The Professionalisation of Vocational Education and Training Practitioners

To Own Buy or Rent

A Case Study of Developments in Finland, Australia and Ireland

Doctor of Education

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Dad, Pat Croke;
and to his brothers Billy and Ned for instilling in me the values I hold dear in life.

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible, and without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter;
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.
Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism.
Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.
Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.
Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

Desiderata ***by Max Ehrmann 1927***

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____
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Abstract

Author: Fiona Croke

Title of Thesis: The Professionalisation of Vocational Education and Training Practitioners. To Own Buy or Rent: **A Case Study of Developments in Finland, Australia and Ireland**

The aim of this study is to explore the professionalisation of vocational education and training (VET) practitioners. Responding to a gap in empirical research the study undertakes a case study analysis of VET national reforms and initiatives in Finland, Ireland and Australia. The study engages with VET practitioners to gather their perspectives on the realities of practice and teaching in the VET sector, their experience of CPD, identifying issues, challenges, barriers and enablers that might inform future developments in the area of professional practice and benefit countries currently embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform.

The research is driven by a constructivist philosophy and employs the research methodological choice of case study. During the operational design phase the study was guided predominantly by the seminal works of Robert Stake *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995) while also referencing Sharan Merriam *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998) and Robert Yin *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (2014). In terms of data gathering the study incorporates participant interview and document review. The works of Myles, Huberman and Saldanas *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2014) informed the data analysis phase. Validity and reliability was approached through a process of triangulating the perspectives and experience of practitioners across three countries: Australia, Finland and Ireland.

In terms of findings the study identifies key drivers in the areas of governance, policy development, organisation, management structures and supports as well as self/the practitioner and their professional development and also comments on the extent to which policy reform and the ability to achieve traction is bounded by country, culture, history and context. In conclusion the study makes a series of recommendations which serve to guide both policy and practitioners towards giving birth to their own institutional responses and to organise public life in such a way as to allow for personal autonomy and critical reflection (that is not anti-intellectual but rather asks questions of itself) and is therefore better equip to keep the system and its structures healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the individual and the learner.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Aim:

The aim of this study is to explore the professionalisation of vocational education and training (VET) practitioners. Responding to a **gap in empirical research** the study undertakes a case study analysis of VET **national reforms** and initiatives in Finland, Ireland and Australia gathering practitioner and policy developers **perspectives** on the **realities of practice and teaching** in the VET sector, **their experience of CPD**, identifying **key policy drivers**, **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** that might inform future developments in the area of professional practice and benefit countries currently embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform.

Context and Rational:

The seeds of interest for this piece of research were sown in 2012 with reports coming out of the European Commission research Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (CEDEFOP) indicating that the vocational education and training (VET) sector had been going through a **period of major reform** and upheaval as a result of the impact of **globalisation,** the subsequent **massification** of education and as a consequence of the **adoption and implementation of Lifelong Learning policy**. **Policy developers** had begun to identify a **lack of engagement with VET** practitioners and **gaps in empirical research** as the bottlenecks to advancing policy developments.

As a programme manager responsible for the implementation of the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme VET funding initiative Leonardo da Vinci Mobility I had attended numerous ministerial meetings, expert group meetings, stakeholder conferences and practitioner workshops across Europe and had also evaluated a number of VET project funding initiatives with the specific aim of addressing the development of VET expertise and best practice. **Common** among the **theme**s were topics such as the **changing role of VET practitioners**, **key competences** and **continuous professional development**. In 2008 I undertook an expert study on behalf the European Commission, the Lifelong Learning Programme National Agencies and the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union to explore the **mobility** of VET practitioner (CMEPIUS 2008). The study identified a **lack of recognition** and **standards of practice** as **barriers to practitioners accessing employment in other jurisdictions**. On reflection each cycle of evaluation seemed to evidence these **reoccurring themes** relating to the **development of professional practice** and I began to become more and more curious about what practitioners from outside the Lifelong Learning Programme funding bubble were **saying about their experience** of teaching in the VET sector, how the major reforms of **Lifelong Learning policy were impacting on their practice** and why countries like Finland could **achieve traction** across the sector while Ireland was struggling to spend Leonardo da Vinci budget allocations directly targeting the professional development for VET practitioners which often resulted in the funding being transferred to other budget streams within the Programme or indeed being returned to the Commission unspent.

Looking beyond Europe to Australia where Training and Further Education (TAFE) providers, with over 100 years experience of industry led VET reform, had embarked on a strategy to **professionalise their workforce during the 90's**: adopting a system of **mandatory competency** based accreditation **policy reform** of the sector was predominately **led by industry demand** underpinned by a process of policy development supported by an **evidence based repository of metrics, statistics** and longitudinal studies. In more recent years, following the implementation of a government policy agenda on Lifelong Learning, TAFE and VET providers alike found themselves coming under increasing pressure to align themselves with the school and higher education sectors who were rather interestingly identifying the **partitioned industry led nature of the TAFE/VET sector as a bottleneck to the provision of a cohesive education system**: being very much of the opinion that they would be unable to **deliver on Government Lifelong Learning targets** without joining forces with TAFE/VET providers and practitioners.

I felt strongly that we had something to learn for each other and from our common experiences: the Greek philosopher Heraclitus $_{C}$.535 to 475_{BCE} believed that in some sense, all things are one and was noted for criticising his predecessors and contemporaries for their failure to see the unity in experience and that parallels are important for how they are different (Buckingham *et al* 2011). For Heraclitus the world was governed by an ongoing law of change with an underlying law of nature manifesting itself as a moral law for human beings.

The aim with this piece of research was therefore to **unpack identified bottlenecks**: to **respond to the gap in empirical research** and to **engage with practitioners**, to learn from each other and from our common experiences by undertaking a case study analysis of VET national reforms and initiatives in Finland, Ireland and Australia to gather **practitioners perspectives** on the realities of practice and teaching in the VET sector, their **experience of CPD**, identifying **key policy drivers** and reforms as well as the **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** that might inform future developments in the area of **professional practice** or be of **benefit countries** currently **embarking** on a **policy agenda of sectoral reform**.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to undertake a **review of literature**, to **contextualise** and **identify key drivers** and **priority areas** in terms of **governance**, **policy development**, **policy evaluation and field research** that both explores and highlights the journey to current European VET policy and professional practice: in other words **how it has developed**, **where it is presently** and **what it is aspiring to achieve and by way of comparison to** look **beyond Europe** to the experiences of **Australia** who had embarked on a policy reform strategy to professionalise their VET workforce during the 90's.

But first let us define VET in the context of this study. Vocational education and training covers quite a broad spectrum of adult and continuing education as well as skills training and development. For the purposes of this study we will focus on the **practice** of vocational education and training that **takes place within the formal education system** as opposed to work-based learning that takes place on-site or in training centres. **Governance** at a national level is often located in the Ministry for Education or the Ministry for Labour and in some cases governance has been merged into a Ministry for Education and Skills. The **organisations** involved in the study are responsible for the delivery of education and training programmes with a focus on the development of skills, knowledge and personal competencies of learners in occupational areas covering sectors ranging from tourism to theatre, healthcare or information technology and everything in between. The **learning environments** can range from a traditional classroom setting or workshop to the industrial/office setting of a work placement in industry/business. The **learners** are typically undertaking full-time or part-time

qualifications and combining work with study to meet the needs of industry. The spectrum of **qualification**s can range from informal to formal as well as containing vocational, technical or continuing education and training. VET **practitioners** as defined by the study encompass individuals who identify themselves primarily as teachers with subject expertise or as industry experts with trainer/facilitator experience. When it comes to VET practitioners professional **practice** the study evidenced professional development in the context of pre-service training and continuous professional development both formal (as in accredited education and training qualifications) and informal as in peer learning, meetings and in-service day training. A more detailed and bounded definition of VET practitioners and practice is outlined in Chapter 4 Methodology pages 68 to 71 along with a comprehensive outline of the case and the case study.

Europe - Governance and policy development:

In order to contextualise vocational education and training governance and policy development across Europe let us start by reviewing **three classic models** of VET evidenced during the first half of the 20th Century, the more recent move towards adopting **Lifelong Learning** as a concept of education, the subsequent **massification of education,** the alignment of **policy to a Lifelong Learning agenda** and more specifically **the implications of Lifelong Learning policy development on VET practitioners** and their practice.

Classic Models of VET:

In the first half of the 20th Century three classic models of VET existed across Europe: the State regulated model, the liberal market model and the dual corporate model (CEDEFOP 2004). The French adopted a State regulated model

whereby priorities for VET were political in nature, the British operated a liberal marketised model with primacy for VET rooted in economics while the Germans opted for a dual corporate model with primacy linked to and located in society:

Three Classic Models of VET			
	The State regulated model	The liberal "market" model	The dual "corporate" model
Identifies with	France	Britain	Germany
Who determines how VET is organised	The State	Negotiated in the market place between representatives of labour management and providers of VET	State regulated chambers of craft trades arranged by profession
Where does VET take place	In special schools so called production schools	Many options in schools and companies or both and via online courses	Predetermined and alternates between companies and VET schools (dual model)
Who determines the content of VET	The State (together with social partners) it does not aim to reflect practice in enterprise but relies instead on theoretical training	The market or individual companies depending on what the need is at that moment – the content is not predetermined	Entrepreneurs, unions and the State decide jointly
Who pays for VET	The State levies a tax on companies and finances VET but only for a number of applicants each year.	As a general rule the people who receive the training pay for it – some companies provide finance for the courses they provide	Companies finance training within the enterprise and can set the cost off against tax. Trainees are paid a contractually agreed sum. VET schools are financed by the State
What qualifications are gained and what opportunities do they lead to	The State awards a certificate which gives access to higher qualifications	There is no monitoring or universally accredited final examinations	The qualifications are generally recognised as entitling their holder to work in relevant occupations and to go on to higher courses

Table 2.1 Three Classic Models of VET CEDEFOP 2004

The aim of a State regulated model of vocational education and training is to create a political power based relationship between capital and labour: workers become qualified with the help of State regulated and State financed education and training schemes. Decisions relating to the supply and demand of training reside with State bodies and agencies and because workforce projections and future-skills-needs change and evolve this system is most effective when focused on developing training provisions for basic professions. The type of qualification is less dependent on its immediate application to market and therefore practical targeted occupational components would not be a key feature of curricula instead content would trend towards abstraction, verbalisation and theorisation. Access, transfer and progression is driven by qualification demand with results attained through a general and centralised education matriculation system. The cost of training is usually borne by the State and the system embodies an elitist system focused very much on imparting high level professional qualifications. Countries operating this State regulated system of VET will usually operate escalator effect processes whereby qualifications have a tendency to move up and through a qualifications ladder. One of the consequences of escalator models is that new training courses need to be routinely devised to replace the lower qualification levels which in turn places the sector in a permanent state of reaction/crisis management with the opening of new institutions becoming a regular feature.

The liberal model of vocational education and training on the other hand forms a market relationship between labour, capital and education and emerges from the processes of industrial capitalism which are typified by individuals plying themselves as a human resource in a free market system. The types of professional qualification depend very much on their application to the labour

market while training practices do not tend to be standardised in any particular way. The cost of training is usually borne by the individual with qualification very much subject to the principles of cost minimisation. Countries operating this marketised system of VET usually distinguish clearly between VET provision in State schools and VET provision located in training organisations operated by market players.

The dual corporate model of VET not only makes provisions for an intermediary organisation to be responsible for VET but also for the intermediary to be a means of communication between labour, capital and State. The intermediary body tends to be a State regulated legal institution detached from the State: established to manage the qualifications of workers on behalf of the State with the aim of limiting State and market conflict. The training system is usually isolated from the general education system, it has its own structure and a set of regulations that serve to meet the diverse needs of both the State and market which in itself can be complicated to coordinate. Employers, trade unions and state bodies take decisions on career profiles and training outcomes, which are usually regulated and legislated for through parliament. Individual companies pay for training while government make provision for costs to be either billed as operating costs for tax purposes or for individuals to be remunerated through processes of collective bargaining. The vocational schools are usually financed from exchequer funding. The system is guided by the key principles of vocation, learning-while-working and self-administration.

Adopting Lifelong Learning as a concept of education:

During the 1970's the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) began to propose lifelong learning as a concept of education (Lengrand 1970). The concept of lifelong learning placed the learner at the centre of the dialogue with the role of the education shifting to one of encouragement and the provision of an encompassed cradle to grave education system. As the European Council progressed towards the Lisbon Strategy their objective and vision was to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (2000). Adopting a policy of lifelong learning and education was one such vehicle through which a " dynamic knowledge-based economy' could easily be achieved.

By 1996 the European Parliament and the European Council had agreed upon and begun to implement a policy of lifelong learning for Member States, announcing 1996 the European Year of Lifelong Learning (European Parliament and European Council 1995) and in doing so the Council set in motion a framework/process through which the European Commission, as the administrative arm of the European Council, could operationalise policy. By 2000 the European Commission had published the European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Council 2000) which was subsequently followed by the European Commission Communication on Lifelong Learning (European Commission 2002) and therein set the agenda for a policy reform that would change the landscape of education provision across Europe.

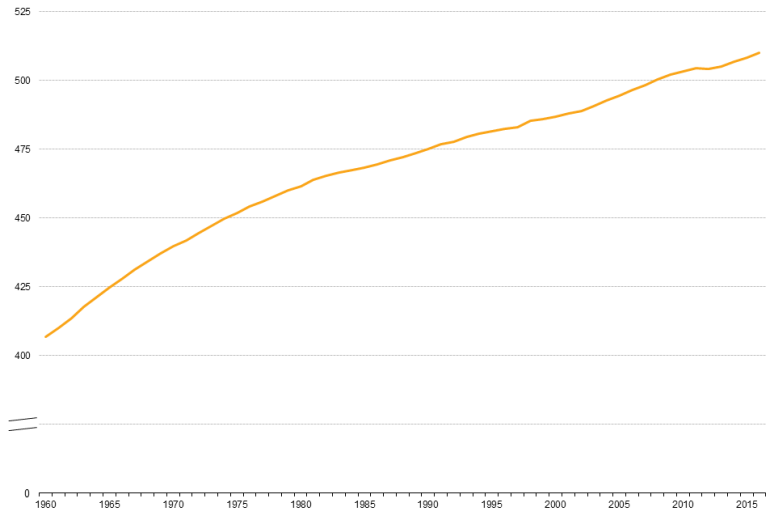
It is probably worth mentioning for clarification purposes and for readers less familiar with European Commission Programmes that funding mechanisms exist to underpin policy development. When it comes to Directorate General Education and Culture the areas provided for include education and training, youth and sport and incorporate learner mobility funding for Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig, Youth in Action plus the five international cooperation programmes Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for co-operation with industrial countries all of which were encapsulated during 2014 under one umbrella logo and rebranded Erasmus+. The rebranding of European Commission funding programmes is a regular feature of policy development and tends to occur in cycles running concurrent with Programme budget durations ergo albeit the Erasmus Programme was first established as a student exchange programme in 1990 it was later incorporated into the Socrates Programme established in 1994 which in turn was re-launched in 1999 as Socrates II. In 2007 Socrates II was incorporated into and rebranded as the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 to 2013 which was subsequently rebranded Erasmus + with funding budgets allocated for seven years from 2014 to 2020. While Programme rebranding and seven year funding cycles have become a feature of the European Commission Lifelong Learning Agenda the target groups of higher education, vocational education and training, schools education, informal learning/development through youth engagement and sport remain consistent and as such the professional development of vocational education and training practitioners addressed during this study has remained high on the European Commission agenda as a priority for Member State Governments who collectively adopted Lifelong Learning as a policy agenda. In terms of European Programme mechanisms it is probably also worth clarifying at this juncture that the European

Commission as the administrative arm of the European Union and it's Member States does not make unilateral decisions or enforce policy directives: derogation remains a core principle of the collective decision-making process and during the development of policy directives and therein provides for individual Member States to opt out or delay aspects of policy implementation. In my experience the principle of derogation is usually triggered for reasons of timescale or because a countries internal policy has yet to evolve or advance to the levels required for whole scale national implementation. Ergo contrary to the straight banana myth, which became prevalent in the media (European Parliament 2016), decisions to implement European Commission policy directives remain wholly in the hands of Member State Ministries and their National Authorities.

