **6.2 Head Teacher Leadership**

Throughout the last decade, a number of researchers reported on the changing nature of the head teacher role in TAFE. They cited increased pressures that have taken head teachers away from their core functions of managing and influencing pedagogical expertise and educational outcomes within the teaching unit (Adams & Gamage, 2008; Black & Reich, 2009). This enquiry yet again confirms that this role has further moved away from an educational leadership position and rapidly evolving into a business leadership position. The evaluations uncovered sufficient evidence to conclude that the role of TAFE head teacher is now expected to be performed primarily with an administrative and business management focus. A significant finding was that educational leadership aspects of the position have moved to the background.

COAG national reform agenda, under the national partnership for skills reform, had the biggest impact on TAFE teaching units due to the direct financial impact on teaching units. A range of aspects of these reforms has resulted in substantial

changes to the structure of the training products and are challenging the pedagogical approaches, quality models, and value systems within teaching units.

Both Victorian and NSW head teachers are struggling to balance the pedagogical issues with competing policy implementations, increasing rate of policy change, excessive reporting requirements, reduced funding levels and many other challenges associated with moving from a supply-based system to a demand-driven marketised environment.

Expectations of various constituents of TAFE system, including government, faculty management, teachers, support units, industry, and students are placing competing priorities on the role of head teacher. A number of large challenges encountered by head teachers were discovered during the research. One of the challenges identified was that head teachers are struggling to be agile and responsive to changing market, funding and environmental conditions amidst current industrial relations structures and long-established traditional subcultures within teaching units.

### **6.3 Influence of Head Teacher Leadership on Pedagogical Practices**

This research partly sought to explore the ways in which head teachers' leadership practice influences pedagogical practices within their teaching unit. The study found that the changing expectations of the role of head teacher due to the current wave of market-based reforms have directly impacted on teaching unit operations. This is posing a great threat to the educational leadership of head teachers.

The study that explored the effects of responding to VET reforms on pedagogical practices within teaching units found that the greatest impact of VET reforms was experienced by teaching units when funding available for teaching was curtailed by the marketised demand-driven system. The effect was that market-based demand-driven funding models within NSW and Victoria have forced teaching units to re-evaluate their cost structures and align their pedagogical models to the revenue generated from teaching.

Further tightening of compliance requirements due to the effects of marketisation and the associated emergence of a reactive risk culture within TAFE institutes are also challenging and disturbing the pedagogical practices within teaching units.

Evidence from the study suggests that in the current environment, teaching units are forced to re-evaluate their pedagogical models due to:

- Pressure to narrow the focus of training and limit training to achieving essential skills that are required for compliance.
- Enforce cap on effective teaching hours due to funding being curtailed to be ‘just-enough’ to achieve competencies forcing a revision of training models.
- Revise training content, structures, and format with a “risk averse” approach to satisfy training compliance expectations.
- Drive delivery of training to maximize completions as they impact on revenue for the teaching sections.

Discussions with teachers from the participating teaching units highlighted that minimal changes in pedagogical practices have been introduced due to VET reforms within their teaching units. The changes that have been introduced were primarily limited to reducing the effective teaching hours, moving a limited number of units to online delivery and changing training models to be ‘audit safe’ to minimise exposure.

It was observed that teaching sections that participated in this study are continuing to deliver in traditional ways where face-to-face, time based and teacher-led instructions are the predominant mode of delivery. According to teachers, apart from aligning their training to new training packages, they have not implemented major changes to their pedagogical models due to reforms. Teaching staff confirmed that changes to pedagogical practices were minimal even amidst major reforms that moved training systems from curriculum based models to competency-based models in mid-1990s. Discussions with teaching staff highlighted that the introduction of training packages driven by CBT had failed to change the pedagogical structures and cultures within teaching units.

The study uncovered that government priorities and faculty management expectations have altered the head teacher leadership expectations from one of

educational leadership to be more of administrative, compliance and business leadership focus. It also found that current expectations of faculty managers, compliance gatekeepers, and tedious administrative procedures render it impossible for head teachers to give any priority to matters related to teaching. Evidence drawn from the study findings suggests that business leadership imperatives are forcing head teachers to compromise on educational leadership.

During the study, the TAFE faculty managers articulated that the educational leadership imperatives and business leadership imperatives of head teachers should not compete with each other. However, discussions during the enquiry established that head teachers had difficulty integrating these two aspects within their current role.

The study findings point to head teachers requiring substantial capability building in integrating business and educational imperatives in their leadership practice. This enquiry highlighted that head teachers are struggling to maintain the core values of TAFE under their leadership practice as they lack the capability to lead the creation of innovative training products that meet both educational excellence and business objectives simultaneously. Issues that came to light during the study indicate that developing the innovative capability of teaching units is the key to achieving this.

## **Inhibitors of Pedagogical Excellence and Innovation**

The evidence gathered from the study highlighted ten factors that are inhibiting pedagogical excellence and innovation. These factors were identified as having obstructed the ability of head teachers to influence pedagogical practices within teaching units.

### **Factor 1. Funding Models and Economic Imperatives**

TAFE is currently operating in a marketised environment where funding is linked to the achievement of competencies rather than time spent on training. During the study, a number of teachers argued that head teachers who are driven by reform imperatives are negatively influencing pedagogical practices within the teaching unit.

Teaching units that have built their pedagogical models predominantly on “time spent on training” has been challenged by the changes introduced to the funding model under the marketised VET environment. TAFE teaching units that are continuing to deliver on the traditional ‘time based’ pedagogical models are struggling to operate within the allocated budgets. Due to the urgency of managing costs within teaching sections, pedagogical issues, including achieving pedagogical excellence has moved to the background.

The VET reforms under marketisation that follow a model closely aligned with Neoliberal CBT, funds are allocated to providing “just enough” training to meet exact competency requirements with a narrow focus on delivery (Hodge, 2016). This funding regime has restricted the freedom of educators to augment training to incorporate their occupational expertise or modelling their tacit knowledge of the occupation during the delivery of training.

According to head teachers, the primary performance measure of their effectiveness in the current TAFE environment has now become the achievement of cost efficiencies. This has pushed pedagogical issues into a secondary position behind economic issues.

The evidence gathered indicates that many of the reforms and associated changes previously introduced within TAFE institutes have had minimal impact on teaching units in terms of their pedagogical practices. A number of ‘locked-step’ models, that teachers are accustomed to, had maximised the income to teaching sections under the previous supply based funding model. The supply based funding model required minimal pedagogic innovation from teaching units.

Due to the funding model that was introduced under the latest reforms not being adequate to fund the traditional pedagogical models, teaching units were forced to review and adjust their pedagogical practices.

The study data indicated that these changes that were made predominantly involved reduction of face-to-face teaching hours with minimal changes in pedagogical practices. Data gathered during the research indicates that the



response of teaching units to changes in funding models has been far from a considered pedagogical response.

Teachers claimed that faculty managers who drive teaching sections focusing on mere economic imperatives based on short-term resource constraints are doing a long term disservice to TAFE. The study evidence uncovered teachers having an ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude in some TAFE institutes. This is evidently created as a result of the perception by teachers that the vertical authority of managers only concerns themselves with the budget and the bottom line and do not fully appreciate pedagogical tensions within teaching units. Consequently, TAFE could be diminishing the innovative capacity of the very people that are supposed to build skills in learners for an innovative Australia.

The head teachers claim that due to the immediate and urgent needs of the current environment, they are unable to provide the due attention to pedagogical imperatives and this is inevitably leading to the diminishing of quality of training and outcomes.

## **Factor 2. Strict Control and Compliant Cultures**

The compliance guidelines were identified as the second factor that has driven pedagogical issues in the background of head teacher leadership. Teaching staff claimed that the ‘top-down’ approach to compliance within TAFE teaching units has taken the focus away from pedagogical issues.

Teaching staff reported that amidst strict and prescriptive compliance guidelines imposed by regulators, TAFE institutes have appointed internal gatekeepers of compliance to diligently control all aspects of training. Compliance gatekeepers, that view training through an audit lens, have limited the freedom of teaching units into exercising training with pedagogical focus. Faculty managers and teaching units expressed the view that the audit cultures within TAFE institutes are ‘crushing’ some valuable pedagogical innovations. The head teachers indicated that they were powerless in controlling these forces external to teaching units that are placing demands on the pedagogical and other aspects of the teaching unit.

There is evidence to suggest that compliance controls what, how and the way training is delivered in teaching units. Internal compliance units are increasingly enforcing prescriptive and time-consuming processes that are required to prove the ability of teaching units to deliver training in a compliant manner.

In TAFE institutes, compliance requirements have mandated an exhaustive list of templates and forms that need to be completed within the teaching unit and reviewed regularly for each qualification and cohort. These multi-paged templates are available to record training and assessment strategies & practices, learning and assessment schedules, learning resources, proof of industry consultations, teacher qualifications, assessment mapping matrices, assessment tools, assessment risk matrices, student assessment guides, proof of teachers vocational and technical currency, assessment validation plans and processes, assessment validation report, RPL processes, educational & support processes, WHS risk assessments, assets registers for the qualification and photographs of assets. Tedious compliance processes and ‘top-down’ monitoring of these processes have distracted head teachers from leading the pedagogical excellence in training within the teaching unit.

The study findings indicate that the work of teachers is also frequently disturbed by strict and prescriptive compliance processes, administration processes, regular reporting functions, constantly changing expectations and unresponsive systems. These expectations, as well as other contextual conditions, are inhibiting them from improving their pedagogical practice and constraining the capacity for innovation.

The research uncovers that the compliance and audit cultures with ‘zero risk appetite’ that are prevalent in TAFE institutes have eroded the professional freedom of teachers to make pedagogical judgments. During interviews, teachers expressed frustration that their occupational expertise is disregarded in the current compliance-driven system and not given the pedagogical freedom to make judgments based on their occupational expertise.

### **Factor 3. Prescriptive Training Package Guidelines**

Teaching staff considered that prescriptive training package guidelines coupled with the culture of compliance as the third factor that is crushing innovation within teaching units. Evidence gathered indicates that compliance gatekeepers within TAFE institutes are enforcing that teachers limit training practices to achieving the guidelines that are explicit in training packages without any appreciation of the wider occupational context.

#### **Factor 4. Traditional ‘locked-in’ teaching cultures**

Research highlighted a fourth factor that is inhibiting pedagogic innovation within teaching units as the persistent traditional ‘locked-in’ teaching cultures that follow a strict ‘time served on training’ practice. Evidence from research indicates that teaching units that have attempted to meet performance expectations of VET reforms while continuing to use traditional predominantly face-to-face, time specific, teacher-led and rigid training structures. It was established that these teaching units will struggle to survive in a marketised environment. The study evidence indicates that there is active resistance by teachers to abandoning traditional practices and embracing any alternative delivery models. One can understand that resistance to change is not always a bad thing as it is appropriate to listen to key stake holders in this matter.

#### **Factor 5. Teaching practice of head teachers**

The limited opportunity available to head teachers to pay any attention to their own teaching practice emerges as the fifth factor that is inhibiting pedagogic innovation. The evidence from the study indicates that head teachers lack the capability in contemporary VET practices and as Mitchell et al. (2003) assert, lack the reflection to position their own practice closer to contemporary changes in VET professional practice. Head teachers who are not active in their teaching practice may not be able to actively explore and identify good practice. Head teachers who are active in their professional teaching practice will be in a better position to foster innovation through collaborative mechanisms and set realistic standards for success.

### **Factor 6. Head teacher resistance to pedagogic innovation**

A sixth factor that inhibits pedagogic innovation within teaching units emerged from data gathered from faculty managers during the research. During semi-structured interviews, faculty managers claimed that some head teachers are actively resisting the introduction of new pedagogical structures or innovative pedagogies within their teaching unit. The result is that instead of head teachers being the change agents that build the capacity and ownership of change, they actively resist and ‘squash’ innovation. Faculty managers alleged that head teachers are inhibiting the professional freedom of teachers’ to innovate and contribute to the wider TAFE community as it may challenge the ‘status quo’ and long-established power relations within teaching units.

Faculty managers stressed that any efforts to promote pedagogic innovation within TAFE institutes will be fruitless unless head teachers actively participate in innovation building efforts of the institutes.

### **Factor 7. Absence of failure tolerant cultures**

A seventh factor that is confronting the ability of teaching units to reach pedagogic excellence with innovation was identified as the lack of permission within TAFE institutes for failure or trialling innovative pedagogical strategies. This was a direct result of funding models in the current VET environment that has limited training to delivering a narrow set of competencies that are adequate to provide surface-level training and the reactive risk cultures (McGing & Brown, 2014) prevalent in teaching units being unable to tolerate failure.

### **Factor 8. Limited incentives for pedagogic innovation**

The evidence from the study suggests that there have been very limited incentives given to teachers for achieving pedagogical excellence within their teaching practice. There is evidence that also highlights the lack of

prominence given to educational leadership, support, intervention, and supervision of pedagogical practices in daily activities of head teachers.

Despite this, there were pockets of innovation noticeable in some of the teaching units. These innovations, however, were seen to be driven by few progressive individuals due to their professional interest in contemporary VET pedagogies such as blended learning, flipped classrooms and educational technologies.

### **Factor 9. Capability of teaching staff**

The capability of teachers in contemporary pedagogical practices and learning technologies emerged as the ninth factor that inhibits innovation within teaching units. Data from research indicated a significant capability gap in digital literacy in at least 50% of trade teachers that participated in the study.

### **Factor 10. Market-based Competition**

The head teachers are expected to lead the training provision in teaching units with a view of maintaining the market share in the VET sector when competing in an open training market. In a training market where for-profit providers may be driven by maximising profits at the expense of educational outcomes, head teachers claimed that they are being forced to alter their practices to suit this competitive environment. This is obstructing the current ethos of the teaching unit to uphold the pedagogical integrity and train students with broad-based occupational skills and prepare them effectively for work.

Despite the factors outlined above actively hindering innovation, faculty managers articulated that head teachers are entrusted with driving and sustaining pedagogic innovation within teaching units.

Teachers viewed their head teacher as the most supportive leader within TAFE institutes. The teachers felt that despite the supportive nature of head teachers, they are unable to operate outside the strict control and compliant cultures that are

controlling all pedagogical and other practices within teaching units. There is evidence to suggest that teachers do not have the pedagogical freedom within their teaching practices and make educational judgments based on their occupational expertise.

It was observed that the current environment of reactive risk culture (McGing & Brown, 2014) within TAFE institutes, institutional strategies, systems and processes as well as a lack of exposure to teachers to the contemporary VET pedagogies, are creating barriers to pedagogical innovation. The study found that head teachers, as the educational leaders of the teaching units, do not have the freedom, capability or conditions to influence the pedagogical cultures of the teaching unit or respond with pedagogic innovation to performance expectations of VET reforms.

### **Facilitating Pedagogical Excellence and Innovation**

Following are some of the approaches that have emerged from data guided by the literature to support the influence of head teacher leadership on pedagogical practices within teaching units. These approaches enable head teachers to uphold the pedagogical excellence and occupational expertise of teachers while meeting the performance expectations of reforms.

#### *Economic imperatives vs Pedagogic Innovation*

As discussed before, evidence emerged from study data indicate that the economic imperatives and compliance guidelines of TAFE institutes are obstructing the educational imperatives of head teacher leadership.

During the study, head teachers who are at the centre of leading teaching units through changes implemented by VET reforms admitted that they neither possess experience nor expertise in balancing economic imperatives with educational imperatives that are expected of them.

This suggests a substantial gap in the capability of head teachers to operate in the current environment.

### *Teaching Unit Cultures*

The evidence from this study suggests that the cultures within teaching units currently lack the following important characteristics to survive in a competitive market-driven VET environment. The following are derived from study data as suggestions for shaping the teaching unit cultures with elements to position it with a competitive advantage in a demand-driven VET sector.

The exploration of the dynamics within the teaching units indicated that teaching units are not designed to embrace innovation. The leadership of head teachers in shaping the sub-cultures to embrace innovation is vital in influencing sustainable pedagogical innovation.

The second characteristic observed as lacking within the culture of teaching units was a “business-link” approach in their daily operations. It is important to transform the cultures within teaching units to demonstrate ‘business-like’ approaches to operating in a marketised VET environment.

A third characteristic that were highlighted as lacking is the willingness to consider alternative approaches to engaging students in learning when traditional methods are not producing traditional outcomes due to changing qualities of student populations and customer expectations. Faculty managers pointed out that the traditional methods of teaching may not serve well for the next generation of learners.

### *Innovate Despite Compliance*

Mitchell et al. (2003) posit that while audit and compliance aspects of VET are seen to be dampening innovation, there is evidence that many teachers and RTOs within the Australian VET sector have responded to these constraints with pedagogic innovation. They provide a counter argument stating that internal and external pressures give the perfect opportunity to innovate and teaching units should see these as opportunities for innovation.

### *Raise the Quality of Teaching*

It was noted that teaching units attributed their excellent quality of training to the meticulous planning of teacher-led content delivery and practical activities within a rigid time critical structure. The quality of TAFE teaching units is seen to be a model which predominantly relied on teachers explaining a concept, demonstrating a related task, answering learner questions and then providing as many practical opportunities as possible for each student to master that skill. This quality model that is linked to ‘time-based on training’ tends to devote generous teaching hours to guide and support students through their learning experience in a structured teacher-centric manner.

A number of issues and trends in the marketised VET environment and TAFE response to reforms are threatening the quality of teaching and learning within TAFE teaching units. They are:

- The funding model that has a narrow focus on delivery does not support the traditional quality model of TAFE teaching units. The reduction in “face-to-face” hours and a reduction in expenditure on training will not support the “time-based” quality model in teaching units. This inevitably leads to a reduction in quality of delivery.
- Funding that is linked to completions of competencies has changed the behaviour of teachers to push the quality agenda aside in favour of achieving completions.
- Funding to teaching units being dynamically adjusted based on fluctuations in market demands in Victoria.
- Reduction of face-to-face delivery hours as the first response to achieving cost efficiencies within the teaching units without due regard to pedagogical implications.
- High-cost structures within teaching units exerting undue pressure on the number of hours that could be dedicated to effective training.
- Changes in customer expectations where quality may not be the only and primary consideration for selecting a course. In a marketised environment, customers are able to choose the provider based on a range of factors in



addition to the quality provision of training. They are: flexibility, convenience, price, time, customer service, qualifications and compliance with regulatory requirements.

- Training packages that are riddled with ambiguous training criteria may favour some for-profit providers to achieve competencies with minimalistic training with a narrow focus on occupational skills. Some customers may be attracted by this.

This quality model was optimised for a supply based funding model. It is a challenge for TAFE leadership to continue this quality model in a marketised environment where the funding provision does not auger well to this model.

This model achieves the ‘volume of learning’ requirements of the VET regulator. This quality model has proven to produce a high standard of quality in student outcomes.

Evidence gathered from this research indicates that the response of the TAFE leadership to reduce the ‘face-to-face’ delivery hours is compromising the quality model and diminishing the quality training provision within TAFE institutes.

The quality and volume of learning are also an important performance expectation of market reforms and this should not be pushed to be background in the quest for achieving cost efficiencies.

### *Trust in the Professionalism of Teachers*

The evidence from the investigation alludes to levels of distrust by senior management on the professionalism of teachers. This general distrust has lead to the forcing of a compliant culture within TAFE institutes.

As Power (1999) asserts, trust in the professionalism of teachers and transforming to a “culture of questioning” (Seddon, 2011) will support and harness the pedagogical innovations of teachers.

It is suggested that a system of teacher registration and continuing professional development (CPD) program will help to raise the confidence and trust of faculty

management on the professionalism of teaching staff. This will enable a progression from a reactive risk culture that currently prevails in TAFE institutes to move to a 'mature risk culture' that is conducive to innovation.