The subsequent massification of education:

A lifelong learning policy agenda that has a focus on individuals accessing education throughout life ultimately results in the massification of education at all levels (Cort. Haekonen and Volmari 2004). To gain a sense of how massification translates in practical terms let us take a snapshot of the population of the Euro Area (28) in a given period and examine the numbers of citizens who could potentially access some form of Lifelong Learning education and training. Take for example the year 1970 when the combined population of the European Member States stood at approximately 450 million (Eurostat 2016) then consider that only a small number of males and females had attained upper secondary school level of qualifications and therein could access further and higher education provision. By 2016 educational attainment had increased significantly with a collective population of 510.1 million and 79.6% of citizens aged 25 – 54

achieving the minimum qualification requirement to access further and higher education provision (Eurostat 2016).



(*) Excluding French overseas departments up to and including 1997. Breaks in series: 2001, 2010–12 and 2014–16.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_gind)

Figure 2.1 Eurostat 2016 Total Population EU 28 1960 – 2014

	25–54 years			55–74 years		
	Low (ISCED 0–2)	Medium (ISCED 3–4)	High (ISCED 5–8)	Low (ISCED 0–2)	Medium (ISCED 3–4)	High (ISCED 5–8)
EU-28	20.5	46.2	33.4	36.3	43.1	20.6
EA-19	23.4	44.3	32.3	40.8	39.0	20.2
Belgium	20.4	38.9	40.7	42.8	31.6	25.6
Bulgaria	16.9	54.0	29.1	26.0	52.9	21.1
Czech Republic	5.4	69.4	25.2	12.1	73.7	14.2
Denmark	16.9	42.5	40.6	29.7	43.2	27.1
Germany	13.2	57.8	29.0	16.0	58.6	25.4
Estonia	10.6	49.6	39.7	17.1	48.3	34.6
Ireland	15.4	37.5	47.1	45.9	30.2	23.9
Greece	22.8	44.1	33.0	54.8	27.5	17.7
Spain	37.4	23.5	39.2	64.9	15.3	19.8
France	17.7	43.7	38.7	38.9	40.2	20.9
Croatia	12.8	61.6	25.5	32.7	49.9	17.4
Italy	36.2	44.4	19.4	59.5	29.7	10.8
Cyprus	16.4	37.9	45.7	43.8	32.7	23.5
Latvia	9.7	54.8	35.5	13.4	62.0	24.6
Lithuania	5.7	51.5	42.8	11.2	62.1	26.7
Luxembourg	19.0	34.5	46.5	33.4	40.2	26.4
Hungary	14.9	59.2	25.9	26.1	57.0	16.8
Malta	48.8	27.3	23.9	76.7	14.9	8.4
Netherlands	19.3	41.9	38.8	39.1	36.1	24.8
Austria	13.7	52.4	33.9	24.2	54.4	21.4
Poland	6.8	59.3	33.9	19.3	66.6	14.1
Portugal	46.4	26.3	27.3	79.4	9.7	10.9
Romania	20.9	59.2	19.8	41.5	50.1	8.5
Slovenia	9.7	55.7	34.6	23.3	58.1	18.5
Slovakia	6.6	69.0	24.4	16.2	70.3	13.6
Finland	9.7	45.0	45.3	26.2	40.2	33.6
Sweden	12.6	43.2	44.2	27.3	43.6	29.1
United Kingdom	18.6	36.7	44.7	29.3	38.0	32.7
Iceland	19.7	36.4	44.0	32.6	41.8	25.6
Norway	16.9	37.0	46.1	20.8	48.6	30.5
Switzerland	10.5	43.2	46.2	16.6	53.0	30.4
FYR of Macedonia	28.5	49.1	22.4	47.2	38.3	14.5
Turkey	61.0	19.2	19.8	83.7	8.8	7.5

Figure 2.2 Eurostat 2016 Share of the population by level of educational attainment by selected age groups and country

Aligning policy development to a Lifelong Learning Agenda:

With demands on education provision increasing it is perhaps understandable that the quality and supply of trained staff came firmly into focus. Studies had begun to emerged from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) voicing concerns about the supply of teachers and highlighting areas of concern regarding the composition of the workforce: academic background, gender, knowledge and skills (2005). By 2004 the European Council and the European Commission had adopted Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications and began to assert that teaching was a graduate profession, a profession placed within the context of lifelong learning, a mobile profession and a profession based on partnership (European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture 2004). Teacher qualifications and competences continued to be a subject of focus with subsequent progress reports by the European Commission projecting a demand for "*more than one million qualified teachers over the next ten years"* (2006).

In tandem with this CEDEFOP, who had been established by the Council of the European Union in 1975 to support the development of European VET policy, had begun to research the history European VET systems looking closely at aspects of divergence and convergence (2004). CEDEFOP concluded that while the three classic models of VET evidenced in the first half of the 20th Century no longer reflected the diversity and rapid change that took place during the development of a common policy on VET in the 70's and the subsequent Lifelong Learning policy reforms of the 90's; they did depict the root of influence that underpins many of the VET systems we know today.

The implications of Lifelong Learning policy development on the VET practice and practitioners:

In order to achieve an inclusive and agreed strategy for European VET policy development, and one that would be owned by its constituent members, the European Commission and thirty-one European Ministers for VET adopted the Copenhagen Declaration as a set of priorities which would not only represent the VET sectors contribution to achieving the Lisbon Objectives (2002) but would also provide a focus for policy development. A key component and process of the Copenhagen Declaration, in its drive to modernise VET across Europe, was to undertake a biannual review of progress whereby interim evaluations and subsequent recommendations served to refine and reform the agreed priorities of the Lisbon Objectives and the European Commissions Lifelong Learning Agenda (CEDEFOP 2009). CEDEFOP who played a key role in terms of supporting the development of European VET policy also played a key role in terms of consolidating the results of the biannual review process and as such were in a position to begin to evaluate the implementation of VET Policy through evidence based research and networking. CEDEFOP reports confirmed that the impact of the lifelong learning policy agenda and the subsequent massification of education had not only resulted in an expansion of the target groups and individuals accessing vocational education and training but that this coupled with the demands for a highly skilled workforce responsive to a dynamic and rapidly changing global economy had led to major reforms within the sector which were subsequently impacting on the management and organisation of teaching and training as well as practice, design and delivery.

More over a study undertaken by Cort *et al* on behalf of CEDEFOP indicated that while the whole of the VET sector across Europe was in this period of major reform, the skilling, reskilling and upskilling of VET practitioners had yet to be addressed (Cort. Haekonen and Volmari 2004). The study highlighted pockets of best practice in the area of **policy development and successful application to practice** in both Finland, Denmark and The Netherlands: countries who had not only been actively engaged in VET reform since 2000 but more specifically had prioritised the advancement of professional development and supports for VET teachers and trainers. Finland had set the pace in 2000 by underpinning major legislative reforms with national initiatives to support the professionalisation of VET practitioners; the Netherlands had introduced national programmes specifically designed to counter the risk of a mass exodus of practitioners from the sector; Italy had increased flexibility and improved access routes to higher education accreditation, while Portugal and Denmark were providing continuing education supports. Elsewhere in Europe studies into the reform of the further education sector in England evidenced a focus on "industry currency" and the introduction of minimum standards and requirements for practitioners working in the sector while VET reforms taking place in France appeared to be tied quite closely to employability, with the result that staff upskilling was primarily focused on developing active relationships with a large range of economic and social partners (Loveder 2005). For countries like Ireland major reform came much later in the day with the passing of two key legislative Acts during 2013 and the subsequent establishment of a further education sector (Department of Education and Skills 2013). What had become clear to Cort *et al* (2004) during their study of the professionalisation of VET teachers for the future was that successive reforms had had a significant impact on professional practice and had

resulted in the emergence of new skill requirements. Staff upskilling had moved into areas such as counselling, skills development for brokering collaborative arrangements with diverse stakeholders and the pedagogic design and development of elearning tools.

Moving forward to 2009 CEDEFOP, operating within the terms of the Copenhagen Declaration, produced their third biannual review of VET policy and practice which included an in-depth analysis of the VET sector including socioeconomic context, demographics, labour market pressures, skills shortages, the integration of social and economic policies, the attractiveness of VET, the implementation of national and European qualifications frameworks and the professionalisation of VET teachers and trainers. The review took the opportunity not only to evidence current trends in professional development but also to reflect on the challenges facing VET professionals and was notable again in its' conclusion that countries were at different stages in the development of standards, qualifications and requirements for teaching in the VET sector. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) it seems was a familiar activity for VET practitioners however, on the whole, across Europe CPD appeared to be largely self-motivated and self regulated and was emerging as the single common instrument through which quality and sectoral responsiveness was being realised. That said, some countries had managed to standardised academic requirements for practitioners working in initial vocational training (IVT) however a common standard of practice for practitioners across the spectrum of VET provision had not emerged and yet again the development of a common standard or practice across the whole of Europe was resurfacing as a policy area that had yet to be augmented. CEDEFOP concluded that while VET teacher training traditions

appeared to be as different as they were diverse, the strategies national authorities developed to underpin national reform seemed only to add complexity to the profession.

The CEDEFOP bi-annual review also highlighted that it was in fact quite difficult to evidence statistically the trends affecting VET practitioners as the only data available related to the entire teaching population: there was no clear delineation between the education sectors which made it difficult to establish from a baseline perspective whether VET practitioners were even reflected in the statistics. At this juncture it seems a good definition and statistics to map the field of VET was non-existent and therein any analysis of or projection in relation to current and future skills shortages was fundamentally flawed. Questions were also raised as to whether VET practitioners would actually evidence similar trends and patterns to teachers employed in the compulsory education sector or indeed academic staff lecturing in universities. By way of example the statistical data depicted below is a sample of the data available to CEDEFOP and depicts the age range of VET teachers employed in the upper secondary education it is unclear if other cohorts of the VET workforce are reflected in the data:

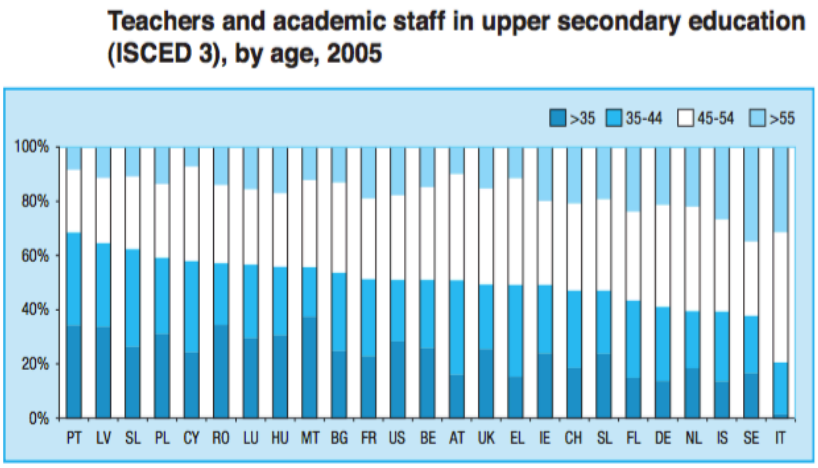


Figure 2.3 Teachers and Academic Staff in Upper Secondary Education (ISCED 3), by age 2005. CEDEFOP 2009

Therein CEDEFOP concluded that while the structural changes affecting VET were well documented and evidenced, the actual **practice** of teaching and learning in VET schools, training centres and enterprises was not: little was known about VET workforce demographics, participation rates, fields, themes and skills even less was known about the impact of continuous reform on VET professionals and their practices (2009) and while individually some countries had undertaken to research VET teacher and trainer practices empirical research at an international level was not available. The apparent **lack of a collective cohesion** across the sector raised interesting questions for policy makers:

- how to start the conversation and;
- how to engage in discourse to improve VET practitioner practices when there is no empirical data relating to the reality of teaching and training in the sector?

It is also common for professional bodies to engage with and be involved in reform processes with practitioners represented by their association or a teachers union, however representative bodies advocating for VET professionals were almost non-existent which raised a third and more pertinent question for policy makers:

- who do we engage with?

As was mentioned earlier when the European Council and the European Commission adopted the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualification they not only placed the teaching profession within the context

of lifelong learning but also asserted that teaching should be a mobile profession (European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture 2004). The European Commission undertaking to evaluate progress towards this goal organised a conference during the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union of 2008 where it was reported that less than 1% of the population of 6.8 million teachers and trainers (EU27) were mobile (CMEPIUS 2008). The lack of mobility among VET practitioners was raising obvious concerns when set against a backdrop of Eurydice employment figures which indicated that 13 countries across Europe (figures include EU31, EEA and Candidate Countries) were experiencing a shortage of VET teachers while others were challenged with an over supply (Eurydice 2002a). Conclusions drawn from the conference (which took the shape of a fourth-generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989) comprising feedback from ministries for education and labour, VET policy makers, stakeholders and practitioners) noted yet again reoccurring themes and key barriers to mobility including: the recognition of VET practitioner professional qualifications, language, subject matter, a lack of transparency and variations in practice across jurisdictions including recruitment, terms and conditions of employment.

Since CEDEFOP first began to focus on best practice initiatives in the area of practitioner skills and competencies, they have consistently noted that while practitioners are responding to and meeting the demands of the VET sector many have found themselves without the qualifications required, official or otherwise, to practice in the sector (Cort *et al* 2004). Therein CEDEFOP's next move was to began to identify a set of specific skills and knowledge that practitioners would

need to acquire if they were to survive the reforms and move forward with the changes. The skill set/key competences were clustered accordingly:

- pedagogic skills in line with the learner centered approach of modern pedagogic theory and on the job learning techniques;
- up to date vocational skills related to modern technologies and work practices;
- awareness of the needs of employers;
- team working and networking skills;
- managerial, organisational and communication skills.