Amidst increasing number of casual and seasonal teachers and a massive administrative burden placed on teaching units, a systematic approach to upholding the pedagogical expertise, technical expertise and professionalism of TAFE teachers is becoming critical.

The suggestion by Barlow (2007) to introduce a continuing professional development (CPD) requirement and a license to practice based on CPDs is a positive move towards building the professionalism of TAFE teachers.

### *Update Pedagogical Skills*

Mitchell et al. (2003) emphasize that the professional practice of teachers must have migrating frontiers to not only follow changing conditions of VET but also to lead changes in VET environments. The study data indicate that despite changing VET conditions, teachers are resisting any movement away from traditional delivery practices and strategies. It was established that this may be due to teachers' capability gaps in contemporary pedagogical practices rather than a willingness to embrace new ways of training.

It was established during the study that training models and practices that were used in teaching units have been continuing for decades within TAFE teaching units. These traditional pedagogical practices are no longer fully servicing the needs of all students. The study findings also confirm that quality training provision is compromised in teaching units due to their response to economic imperatives. It also confirms that achieving quality educational outcomes has been problematic in the current environment.

Kirkwood and Price (2006) call for practitioners to adapt their practices and systems to suit the changed societal, educational and technological environments.

Following is a summary of research findings highlighting the professional practice of teachers. These findings denote the need to update the pedagogical skills of teachers with the changing frontiers of market conditions and VET environment.

The drive to reduce the cost structures of teaching units and associated reduction of face-to-face teaching hours have rendered the traditional pedagogical practices ineffective due to diminishing quality and student outcomes. There is a need to integrate digital technologies and flexible approaches into the pedagogical practices within colleges and bring learning into the 21st century. The teachers need to be encouraged to move away from using traditional classrooms and workshops as their sole pedagogical approach and incorporate other approaches, including technology-enabled spaces available to them at their disposal.

In the past TAFE teachers, strong occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence brought quality in the provision of learning into teaching units. The evidence emerging from the data questions that ability of head teachers to harness these skills amidst non-negotiable expectations due to competition, business imperatives, economic imperatives and compliance pressures. As Mitchell et al. (2003) assert, the best way to achieve quality in a changing VET environment is to support teachers to transform their current pedagogical models to suit the new environment through pedagogic innovation.

Pedagogic Innovation will require rebuilding the capability of teaching staff to unpack training packages and interpret competency standards. This is necessary as the study revealed that pedagogical practices of teaching units have not changed for decades, even when TAFE institutes were forced to move from traditional curriculum based training models to training package based models.

### *Overcoming Teacher Resistance*

Powerful leadership influence is expected from head teachers to channel the resistance that is currently revealed within teaching units and ensure that it does not interfere with executing the shared mission of the teaching unit in a market-based demand driven environment. This can only be achieved through ongoing and

reciprocal communication, capability development, the continuous revival of teaching practices and mentoring.

### *Extend Innovation beyond Teaching Units*

Changing VET environments and associated demands from teaching units have forced TAFE teachers to revise their teaching practices, increase their knowledge in contemporary work practices and adapt their pedagogy to changing environments. Though there is an expectation from TAFE management that TAFE teaching units will respond to demands for VET reforms with innovation the study revealed the need for senior managers to make positive contributions to this by proactively taking measures to create conditions that are conducive to innovation.

Sustainable pedagogic innovation within teaching units cannot be achieved within the boundaries of teaching units alone. This is only possible when the organization through faculty management strategies and processes, create conditions that are conducive to innovation, promotes “cultures of questioning” (Seddon, 2009) and transform the wider organizational culture into a “mature risk culture” (McGing & Brown, 2014).

There is evidence that suggested that innovation is currently impeded within the “reactive risk culture (McGing & Brown, 2014)” that promotes strict “cultures of compliance” within teaching units. Mitchell et al. (2003) extend this argument and comment that pedagogical innovation should happen at all levels, including strategic responses by faculty management to internal and external pressures, teaching units under the leadership of head teachers, groups of practitioners brought together through innovative projects and individual teachers themselves.

### *Professional Renewal of TAFE Teachers*

As Seddon (2009) points out, TAFE has a great resource of teaching expertise in its teaching workforce and needs to be harnessed and utilized effectively by TAFE institutes.

The participants’ of this research project, found to be possessing collectively over 440 years of occupational experience in the plumbing and construction industry with

some teachers still continuing to be employed in the industry. Occupational expertise within the teaching units is a great competitive advantage in TAFE institutes. This is ignored by TAFE institutes when responding to market-based reforms, particularly due to strict compliance requirements and other expectations from external stakeholders. In this competitive environment where teaching units are struggling to survive due to funding restrictions and competition, TAFE institutes should mobilise this innovative potential of teachers to capture the market and continue to be the training provider and employer of choice.

TAFE needs to support head teachers to harness and elevate this potential of teachers by providing more structured and failure-tolerant opportunities. These opportunities should not be available to a few privileged people, but should be available to teaching units using a variety of modes. These strategies will ensure that much-needed professional renewal is provided for teachers to reinvigorate their passion for teaching.

In an environment where teachers' traditional work patterns are no longer able to be sustained (TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators, 2009), the capacity of teachers must be increased to work within productive innovative delivery strategies. These alternative and contemporary delivery strategies need to ensure that quality is maintained and a reasonable volume of learning opportunities is provided to learners. This is achieved through pedagogic innovation.

TAFE Directors Australia & Australian College of Educators (2009) assert that the role of the teacher should not be left to be concerned with delivery alone – vocational learning should be a partnership between educators and relevant sections of industry and business.

This study avers that the teacher capability must be developed and extended beyond classroom boundaries. This was also called for by Seddon (2009). The 'integrated training' approach to training recommended by Seddon suggest extending classroom boundaries in the workplace and industries. This approach suggests a team approach to training where occupational teachers, foundational skills teachers, and industry experts come together to deliver training. This integrated approach to training leverages the strengths of each party and provides a learning experience in the

workplace that goes beyond the presentation of information. Seddon (2009) claims that this approach will stretch the pedagogical capacities of teachers and challenge them to leave the comfort of their familiar classroom behind and embark on sharing their occupational expertise in an unfamiliar and unstructured environment of a workplace.

The current TAFE context is compelling teachers to conduct their pedagogical practices in new ways and in new environments. This study confirmed that the majority of the teachers demonstrated a lack of willingness to engage in integrated training approaches. The teachers claimed that involvement in alternative pedagogical strategies is onerous and the current admin-centric compliant-driven culture is designed to inhibit this. This study highlighted the need for faculty managers and head teachers to develop the capacity of teachers in alternative pedagogical strategies by acknowledging the professional freedom they require to achieve such competence.

In order to achieve this urgent cultural transformation in teaching units, head teachers with the support of faculty managers need to push the teaching units from incremental innovation to embark on more disruptive innovation strategies that may disturb the comfortable ways of doing things in teaching sections. This approach was highlighted in Reeson et al. (2016).

This may mean implementing innovative practices across teaching sections and questioning the established power relations & blurring the claimed expertise within the teaching units. Teaching units need to ensure that these innovations are sustainable and easily adaptable to the future VET environments.

As Seddon (2009) points out, TAFE faculty managers and head teachers need to acknowledge the capability gaps of teachers in these areas and take action to develop teachers with critical skills that are needed in these changing environments. This means that teachers need courage and capability building to leave aside the comfortable and familiar classroom setting to explore how their expertise may be applied in particular work situations (Seddon, 2009). Evidence from this study suggests that there are pockets of innovative practices in most teaching units that

participated in the study. There is a need for head teachers with the support of faculty managers to develop and implement a strategy to harness and expand these capabilities across the entire teaching section.

### *Capability Development in Current Environment*

The study discovered limited evidence to suggest that there is a systematic approach to developing capability in teaching units to achieve the results required in the current VET environment. The study determined that continuing professional development for teachers is critical in this environment not only to respond to changing VET market with appropriate pedagogical practices but also to reinvigorate their passion for teaching practice.

Innovation & Business Skills Australia (2013) outlines the broad capabilities required by various job roles within the VET sector. Prior to that TAFE NSW Strategic Professional Development Committee (2004) published a framework for identifying the current and emerging development needs of teachers. These frameworks still do not appear to be providing a systematic development of contemporary pedagogic skills, technical currency and other workforce development need across the entire TAFE teaching workforce. Frameworks also do not mandate the continuing professional development requirements that must be maintained by every single teacher to maintain their professional status as VET teachers.

In an environment where funding is linked to productivity, professional activities need be built into teacher's work situations by allocating meaningful development projects to their work duties. The expectation is that this approach will build the essential contemporary pedagogical skills in teachers and enable them to produce excellent quality student outcomes in the current VET environment.

This requires a cultural transformation in teaching units where teachers and managers are working together to formulate professional development plans that are more sustainable and achievable in the current TAFE funding environment. The challenge for faculty managers is to get the buy-in from teachers to move away from previous models of professional development and move to more effective and affordable

activities that fit well with the requirements of the current and future VET environment.

## **6.4 Influence of Teaching Unit Culture on Pedagogy**

According to Schein (2004), the culture of an organizational unit provides insights into how they approach their work, team dynamics, leadership influences, reputation and performance levels of that unit. This analysis of study data provided insight into the beliefs, practices, and attitudes of the teaching unit that formulated the teaching unit culture.

Data gathered during the study suggests that the reforms that moved teaching units fully into marketisation and demand-driven funding is challenging the long-established cultures of teaching units. Teaching unit cultures have been co-created over a long period of time and have shaped the pedagogical practices, behaviours, beliefs, expectations, values, assumptions and attitudes (Schein, 2004) that are prevalent. Discussions with teaching staff imply that these deep seated cultures along with other social, political and historical aspects of teaching units have guided and influenced the pedagogies and practices within teaching units.

Teaching units are fully entrenched in the current teaching unit culture and to a great extent share the practices, beliefs, values, behaviours, and attitudes of the culture. The study uncovered distinct sub-cultures (Haneberg, 2009) within teaching units where there was an agreed set of values, assumptions, and beliefs that guided their pedagogical practices and operations. As discussed earlier, these subcultures were somewhat influenced by the unique practices of their industry as well as long-established patterns of behaviours within the teaching units.

This study explored the leadership influence and challenges to adapt the existing culture to the culture that is expected to achieve the performance expectations of VET reforms while preserving the pedagogical quality and excellence within teaching units.



## **Existing culture within teaching units**

Awadh and Alyahya (2013) and Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, and Shabbir (2012) in their respective studies found that there is a strong relationship between the organizational culture and the job performance.

The current culture that was observed within teaching units were taken as denoting their current approach to work. The study of the six teaching units established that the unique cultural elements of each teaching unit are linked to the professional activities of teachers and is shaping the learning environment within the teaching unit. This has a direct influence on the student motivation, experience, and achievement during their engagement with the teaching unit.

### *Classroom culture*

The study found that the pedagogical cultures within classrooms are predominantly teacher-led using a “one-size fits all” model. This dominant teacher-led pedagogical culture has evolved in teaching units over a number of years based on the historical pedagogical models and environments within TAFE institutes. The study revealed that teachers consider the objectives of the reforms to be economically driven rather than pedagogically driven. The main reason given for this claim was that the reforms have disturbed and challenged the historical pedagogical cultures and proven practices within teaching units. The teachers also viewed reforms that have forced a business focus onto teaching units as not within the scope of their jobs.

The current dominant teacher-led ‘one size fits all’ pedagogical model within classrooms that concentrates on “time served on training” rather than achieving competencies is proving to be challenging in a demand-driven marketised VET environment.

The existing pedagogical culture within teaching units gave prominence to providing a structured learning experience for students with carefully planned learning instructions determined by the teacher. There was very little evidence of project based learning or problem-oriented learning observed, especially in the four trade-based teaching units. The two services based teaching units that participated in the study demonstrated the use of any student-oriented alternative learning strategies.

They were, however, cautious of these approaches due to perceived compliance risks associated with them.

In these classroom cultures, teachers are in control of learning activities, their sequence, and the student progression through these activities. In this mode, the lessons are driven by content rather than creative exploration, innovative problem solving, independent learning and authentic work-based skills (McGaw, 2013) that are seen as promoting authentic learning which prepares students for current and future skill needs of the economy. The primary mode of delivery is within the classroom or workshop environments. All students are allocated set training durations to achieve quality educational outcomes prior to being assessed for competence. This mode of delivery gives secondary importance to the unique needs and abilities of students. Instead, this model of delivery places the primary importance on getting through the content as outlined in the training package and relies on the occupational expertise of teachers and their understanding of the occupation.

A prominent feature of the existing pedagogical culture is that students that are struggling with lesson content are provided with pastoral care by teachers or referred to various support services available within the TAFE institute for additional support. At the same time, teachers argued that teaching units are adult learning environments and the content cannot be ‘watered down’ to accommodate student needs.

During the study, teachers expressed the view that as experienced practitioners in their field, they are able to confidently choose the learning activities that would prepare their learners to the standard required by their industry. They argued that this is constantly being disturbed (Seddon, 2011) by strict compliance requirements imposed by regulators due to marketisation that is calling for intense quality control (Wheelahan, 2015a).

### *Admin-centric Cultures*

These are represented by the introduction of rigid administrative systems together with strict reporting and compliance requirements in a bid to enforce tight, rigid structures that are not conducive to creating environments that promote learning and

rich customer experience. The current culture of teaching units is overtaken by administrative duties.

### *Compliance-driven Culture*

The study revealed that teaching units suffocate under the control culture created by compliance and claim that this has inhibited pedagogical innovation.

Strict regulations and compliance expectations were introduced into the VET system for several reasons:

- There is a perception that public institutions are not responsive to customer needs and acted based on their own agendas (Wheelahan, 2012b).
- As a result of a large number of private RTOs entering into the training market (Wheelahan, 2012b).

To produce trust in the public system and promote accountability and transparency (Misko, 2006). The faculty managers stressed that the strict compliance culture that is currently prevailing in TAFE institutes is a direct result of the strong regulatory frameworks that are continuing to deepen compliance cultures (Wheelahan, 2015a) in response to scandals and rorts in the VET environment. They claimed that this is a negative effect of marketisation.

Participants of this study argued that trust in the public VET provider by communities, industries, and individuals have been established over a century and this could not be improved using a minimalistic approach to quality presented as compliance.

Participants also indicated that despite the reasons for tightening compliance requirements, teaching units should focus less on compliance and more on quality teaching practices. McGing and Brown (2014) claim that an innovative, progressive organisation must alter their risk functions to shift its focus from compliance to more forward-looking approaches. Participants stated that the current risk function within the teaching units that is totally compliance-driven is far from forward-looking.

Heimans (2012) and Davids (2012) note that the notion of managing the quality of VET delivery through audits and compliance processes are informed by accounting and quality assurance principles. Victorian TAFE Association (2015) also states that the majority of people conducting compliance audits are ‘financial’ auditors who may not understand the core functions of TAFE as a public VET provider.

Power (1999) asserts that the high status given to ‘auditors’ in making judgments about the validity of educational decisions has misplaced the superiority of the auditor. In many instances, auditors make passive and retrospective observations and reviews concluding that decisions by teachers are incorrect. In many instances, teachers may have sound pedagogic reasons for their actions and this is not considered by auditors. The audit process discounts the occupational & pedagogical expertise of teachers.

### *Countercultures*

Attempting to influence pedagogic innovation without a plan to change the pedagogical cultures and structures within teaching units appear to create hostility and resentment within teaching units. This was explicitly observable in trade based teaching units that participated in this study.

A continuous wave of reforms that has impacted on TAFE institutes has been the catalyst for substantial and gradual changes to values, beliefs, and assumptions of TAFE institutes. However, evidence suggests that the teaching unit cultures have not evolved at the same pace. This has resulted in countercultures being created within teaching units where an organisation’s changed core values and directions are being resisted and obstructed by teachers due to conflicts created by parent and teaching unit cultures.

Data gathered during the study revealed a number of ‘disconnects’ between head teachers and faculty management, leadership messages that are communicated to teachers. This was prominently noticeable in three out of the six teaching units that participated in this study. A number of head teachers indicated that they had lost faith in the direction the senior management had taken and were moving away from the values that were currently espoused by the faculty management. The lack of

cohesiveness between the faculty management and the head teachers is more evident in NSW teaching units than in Victoria. This is another disturbance that is contributing to the rise of countercultures within teaching units.

The study found that head teachers are not espousing the expectations of the innovators that are described by Elliott (1991) as they are not actively questioning the long-established beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours, and practices within teaching units. Schein (2004) confirms that in order to bring cultural change, leadership must demonstrate the ability to step aside from the culture that created them and start the adaptive evolutionary processes to align the culture to the current environments. As Schein (2004) and Elliott (1991) explain about cultural change and leadership, the ability of head teachers to understand the limitations of the culture is essential for shaping the teaching unit culture with the elements that are needed to operate in a marketised environment.

The disconnect between teaching units and the wider TAFE environment has been noted in literature over a number of decades (see Frew, 1990). Once the culture within the teaching unit aligns with the wider TAFE environment as well as the requirements of the external VET environment, it will create a common set of purpose from within it. This will not only increase the performance of teachers with regard to expectations of VET reforms but will also enhance the financial sustainability. The study concluded that head teacher capability to critically challenge the prevalent cultures of the teaching units and align them with the wider internal and external requirements while upholding the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence of teachers has proved to be deficient.

During the study, some teachers articulated a very clear distrust of faculty management claiming that managers other than head teachers did not own or understand the issues at the teacher level. The head teachers are at the interface between teaching unit subcultures and the parent organisation cultures (Black, 2009). Amidst time pressures of managing the day-to-day operations of the teaching units, head teachers also have the pivotal role in influencing and shaping the culture of teaching units to be in line with organisation core values, beliefs, and assumptions. The study uncovered that some head teachers have embraced the core direction of

their parent organisation and other head teachers were somewhat non-committal to the changes introduced by TAFE institutes.

A number of faculty managers disclosed that some head teachers actively dampen the innovation efforts of teachers rather than harnessing and supporting it. Despite this, the study found that the conditions in teaching sections are not conducive to formulating cultures of innovation due to constraints in terms of resources, strict compliance requirements and administrative burdens. Faculty management confirmed that in order to provide a collective teaching unit response to the current VET environment, an attitudinal and behavioural change is required from within the teaching units.

Most head teachers who participated in the study had attempted to make some cultural shifts within their teaching unit. However, they were either distracted by other urgent priorities or were unable to break the cultural barriers.

The study concluded that the teaching units quietly resist against the painful process of moving from a predominantly liberal education, culture to a business-focussed education culture. They resist the culture that is constantly reacting to government policy changes and the wider compliance culture created by the TAFE system due to the pressures of regulation and marketisation. This tension has resulted to countercultures being created within teaching units that actively work against the values and directions of TAFE institutes.

## **Leadership Influence**

Head teachers as the immediate leaders of teaching units need be conscious of the existing cultures and understand the need for cultural change within teaching units. Head teachers as the most trusted leaders within the teaching units are the key to reaching the requisite cultural change to achieve the competitive edge in the current marketised demand-driven VET environment. The teaching units where the head teacher has not actively managed and shaped the organisational culture, it was noticed that the existing culture of the teaching unit had influenced the practices of the head teacher.

The head teachers asserted that while they ignored some negative behaviours by teachers, the behaviours that are clearly contrary to the faculty management expectations escalate to the faculty management for resolution. The lack of ownership by some head teachers to align the behaviours and actions within the teaching unit to the values of the parent TAFE culture is leading to countercultures being created from within teaching units. The head teacher as the front line leader within the teaching unit is expected to support and infuse the parent culture values and behaviours within the teaching unit. A number of head teachers said that in many cases, they have chosen to ignore the negative behaviours of teachers that are contrary to the values and behaviours expected by management. They admitted that this may be indirectly endorsing the negative behaviours of teachers.