In 2006 the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) in Finland, on behalf of the European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture (DGEAC) Leonardo da Vinci National Agencies responsible for the implementation of Lifelong Learning Programme for VET, undertook a grassroots study to identify the changing role of VET practitioners across Europe. Their study identified key competences as well as key challenges for the future professionalisation of the VET sector (Mahlamäki-Kultanen *et al* 2006):

Key competences for the future professionalisation of the VET sector

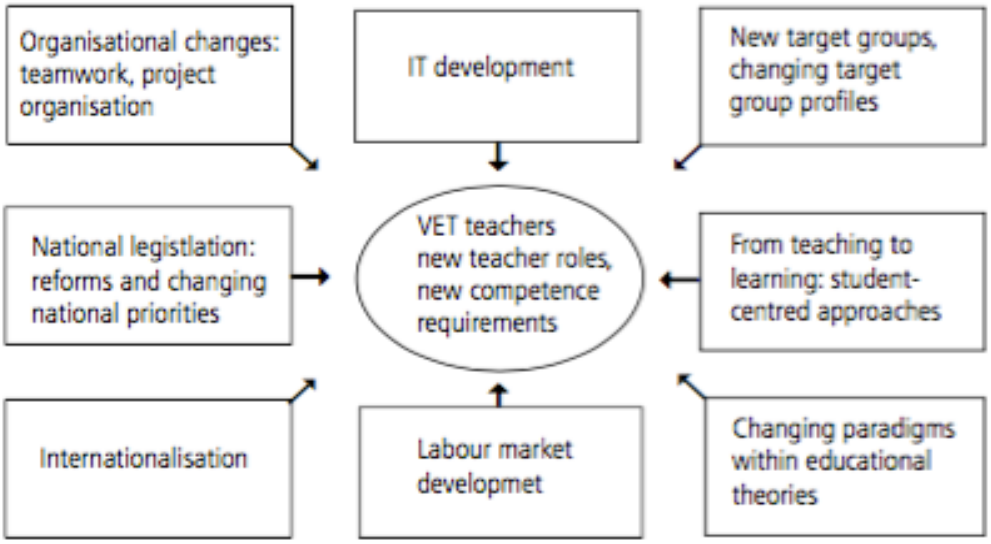


Figure 2.4 Key competences for the future professionalisation of the VET sector. Cort, Härkönen & Volmari 2006

Key challenges for the future professionalisation of the VET sector

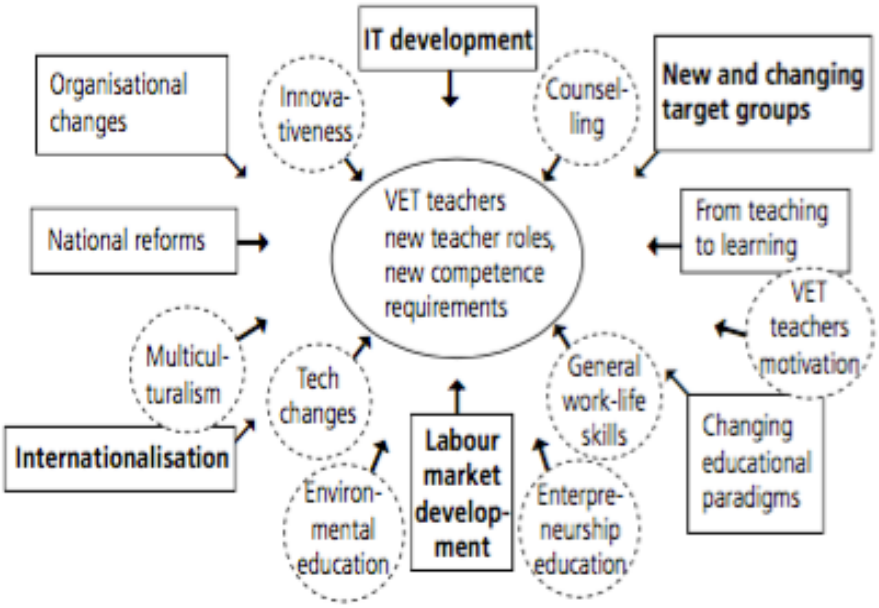


Figure 2.5 Key challenges for the future professionalisation of the VET sector. Cort, Härkönen & Volmari 2006

Cort undertook a further study the changing roles and competences of VET practitioners, however this time she focused specifically on practitioners in Denmark (2009). The study, qualitative in nature, comprised semi-structured interviews based on VET practitioner experience of teaching in other words their teaching biographies. During the data analysis Cort adopted the themes identified in the CIMO study of 2006 as a frame through which to categorise the interview data. Cort concluded that in the 20 years since the first major reform of the Danish VET system in 1989 the role of the VET practitioner had changed with each successive reform, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2003 and 2007. **Cort argued that for policy implementation to be successful practitioners needed to be active participants in the change process**, the connection between policy and practice needed to be tightly aligned and quality assurance systems needed to be increased. Cort also advanced that top down funding streams targeting development should incorporate objective management and evaluation as key features of the process. The study also identified a key feature missing from CIMO 2006 model, and one that should not be overlooked, the wellbeing of teachers at work. Participants noting the frequency of reform and commented that they "*had been overburdened by a new reform every second year*" and while this constant state of change had become the a norm for the profession, practitioners still have the every day reality of student learning to organise, lesson plans, timetabling, teaching, assessment, exams and the inevitable school bell. **Cort observed that internationalisation, globalisation and national reform were hardly mentioned in the interviews, reflecting that in some respects, teachers felt that these factors were beyond their sphere of influence**. Cort revised the CIMO 2006 model (figure 2.1) arguing for influencing factors that adapt and transform practice to be placed

closer to practitioners sphere of influence while also including time constraints as a factor for framing practitioners work:

Influencing factors for the future professionalisation of the VET sector

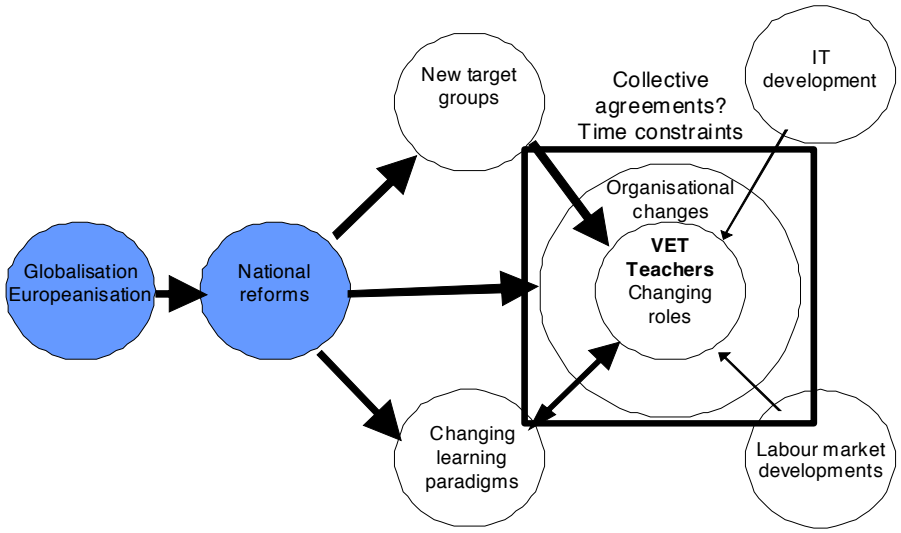


Figure 2.6 Influencing factors for the future professionalisation of the VET sector Cort 2009

Aspirations for the future:

The emphasis during the first decade of Europe's Lifelong Learning Programme Agenda was very much focused on placing the learner at the centre of the dialogue while also guaranteeing access for learners and as was mentioned earlier the conversation in more recent years has most definitely turned to addressing principles of efficiency and quality (CEDEFOP 2014). The Copenhagen Declaration specifically made provision for the advancement of vocational education and training strategies subsequent to which the Bruges Communiqué of 2010 made a strong commitment to implementing the priorities identified during the Copenhagen Process while also advancing future aspirations for the sector with the identification of long-term strategic objectives identified in the European

National Reform Programme 2020 (European Commission 2010). During 2014, and prior to agreeing objectives for the Education and Training 2020 the European Commission and European Union Member States engaged in a stocktaking exercise. This stocktaking exercise and subsequent stakeholder discussions resulted in the development of the next key phase of the European Councils agenda on Lifelong Learning which was agreed and published in European Union Education and Training 2020 Strategy (2015). The quality of VET provision and the role of VET practitioners and their professional development continues to be a key focus of the education and training strategy and following agreement of the Riga Conclusions in 2015 (European Commission 2015) CEDEFOP's working group ReferNet (2016) developed four distinct categories of teachers and trainers working in VET: teachers in general and initial vocational education schools/centres; teachers of practical subjects in workshops or simulated environments; apprenticeship tutors and practical training instructors who accompany students during work-based learning programmes taking place in companies. CEDEFOP then coordinated Member State country specific reports with the aim of addressing country specific challenges such as the introduction of apprenticeship, aging workforce, lack of teachers and the need for competences to deal with emerging issues or new requirements (CEDEFOP 2016). However as Saros (2017) notes the future of Europe needs a radical reinvention and a shift of momentum with a collaborative effort that combines top down and bottom up initiatives and to abandon the hidden assumption that Member States are moving at various speeds and heading to the same destination by acknowledging a multi-track Europe that allows Member States a wider variety of choice.

Green shoots of sectoral **cohesion** are starting to appear at practitioner level and is evidenced in the UNESCO vocational education eforum (UNEVOC) where forum members have posted requests for member countries to submit criteria aimed at shaping vocational educator development, while another launched an International Forum for Researchers in Vocational Education with the aim of building research capacity in the sector (UNESCO UNEVOC 2014). For many countries the challenges presented in terms of quality of teaching and provision of CPD are being addressed through retraining/upskilling interventions and also through initiatives adopted either nationally, regionally, or locally by government and key stakeholders. Some countries have adopted a dualistic approach to developing VET practitioner upskilling and reskilling whereby theoretical work alternates with the practical work taking place within the school environment while others have approached VET practitioner CPD using bottom across initiatives linked to enterprise. In Scandinavian Europe there appears to be a growing trend towards practitioners being given the opportunity to update their vocational competences by undertaking a two or three month on-the-job training/work placement in industry which has the added advantage of providing practitioners and workplace instructors with opportunities for cooperation through a process of cross fertilization: exposing workplace instructors to the dialogue of modern pedagogic theory and learner centered approaches commonly employed by VET practitioners. CEDEFOP (2014) surmise that it would seem logical for advances in the further and continued professional development of VET practitioners to take consideration of these new and flexible approaches to meeting the demands and challenges of the sector.

Europe - Summary:

Having discussed the development of European vocational education and training and having contextualised professional practice in terms of governance, policy development. policy evaluation and field research we have learned that many of the **key drivers for a Lifelong Learning policy agenda,** subsequent policy directives and identified priorities **were** predominantly **motivated** by the European Union Member State countries adoption of a concept of Lifelong Learning education as advanced by UNESCO. In terms of VET policy reform we have identified a number of concerns in relation to the quality and supply of staff. Quality issues relate to areas of expertise and competency, knowledge and skills, management and organisation of teaching/training practices, design and delivery. When it comes to issues of supply there is a lack of reliable data to enable workforce planning in terms of composition, demographics, age and gender profiling and academic background. Barriers to progressing a common system in terms of standards of practice and qualifications seem to emanate from a lack of cohesion due to countries being at different stages in their development or a government reform agenda that seems only to have added complexity to the profession. That said CPD for practitioners is a familiar activity which is by and large self-motivated as well as being the single instrument through which quality and responsive to labour market demand is achieved. Common themes and challenges for the development of CPD include skills and competences in the area of counselling, collaboration with industry, pedagogic design and the development of elearning tools. That said a number of professional competences have been identified including pedagogic skills focusing on learner centered approaches and vocational skills for modern technologies, networking skills and the ability to identify the needs of employers, team working, organisation and

communication skills. While challenges for future development of practice include: wellbeing at work, flexible approaches to CPD, increased capacity building especially in the area of research and evaluation, a policy development that is more tightly aligned to practice and practitioners, an increase in quality assurance mechanisms and an acknowledgment that practitioners can be co-authors in the change process and can positively contribute to and influence policy reform as well as practice develop.

Juxtapose to the experiences of many European countries Australia's leading technical and further education provider (TAFE), having over 100 years experience in VET, had professionalised the sector back in 1990. By way of comparison the following section will contextualise key drivers and priority areas in terms of Australian VET governance, policy development, professional practice, research and development.

Australia - Governance and policy development:

Technical education as introduced during the 1800's was one of the first forms of education to be established in Australia. By 1870 all Australian colonies had established technical education intuitions to train young people and adults in a broad range of occupations as defined by industry. Technical education intuitions were the main providers of post primary education and as Pickersgill notes by 1901 New South Wales alone had over thirty technical colleges and only three state high schools (2004). The Commonwealth of Australia had given state and territory governments primary responsibility for education and as such state governments had expanded their network of publically funded technical institutions according to local industry, geography and demographics (Bowman

and McKenna 2016). Unsuccessfully and on several occasions during the First World War, the economic depression of the 1930's, the Second World War, throughout the 50's, 60's and into the early 70's the states and territories asked the Commonwealth government to invest in the technical education system. Save for in 1973 when the Technical and Further Education Teachers Association of Australia resolved to hold a national enquiry into technical education (Goozee 2001) with the result that the government established the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE) and subsequently published the Kangan Report (1974). The Kangan report established the foundations for a new era of technical education providing a clear national identity set in the context of a nation education system, renamed the sector technical and further education and recommended significant investment by the Commonwealth in terms of capital funding with the aim of stabilising TAFE Institutions and their operational budgets. Significantly the Kangen report defined TAFE as an alternative, neither inferior nor superior, to the other sectors of education and also framed TAFE as a social entitlement and key responsibility of government. Primacy was given to the individual learner and the community followed by industry and commerce, fees were abolished, educational programmes targeted disadvantaged groups and student numbers grew. TAFE now had a national platform through which they could influence the national agenda, policy and standards (Goozee 2001). National co-operation progressed into the early 1980's with the Commonwealth advocating for the national coordination of TAFE who were seen as key to the government's microeconomic reform agenda (Bowman and McKenna 2016). Vocational education and training predominately focused on providing education to individuals in order to meet their freely chosen vocational interests. VET practitioners entering the profession were given the time and support over a

period of two years to develop teaching skills and competences: achievement of which was mandatory and certified. The aim was very much to provide practitioners with an understanding of the teaching and learning processes relating to technical education and skills development. The general consensus at the time was that teaching in the VET sector was unique, catering for a student demographic that was generally older, studying part-time, employed and therein required for practitioners to be competent in teaching and learning methodologies appropriate to an adult learner environment (Gutherie 2010) ergo moving into the 90's a central plinth of the TAFE national strategy was to professionalise practice through the development of mandatory competency based accreditation for all practitioners (Wheelahan *et al* 2010).

Meanwhile a succession of Commonwealth government enquiries had begun to highlight deficiencies in Australian industry and called for urgent structural adjustments if Australia was to keep up with technical developments, international competition and employment trends with the result that the VET system was identified as being best placed to respond to the identified economic and employment challenges (Dawkins 1986). The National Training Reform Agenda identified priority areas (Dawkins 1989) while the seminal document Australia Reconstructed (1987) produced by The Australian Council of Trade Unions and Trade Development Council defined the approach through which to integrating employment with education and training (Ryan 2011) and in 1988 a report published by Dawkins shifted the focus of VET relationships away from education and community towards workforce development and industry. By 1991 many of the views expressed by the Commonwealth were adopted by the states and territories: the emphasis for government had shifted VET policy to firmly

focus on the needs of industry as opposed to the needs of the individual which ran contra to TAFE ethos.

As was mentioned earlier UNESCO had begun to advance the concept of Lifelong Learning during the 90's, subsequent to which Louise Watson and Canberra University were commissioned by the Commonwealth of Australia Department of Education, Science and Training to survey Lifelong Learning policy in Australia (2003). Rather interestingly in its conclusion the report focuses on providing government with assurances that the Australian economy appeared to already fit with the paradigm of "a knowledge based economy" advanced by UNESCO and also fit with the definition of Lifelong Learning advanced by the OECD. In many respects it is interesting that study took the shape of a survey and also that the conclusion was pitched in terms of "a system that already fits/meets the requirements" suggesting perhaps that research took the shape of a gap analysis as opposed to a process of consultation to discuss a new concept of education or a potential shift in provision that would adopt a cradle to grave education system for society. The study corroborated for government that the education system was already well placed to meet the demand for high skills in the new economy and that adult participation trends in formal and informal education and training were already high and consistent with UNESCO and OECD Lifelong Learning policy indicators. Areas for concern concentrated on the widening gap between socio-economic groupings (the long term unemployed and those with low skills) and their ability to access opportunities for upward mobility. The report also highlighted that an inadequate credit transfer system presented additional barriers for VET students hoping to access, transfer and progress to University. Rather curiously there also seemed to be an assumption throughout the report that the

adoption of a policy on Lifelong Learning presupposes that individuals co-finance their own learning. In conclusion the report recommended a rebranding of policy directives already in existence as well as the continued support for an open and flexible marketplace for education provision and one that placed a priority on structural changes that responded to demands driven by the workforce or any skill requirement they identify in relation to future economic performance. Another interesting aspect of the report was that those charged with addressing UNESCO and OECD Lifelong Learning objectives were referred to as promoters of Lifelong Learning (as opposed to policy developers) addressing priority areas to narrow the gap between socio-economic grouping so that Australia could achieve the high levels of education participation required to meet the needs of the new economy.

In 1992 The Commonwealth made a bid to take full control of VET across Australia although on this occasion the states and territories were the ones to resisted the concept. However signing the national Vocational Education and Training System Agreement (Ryan 2011) they did agree to greater cooperation and coordination between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments with the result that subsequent policy developments have evolved through a complex system of partnership agreements that try to balance the needs of industry, education, community and government as opposed taking a route consistent with national administrative arrangements and priorities (Goozee 2001).