A number of head teachers also said that they are not able to adequately deal with performance management and behavioural issues with teachers as they do not have the leadership capability or the power within their delegation to change their behaviours. The research findings indicate that the absence structured performance measuring frameworks and KPIs within TAFE institutes makes it difficult to manage the performance of teaching staff.

Mitchell et al. (2003) assert that innovation in teaching and learning can happen in many ways. However, sustaining and infective pedagogic innovation in the teaching unit requires the support and sponsorship of head teachers. The head teachers are unable to be catalysts for pedagogic innovation unless conscious efforts are made to change the pedagogic cultures within classrooms collaboratively.

## **Expectant culture in the current VET environment**

### *A Culture that Promotes Learning*

On most government performance measures such as completions and financial efficiency, the current pedagogical cultures within teaching units have not fared very well both in Victoria and NSW. This is consistent with findings from Williams (2011). A number of studies conducted on student learner experience and completions within TAFE found that there were strong positive endorsements and some negative assertions about the current pedagogical models (Behncke &

McNaught, 2001; Callan, 2005; Misko & Priest, 2009; Polesel, Davies, & Teese, 2004; Uren, 2001).

Polesel et al. (2004) found that generally there was a strong endorsement from students on the quality of instructional experience in TAFE. They found that the unique relationship created by the teacher and the student is a primary factor in student retention and an important factor in the completion of their course.

On the other hand, Uren (2001) found that part-time participants who typically are mature-age students were dissatisfied with their study, content and the way it was taught. They found that difficulty with the workload and choosing an alternative provider were primary reasons for leaving their course of study with a non-completion. Callan (2005), in another study on TAFE institutes, concluded that some of the main reasons for students leaving the course were related to perceived poor quality of teaching staff, the content of course not matching the needs of the students and excessive demands on their time. Callan (2005) also found that some students that participated in his study confirmed that they would return to TAFE if the quality of teachers, flexibility and the content of the course were improved.

Callan (2005) calls for TAFE institutes to address the students' perception of the lack of quality of teachers and inflexibility within teaching units. A decade later, evidence from this study found that apart from ensuring compliance with regulations, there has not been any substantial change to the training structures or learning experiences of students within teaching units.

During the study, faculty management outlined their expectation that head teachers work more actively to incorporate student-centric cultures and flexible strategies into teaching section operations, particularly in pedagogical practices. A number of faculty managers characterised some head teachers as inhibiting pedagogic innovation and actively supporting the maintenance of familiar traditional pedagogical practices.

Misko and Priest (2009) also investigated some of the suggestions of this study for improving the VET experience of learners based on the course relevance and design, staff attributes and behaviours, teaching and learning practices, access to courses,



facilities and services, assessment practices, learning resources, equipment and materials, initial information provision and administration & learning support services. They found three areas that students deemed most in need of improvement. These were improving course relevance and design, improving staff attributes and behaviours and improving teaching and learning practices.

If head teachers are to influence cultures that promote learning within teaching units, senior managers need to critically evaluate the role of compliance and audit culture within TAFE teaching units to avoid excessive focus on process and prevent it from becoming a hindrance to educational imperatives. This is a challenge for TAFE leadership as regulators demand full compliance at all times (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2016c).

This will enable TAFE institutes to move into a mature risk culture where faculty managers trust the occupational expertise and commitment of teachers. This could only be achieved if all ingredients of success are brought together, particularly with regard to raising the capability of teaching staff in the light of the performance expectations of VET reforms that are continuing to place demands on teaching staff thereby disturbing (Seddon, 2011) their occupational mission.

### *Culture of Innovation*

In an environment where TAFE teaching units have transitioned from a supply-based to a demand-based funding model, operating within a marketised environment, the need for pedagogic innovation has never been greater (Robertson, 2009; Seddon, 2011). Evidence from this study suggests that teaching units are struggling to maintain any conditions for creating or sustaining a culture of pedagogic innovation in this environment when they are stretched with many competing internal and external pressures. The discussions with teachers from all six teaching units highlighted that, teaching units currently do not have the capacity, capability, conditions, environment or the freedom to be innovative in their teaching practices.

As Harris (2015) asserts, teachers indicated that the current VET policies create a culture where the needs of the economy are seen as superior to the needs of

individuals in the society to which TAFE teaching units traditionally attributed greater importance to.

During the study, a major concern raised by head teachers was that the pressures and trends within the current VET environment have diminished the quality of tradespersons and other para-professionals emerging from the VET sector. They claimed that this will have detrimental effects on the economy in the future. The head teachers also claimed that the current environment is threatening the ability of slow learners to succeed. Another concern was that the pressures of regulatory compliance are taking their focus away from the core function of teaching and minimizing their activities to achieve a compliance 'check list'. The head teachers said that maintaining teacher morale in a very negative teaching unit culture had become a problem. In a similar manner, teachers also perceived that strict enforcement of efficiency measures, customer-centric processes, and compliance requirements had increased their workload and reduced the quality of delivery without any tangible or intangible reward for their extra effort.

### **Resistance to Pedagogic Innovation**

Teachers stated that long-established and unchallenged pedagogical practices had continued to dominate teaching unit pedagogical cultures. The teachers articulated that these practices that served their industry and students well in the past are still valid for achieving the objectives of the teaching unit. The teachers acknowledged that their pedagogical practices have not categorically been challenged by either the TAFE leadership or themselves in the past, even amidst the changes experienced in the VET sector over the last two decades. The teachers deny that pedagogical transformations are necessary to respond to reforms that they perceive as being driven by economic factors.

In order to produce quality educational outcomes, in an environment where performance expectations are linked to efficiency measures and strict compliance requirements, faculty managers are looking to head teachers to bring a culture of pedagogic innovation within teaching units. At the same time, faculty managers acknowledged that they are not at liberty to relax the strict compliance requirements

and create environments that are conducive to pedagogic innovation. This has impacted on the innovation capacity of the teaching unit.

There have been calls for teaching units to transform into cultures that promote learning and to tailor operations to customer needs with agility and flexibility. The faculty managers and head teachers claimed that teaching unit pedagogical structures that are predominantly driven by teacher-led 'locked-step' delivery will not provide that flexible customer demand in the current VET environment. This requires head teachers to influence a positive learning culture with inviting, enabling, safe and secure learning environments where students are guided to achieve excellence through personalised approaches to learning. In an environment driven by the learning needs of students, they are expected to take more ownership of their own learning.

The findings from the study suggest that this would be challenging to both teachers and students, especially in trade based teaching units. The capacity of current apprentices to take responsibility for their own learning was questioned by teachers. Based on the evidence gathered, the study concluded that there is a need for a considered approach to shaping the culture of employers and students to take on and succeed in learning environments that are not purely led by teachers as per the past practices.

### **Economic Solution or Pedagogic Solution?**

The study on teaching units confirmed that the primary response of TAFE to VET reforms was economically driven. In response to changing funding models, teaching units were forced to make cost efficiencies through increasing class sizes, reducing face-to-face class hours, casualization of teachers, introducing blended delivery and cutting down on individual support.

Some teaching sections have marginally modified their delivery practices through conducting integrated competency unit delivery and assessment. In limited cases, teaching units introduced online learning material supplement face-to-face delivery without substantial changes to the teacher-led pedagogical model.

## **Harnessing a Pedagogic Culture**

The observations and data presented within the study demonstrate that teachers are accustomed to a high level of autonomy within the boundaries of their classrooms. The cultural norm of teaching units demonstrated that teachers limited their occupational expertise and pedagogical skills predominantly to their own classrooms and collaboration amongst teachers were limited. During semi-structured interviews, teachers frequently used phrases such as “my classroom”, “my students” and “my lessons” when discussing pedagogical issues. The pedagogical expertise they developed as part of their work practice were primarily confined to their own practice.

Head teachers also perceived their role as educational leaders to be supporting the teachers in their classroom practices by establishing environments and conditions for teachers to perform their job well within their own classroom. Any interference by the head teacher into their classroom practices was generally seen by teachers as intruding into their teaching space.

Zammit et al. (2007) assert that quality teaching is not derived from applying a pre-determined set of methods to all situations, but should be dynamic and contextualized to the changing needs of students and environments. In line with this argument, progressive head teachers will make a difference by actively refining the patterns of pedagogical behaviours and values of the entire teaching unit collectively to ensure that quality teaching and learning is achieved even amidst constantly changing environments.

Discussions with teaching staff and the study into the daily activities of the six teaching units exhibited shared beliefs, values, assumptions and experiences that are unique to each teaching unit exposing the long-established subcultures within these teaching units. The study provided strong evidence that any attempt to change these long-established cultures and patterns of behaviours are fraught with the intense objection, emotion and retaliation within teaching units, especially trade teaching units that have entrenched industry and trade based cultural attributes within the teaching unit cultures.

The head teachers are being entrusted with leading a systematic permeation of performance expectations into teaching unit cultures and to influence the pedagogical structures and practices. These influences are expected to harness a pedagogical culture that would shape individual teaching practices as well as collective pedagogical structures across the teaching unit. This is critical if teaching units are to respond successfully to the expectations of reforms in terms of quality, efficiency, flexibility, and transparency.

### *Commercially focused Cultures*

Evidence from the study suggests that TAFE institutes are expecting head teachers to promote commercially focused cultures that are perceived by teaching staff to be standing in tension with the service-oriented cultures that TAFE teaching units are well-known for. The spirit of Kangan (Kangan, 1974) that supported the occupational commitment of TAFE teachers to build the capacity of individuals and societies is seen to be standing in tension with these directions. The head teachers assert that within the current industrial relations structures and long-established 'public-service' cultures within teaching sections, achieving a commercially-focused culture proves to be very challenging.

### *Quality focused Cultures*

Discussions with head teachers suggested that the current teaching unit cultures are formed to provide quality teaching by providing structured instructions to students in a systematic manner using a strict time-based volume of training provision. Some head teachers suggested that there is a 'disconnect' between the quality of training that TAFE teaching units are aiming for and the quality that is expected by the customer. The head teachers articulated that quality is not the ultimate motivation of many customers. In the current VET environment, head teachers say that customers and industry are not willing to pay any additional price for quality in terms of money, effort or time above and beyond their immediate needs.

During this study, a common concern that was shared by teachers was that the push for new delivery models that takes the focus away from teacher-led training will result in erosion of quality provision of training. This association of quality with

teacher-led training is resulting in teachers being resistant to any alternative delivery strategies.

### *Customer Centric Cultures*

Mitchell et al. (2003) state that the VET environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a new emphasis on demand-driven and customer-centric approaches. This leads to greater emphasis on customising and personalising services to individual customers.

Australian council for private education and training (2011) claims that private education providers are strongly customer centric and take pride in their ability to design services to meet the unique needs of customers. TAFE NSW (2008) also promoted a customer-focused agenda within TAFE NSW. The state of Victoria - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2012) made a strong commitment to placing customers and industry at the centre of vocational training and to provide choice to customers through open and competitive markets.

As Callan et al. (2007) assert, TAFE institutes both in Victoria and NSW will need to be flexible and customer-centric to compete and survive in these highly competitive VET markets.

Students and employers now demand training structures that are flexible to their unique requirements. This was also confirmed in previous studies done on TAFE customers (Callan, 2005; Misko et al., 2005; Polesel et al., 2004; Uren, 2001). The study found that Victorian teaching units, particularly have had demands from customers to match the services provided by other training providers and provide personalised solutions to their unique needs.

In the absence of innovative pedagogical practices, changed administrative practices and limited adaptation of technologies across all teaching units, head teachers are confronted with being expected to provide personalised services to individual customers that are resulting in chaos, confusion and an unmanageable workload.

## **6.5 Responding to VET reforms**

As outlined above, the study found that VET reforms have intensified expectations from teaching units and these are challenging and disturbing the core mission of teaching units. Head teachers, as the most influential and trusted TAFE leaders within teaching units, are entrusted with responding to reforms with innovation to meet the performance expectations.

### **Performance expectations of VET Reforms**

#### *Revenue Based Budgeting*

As Heimans (2012) asserts, TAFE institutes need to be able to continue to provide their important function within the society. As the owner of TAFE sector, governments have determined the ‘value’ that the society is willing to pay for this function. Therefore, the production cost of these institutions is expected to be within this ‘value.’ Heimans (2012) continues to assert that those with the power and influence in shaping the policies are able to delimit what constitutes as knowledge in a particular occupation at a particular time. They also have the power to determine who will involve in the means of knowledge production and determine the value of those productions.

On that basis, as outlined above in the document, the reforms that were introduced by the Australian government have shifted the focus to demand-based funding and has determined the ‘value’ of the development of skill in a particular occupation. This is reflected in the funding model that is implemented in the marketised VET sector.

The head teachers are grappling with the tensions of implementing the requirements of the new funding environment where the ‘value’ that is determined by “persons with power” do not stretch to cater to the current occupational commitments of teachers. The study highlighted that the funding in the new environment is sufficient to deliver ‘just-enough’ to achieve competencies outlined in the training packages. Teachers claimed that very limited time can be devoted to the development of competencies under the current funding model.

Evidence from this study suggested that teachers are very passionate about their students and committed to building the capacity of the individuals and prepare them for their industry. Harnessing the teacher's passion and mobilizing their commitment to building the capacity of individuals, preparing learning workers and enabling them to make contributions to national economic and social development (Seddon, 2011) is not catered for in the current demand-driven funding model.

The study confirmed that head teachers are increasingly under pressure to bring their training delivery budgets to be in line with the revenue derived from training. This forces them to re-think the collective approach to training from within teaching sections. Training activities within teaching units need to be revised to fit with the revenue generated from each activity.

The service-dominant culture within teaching units pose huge challenges for implementing revenue- based delivery. The faculty managers argued that the negative reactions from teachers are due to the current model restricting them from providing unrestricted educational services to students as required under the previous model where budget considerations were not at the forefront of educational decision making. All head teachers are dealing with negative reactions from teachers to these changes on a daily basis.

### **Diversify Income Streams**

Faculty management expects head teachers to diversify income streams within the teaching unit by broadening products and services offered to protect themselves with 'ups and downs' of market conditions. Commercially savvy head teachers stated that diversifying income streams has the capacity to enable teaching units to subsidise high expense programs with high profit making programs and buy the time required to change the pedagogical practices to make all activities cost-neutral.

Evidence from this study suggested that while the two service-based teaching units have moved more successfully for diversifying income streams, trade teaching sections displayed very limited movement in this regard. The study also found that Victorian teaching units have progressed more into diversifying income streams



through commercial ventures compared to NSW teaching units that participated in the study.

### *Meeting Customer Expectations*

The current reforms are designed to give power to the customer as the purchaser of training and therefore customers have the right to choose how, where and when learning should happen depending on their requirements.

Evidence from this study suggests that teaching sections showed limited willingness to change teaching practices to put customers at the centre of training efforts. Head teachers have begun to make this cultural change within the teaching units by attempting to embed more customer focused processes into teaching units. However, this study found that minimum progress has been made in changing pedagogical models to suit customer needs.

The study highlighted the push by faculty management to provide greater choice and personalised programs for customers to gain the competitive advantage in a marketised environment. Victorian head teachers highlighted that constant customer demands to match the service provision of private “for-profit” providers, is creating fundamental issues within teaching units as the complex process of quality, content, delivery modes, compliance and time cannot easily be aligned to the needs of individual customers. This has been exacerbated by complex compliance policies of regulators as well as systems and procedures within TAFE institutes. These are constraining the ability of teaching units to quickly enforce operational changes to meet individual customer demands.

### *Responding to ‘Competition Agenda’*

The study highlighted that effects of competition on teaching units were realised more by Victorian teaching sections than NSW. The evidence from the study indicated that marketisation, especially in Victoria, is promoting competition based on price, customer service, responsiveness and flexibility rather than educational outcomes and quality. Implementation of competition in Victoria was rather chaotic for TAFE institutes where policies were continuously reformed and changed in

response to questionable practices from some training providers. The regulations and policies were also changed frequently by governments to accommodate changing market conditions. Participants claimed that competition has inhibited quality and pedagogical excellence in teaching units.

Teachers in NSW were focused on competing in the market-based on 'value' and articulated that as an educational institution TAFE sector should be competing based on 'price'. As Wheelahan (2012b) points out, competing on value is difficult in VET as products and quality are already set by the training packages and funding regimes. As suggested by Wheelahan (2012b), Victorian head teachers and faculty managers also confirmed that the competition in Victoria is based on price rather than quality. In NSW, participants were expecting that employers, industry, and learners will be attracted to TAFE due to the 'quality' education they deliver through increased time served on training. As 'price' is set by the funding body, competition based on 'price' is irrelevant in NSW with the exception of fully commercial delivery.

### **The Competitive Advantage**

The faculty managers reported that TAFE institutes are at a distinct competitive cost disadvantage due to its high-cost models and industrial relations structures.

Teaching staff viewed the competitive advantage of teaching units as the quality and the volume of face-to-face training that is offered to students. The teachers, particularly from trade sections stressed that employers and apprentices value the quality and certainty of learning provided through face-to-face training. The faculty managers had an alternative view that this 'one-size fits all' model has the danger of reducing the competitive advantage of TAFE institutes (Polesel et al., 2004; Uren, 2001). A number of teachers were of the opinion that TAFE should segment its market and only concentrate on customers who value 'face-to-face' training and leave the other modes of delivery to other providers.

The evidence from this study infers that the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence of teachers have the biggest competitive advantage within teaching units compared to private providers. These strengths need to be harnessed by head teachers to transform teaching unit cultures to meet the performance expectations of

reforms (see Seddon, 2011). This needs to be achieved through promoting pedagogical innovation, customer-centric processes, efficient cost structures and producing quality outcomes.

### *Industry-Led Training*

The concept of industry led VET is not new to TAFE institutes as this is a theme that is embedded in the entire flow of policy reforms in the VET sector (Noonan, 2016).

The study findings suggest that head teachers are struggling with the provision of training in the manner, mode and time that employers expect due to the restrictions of current teaching conditions, funding models as well as administrative and compliance frameworks. The teachers reported that especially employers of apprentices are expecting quality through face-to-face training in a strict time-based manner utilising the entire four-year duration allocated. Teaching staff also reported that the majority of apprentices were expected to learn all skills using face to face delivery at TAFE teaching units and employers had minimum time devoted to training apprentices.

The faculty managers stated that if head teachers are to be responsive to industry needs, significant review of teaching unit processes will need to occur. Head teachers are further challenged by some employer expectations that go beyond the expectations of training packages and the restrictions of the reformed VET environment. The head teachers from trade sections that participated in the study do not actively promote training and assessment at workplaces. They claim that license restrictions on the trade require them to train apprentices under close supervision within simulated workshops and training environments. This issue is also exacerbated by some employers being too narrow in their service provision where they are unable to provide on-the-job training to workers across the entire range of skills that are required for the qualification. The head teachers also claimed that the cost of conducting workplace delivery and assessment will be substantially higher than classroom training.

Discussions with head teachers from both Victoria and NSW suggest that head teachers are approaching any flexible provision of training to individual employers

cautiously as the compliance processes of TAFE institutes will render this extremely difficult to manage.

Participants of the study also had conflicting views with regard to training provision. According to some teachers, the training provision should be focused narrowly to meet the immediate skill needs of the industry. According to other participants, TAFE should provide broad-based skills that prepare students for future variations of job functions. It was seen that generally trade based teaching sections favoured a narrower skill based training provision and service based teaching units favoured a broader skill set. The head teachers stressed that it has been challenging to incorporate generic and transferable skills into training provision while at the same time providing occupational specific skills that industry and employers require to meet their immediate skill needs.