During the latter half of the 90's the government agenda shifted to a policy of marketisation with the result that education and training delivery was opened up to both public and private providers alike while funding models adopted

contestable funding mechanisms and metrics. Predictably there was a growth in private provision and increasingly the terms and conditions of employment for VET practitioners became casualised. The dynamic of the sector was competitive in terms of supplying a skilled workforce to meet the growing demands of industry and commerce. The tag line was "growth through efficiency" with leaders from industry and commerce very vocal in relation to "quickness to market" acquisition of skills, curriculum content, design and delivery (Gutherie 2010). In the push for "teacher proof" training packages the role of the VET educator diminished along with any justification for professional development, supports and funding. With high demand and efficiencies being key drivers in an open marketplace largely populated by a casualised workforce it is perhaps understandable that the minimum requirements for professional accreditation came into focus. The Certificate IV in Assessment and Training (Cert IV) was quickly developed and became the minimum requirement for VET practitioners accessing employment in the sector. The Cert IV was packaged for delivery through a short course training intervention that could be achieved within the timeframe of one weekend (Gutherie 2010). During his review of VET practitioner knowledge and experience Roberson expressed doubts as to whether the level of content and theoretical knowledge required to progress from novice VET practitioner to expert VET practitioner could be achieved through a certificate level qualification delivered within a two day timeframe (2008).

The VET sector in Australia is a diverse space that has been compounded by a policy approach that located education and training provision in a marketised competitive environment with the result that there has since been an ongoing struggle to position VET within the education system but as globalisation took

hold the scope and nature of the Australian VET sector expanded yet again. A 2007 report identified 18% of 15 to 24 year olds as unemployed and not in education or training with one in five young adults dropping out before they completed high school education (Dusseldorp Skills Forum). By 2009 a booming economy tied to growth in Asia, growing skills shortages and an ageing population put pressure on the VET sector to deliver more skills and different skills (OECD 2009). At the same time government targets prescribed that schools increase retention rates to 90% by 2015 and that higher education increase the percentage of adults attaining a bachelor degree to 40% by 2025 (Wheelahan 2010). A 2009 OECD report identified key strengths of the Australian VET system including: a national quality assurance system for registering training providers and qualifications; strong industry partnership; industry determined competences and industry developed qualifications. Commentators surmised that higher education and schools were actually unlikely to achieve their goals without support from the VET sector. With changes to work and society and even as a result of the global financial crisis the VET sector found themselves being called upon by the schools and higher education sectors to help them to deliver on the education targets set by government. The magnitude of government targets on equity and expansion had opened up a space whereby the VET sectors responsiveness to the needs of industry and their ability to delivery on more and different skills could be brokered and where identified barriers to access, transfer and progression could be addressed. Understandably, and yet again, the nature of VET teaching as well as the terms and conditions of employment came into focus. Following repeated requests from the schools and higher education sectors the government began the process of realigning VET professionals with their counterparts across education (Wheelahan *et al* 2010).

Professional practice research and development:

Research and development into VET practitioners and their professional practice has been a consistent theme and an area of activity for the Australian VET sector however before identifying studies relevant to the development of professional practice and discussing the recent reports commissioned by government during the more recent push for realignment it is probably worth contextualising not only the breath of stakeholder involvement but also the weight of their voices. As was discussed earlier VET in Australia is the constitutional responsibility of six states and two territories with the Commonwealth Government acting as a ninth partner (OECD 2009). When the Commonwealth put forward their proposal to assume full responsibility for the technical and further education sector in 1992 which was rejected by the states and territories but led to the signing of a cooperation programme and the signing of the VET System Agreement they also agreed to broadening the scope and expand the role of the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development and in doing so established the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) as a non profit organisation co-owned by national, state and territory ministers responsible for VET. NCVER is responsible for the management and coordination of evidence based statistical research on behalf of the government with the aim of supporting the role of policy developers, employers and practitioners. The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) is another key VET research body, established in 1997 with members comprising researchers from across the VET sector including universities, TAFE institutes, training managers and individuals interested in VET research. While government evaluation and field research has been a key component of Australian VET practice for many years tensions between the government and the research community exist primarily due

to an over emphasis on the part of government in their use of quantitative evidence based research and statistics when developing policy. This coupled with the fact that private providers are not obliged to submit activity reports to government and given that a substantial cohort of VET provision is therefore not actually reflected in the statistics many practitioners feel that the evidence base is fundamentally flawed (OECD 2009). Guthrie (2010) notes that gathering data on the VET workforce is problematic and surmises that less is known about VET practitioners then about schoolteachers and university lecturers. A situation compounded by the casualised nature of VET practitioner terms and conditions of employment as evidenced by Simons, Harris, Pudney and Clayton in their 2009 report which indicates that 41% of the workforce were unsure as to whether they would still be employed in the VET sector in 5 years time (Simons *et al* 2009). Having contextualised the breath of stakeholder involvement and having given consideration to the weight of their respective voices we will now look more closely at some of the studies that have provided a focus for the development of VET practitioner professional practice and in doing it is probably useful to stay alert to ongoing tensions between government and the research community in that one favours statistical evidence based research while the other is very much tied to the quality of practice and viewed from the perspective of practitioner experience.

During 2005 Loveder undertook a worldwide review of VET practitioner competencies identifying key trends in staff training and development (Loveder 2005). The review evidenced common themes to include: a focus on the learner, labour market relevance (linked to technical and employability skills), ICT and flexible delivery approaches, client or stakeholder focus, developing partnerships,

customizing training provision to industry and local community needs; evaluating and monitoring learning outcomes, technical education system expertise (quality assurance, qualification frameworks, competence-based assessment, assessment of prior learning) and the development of peripheral competences and skills such as counselling, management and administration (Loveder 2005). By comparing CPD trends for technical education and training practitioners worldwide as identified by Loveder (2005) and the key competences of European VET practitioners as identified by Mahlamäki-Kultanen *et al* (2006) we observe some interesting parallels:

VET Practitioner key competencies compared to VET CPD trends		
Key competences (CIMO 2006)		**CPD trends (Loveder 2005)**
Internationalisation		Developing partnerships
Labour market development		Labour market relevance (linked to technical and employability skills),
National legislation: reforms and changing national priorities		
New target groups, changing target group profiles		Client or stakeholder focus
Changing paradigms within educational theories		Flexible delivery approaches
From teaching to learning: student-centred approaches		Focus on the learner
Entrepreneurship education		
IT development		ICT
Environmental education		
Multiculturalism		
Organisational changes: teamwork, project organisation		Development of peripheral competences and skills such as counselling, management and administration
General working life skills		
Counselling		
Innovativeness		
Motivation		
		Customizing training provision to industry and local community needs
		Evaluating & monitoring learning outcomes
		Education system expertise (quality assurance, qualification frameworks, competence-based assessment, assessment of prior learning

Table 2.2 VET Practitioner key competencies compared to VET CPD trends

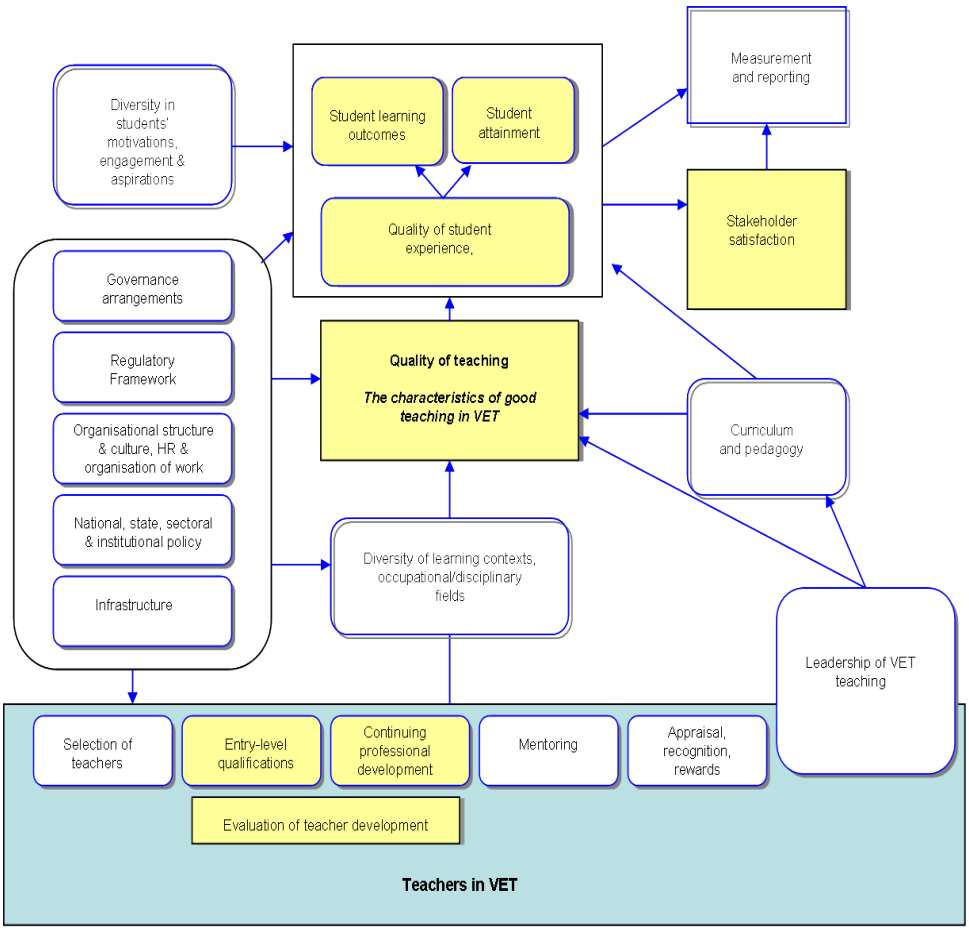
Based on the finding of Simons, Harris, Pudney and Clayton who had begun to research Australian VET careers and what they were like (2009) Nechvogold, Mlotkowski and Guthrie undertook a study of the Australian VET workforce (2010), Forward embarked on a review the quality of TAFE teaching (2010), Clayton, Meyers, Bateman and Bluer looked at VET practitioners experiences of the Cert IV (2010) while Mitchell and Ward commenced a feasibility study with the aim of scoping options for a systematic approach to developing VET practitioner capabilities. More specifically Clayton along with Guthrie who had mapped the history of VET teacher training (2010) and the professional development of the VET workforce (2010a) researched the feasibility of an association for VET Professionals (Guthrie and Clayton 2012).

More recently, in a move to begin the process of realigning VET practitioners with their counterparts in schools and higher education and in a bid to harness stakeholder expertise, the Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWAR) commissioned three research studies. Guthrie, McNaughton and Gamlin (2010) were tasked with trying to establish a clear picture of the VET workforce including demographics on age, expertise, qualifications, the characteristics of CPD provision including type and focus as well as notable differences between sector (public/private) and state. Clayton, Meyers, Bateman and Bluer in collaboration with NCVER (2010) combined their expertise to explore new graduates perceptions of the Cert IV Training and Assessment and the extent to which the Cert prepared new entrants for employment in the sector. Of particular interest is the research managed by the L H Martin Institute and driven by Leeesa Whelan which culminated in five publications focusing on the quality of VET and serves to make recommendations

on the quality of teaching, the quality of practitioner qualifications, the quality of CPD, the impact teaching has on the quality of student experience and suggested approaches to evaluating student outcomes (2010).

In an effort to depict the complexity of evaluating the quality of VET teaching Wheelahan (2010) rather succinctly produced a conceptual model that not only captures the many factors that influence and support high quality VET teaching but also incorporates the qualifications and requirements for CPD that underpin the notion of professionalism and remarkably manages to also include a contextualisation of quality indicators and evaluation frameworks:

Conceptual model factors that influence and support high quality VET teaching



The areas shaded in yellow represent the focus of the *Study on the Quality of Teaching in VET*

Figure 2.7. Conceptual model factors that influence and support high quality VET teaching. Wheelahan 2010

Aspirations for the future:

This very recent renewed focus on VET practice has however been viewed by many practitioners as somewhat of an apparition: they have become familiar with this pattern of resurgence and remain all the while hopeful that it won't disappear into thin air again. In fact Wheelahan and Moodie (2010) conclude that key to any policy implementation is the "creation of considerable buy-in" as practitioners are still coping with the side effects of years of divisive policy development. Leading voices began to express their opinion that VET practitioners be viewed as co-authors and change agents who play a vital role in not only the economic advancement of Australia but also in the social development of society (Guthrie 2010) while Harris, Simon and Maher (2009) reiterated the importance of VET practitioners contribution to and ownership of VET strategy if the ambition is for sustainable professional development to be achieved. Indeed studies undertaken by Guthrie and Clayton (2010) into the development of a professional body for VET practitioners concludes that the sector is not actually bereft of a system to regulate the quality of practice, particularly as Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) was established in 2011 as the government regulatory authority with a remit to audit the quality of provision implicit in which is an audit of professional competency and practice, but rather that practitioners actually have a voice and it needs to be heard.

Wheelahan and Moodie (2010) concluded their study with recommendation for a staged approach to the policy reform if government are to achieve the alignment of VET practitioners to their counterparts in schools and higher education including:

- a restructuring of the VET workforce and the distinguishing of practitioners based on their level of responsibility with a view to creating cross sectoral teachers and trainers.
- the need for national staff data to assist with workforce planning, institutional benchmarking and transparency of outcomes
- the implementation of a national teaching and training award consistent with that of schools and higher education
- the integration of VET teaching and training qualifications, supports for new practitioners, CPD and the maintenance of practitioner industry currency with national policy and institutional strategies.
- external validation of VET qualifications as well as industry and professional recognition with the introduction of a professional body, standards for VET teaching and training, accreditation of qualifications, registration of practitioners and evaluation of the quality of practice
- research into VET pedagogy and models of VET teaching.

Australia – Summary:

Having undertaken a literature review and having contextualised the development of Australian vocational education and training in terms of governance, policy development, professional practice research and development we have learned that many of the key drivers of Australian VET policy reform and identified priorities are motivated by the demands of industry and by policies of marketisation |with the objective to remain flexible and responsive to labour market demands. We have also indentified a key stakeholder in the Commonwealth Government but that the ultimate responsibility for the development and implementation of policy agenda resides with each State and

within their respective jurisdictions. However the system is complex in its ambition to balance the needs of industry, education, community and government. In terms of VET practitioner professional development we have noted the breath, depth and vibrancy of stakeholder research undertaken by universities, TAFE institutes, training managers, policy developers, practitioners and individual researchers but that they have little or no voice or one that is very often pitted against that of the government who give primacy to the voice of industry and statistical evidence based research when developing policy agenda. Challenges, and barriers to professional development of practice appear to be concentrated in the area of tension that exists between government agenda and practitioner needs. We have also identified an uncertain workforce existing at the behest of industry responsiveness and operating in an arena of casualised contracts with insecure terms and conditions of employment. That said key competences have been identified and more recently, in a bid to realign VET practitioners with their counterparts in schools and higher education, the government have begun to work more closely with practitioners to advance a reform agenda. A staged approached to reform has been advanced including a restructuring of the workforce, a database for workforce planning, identification of standards of practice, the alignment of VET teaching qualifications with that of their counterparts in schools and higher education, education and training supports for practitioners and the embedding of research and development into practice. However the sector has acknowledged that challenges remain in terms of government achieving practitioner buy-in following years of divisive policy making and questions whether current drivers and momentum can achieve sustained development.

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter was to undertake a literature review and to contextualise vocational education and training in terms of governance, policy development, policy evaluation and field research that both explores and highlights the development of VET practitioners and their professional practice across Europe and to also similarly review policy and contextualise practice developments in Australia where VET practice was professionalised during the 90's. In doing so we have identified a number of **key drivers** in terms of governance be that the adoption of a policy reform agenda that focuses on lifelong learning for a knowledge based economy but that places the learner at the centre of the dialogue or a policy reform agenda of marketisation that focuses on the needs of industry with the ambition to remain open, responsive and flexible to labour market demands. In terms of subsequent step changes in policy development we have identified a number of **priority areas and challenges** that relate specifically to the management, organisation, design and delivery of VET such as the expansion of target groups, widening range of economic and social collaborations/partnerships, emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, pedagogic design and delivery of new skills including elearning tools and the provision of guidance and counselling to learners. We have also discovered a number of **challenges and bottlenecks that impact VET practitioners** professional practice directly such as the implementation of national reform agenda that seems only to add complexity to the profession, the absence of a good definition and statistics through which to effectively analyse, plan for or evaluate workforce professional development, the slow development of a common set of standards of practice, qualifications and requirements for teaching in VET that allow for practitioners to become mobile/seek employment

across jurisdictions or indeed argue for better terms and conditions of employment which brings us to the absence of a collective or cohesive voice that holds weight either in terms of contributing to a national strategy on VET policy and practice or in terms of capacity building through research and evaluation, defining practice standards, shaping policy reform, preserving quality in the face of both successive reforms and divisive policy development or pressures from other sectors of education to buttress governments targets, creating buy in and being co-authors of change, contributing to and ownership of VET strategy for the sustainable professional development and wellbeing of practitioners. That said practitioners appear to be a motivated and dedicated group of experts who have sought to upskill and develop their personal competences while maintaining quality and remaining responsive to sector and labour market demands.