### **Changing Goal Posts**

The study participants expressed concern that the work of head teachers is constantly being interrupted by increasing the rate of policy changes, particularly in Victoria. Variations and modifications to funding arrangements midway through programs are forcing head teachers to constantly look for creative and innovative ways of continuing student learning and maintaining teaching hours. Teaching sections also reported that there is a lag between announcements of changes to funding models and reviewing TAFE contracts to accommodate these changes. This has created further challenges for teaching units. The study participants indicated that governments are constantly changing goal posts in reacting to negative practices of some VET providers by tightening policies and compliance requirements. Wheelahan (2015a) claims this is a direct consequence of opening up the training market to for-profit providers under marketisation policies.

### **Teaching Unit Workforce**

The teaching unit workforce is critical if performance expectations of VET reforms are to materialise within teaching units. Head teachers are entrusted with the task of creating high performing teams within teaching units that promote pedagogical

innovation, cooperative work environments, flexible & agile processes, collaborative approaches, streamlined approach to capability development and accountability for process improvements.

The study highlighted that the head teacher alone is not in a position to drive quality, availability, flexibility, and responsiveness of products offered to customers. It was evident that unless head teachers have the ‘buy-in’ from teachers to incorporate these characteristics into the training provision this will be an impossible task. While the study found that there were ‘high performing’ teachers attached to teaching units, significant cultural changes will need to occur to shape these teaching units to be high performing teams.

### **Managing Performance**

Performance management of TAFE teachers is considered to be a primary responsibility of head teachers. This is an extremely time-consuming iterative process that involves planning, detailed record keeping, regular reviews, follow-up plans and formulation of extended support plans. During the study, head teachers expressed that they did not have the capability or the time to devote to implement the processes needed to get a positive outcome from performance management of teachers. Furthermore, head teachers claimed that the absence of enforceable key performance indicators for TAFE teachers and ambiguous performance standards are a massive obstruction for managing teacher performance. The head teachers also identified that management skills and tools to deal with resentment, constant objections and retaliation by teachers against any performance expectations are essential for providing strong leadership within the teaching unit.

### **Leading Innovation**

The teaching units currently operate in a vastly different environment and are radically changed from the environment that existed when the TAFE system was first initiated. The current VET environment is not only urging teachers to instil innovative capability in their students, but also forcing teaching sections to be innovative in the provision of training. The head teachers as the leaders of the teaching teams are entrusted with leading this innovation.

## **Gaps in Capability**

The study established that a range of leadership skills, including educational, business and team leadership skills is essential for surviving as a head teacher in the current rapidly changing environment. Head teachers stated that they were promoted to this position based on their competence in pedagogical and technical skills rather than based on their leadership skills. Participants stated that they are now expected to possess a range of skills ranging from business and business leadership skills, innovation and entrepreneurship, staff and team management skills, distributed leadership capabilities, mentoring and coaching skills, managerial courage and risk taking, performance management, and strategic planning skills.

It is necessary to develop the business acumen of head teachers to build their capability to successfully manage the business imperatives of their job with the educational imperatives.

In addition to formal leadership skills, the study also uncovered an urgent need for more formal head teacher support networks, ongoing formalised coaching programs as well as continuing professional development requirements to ensure technical currency in their discipline.

A number of head teachers requested a cross-discipline head teacher support networks to “thrash things out” and discuss collective solutions for the challenges they are facing in teaching units. This will help to infect others with pockets of pedagogic innovation that is prevalent in teaching units.

## **Chapter Seven: Concluding Remarks**

Derived from the findings of this study, a summary of the conclusions and suggestions are included in this segment. A summary of study findings framed within the original research questions as well as suggestions for TAFE leadership is provided in the following segment.

In summarising the study findings, this segment seeks to link the connection between the three research questions. During the review of the literature, the researcher established that these three research questions stand in tension with one another with regard to the role of head teachers. The head teachers as educational leaders hold a core function of supporting pedagogical excellence within teaching units. However, the expectations of VET reforms may create inherent tensions within the educational leadership function of head teachers and the study was expected to provide insight into how head teachers balance these imperatives. In addition, the long-established cultures within teaching units may support or hinder the educational leadership practices of head teachers within a marketised VET environment. The three research questions are intended to explore each area distinctly and aggregate the findings to provide an overall view of the influence of head teacher leadership on pedagogical practices within the long-established culture of teaching units amidst continuous VET reforms.

In addition, the study also provides a series of suggestions for TAFE leadership and policy makers. It is expected that these suggestions will inform TAFE leadership and government policy makers of possible actions and attentions in relation to supporting head teachers to positively influence pedagogical practices within TAFE teaching units.

## 7.1 Conclusions Related to Research Questions

### Research Questions One:

*In what ways might the leadership of head teachers influence the pedagogical practices within TAFE teaching units?*

The head teachers are found to be the most trusted leaders, according to teachers within TAFE institutes. Head teachers are in the best position to influence pedagogical practices within teaching units. They play an important role in bringing teachers together to create environments that are conducive to co-creation of knowledge.

The head teacher role was described by study participants as demanding, tedious, stressful, busy, pressured, lonely, isolated, reactive, separated from teaching, unrewarding, time wasting and lacking in support. These characteristics do not support conditions needed for influencing pedagogic innovation within teaching units.

The freedom of head teachers to uphold the pedagogical excellence and occupational expertise of teachers are constrained by various changes in the external VET environment. These changes include, but not limited to: the introduction of Neoliberal CBT models through the implementation of training packages, prescriptive training package guidelines, marketisation and associated demand-driven funding regime and continuous tightening of compliance guidelines. The leadership practice of head teachers is also disturbed by a myriad of financial, business, administrative and compliance expectations. In addition, there are mounting and sometimes contradictory pressures from TAFE institutes and industrial relations structures. These have also greatly restrained the ability of head teachers to influence pedagogical practices.

The study found that the development of strong, consistent and pedagogically sound leadership skills of head teachers is paramount to reaching consistent excellence in training. The study on teaching units demonstrated that TAFE is well positioned with the expertise needed to support pedagogic innovation. TAFE leadership must



implement strategies to harness this potential and use it to position the TAFE sector with a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive Australian VET sector.

Evidence from the study suggests that TAFE teaching staff favour traditional teacher-led ‘face-to-face’ delivery strategies. This fact was demonstrated by their commitment, capability, and proficiency to this mode of training. The study also uncovered elements of pedagogic innovation from within teaching units. However, due to various organisational, system and cultural issues, the innovation in pedagogy is not at the forefront of the pedagogical practices within teaching units. The study uncovered a gap in the willingness and capability of head teachers to provide leadership in alternative pedagogical models and capability and willingness of teachers to embrace any alternatives to traditional models.

Despite distinct sub-cultures that are evident in teaching units, the study found that more pervasive and sustaining pedagogical influences within the teaching units cannot be achieved by head teachers operating in isolation. This could only be achieved if head teachers become part of an effective management team within TAFE institutes with a focus on pedagogical innovation and having a high-level sponsorship of senior management.

According to teaching staff, the “top-down” leadership models within TAFE institutes had inhibited the ability of head teachers to influence pedagogical structures within teaching units. In order to provide environments for pedagogic innovation, TAFE institutes may need to relinquish their power to teaching staff and elevate the status of teachers by empowering them to become pedagogic leaders. Investing in continuous professional development opportunities for teachers is an important aspect of achieving this.

The study established evidence to support the claim by Seddon (2011) that performance expectations of VET reforms, if not implemented with pedagogical innovation, will render the status of TAFE teacher to a mere ‘industry-trainer’ position. The study uncovered that teachers are resisting any move away from traditional face-to-face delivery models and at the same time deny that teachers should be moved to the position of ‘industry-trainer’. Many external factors such as the funding that is linked to Neoliberal CBT models (Hodge, 2016) and minimum

VET teacher qualifications suitable for workplace trainers, are limiting the ability of head teachers to influence pedagogical structures within teaching units when responding to VET reforms.

## **Research Question Two**

*How might the culture created by shared experiences within the teaching unit influence the way content is taught in teaching units and the leadership practice of head teachers?*

Conclusions derived from the study suggest that head teachers within teaching units are attempting to transform teaching section cultures to be ‘just enough’ to satisfy the requirements of new funding regimes and therefore major cultural transformations are not sought or achieved. The study data did not highlight any exceptional pedagogical practices or innovation that has transformed the teaching units with the elements that are conducive to gaining competitive advantage in a marketised environment.

The study highlighted head teacher capability gaps to critically challenge the prevalent cultures of the teaching units and to align them with the wider internal and organizational requirements. The lack of ownership by some head teachers to align the behaviours and actions within the teaching units with the values of the parent TAFE culture has led to countercultures being created within teaching units.

Strong and long-established cultures within teaching units are proving to be resistant to re-evaluating practices and adapting new strategies to be in line with changed operational contexts. Developing new approaches to pedagogies within teaching units is challenging in these conditions as the study found that the teaching unit cultures proved that they had limited ability to embrace new learning, and to review their practices to align more with the expected culture within a marketised environment. The head teachers are operating within a wide range of operational tensions in strong teaching unit cultures. They include but are not limited to: educational leadership vs management imperatives, maintenance of current practices vs challenging established norms, respecting professional freedom vs achieving

compliance, achieving current performance expectations vs positioning the teaching unit with a competitive edge for the future.

The study established that ‘top-down’ management approaches, where teaching units are directed to achieve cultural transformations, are leading to countercultures within teaching units. Instead, senior management efforts must be directed to transforming the teaching units into learning organisations where teachers collectively become reflective practitioners who understand the pressures and trends of external environments and transform their cultures to provide innovative responses.

Teachers expressed the view that faculty managers, who drove expectations with mere economic imperatives based on short-term resource constraints, were doing a long term disservice to TAFE. Evidence from the study demonstrates a distinct ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude from teachers. This is evidently created as a result of the perception by teachers that the vertical authority of managers is only concerned with the budget and the bottom line and do not understand the pressures that exist within teaching units. Consequently, as Seddon (2009) states, TAFE could be diminishing the innovative capacity of the very people that are supposed to build skills for an innovative Australia.