With policy reform and policy development as a backdrop to VET practitioners and their professional practice and having identified some of the **key drivers, priority areas, challenges and bottlenecks** that surfaced during a review of literature which included field research and policy evaluations across Europe and in Australia the ambition of the study will now move forward to engage directly with policy developers and practitioners to ask questions about VET practitioners and VET practices and to capture their perspectives on both the every day realities of teaching and working in the VET sector as well as their experience of CPD and professional development:

<u>Questions about VET Practitioners:</u>

- Who are they?
- How do we start a conversation with them?
- What are they talking about?

Questions for Practitioners:

1. VET practitioners perspectives on the realities of practice and teaching in the vocational education and training sector.
2. VET practitioners experience of continuous professional development.
3. The impact policy reform has on the role of the VET practitioner.
4. The relationship between VET practitioners and national legislation, national reforms and changing national priorities.

Capturing perspectives on:

- the notion of governance and the **impact legislation**, subsequent **policy reform** and changing national priorities has on VET practitioners and their professional practice;

- the notion of professionalisation and the **impact policy reform** has on the structures and the role of VET practitioners in terms of the **management and organisation** of teaching and training, practice design and delivery such as workforce development, definitions and demographics, capacity building, standards and quality of practice, changing paradigms within education theory, pedagogic design and delivery, adopting learner centered approaches, widening target groups, labour market demands, the emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, organisational changes to the working environment vis a vis distributed leadership, teamwork, collaboration and extended partnerships with industry, collegial networks, ICT, administration, project management and wellbeing at work;

- the notion of the practitioner and the impact policy reform has on **professional development** in terms of adding complexity to the profession, encouraging a platform for a cohesive voice, including practitioners as co-authors of VET strategy and in the development of sustainable professional development and standards of practice including qualifications and training, continuous professional development, education and training, research and self evaluation, career planning and progression, employment opportunities and wellbeing.

By responding to the gap in empirical research and by placing VET practitioner experiences in the context of governance, policy development, policy implementation and by capturing the impact of policy reform on the professional development of practitioners across Europe and in Australia highlighting key **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** the study hopes to inform and be of benefit to countries currently embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform, asking questions in terms of achieving traction while also informing and supporting the future professionalisation of practice: providing insight into how governance and policy reform shapes practice, how organisational structures support practice and how individuals influence practice.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to discuss research methodology from the perspective of ontological and epistemological commitments as well to provide an outline of the design choices that underpin the study.

Overview

This study is a **qualitative research** study of VET practitioner's experience of professional practice and how policy reform impacts practice. The aim of the study is to describe participants **perspectives** regarding the **realities of professional practice** in vocational education and training, their **experience of CPD** and to identifying **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** that might **inform policy** and provide for the **future development of professional practice**.

The research is driven by a **constructivist philosophy** and employs the research methodological choice of **case study**. During the operational design phase the study was guided predominantly by the seminal works of Robert Stake *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995) while also referencing Sharan Merriam *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998) and Robert Yin *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (2014). In terms of **data gathering** the study incorporates participant interview and document review. The works of Myles, Huberman and Saldanas *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2014) informed the **data analysis** phase. **Validity and reliability** was approached through a process of **triangulating t**he perspectives and experience of practitioners across three countries: **Australia, Finland and Ireland**.

Philosophy, Ontology and Epistemology:

Whenever we reason we are thinking philosophically. **Philosophy** is not so much about coming up with the answer to fundamental questions as it is about **the process** of trying to **find the answer**. At its core philosophy is about using reasoning as opposed to accepting, without question, conventional views or traditional authority. Early thinkers like Plato and Aristotle were not satisfied with the established explanations provided by religion and tradition but instead sought **rational justifications**. Socrates legacy to us was to establish **debate and discussion**. New ideas emerge when we discuss, examine, analyse and critique each others ideas. **Big questions** like **what the universe is made of** or what does it mean to be a conscious human being fall into the branch of philosophy known as **metaphysics** and because we exist as part of the universe metaphysics also considers the nature of human existence: what it means to be a conscious human-being perceiving the world around us and **whether things exist independently of our perception**. The **area of metaphysics** which concerns itself with questions of **human existence** is known as **ontology**. Once philosophers started to look at reason and wisdom they then began to ask questions about how we know what we know. We need to be able to rely on our knowledge so that we can reason correctly and in doing so we also need to understand the scope/limits of our knowledge. The study of the **nature and limits of knowledge** is referred to as **epistemology**. Reasoning also relies on establishing the **truth/validity** of a statement, an idea or a thought that has lead to a conclusion. We use statements to construct a rational argument that can be distinguished from superstition or religious explanation. Rational argument or **logic** is usually **expressed in words** but as we know words are subject to the ambiguity and the subtleties of language. We therefore **need to analyse** not only **the logic** behind the construction of a

rational argument but also **the language** used so that we can establish whether the **conclusion** reached **holds water**. **Socrates added another layer** of questioning when he challenged the way we live life and how our **concepts of justice** and happiness guide our reasoning **both morally and ethically**. When we consider ethics we start to think about the sort of society we would like to live in, an area that **Plato** considered when he explored the **politics of society**, how it should be governed as well as the rights and responsibilities of its citizens (Buckingham *et al* 2011).

During our lives we have ideas we like to discuss, wonder and be curious about or we might seek to examine, explore and discover and if during the process of developing our knowledge (and in the event that we undertake a research study of the idea or thought) we allow ourselves to be **guided by the scaffolding of ontological, epistemological, logical, ethical and political philosophies** we can then hope to arrive at a set of beliefs and ideas that are not just handed down or forced upon us by society, teachers, religion or even philosophers but are arrived at through our own reasoning (Buckingham *et al* 2011).

Quantitative and Qualitative Research:

When undertaking a research study of our thoughts and ideas and in using the scaffolding of **ontological, epistemological, logical, ethical and political philosophies** to conduct our study we first need to ask ourselves a few fundamental questions about what our belief about the nature of reality is, what knowledge is and how it is produced (Merriam 1998). Linking research to philosophical schools of thought helps to illuminate the characteristics of different research orientations. **Quantitative research** posits that reality is stable,

observable and measurable. Knowledge is developed through scientific and experimental research while the results produced are objective and quantifiable. **Qualitative research** on the other hand implies a direct concern with experience as it is lived or felt (Sherman and Webb 1988), there are multiple realities constructed socially by individuals and as the qualitative researcher you are therefore interested in understanding the meaning people construct: how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Knowledge is gained through understanding the meaning of the individuals experience with the results produced using inductive modes of inquiry as opposed to deductive testing.

Qualitative Research Ontological and Epistemological Stance:

During their 2009 study of epistemological awareness in qualitative research Koro-Ljungberg *et al* borrow from Thayer-Bacons (2003) distinction between the epistemological positions of transcendental (what is True and Real in a universal way) and non transcendental (knowing is situated in the context of the world and our everyday experience). The **reconstructing of qualitative research into two (e)pistemological stances** frees us up to have a conversation about epistemology "without getting tangled up in the simmering ontological nest of universal essences". Epistemological awareness is important not only because it allows the researcher to select methods that support the knowledge building and choice of theoretical perspective but also because it plays a key role in terms of providing transparency to the research process. Lincoln *et al* (2005) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) introduced us to theoretical paradigms and perspectives while Crotty (1998) distinguished between a theoretical perspective being a "*reference*

to a philosophical stance informing methodology" and epistemology as a *"theory of knowledge embedded in a theoretical perspective"*.

Koro-Ljungberg *et al* (2009) usefully hybrid (e)pistemological stance into two argument structures: **internalism and constructionism**. Researchers taking the **internalist position** towards knowledge building would articulate their knowing and reasons for action as grounded in motivation, desires and goals. Their view of knowledge articulating itself as being somewhat pragmatic, normative, containable and even predictable (Kuhn 1996). Their approach suggesting ways in which qualitative research can be employed to access, create and interpret different social phenomena. Their decisions working towards illuminating the methodological options and connections affiliated to the particular epistemological conditions and justification systems. Crotty (1998) posits that this interpretivist approach would generally look for culturally derived historically situated interpretations of the social-life world and often seeks to describe and understand the participants meanings and understandings. Examples of interpretivism as a theoretical perspective include ethnography, phenomenology, constructivism, social constructionism and hermeneutics. The **knowledge building of the constructionist** researcher would on the other hand convey them as curious and unknowing (Lather 2007) their position being characterised as "getting lost" both epistemologically and methodologically. Their perspective is often typified by nuance and the uncertainty of knowing while interactions, language games and situatedness would serve to highlight the knowledge building. Constructionists differ from the interprevist in that they often seek to deconstruct participant narrative and produce critique with the aim of changing, transforming, destructing and rebuilding practice. The researcher takes an

interrogative stance towards the meaning or experiences expressed in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) we call it critical because the data isn't taken at face value which means that the researchers interpretation becomes more important than the participants. Examples of the constructionists critical theoretical perspective include feminism, critical theories, poststructuralism and postcolonialism.

Quantz (1992) states "method is fully embodied in theory and theory is expressed in method. **Methods, analytical approaches and research techniques** do not exist in a vacuum, they **are (e)pistemologically guided** and accommodating of the ways of knowing/knowledge building. Crotty (1998) explains that justification of choices, methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that the researcher brings to their work: to ask the researcher about their assumptions is to ask them about their theoretical perspective. Researchers can not collect and analyse data without their (e)pistemological purpose in mind. In other words as soon as we enter the scene the world is a world that is filtered through an act of framing/our ability to perceive and therein conforms to what the frame and our brain consolidates as reality or as von Foerster posits if you give a person a problem their actions in attempting to solve the problem reveals the identity of the person and the nature of their creativity.

As an individual **I believe** that a **truth is relative and subjective**: **peoples' opinions** are from their **own perspective**, what is true for one person may be false for another and therein all judgements, including moral judgements, are subjective. **My ambition** throughout this study was to **build knowledge** by

eliciting and understanding participants own perspectives and therefore at its core this study is driven by an interpretivist perspective. The study is not an attempt to change transform, deconstruct or rebuild practice but to validate the meanings, views, perspectives, experiences and practices expressed in the data. As a researcher **my focus** is to **accept and prioritise the participants interpretation** rather than use them as a basis for analysis and therefore the study is constructionist in its orientation. **The design choices** open to me as a qualitative researcher with an interpretivist theoretical perspective include **ethnography, phenomenology and constructivism**.

Ethnography is commonly adopted by anthropologists in the study of human society and culture. Culture in anthropology would be defined as the beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behaviour patterns of a specific group of people (Merriam 1998). The ethnographer interpreting the data is concerned with reconstructing symbolic meanings and patterns of social interaction to recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artefacts, folk knowledge and behaviours of the group.

Because **phenomenology** emphasises experience and interpretation it is a philosophical thought that permeates and underpins all qualitative research, this can lead to some confusion both in terms of the literature readings and for the researcher delineating between concepts. Patton (1990) gives a useful definition when he draws on the ethnographer's assumption that culture exists to posit that the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study is essence and therein the focus of a phenomenological study is on the essence of the experience. The task of the researcher is to depict the essence of the experience and in doing

so prior beliefs are suspended or bracketed off so as not to interfere with their sense of the phenomenon's general essence. According to Moustakas (1994) the process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings and is therefore a unity of the real with the ideal.

Constructivism is grounded in the understanding that the world is independent of the human mind but that knowledge of the world is a human and social construction (Crotty 1998). For the constructivist researcher the human mind is not passive, the individual plays a role in co-constructing meaning. Individuals therefore abstract meaning from subjective experiences and as such there are multiple perspectives and multiple versions of reality. The constructivist researcher is concerned with collecting participant generated meaning with the result that participants multiple realities can create an infinite number of interpretations. The task for the researcher then becomes one of choosing the more plausible (Donmoyer 1984) and fruitful (Lather 1995) possibilities while bearing in mind the context and purpose of the study. Miles, Huberman and Saldana reflect "that there are no canons, decisions rules or algorithms" guiding constructivist research (2014) and therefore advise for the researcher to draw boundaries around the endless possibilities/interpretations and to pay particular attention to protocols that support authenticity and trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln 1989).

This study is not focused on reconstructing symbolic meanings in an attempt to explore the beliefs and values of VET practitioners nor is it focused solely at finding the essence of their experience. The aim of the study is occurring more, if

you would have it at the surface-level of the inquiry, looking outwards as opposed to around and inside. It is focused on gathering VET practitioner perspectives and understanding their experiences with the ambition to prioritise their interpretation, to extract meaning from their subjective experiences and provide a description of their world and their reality, which **aligns itself with the qualitative researchers interpretivist theoretical perspective of constructivism**.

Constructivism:

Unpacking the philosophical stance of constructivism: the term was pioneered by Jean Piaget in 1967 and posits that individuals construct mental models to make sense of the world around them and is not to be **confused with constructionism** which is an approach to learning developed by Papert and Harel (1991) who advocate for experimental learning activities: the learner participating in the creation of a project to discover and demonstrate learning.

Constructivism as a philosophy stems from the **branch of ethics** known as the relativist approach "man is the measure of all things" as espoused by Protagoras $_{C}$.490 to 420$_{BCE}$ (Buckingham *et al* 2011) while also having shades of the metaphysical branch and monism approach of Heraclitus $_{C}$.535 to 475$_{BCE}$ who used the imagery of never being able to step into the same river twice in that the water will be replaced immediately, to depict his theory that "everything flows nothing stands still". While Heraclitus believed that everything in the world is in a constant state of flux, Protagoras was the first of the philosophers to place human beings and human behaviour at the centre of philosophical argument: believing that every argument has two sides, both being equally valid and that the person holding the opinion does so from their own perspective ergo what is true

for one person may be false for another. This led Protagoras to reject the existence of absolute definitions. Truth according to Protagoras is relative and subjective and while he was derided by Socrates and Plato for being a rhetorician his philosophy did represent a significant step towards the ethical view that there are no absolutes and that **all judgements, including moral judgements, are subjective**.

Phenomenology is the study of experience and during the period of philosophy known as the Age of Reasoning 1500 to 1750 philosophers Locke, Berkeley and Hume began to investigate how human beings attain knowledge by examining the world as it is around them (Le Moigne 1995). Their empirical view held that **all human knowledge comes from the experience** of the world that we acquire through our senses alone (Buckingham *et al* 2011) **and from the minds reflection** of it's own operations (Locke 1690). Locke did make the distinction that he did not believe that sensory data reflected properties of the real world ergo senses do not tell us what something is. Berkeley and Hume would concluded that all of our sensory data combines to form images of our experiential world which is helped along by an **actively thinking mind that is all the while making associations** (Le Moigne 1995). Kant, an idealist, belonged to the next generation of philosophers who were responsible for radically altering the course of philosophical thought during The Age of Revolution 1750 to 1900 (Buckingham *et al* 2011). Kant was inspired by Hume and his elevation of the role human nature (belief system and customs) plays in our ability to **infer things from past experience** (inductive reasoning) while being simultaneously intrigued by Berkeley's argument that knowledge comes from experiences our consciousness perceives and that we have no justification for believing that these experiences

have any external existence outside of our own minds. Kant wanted to demonstrate that there is an external material world and that it's existence can not be doubted. **Kant proposed** that our experience of the world involves two elements and in doing so he **split knowledge into sensibility and understanding**. Sensibility involves our ability to be directly acquainted with particular things in space and time (these direct acquaintances are what Kant referred to as intuitions) while understanding involves our ability to have and use concepts. Some knowledge (both sensibility and understanding) comes to us **via empirical evidence and some is *a priori*** (known before or independent of experience) arising from the minds own intuition. Holding a philosophical position that asserts that some state or activity of the mind is prior to and more fundamental than things that are experienced is called idealism. Kant would refer to his positioning as transcendental idealism. While **Kant's understanding** of consciousness **led Husserl to phenomenology**, one of the richest philosophical approaches of 20th century (Buckingham *et al* 2011), his works **also provided the scaffolding for** mapping the **constructive activity of reasoning** and also **hinted at the process of conceptualisation**. William James, known for his pragmatic approach to truth and developing his concept that belief in an idea is part of the process of making an idea true, advanced the process of conceptualisation during the 19th century. While **Wittgenstein**, famed for his **philosophy of language** during the era of the Modern World Philosophers 1900 to 1950 (Buckingham *et al* 2011), was indebted to James, it was **the work of Mach, Bogdanov and Vaihinger's that led to the study of conceptual construction** (Le Moigne 1995) and the theory that we construct systems of thought and assume that they match reality (Shook 2005), which when **viewed through the theory of evolution** culminated in the work of **Piaget**.