The study highlighted that long-established identities of TAFE teachers are currently being challenged through reforms. The VET reforms are forcing transformations of the teaching positions. As Seddon (2011) anticipated, the study witnessed that head teachers are confronted on a daily basis with resistance by teachers as their cultural identity within the teaching units are questioned by the expected changes to the teaching unit cultures. The teachers actively defend their past practices and values that have contributed to the current teaching unit cultures. They have shown strong resistance to the forced changes to their cultural identity due to VET reforms. This is governing the pedagogical practices and limiting the ability of head teachers to bring pedagogic innovation.

### **Research Question Three**

*How does the teaching unit under the leadership of head teachers respond to VET reforms implemented by Australian government?*

The study concluded that teaching units quietly resist the painful process of moving from a predominantly liberal educational institution to a business-focussed institution that constantly react to government policy changes and the wider compliance culture created by marketisation. The head teachers are under constant pressure to provide positive solutions to mounting expectations from senior managers, government expectations, industry requirements, employer preferences, communities and learners due to marketised reforms within a service based traditional teaching unit culture. In the trade based teaching units, head teachers are expected to assume the full responsibility for responding to competition and complying with regulations within the minimum responsibility placed on the teachers. It was observed that responding to these pressures requires a skill set from head teachers that are different to the educational leadership role that they were previously employed to undertake.

The study concluded that TAFE institutes needed to concentrate on building the innovative leadership capability of head teachers to transform pedagogical practices by transforming the teaching unit cultures. Measures must be taken to formulate high performing teams of co-leaders from within teaching units to collectively achieve the performance expectations of VET reforms. This will enable teaching units to continue to produce high-quality outcomes even within a marketised VET environment.

## **7.2 Suggestions and Recommendations**

The following are some suggestions for TAFE institutes and policy makers based on the findings that emerged from the study. It is anticipated that these suggestions will provide a substantive set of principles to guide TAFE leadership on influencing and upholding pedagogical excellence in producing quality educational outcomes while responding to challenges of market-based VET reforms.

### **Suggestions for TAFE Leadership**

1. The TAFE sector needs to review the head teacher role with a future focus to be a better fit for the current and future VET environments.

- a. Revise the heading teacher statement of duties to reflect the actual responsibilities and duties that are performed within TAFE institutes. Link the statement of duties to various performance expectations of VET environment.
  - b. Implement a head teacher capability framework addressing all leadership capabilities that are required to develop the complex mix of requirements to be a head teacher in a rapidly changing marketised VET environment.
  - c. Ensure that role of head teacher of each state reflects the unique performance expectations of these States as the study noted that the reform implementation model in Victoria differs significantly from NSW.
2. Develop and implement a coordinated strategy to harness and expand the pedagogical, occupational, administrative as well as business capabilities across the entire teaching section to operate in changing VET environments.
    - a. Introduce a scheme of continuing professional development (CPD) program based on the immediate and forecasted changes in the external and internal environments. It is anticipated that such scheme will help enhance the confidence and trust in the professionalism of TAFE teaching workforce.
    - b. Link CPD programs to the pedagogical as well as occupational specialisations of teachers.
    - c. Present a framework to support head teachers to harness and promote this potential of teachers by providing more structured, failure-tolerant opportunities to teachers.
    - d. Gather information on current and ongoing teacher capability and employ this information for evaluating risk status of teaching units and in formulating plans for capacity development in teaching sections.
    - e. Consider implementing a head teacher leadership development program to support future leaders with the breadth and depth of capability development required to perform this role.

3. Establish a more streamlined approach to building the innovative capability within teaching units. Consider leadership coaching for head teachers using external consultants with a program to train internal coaches for the continuation of mentoring and coaching in the hereafter.
4. Consider introducing KPIs for teaching staff within teaching units and providing more team-centred leadership and autonomy to teaching units to achieve the KPIs. Develop standards for teaching and assessments within teaching units and link them to KPIs.
5. Provide continuous professional renewal for TAFE teachers and provide opportunities for experiential learning capability development (Woods, 2009) projects to extend their teaching practices from the boundaries of classrooms into online platforms, workplaces, and industries.
6. Refocus attention to quality issues while managing the tensions of introducing market-based reforms within teaching units. Critically revise the quality model used in teaching units. Reward low-risk teaching units by using a risk-based approach for monitoring compliance. In doing so, explore how head teachers can provide pedagogical freedom for teachers to harness the occupational expertise and pedagogical excellence within the teaching unit.
7. Critically evaluate the role of compliance and audit culture within TAFE teaching units to avoid excessive focus on process and prevent it from becoming a hindrance to educational imperatives. Plan a progressive move from the current 'reactive risk culture' driven primarily by compliance to a 'mature risk culture' that enables innovation.
8. Take a strategic approach to shaping the culture of employers and students to accept and succeed in learning environments that are not purely led by teachers as per past practices.
9. Extend pedagogic innovation beyond teaching units into all support units and managers.
10. Shape the teaching unit culture to embrace innovation through harnessing the collective occupational background and pedagogical skills of teachers. As the most influential leader in teaching units, the head teacher needs to be an enabler of innovation. They must take an active interest in changing the culture of the teaching unit to promote innovative teaching practices.

## **Suggestions for Policy Makers**

1. Policy makers need to consider a system of VET teacher registration linked to qualifications and CPD points within a professional body of VET educators. This has the potential to raise the professional status of teachers and also provide a certified register of teacher and trainer qualifications for compliance purposes across the Australian VET sector.
2. The study participants urged governments to have greater inclusion of VET educators in the process of VET policy creation as they are critical partners of skill development for Australian economies.

TAFE institutes need to promote the stability of teaching units and invest in its' teaching workforce to ensure that teaching units operate effectively to respond to the performance expectations of VET reforms. This has the potential to increase the overall student experiences and quality of educational outcomes while operating within the constraints of financial limitations and compliance expectations. TAFE teachers suffer from a lack of structured capability development frameworks within TAFE institutes to support the maintenance of their occupational currency and develop up-to-date pedagogical skills.

Participants said that due to mishaps of many RTOs, there is a lack of confidence in the quality of VET qualifications in the employment market. Unless measures are taken to restore this confidence, reputation of TAFE will also suffer along with other competitors.

It was the intention of the study that these findings will enable TAFE senior management to understand the challenges, dilemmas, pressures, and tensions within teaching units and enable their innovation efforts. Support of senior managers is required to empower head teachers to transform the teaching unit cultures to align with the parent organisational culture and the changing VET environment. TAFE Directors and decision makers need to recognise and place greater importance on leadership at the teaching unit level and implement strategies to upskill existing head teachers as well as plan for future head teachers.

It was also the intention of the study that the findings will provide inspiration for all stakeholders to invest in teaching units and in turn promote careers in TAFE teaching to a new younger generation. The study findings confirmed the need to attract and retain the best teachers within TAFE institutes by improving the attractiveness of TAFE teaching as a profession. The study participants claimed that succession planning to preserve the pedagogical expertise within TAFE amidst an ageing and somewhat dis-empowered teaching workforce is urgently needed to maintain the prominence of TAFE in Australia. The teaching staff suggest that TAFE executive and faculty management take active measures to re-invigorate the existing teaching workforce with a renewed passion for teaching. This will attract young teachers with a commitment to pedagogical excellence into the future TAFE workforce and enable the TAFE sector to continue to be the benchmark of quality of VET delivery in Australia.

### **7.3 Suggestions for Further Study**

The issues surfaced during the study highlights a number of areas when further research is warranted.

Four trades- based teaching units participated in this study. During the study, they claimed that trade based qualifications must be delivered in a teacher-led traditional classroom environment with a strict time-based progression. The objective of this study did not support exploring this further and testing this claim. However, it highlights the need for further study on delivering trade-based qualifications in a marketised VET environment focussing on pedagogical structures and models for trade based delivery.

This study pointed to the substantial capability gap in teachers and head teachers in contemporary pedagogic models. The researcher believes that this has impacted on their capacity for pedagogic innovation. This study highlighted the need for a study on the capacity for pedagogic innovation within TAFE sector to support structured capability development frameworks for TAFE teachers in a marketised environment.



During this study, there were claims by teaching staff that marketisation has seriously impacted on quality and student outcomes. This was highly visible within trade environments. Further study on effects of marketisation on student learning and outcomes will make valuable contributions into this argument.

The study highlighted the preference from TAFE teachers to continue to deliver in a teacher-led face-to-face delivery model. Teachers claimed that this model promoted quality student outcomes. Further comparative studies on student skill development journey under the following alternative models has the potential to greatly contribute valuable data to support or disprove this argument. The suggested alternative models are: open learning spaces, open workshop spaces, self-paced learning, technology-integrated learning, workplace delivery, employer-led skill development.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

This qualitative study was conducted within the social constructionist theoretical framework. Data gathering and deductive thematic data analysis were conducted within the chosen framework.

A detailed literature scan on the flow of VET policy set the context of the study. This highlighted the policies that transformed TAFE environment from being predominantly a supply-based educational service institution to a market-driven demand based institution. It was found that despite the changes in the policy context, many TAFE teaching units have continued to operate in the same way until the impact of changes to the funding environment. The literature scan on external influences shaping VET reforms highlighted the global drivers that have influenced the Australian TAFE sector.

The study highlighted the tensions within the teaching units when moving from a supply- based funding environment to a demand-based funding environment within the TAFE sector.

Main findings from the investigation suggest that head teachers are limited by the culture of compliance, prescriptive training package requirements, heavy

administrative workload, and the ‘top-down’ management directions stifling the educational leadership of head teachers.

This chapter summarised the findings with respect to each research question and objectives. Based on the findings that emerged from the study, this chapter also included a summary of recommendations for TAFE institutes and policy makers.

It also highlighted some new issues that surfaced during the study and suggested areas of potential future research within TAFE sector as well as wider Australian VET environment.

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