Piaget revolutionised the field of cognition by applying the evolutionary principle that the purpose of human knowledge was not the representation of an independent reality in itself but the **thinking's organism's adaptation to the world of experience**, it's value being determined by **successful application to the practice of living and thinking**. Piaget gives us the insight that all organisms can be said to act intelligently when they are capable of learning: when they have the ability to take from their experiences and use the learning to create and maintain their inner equilibrium both physical and sensory as well as the higher equilibriums that involve the mutual compatibility of conceptual structures (a level at which contradictions might cause us to be perturbed). While Piaget's theory of constructivism talks about the production of meaning and knowledge based on experience, he also introduces his theory that knowledge is constructed through the concepts of accommodation and assimilation. Assimilation incorporates new experiences into old causing the individual to develop new outlooks, rethink misunderstandings and evaluate what is important, ultimately altering their perceptions. Accommodation on the other hand involves reframing the world and new experiences into the mental capacity already present. Individuals therefore conceive the world and how it operates, it is not a world that is "out there" acting as an independent realm of "being" but one whereby experiencing something that doesn't operate within bounds of their concepts can be experienced through the process of accommodation and reframing.

While Piaget pioneered constructivism, **Heinz von Foersters** paper (1976) became the reference document for **constructivist epistemology** asserting that in the **act of knowing** it is **the human mind** that actively **gives meaning** and order **to the reality** that it is responding to. For constructivists **truth is socially**

negotiated with others and **knowledge** is then **internally constructed**. Crotty (1998) posits that for constructivists the world is independent of human minds but knowledge of the world is a human and social construction.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) would **define constructivism** as **relativist** (as opposed to realist) **in ontology** and **subjective** (as opposed to objectivist) **in it's epistemology**. **Relativism** can be a bit confusing in that it is not immediately obvious to us "what is relative to what" (Segal 2001). While relativists would agree that there is an external world out there, they hold that representations of the world can only be accessed through our consciousness. Take for example the colour blue and how it looks. In terms of human anatomy the retina focuses on and captures light, the pathways to the cortex process the nerve impulses so we see and register the colour blue but the blueness of the blue is something each person constructs in their consciousness and therein is unique to each person: eliciting the old adage "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (Wolfe Hungerford 1878). A realist on the other hand would argue that blue is experienced exactly the same by all human beings as it exists separately to us and is not constructed in the individuals consciousness. When it comes to **subjectivism** the researcher needs to be present to the individual. Looking to the individuals narrative, considering what their story is and diving into the number of interpretations therein while remaining cognisant that individuals approach life in their own way and therefore construct meaning that is unique to them. Understanding the subjectivists beliefs and behaviours requires the researcher to become aware of the individuals life experiences, their background and the social forces acting on them both historically and culturally, and that the individual doesn't just view the world differently but that they experience it differently too. To understand

subjectivism is to understand that there are multiple interpretations of any given situation and therein there is no single ultimate truth: truth is only true under certain conditions at certain times or for certain people. The objectivist view would jar with this in that for them truth is true at all times, independent of any other conditions. In their opinion knowledge is discovered rather than created by the individual and that ultimately there is only one universal truth, for example two plus two equals four.

In his study of **von Foerster's concepts** Kauffman (2003) posits that **constructivists identify the world in terms of how they shape it, they shape the world in response to how it changes them, they change the world and the world changes them**. Objects, thoughts and feelings are perceived and perceptions are invented by the perceiver. Le Moigne (1995) is clear that constructivism is not a form of solipsism, the theory that the self can know nothing but its own modifications and that the self is the only existent thing, which in itself is a form of egocentrism. For Le Moigne constructivism represents a move away from philosophy's traditional preconception that knowledge must be located on some part of an axis between materialism and idealism and moves towards an understanding that the individual abstracts regularities from subjective experiences, their judgement of viability and the subsequent construction of an experiential reality gain valuable and relative permanence on the basis of their intersubjective compability and as von Glaserfield (1999) concludes entails the realisation that the relationship between the experience and the individuals experienced ontology/knowledge-building is a question that can not be answered on the level of rational thought. While physicist von Foerster was widely known for his studies into the problems of cognition he was also heralded for his

approach, which transcended the traditional boundaries of scientific discipline and is **viewed as the forerunner** to an era where **natural and human sciences** began to **converge**. Working with psychologists in the area of therapeutic research von Foerster observed how people were blind to each other and even to their own blindness "they don't see what they don't see" but through the power of talking and language they opened themselves to a realm in which they could reinvent themselves and their relationships with each other (Segal 2001). More importantly for von Foerster was the realisation that **man literally constructs his reality and then reacts to it as if it existed independently of him** "out there" eventually arriving at the startling awareness that **his reactions are both the effect and cause of his reality construction** or as T.S Eliot poetically put it " *the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time*" (1945).

When it comes to the **methodology** of qualitative research constructivism is epistemology grounded in the understanding that the human mind is not passive, it does not produce a copy version of the order of reality (Balbi 2008), Raskin advises the researcher to remain open to the ways in which human-beings create systems of meaningful understanding of their world and their experiences (2002) and therefore encourages the researcher to move away from **presenting research** results as accurate models of social realities but towards depicting results as the negotiable constructs they are. For example the researcher designing a constructivist study aimed at exploring individual perceptions would not approach data collection using structured questionnaires given that the method would not support a participant centered subjective epistemology. Likewise the choice of **data analysis** should remain cognisant to the type of knowledge being produced

for example it could be argued that it is not possible to demarcate individual meaning making from the socially constructed meaning generated during large group discussions (Morgan 1988). For constructivist researchers the data analysis design should therein stay true to the knowledge being produced by the individual as being their perception: objects are not separate they always “objects perceived" and that the perceiver and the perceived arise together in the condition of observation (Kauffman 2003). In his 2008 study of constructivism Kincheloe placed an emphasis on the power and influence **politics and cultural** have when it comes to constructing knowledge. Kincheloe would argue that, before the age of computerisation dominant powers had never been in a position whereby they could exert such influence on human affairs, pedagogically he would also question the influence of **reductionist modes** of measurability as typified by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). Von Foerster through his studies and observations (1973) understood that his role was **not to be confrontational**: in his opinion every discovery has a painful and joyful side. Painful when struggling with new insight and joyful when this insight is gained. To this end von Foersters approach to dissemination was to minimise the pain for those who have not yet made the discovery and to maximise the joy for those who have made it by letting them know that they were not alone. His methodology was to **take us on a journey** and **let us participate in the making of it**. In congruence with the constructivist approach von Foerster **leaves the corollaries and consequence of the journey to us** believing that in the world of eigenforms **objects are oscillatory (they swing back and forth) and unstable (they are not fixed)** and that any stability is anchored in the present perception of that world with the understanding the eigenform leads outwards into larger worlds and new understanding. Although viewed as a radical constructivist von

Glaserfield is keen to articulate this view of understanding and acting is not dualistic but posits a more precise description of it being both **circular and conjoined** (1995). To this end Segal rather skilfully closes her study of von Foersters view of constructivism (2001) by suggesting that the reader, at some point in the future, picks up the book and reads it again: **making tangible the concept of constructivism** in that each **recursive journey through the book elicits a different experience for the reader.**

Aligning constructivism to research methodology and design:

For the constructivist researcher designing a study the aim is to **stay true to the knowledge being produced by the individual**: it is the individuals **lived experience**, **their perception**, **their truth** and ultimately **their knowledge**. The primary interest of **the researcher** is to attempt to **understand** the meaning or **knowledge constructed by the participant**, how they make sense of their world and their experiences in the world (Yazan 2015). Miles, Huberman and Saldana note that words organised into incidents or stories have a concrete, vivid and meaningful flavour that can be far more convincing to us as readers, researchers, policymakers and practitioners (2014). Case study is one approach to organising words into vivid meaning or story telling and is used frequently in qualitative research as a methodology design framework through which to examine a phenomena.

Case Study Methodology:

While case study is a frequently used methodology it is also **contested terrain** in terms of social science research strategy: mostly because it is characterised by the varying and sometimes opposing approaches of research theorists. A **lack of**

consensus in relation to planning, implementation, design and structure has hampered the full evolution of case study (Yazan 2015). For the novice researcher the lack of consensus can be confusing. From my own perspective delineating between the different perspectives of prominent methodologists required an amount of "***stripping back***" of text to identify **foundational principles** that would guide and inform the design going forward. **Three methodologists** whose **seminal works** are prominent in the area of case study research are Robert Stake (1995), Sharan Merriam (1998) and Robert Yin (2014). Each has a distinctive stance on the methodological design of case study and while, in places, **their approaches diverge and intersect** they also, and importantly, **complement each other**. The first task was to unpack and sift through their **epistemological commitments**, **definitions of a case** and **a case study** and the practicalities of **design, data gathering, analysis and validation** so as to identify an approach that would fulfil both the ambition of the research question and the epistemological commitment driving the research.

Epistemological commitments:

Stake (1995) holds the claim that the researchers own notion of knowledge and reality contributes to the research. For Stake **knowledge is constructed** rather than discovered he believes that constructivism and existentialism (non determinism) **epistemologically** inform and guide the researcher and their research. In Stakes opinion **the role of the researcher** is therefore to **gather participant interpretations**, **interpret** and then **report the knowledge gathered**. Given that the knowledge gathering includes multiple perspectives the task for the researcher is to identify the most appropriate design to best represent the participants. To this end Stake provides the researcher with interpretative

research methods: naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic. **Merriam** (1998) **focuses on resourcing the researcher** and outlines general principles of qualitative research and their application to case study methodology. Through Merriam the researcher gets a sense of what constitutes a case study, how it differs from other qualitative research methods (generic/basic, ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory) and when it is appropriate to use it. Merriam has a practical straightforward and clear approach towards the mechanics of conducting qualitative research using case study methodology. Where Stake provides abstracts and concepts, Merriam provided practicalities, logic and guidance. Epistemologically Merriam is closer to Stake than Yin: her belief being that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world, it is not objective and that multiple interpretations exist (Merriam 1998). For Merriam the focus is one of intrigue: how people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world. Merriam differs from Stake in that she **does not expect the reader to get involved in the researchers filtering, interpretation and construction of knowledge**. For Merriam the final report is where the interaction takes place in that the researcher brings his/her construction of reality to the table (in that the view of others is filtered through the researcher to produce yet another interpretation) and it is this final report that provides the basis for an interaction between the researchers interpretation and the readers own construction of reality. The rather subtle locating of the point at which interaction between the researcher and reader takes place dissects with von Foerster notion that the role of the researcher is to take the reader on a journey, have them participate in the meaning making and more particularly to leave the corollaries to them. **Yin** (2014), on the other hand, **advocates** for case study methodology to hold it's place in social sciences as a legitimate methodology through which **to**

conduct inquiries into theoretical propositions and so focuses on providing a comprehensive guide to the utilisation of case study. Yin tends to evade his epistemological commitments however his perspective on case study demonstrates **positivistic leanings** in that he is driven by the fundamental positivist principles identified by Crotty: objectivity, validity and generalisability (1998). Yin advocates for the common ground between qualitative and quantitative orientations and as such favours tools that are functional and common to both: his central tenet being to **establish facts** through a form of **quality control** and as such urges the researcher to keep four tests at the forefront of each stage of design and during each phase of the research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (2014).

Having reviewed the epistemological stance of Stake, Merriam and Yin and given that the research questions outlined in this study are not focused on establishing facts for the purpose of conducting an inquiry into theoretical propositions it is at this juncture of the decision making process that the study diverges with Yin and aligns itself with the epistemological commitments of Stake and Merriam. Merriams view of constructivism however diverges with Stake in terms of his non-deterministic leanings and also at the point to which the reader becomes involved in the interpretation and construction of knowledge. Given that epistemologically the research is running in congruence with von Foersters view that as researcher and reader we are on a journey, participating in it together with the corollaries and consequence of the journey being left to the reader then epistemologically we arrive at a place that is more in harmony with Stakes view of constructivism. That is not to say that we dispense fully with Merriam and Yin: pragmatically their strategies, guidelines and tools provide valued advice and

guidance, but it does mean that at this juncture of the decision-making the researcher and Stake compliment each other epistemologically.

Defining a case and the case study:

When it comes to **defining a case and the case** study Stake, Merriam and Yin diverge. **Yin** (2014) defines a case as a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. He is particularly interested in the how and the why questions and advocates for the prior development of **theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis**. For Yin there is an emphasis on building quality control structures into the design phase. The **identification of a theoretical lens** and quality control tools **prior to the commencement of the study** in effect **bounds the case** to propositions, which then guide the data collection and analysis. **Stake** (1995) on the other hand takes the view that a **precise definition** of the case or case study **is not possible** and while he holds the belief that **the case is a bounded system** he considers the inquiry to be **about an object, a complex and functioning thing as opposed to a process**. Stakes view not only **takes consideration** of the **interrelationship** between the **phenomena** and its **contexts** but also of the **researcher** and their interactions in the field: what they observe, interpret, reflect and construct as they move through each stage of the research. **Merriam** (1998) interestingly approaches the definition of a **case study as being bounded by it's own characteristics** and the **choices/limits** made by the **researcher**. Merriams view connects with that of **Miles, Huberman and Saldana** (2014) who succinctly describe the case as being a phenomenon occurring within a bounded context whereby the researcher specifies the phenomenon of interest and draws the boundaries of the case: effectively fencing in what the inquiring is looking into. **The researchers definition becomes the**

case. Merriams view is broader than that of Yin and Stake and to this end while she provides for flexibility she emphasises particularity and uniqueness as the distinguishing features bounding a study.

In terms of defining **this case and this case study**: the case is an inquiry into VET practitioners, their perspectives on the realities of practice and their experience of CPD. The study incorporates a review of VET policy reforms and initiatives in Finland, Ireland and Australia and explores the impact national reforms have had on VET practitioners and their professional practice. Each country has a particularity and uniqueness, and given that the VET workforce in Finland, Ireland and Australia would appear to be as different as it is diverse it is important that the participants realities are placed within their own context. When it comes to **bounding the case** the VET sector is to a large extent **self-defining**, in some respects this goes with the territory, in that the sector provides education and training for large numbers of people who fall outside the very defined role of schools and higher education (we commonly defined schools by the age of their pupils and higher education by the level of qualification being awarded). VET provides education and training to full-time and part-time learners who **combine work with study** to meet the needs of i**ndustry**. VET is also home to **post-secondary** school leavers, **special needs** and **disadvantaged groups** and more particularly in times of recession provides **retraining/ameliorative programmes** for youth and citizens who find themselves unemployed or redundant as a result of downturns in economy. The spectrum of **qualifications** can range from **informal** to **formal** as well as containing vocational, technical or continuing education and training. Being responsive and flexible to the needs of the economy and society also translates to self-defining the features of

organisational structures; which in some respects is reflected by the lack of immediately recognisable characteristics we associate with schools and higher education (management arrangements, funding, staff employments roles and responsibilities). Being responsive to the labour market needs of the economy can also define VET organisations as being inconsistent in their planning and development; in that the provision is subjected to either the chaos of rapid change followed by periods of major reform/upheaval or on the flip side long periods of neglect which are compounded by government funding priorities being directed, in the first instance, towards schools and higher education. For **VET practitioners** the practice of teaching is also self-defining: in and of itself it is a dichotomy occupying the space between the ideologies of education for personal development, growth and knowledge and training for skills mastery, competency and attainment. At a given point in time a VET practitioner might find themselves beginning their day in the local vocational college facilitating one to one sessions in level one literacy and numeracy to socioeconomically disadvantaged adult learners and ending their day in the boardroom of a of multi-national company delivering advanced level financial qualifications or computer programming languages to management and staff. The **breath of pedagogic theory and skills** required to adapt teaching and learning styles across a **wide spectrum of learners** while also **staying abreast of developments** in professional practice, vocational skills, changes in work practices, innovations in technology and being present to the **needs of employers** is both **characteristic of the role** of the VET practitioner as well as being **a distinctive feature of CPD**. This case therefore holds with Stakes definition of a case and a case study in that it is self-defining and bounded in context by a set of complex interrelationships: politically by governance, historically by policy reform, organisationally by

structure, roles and responsibilities, ideologically in terms of education paradigms and theories and professionally in terms of the nature and breath of provision and the needs of individual learners, the labour market and employers. And while the self-defining nature of VET does not hold with Merriams notion of the researcher fencing in or defining the boundaries of the case is in itself distinguishable from schools and higher education provision for its particularity and uniqueness.

Designing the case study:

When it comes to the practicalities of designing a case study Yin (2014) approaches the design in a logical sequence connecting empirical data to research question and then to the conclusion. Yin provides a catalogue of research designs: detailed in their formation, addressing each stage of the research process and mindful of prior theoretical lens. Yin speaks in units of analysis: holistic design, single embedded design, multiple holistic design and multiple embedded design. His advice is to choose the design that answers the question and encourages the researcher to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each design before selection and implementation. For Yin the study design is divided into five parts: the question, the proposition, the unit of analysis, the logic that links the data to the proposition and the criteria for interpreting the findings. The role of the researcher is to ensure that each part is cohesive and consistent with the other. Adopting his approach the researcher would read relevant literature and decided on the theoretical propositions before proceeding to data collection and application of the five quality control checks. It comes as no surprise when Yin warns the researcher who finds themselves midstream, considering major deviations from the tightly structured strategy to return to the starting point (the conceptualisation of the design methodology) and to redesign the methodology

afresh. **Stake** (1995) understandably looks to map as flexible a design as possible so as to incorporate change. At this stage of the design process the only place Stake advises for structure is in the initial concept of the design in that the issues and the questions provide the focus. For Stake two or three sharpened questions draw attention to observing the problems of the case and the complexity of the issues therein. The questions in turn guide the researcher through the process of observation, interview and document review. Stake focuses the researchers efforts on consideration for what is driving the study and whether the motivations are intrinsic or instrumental. Stake posits that the researcher undertaking an intrinsic case study is driven by intrigue and curiosity: the case happens because we are interested not because it is a choice and in this respect the case takes prominence throughout the design of the study. Stakes comments that the researcher undertaking an intrinsic case study has a job of work to do in terms of restraining their curiosity: learning to recognise, distinguish and pursue only the critical issues pertaining to the case. Instrumental case study on the other hand is driven by the researcher deciding with good reason that case study is the best approach for answering or gaining insight into the research question and in this respect it is the issue/the insight to be gained that drives the research and takes prominence throughout the design phase. Stakes flexible approach can leave the novice researcher uncertain, adrift and without a detailed roadmap or timeframe. There is an absence of clear guidelines around the basics like when to start data collection and analysis, he does not provide specifics in relation to processes and practicalities. Instead Stake adopts Parlett and Hamiltons (1972) notion of progressive focusing of data and observations as the study unfolds and as issues become progressively clarified and redefined. **Merriam** (1998) taking consideration for the novice researcher presents informative and clear guidelines

to assist in the design process from conceptualisation to planning. Merriam provides a practical step by step guide to conducting a literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying a research problem, crafting and sharpening a research question and advice on sampling. Unlike Stake, Merriam considers the literature review stage of the process essential for developing the design of the research and looks for the literature review to develop a theoretical framework which in turn shapes the research question and guides research emphasis. There is an amount of flexibility build into Merriams approach however it is not as flexible as Stake or as predetermined as Yin.

In terms of the design choices for this research paper it is at this juncture the study diverges with Yin and finds complement with Stake and Merriam. However given that Merriam looks towards the development of a theoretical framework and Stake allows us to be guided intrinsically by the curiosity of the research question, the teasing out of problems and the journey from raw experience to conscious realisation: the design aligns itself to Stake key principles in that it is:

- intrinsically driven by a curiosity about VET practitioners and their practice and in this respect it is the case that takes prominence;
    - Who are they?
    - How do we start a conversation with them?
    - What are they talking about?

- guided by the development of two or three sharpened questions which serve to draw our attention to observing the problems of the case and the complexity of the issues as well as providing a guide for the data gathering process;

1. VET practitioners perspectives on the realities of practice and teaching in the vocational education and training sector.
2. VET practitioners experience of continuous professional development.
3. The impact policy reform has on the role of the VET practitioner.
4. The relationship between VET practitioners and national legislation, national reforms and changing national priorities.

Case studies – how many and how to select

Case study as an approach is an effective tool to underpin the validity of many research projects primarily because case study offers a diverse organisational mix that provides a wealth of practice examples and also because the diverse range of actors within each case offer multiple perspectives of practice. Billet (1996) surmises that the value of a constructivist case study approach is garnered through the development of understanding, a notion supported by McDonald (1995) who undertook a review of vocational education and training evaluations in Australia and noting the relationship between deeply contested organisational spaces and workplace learning advised for researchers to undertake considerable field interaction in order to gain multiple perspectives in relation to performance and to develop an understanding of the emerging practices. Gerring and Cojacaru (2015) in their review of the diverse methods and criteria applied to case selection attempt to categorise the myriad of approaches into typical, deviant and crucial case selection and in doing so note a disparate typography: Mill (1843 and 1872) proposed the method of difference which is also known as the most similar method and the agreement method often referred to as the most different method; Lijphart (1971) proposed six case types a-theoretical, interpretative, hypothesis generating, theory confirming, theory infirming and deviant; Eckstein (1975)

identified five species configurative-idiographic, disciplined-configuration, heuristic, plausibility probability and crucial case; Skocpol and Somers (1980) indentify three logics of comparative history, macro-causal analysis, parallel demonstration of theory and contract of contexts; Gerring (2007) and Seawright and Gerring (2008) identify nine techniques typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, pathway, most similar and most different; Levy identifies five case studies designs comparable, most and least likely, deviant and process tracing; Rohlfing (2012) identifies five case types typical, diverse, most likely, least likely and deviant which are applied differently according to the purpose of the case study while Blatter and Haverland (2012) identify three explanatory approaches covariational, process tracing and congruence analysis each of which offers a variety of case selection strategies.

Common to each approach is the quality of the case selected and the significant influence quality has in terms of the effectiveness of the study. To this end and in terms of undertaking a review of VET practices pertaining to **this study** a scoping exercise was undertaken to review literature while expert meetings advised on themes such as: sectoral reform, whether policy implementation was cohesive or fragmented and whether there was evidence of policy advancement both in terms of the professionalisation of practice (standards of practice, mandatory qualifications or qualification frameworks) and in terms of evidence based research/evaluation studies relating to policy implementation. Reflecting on the literature coming out of **Europe**: the **Danish Ministry** had taken the approach to reformed VET policy every two years however they had yet to undertake a national evaluation of the impact of VET reforms on the professionalisation of practice; VET policy reforms in **the Netherlands** were mid cycle and as such had

not reached the evaluation phase in addition to which reform objectives were very much focused on retention and building regional structures as opposed to professionalisation of practice; **Italy** had unionised and regionalised VET practice while also increasing access routes for practitioners to undertake CPD and professional development and as such the regionalised nature of practice evidenced fragmented approaches to policy reform and practice; likewise **Portugal** was equally individualised and fragmented; **England** evidenced a succession of policy reforms that were not working having swung in quick succession from a policy of unregulated practice to one of highly regulated practice coupled with an extensive "for profit" training sector neither of which appearing to advance standards and quality of practice; **France** evidenced a policy reform that was tied to industry and sector demands; **Finland** had achieved cohesive inclusive reforms with an imbedded system of quadrennial review/evaluation of policy implementation while **Ireland** on the other hand had only recently undertaken the journey to reform with the passing of two legislative Acts in 2013 establishing the Further Education and Training Sector and the Further Education and Training Boards. In order to provide comparisons of VET professionalisation, policy reform and practice **outside of Europe** the study undertook a review of activity across the UNESCO member states: **in Canada** the absence of a national ministry for education made it difficult to review policy reform in the VET sector in addition to which the focus of VET discussion appeared to centre on the combined sectors of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as opposed to VET. Not unlike England, Canada has a free market approach to VET and an extensive "for profit" training sector which has resulted in considerable variation in quality across providers and provinces. When it came to the **USA** access became an issue with a decentralised system of

governance and provision the VET /or Career and Technical Education (CTE) sector is the responsibility of local, state and federal government with decisions on course design, content and qualifications made at both state and local level. Following talks with government and policy developers in both Washington DC and Oregon State it became clear that the fragmented localised nature of VET would present a barrier to access. Meanwhile **Singapore**, **New Zealand** and **Australia** were surfacing as systems of best practice among the Asia Pacific countries with reforms in Singapore of particular interest in terms of both cohesion and integration however again and unfortunately, as in the case of the Netherlands and Denmark, policy implementation was mid cycle and as yet had not reached the evaluation phase. Australia on the other hand had implemented a policy of reform during the 90's, applied mandatory certification to practice and much like Finland had imbedded a system longitudinal studies to review and evaluate policy implementation in addition to which recent reforms had refocused VET policy to align with Lifelong Learning policy developments in schools and higher education. While the purpose of the scoping exercise was to review VET sectoral reform, policy implementation and advancements in professional practice and advise on the feasibility of this piece of research, the knowledge gathered also later advised and guided a report commissioned by the Prime Minister of Victoria and undertaken by the L H Martin Institute (2015).

On completion of the scoping exercise and taking consideration of Merriam's notion that non-probability samples are effective when the research is exploring what is occurring (1998) underpinned by Patton's (1990) suggestion that purposeful sampling not only has logic and power but also provides rich information and taking consideration of Gerring and Cojoearu (2015) findings

that researchers tend to focus on within case evidence and the case itself coupled with Stake (1991) and Remenyi *et al* (1998) recommendation for a structural representation that matches the purpose of the study, the case study selection protocol for this piece of research undertook to provide case studies that provided for comparisons and also case studies whereby government had undertaken progressive reforms with a system of policy implementation that both imbedded evaluation and evidenced traction:

Rational for Selection			
Case One	**Education System**	**Evidence that policy implementation achieved traction**	**Policy implementation evaluation**
Finland	Driven by strong ideology and cohesive policy	Professional practice and CPD moves fluidly in tandem with learners needs	Quadrennial review/evaluation undertaken directly with practitioners
Rational	Thirty years ago Finland had an education system which was struggling, mediocre and inequitable and following successive policy reforms had not only implemented cohesive inclusive policy reforms and achieved traction as evidenced through an imbedded system of quadrennial review/evaluation with practitioners but has also achieved world renowned status and are now consistently top of international education rankings		

Table 3.1. Rational for Selection Finland

Rational for Selection			
Case Two	**VET Education System**	**Evidence that policy implementation achieved traction**	**Policy implementation evaluation**
Australia	Driven by industry and labour market demands Marketised and contested space	Professional practice and CPD is driven by market demand and audit compliance	Imbedded a system longitudinal studies to review and evaluate policy implementation. Priorities identified using evidence based research, statistics and metrics
Rational	Australia had professionalised VET practice during the 90's, had developed and certified a set of standards and mandatory qualifications for professional practice which had achieved traction across the sector and had an imbedded a system longitudinal studies to review and evaluate policy implementation with priorities for sectoral development identified using evidence based research, statistics and metrics.		

Table 3.2. Rational for Selection Australia

Rational for Selection			
Case Three	**VET Education System**	**Evidence that policy implementation achieved traction**	**Policy implementation evaluation**
Ireland	Fragmented, localised	Yet to be ascertained	Yet to be established
Rational	Ireland was coming from a localised practice base with no evidence of a cohesive system, policy of national review or practice evaluation and had yet to embark on the journey of policy reform having newly established a further education and training sector during 2013.		

Table 3.3. Rational for Selection Ireland

Data gathering:

Understandably Yin (2014) places an emphasis on the planning phase of data collection and recommends for the researcher to also incorporate a pilot phase to guide and refine the data collection plan and advances the notion of the researcher skilling up in this respect prior to commencing the study. Yin advises for the researcher to draw on multiple sources of data both qualitative and quantitative in nature for example documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) focus solely on qualitative data sources such as document review, interview and observation. Stake advises for the researcher to apply sensitively and scepticism when gathering their impressions while Merriam attends to the researchers technique: how to conduct effective interviews, mine effectively for data and carefully observer. Yin (2014) outlines the need for the prior development of detailed data collection protocols and processes: multiple sources of evidence, a case study database and a chain of evidence all working towards quality control and validation of data. Stake (1995) is less prescriptive his suggestion for a data-gathering plan includes: defining the case, developing a list of questions, identification of helpers, data sources, allocation of resources, time and reporting. Stake talks in conceptual terms of knowing what leads to

significant understanding, being able to recognise good data sources and consciously or unconsciously testing the accuracy of what is seen as well what is interpreted. Unpacking these concepts into practicalities can be difficult and in this respect the detailed discussion and precision of Yin (2014) coupled with the advice and practical guidance of Merriam (1998) provides the researcher with a foothold through which to gain traction. Yin, Stake and Merriam are united in their opinion that the data should converge in a process called triangulation. However while Stake (1995) plans for triangulation to take place at the end of the study employing it as a strategy for validating the researchers interpretation of data, both Yin (2014) and Merriam (1998) would lay the foundations for the triangulation process early on in the research design. Their belief being that the process of triangulating benefits from the researcher developing theoretical propositions through which data collection and analysis can be sieved.

In terms of the designing the data-gathering phase of this study the three authors provide for each other. Where Stake (1995) offered concepts, Yin (2014) and Merriam (1998) presented detail and guidance and while the epistemological commitments of the study is not looking to develop theoretical propositions in advance of the inquiry the use of triangulation and data collection tools and protocols to enhance validity, provide for an audit trail and assure reliability is beneficial. To this end the study is advised by Stake (1995) and Merriams (1998) exclusive use of qualitative data sources, the data collection tools of interview and document review and leans into Merriam (1998) for advice and guidance regarding the practice of conducting effective interviews and data mining. Observation, in the formal sense of being applied as a data collection tool and process through which to observe VET practitioners in the field was not practical.

Primarily because of time and resources but also because of the disparity and breath of CPD activity undertaken by VET practitioners: some count attending a meeting as CPD while others might be undertaking formal qualifications over a period of two or three years. This is not to say that observation is dispensed with, it just means that the location of the activity as a process shifts to being incorporated into the data analysis phase of the design. The study complements Stakes (1995) methodology by locating triangulation into the data analysis phase to enhance validity and assure reliability. The design incorporates the use of a database to link the questions to data collected and to the conclusions drawn while also providing for an audit trail of evidence, as advised by Yin (2014). Computers are a common feature of our day and as such provide a practical repository for the storage and retrieval of data. The design also provides for routine back up of all data to an external harddrive. The design methodology adopts practical and systematic protocols during the data analysis of interviews and documents as advised by Merriam (1998) with interviews transcribed, highlighted and annotated with reflective comment or as Stake (1995) recommends "*the requirement of being sensitive and sceptic of impressionistic data*". Although Merriams (1998) concrete guidance, experience and suggested protocols are given precedence the design also takes account of Stakes (1995) epistemic commitments in that the researcher be guided by intuition and impression. Stakes recommends the researcher to consider the allocation of resources, time and reporting and to this end the study is guided by the academic timetable with the researchers own skills and resources being employed to source participants and project manage the study. The following schedule provided a road map:

Activity **Phase One Viability Study**	**Timeline**	**Date of completion**
Review CEDEFOP VET Professionalisation research	February to April 2014	
Review CIMO VET Professionalisation research	February to April 2014	
Review NCVER VET Professionalisation research	February to April 2014	
Review Irish Research (ESRI, NESC, FÁS, SOLAS, Govt Acts, Govt Pub)	February to April 2014	
Decide on viability of Thesis Proposal	February 2014	
Identify key stakeholders and readings in the area of VET professionation: research, policy, practitioners	February 2014	
Contact National Authorities Ireland to scope out viability of study	March 2014	
Contact CIMO to scope out viability of study	March 2014	
Contact NCVER to scope out viability of study	March 2014	
Draft Thesis Proposal	April 2014	
Submit thesis proposal submitted to DCU Faculty of Education	30th April 2014	
Submit ethics proposal to DCU Ethics Committee	30th April 2014	
Approval to commence	September 2014	
Contact National Authorities Ireland to request referrals	November 2014	
Contact CIMO to request referrals	November 2014	
Contact NCVER to request referrals	November 2014	
Phase Two Prepare, Gather, Process data		
Contact HOD's for list of participants/referrals	January 2015	
Draft questionnaire	January 2015	
Email Participants	January 2015	
Interview participants	March to July 2015	
Document Mining	March to July 2015	
Transcribe interviews	August to October 2015	

Table 3.4 Preliminary Roadmap *cont*.

Activity	Timeline	Date of completion
Phase Three Data Analysis		
Nvivo coding	October to November 2015	
Identify patterns and themes	October to November 2015	
Analyse Data	December 2015	
Summerise Findings	December 2015	
Phase Four Write up		
Read qualitative research philosophical underpinnings	January 2016	
Draft premise for qualitative research: epistimological evolution, key theorists and personal stance.	January 2016	
Read policy, history cultueal context documents	January 2016	
Draft case studies	January 2016	
Draft and edit Thesis	February 2016	

Table 3.4 Preliminary Roadmap

Data gathering:

Interview and document review were identified as the primary modes of data collection. Interviews with VET practitioners represented the best approach to gathering individual perspectives on the realities of practice, their experience of CPD and the impact of policy reform on practice. Merriam (1998) advises that interview is the best approach when we are not in a position to observe behaviour and how people interpret the world around them. Merriam provides guidance on: types of interview; asking good questions; beginning the interview; recording and evaluating interview data, and the nature of the interaction between interviewer and respondent.

As the study was not looking to gather data in relation socially constructed views of practice the use of focus groups to gather group perspectives was not selected as a data gathering process. The study employed one-to-one interviews as the most suitable approach to gathering individual perspectives. Highly structured interviews adhering to predetermined questions can have the effect of being the oral format of a survey and as a result may not allow for fluidity or for the participant to fully express their experience. On the other hand unstructured informal interviews become useful in situations where the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon. On this occasion less structured interviews allowed for the participant to participate in defining the content of the conversation and ensured a more organic approach to topics raised. The format also provided for participants emerging views of the world to come into conscious realisation and for new topics/issues of interest to surface.

A list of open-ended semi structured questions provided a guide for the issues being explored. The questions were structured to avoid yes/no responses and to illicit descriptive responses such as participants career path, qualifications, experience of practice and of CPD as well providing a space for some discussion about context such as the structure of their organisation and the impact of policy reforms on the sector:

	Questions
1	Career path to date
2	Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken
3	Career trajectory
4	The impact of sectoral developments on current practice
5	Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development
6	Barriers, Enablers
7	Views on policy developments in the sector
8	Views on policy implementation
9	Views on policy supports

Table 3.5 Interview questions

Yin (2014) categorises five levels of questioning to serve as a guide to reflecting on the relevance of the questions and posits that the difference between level one and two is the difference between a verbal line of enquiry and a mental line of enquiry. The delineation he illustrates as a clinician diagnosing an illness in that the line of questioning does not necessarily reveal much about the clinicians thinking. It is in this respect Yin advises the researcher to explicitly articulate the level two questions so as to avoid losing sight of the entire study. Level three questions can only be addressed when the data from all of the cases has been examined while level four and five go beyond the empirical data found within the study:

Levels of Questioning	
Level 1	specific questions asked of the participant
Level 2	specific questions asked of the individual case
Level 3	questions asked in relation to the pattern of findings across multiple cases
Level 4	questions asked of the entire study (which includes evidence, literature or published data that may be reviewed
Level 5	normative questions about policy recommendations and conclusions

Table 3.6 Yin Levels of Questioning

The questions were screened to avoid jargon, terminology and concepts such as "how do you make sense of". Blooms taxonomy (Bloom *et al* 1956) guided the wording of the questions towards gathering lists of facts, to chronicle career path, prompt recall of actual experience, encourage explanation of experience and to discuss views:

Questions to Prompt Recall	
1	What?
2	Tell me about?
3	What have you?
4	In your opinion?
5	What are your views?

Table 3.7 Questions to Prompt Recall

Planning for the interview: Merriam (1998) talks about first of all determining who to interview with the aim to achieve a holistic view of the phenomena, it is not necessarily the number of interviews but the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding. One approach is to identify key personal through on-site observation and informal discussion. Another approach is to identify key personnel in the field and request a list of referrals. For this study the national authorities responsible for research and development of VET policy and practice were approached with an outline of the study and a request for suitable participants/referrals. The point of contact for

Finland and Australia was centrally located which amounted to one request per organisation. In Ireland the sector is fragmented: key personnel responsible for policy development and the programme co-ordinators for three national programmes were identified and contacted. Contact/referral lists were provided by reply. Email requests were circulated to fifty-three potential participants over a period of seven months:

Interview Request Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Interviews requested**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	14	9th Jan 2015	21st April 2015	14.5 weeks
2	Finland	20	19th May 2015`	16th June 2015	4 weeks
3	Australia	19	26th May 2015	2nd Aug 2015	10 weeks
Total	**100%**	**53**	**Timeline**	**7 months**	

Table 3.8 Interview request timeline

Thirty-two participants agreed to participate in the study. The percentage rate of return on referrals was 56% however this is mostly attributed to the Finnish case whereby seven out of the twenty potential participants responded to email requests:

Interview Secured Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Interviews secured**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	10	9th Jan 2015	21st April 2015	14.5 weeks
2	Finland	7	19th May 2015`	16th June 2015	4 weeks
3	Australia	15	26th May 2015	2nd Aug 2015	10 weeks
Total	**56%**	**32**	**Timeline**	**7 months**	

Table 3.9 Interview secured timeline

Of the thirty-two interviews secured: twenty-four were completed. Reasons for the non-completion include cancellation due to meetings, term time break for holidays, logistics and illness:

Interview Completed Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Interviews completed**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	9	9th Jan 2015	13th May 2015	17.5 weeks
2	Finland	4	19th May 2015`	17th June 2015	4 weeks
3	Australia	11	26th May 2015	3rd Aug 2015	9 .5 weeks
Total	**45%**	**24**	**Timeline**	**7 months**	

Table 3.10 Interview completed timeline

The interview phase was active for a total of thirteen months from the time of the initial scooping exercise to the final interview:

Interview Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Initial contact**	**Start Date**	**Interviews completed**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	National Authorities Programme coordinators	11th Nov 2014	13th May 2015	25.5 weeks
2	Finland	CIMO	11th March 2014	17th June 2015	66 weeks
3	Australia	NCVER	26th Feb 2014	3rd Aug 2015	74.5 weeks
Total			**Timeline**	**31 months**	

Table 3.11 Interview Timeline

Preparation for the interview: participants were selected because of their role and the contribution their experience would bring to the research therein it can be assumed that they had a level of understanding about VET practice and VET as a sector of education provision. A questionnaire (Annex One) was forwarded to participants in advance of the interview and contained an informed consent as well as a plain language statement, which outlined the purpose of the study and a list of topics. Participants were advised that the interviews would be one to two hours in duration and that every effort would be made to conduct the interview efficiently without impacting on their day/working life. Participants were assured

of confidentiality and provided with contact details for DCU Ethics Committee in the event they had any queries in relation to the study.

The Interviews: two hours were set aside for each interview. To maximise the time spent with the participant and to ensure the participants comfort levels were considered the questionnaire was structured so that descriptive details about the organisation and familiar topics for discussion began the interview experience. Presence of mind was paid to being respectful, remaining non-judgemental and above all being non-confrontational and non-threatening. Clarification was prompted using hypothetical questioning such as "for example *x,y,z* " and "can you unpack that for me". Every effort was made to avoid leading questions or multiple questioning that might signal researcher bias or overload the participant rendering them unable to respond. Probing was used to follow up on topics of interest or where participants mentioned policy document, guides, articles of interest. Probing also took the shape of silence or an encouraging "uh huh" combined with a nodding head to prompt further explanation or a continuation of the story/experience. Streams of consciousness and digressions were buffered by guiding the participant back to the question, paraphrasing notes or summarising interpretation. On the whole participants articulated that they found the experience a positive one. The interviews took place in three phases over a five-month period:

Interviews Completed Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Number of Interviews completed**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	9	26th Feb 2015	13th May 2015	11 weeks
2	Finland	4	1st June 2015	17th June 2015	2.5 weeks
3	Australia	11	9th July 2015	3rd Aug 2015	3.5 weeks
Total		**24**	**Timeline**	**5 months**	

Table 3.12 Interviews Completed Timeline

On average the 24 interviews took 1 hour 30 minutes each. Eighteen of the interviews were face to face and located in the participants office/hotel/home, six were conducted face to face via the internet. All of the interviews were recorded. Hand written notes were made primarily to keep track of the conversation and also as a back-up in the event the tape recording malfunctioned. The note taking also provided for an opportunity to pace the interview, annotate and reflect on the data being gathered and to note topics of interest highlighted by participants as well as common themes emerging. Throughout the interviews participants mentioned relevant policy papers, research documents, links to key organisations and relevant literature. Subsequent to the interview an email request was forwarded to the participant outlining and listing the agreed follow-up activity. Participants were also sent an email to thank them for their participation in the study. In total the interviews took 33 hours:

Interview Hours				
Participant ID	**Interview format**	**Duration**	**Duration in minutes**	**Running total**
Participant 1	One to one	1 hour 40 minutes	100 minutes	
Participant 2	One to one	1 hour 47 minutes	107 minutes	207 minutes
Participant 3	One to one	42 minutes	42 minutes	249 minutes
Participant 4	One to one	13 minutes	13 minutes	262 minutes
Participant 5	One to one	2 hours 5 minutes	125 minutes	387 minutes
Participant 6	One to one	2 hours 3 minutes	123 minutes	510 minutes
Participant 7	One to one	1 hour 1 minute	61 minutes	571 minutes
Participant 8	One to one	2 hours 49 minutes	169 minutes	740 minutes
Participant 9	One to one	34 minutes	34 minutes	774 minutes
Participant 10	Skype	1 hour 47 minutes	107 minutes	881 minutes
Participant 11	Skype	21 minutes	21 minutes	902 minutes
Participant 12	Skype	1 hour 39 minutes	99 minutes	1001 minutes
Participant 13	Skype	1 hour 34 minutes	94 minutes	1095 minutes
Participant 14	One to one	1 hour 22 minutes	82 minutes	1177 minutes
Participant 15	Skype	1 hour 30 minutes	90 minutes	1267 minutes
Participant 16	Skype	1 hour 21 minutes	81 minutes	1348 minutes
Participant 17	One to one	27 minutes	27 minutes	1375 minutes
Participant 18	One to one	1 hour 20 minutes	80 minutes	1455 minutes
Participant 19	One to one	53 minutes	53 minutes	1508 minutes
Participant 20	One to one	1 hour 40 minutes	100 minutes	1608 minutes
Participant 21	One to one	50 minutes	50 minutes	1658 minutes
Participant 22	One to one	2 hours	120 minutes	1778 minutes
Participant 23	One to one	1 hour 28 minutes	88 minutes	1866 minutes
Participant 24	One to one	1 hour 44 minutes	104 minutes	1970 minutes
Total				**32.83 hours**

Table 3.13 Interview Hours

Transcription: to optimise data analysis Merriam (1998) guides for a verbatim transcription of the recorded interview. In preparation for this participants were assigned a participant identification code, a transcription code and as advised by Merriam a pseudonym to protect the participant and assure confidentiality:

Interview Transcription Codes		
Participant ID	**Transcription code**	**Pseudonym**
Participant 1	A	Anne
Participant 2	B	Daniel
Participant 3	C	Kieron
Participant 4	D	Clare
Participant 5	E	Sally
Participant 6	F	Mary
Participant 7	G	Simon
Participant 8	H	Violet
Participant 9	I	Paul
Participant 10	J	Kella
Participant 11	K	Valter
Participant 12	L	Maria
Participant 13	M	Suri
Participant 14	N	Tessa
Participant 15	O	Jane
Participant 16	P	Maddie
Participant 17	Q	Linda
Participant 18	R	Deirdre
Participant 19	S	Rebecca
Participant 20	T	Laura
Participant 21	U	Tanya
Participant 22	V	Pauline
Participant 23	W	Sophie
Participant 24	X	Robert

Table 3.14 Interview Transcription Codes

Transcribing as an activity, while time consuming and tedious, is beneficial in that the researcher develops an intimate familiarity with the participant and their experiences. Each transcript was headed with the participants ID and pseudonym. The data storage tag locating the recording was also inserted into the document. The total interview time for the twenty-four participants was 1,970 minutes. A review of the project management timeline notes that the interviews were transcribed over a ten-month period with the actual number of weeks assigned to

the activity totalling 32.5 weeks. However it is important to be aware that this time was not exclusively taken up transcribing interviews. Other research activities were being operationalised during this phase such as data review and data mining. In practice twenty minutes of taped interview took approximately one hour to transcribe:

Transcription Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Duration**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Weeks active**
1	Ireland	774 minutes	9th Mar 2015	22nd May 2015	10.5 weeks
2	Finland	321 minutes	27th Dec 2015	19th Jan 2016	3 weeks
3	Australia	875 minutes	5th Aug 2015	15th Dec 2015	19 weeks
Total		**1970** minutes	**Timeline**	**10 months**	**32.5 weeks**

Table 3.15 Transcription Timeline

The iterative process of listening to recordings repeatedly for the purposes of verbatim transcription provided an opportunity for annotating and highlighting the text with reflective comment and as Stake recommends sensitivity and scepticism towards impressionistic data. Words, phrases and entire sentences were quoted exactly:

Transcription Log			
Participant ID	**Transcription code**	**Pseudonym**	**Number of pages transcribed**
Participant 1	A	Anne	35
Participant 2	B	Daniel	32
Participant 3	C	Kieron	18
Participant 4	D	Clare	16
Participant 5	E	Sally	49
Participant 6	F	Mary	43
Participant 7	G	Simon	25
Participant 8	H	Violet	79
Participant 9	I	Paul	26
Participant 10	J	Kella	27
Participant 11	K	Valter	28
Participant 12	L	Maria	30
Participant 13	M	Suri	26
Participant 14	N	Tessa	25
Participant 15	O	Jane	23
Participant 16	P	Maddie	21
Participant 17	Q	Linda	9
Participant 18	R	Deirdre	24
Participant 19	S	Rebecca	19
Participant 20	T	Laura	28
Participant 21	U	Tanya	11
Participant 22	V	Pauline	40
Participant 23	W	Sophie	33
Participant 24	X	Robert	54

Table 3.16 Transcription Log

The transcribed documents were cleaned of personal information that might identify the participant, their colleagues, their organisation and location. The transcriptions were also checked for misinterpretations and articulations misunderstood or misheard, a process which involved listening to the recording again. Each transcript was printed and exported to a spreadsheet where, for the purposes of search and retrieval, each sentence was chronologically numbered and prefixed with the transcription code e.g A1, A2. The spreadsheet also included columns to provide for the transcript data to be coded according to emerging themes and categories during the data analysis phase. Each spreadsheet was

printed in preparation for the data analysis phase. Not unlike the act of transcribing the time consuming and resource heavy nature of cleaning and preparing data for analysis should not be underestimated. In total this process actually took fifteen days:

Transcription Timeline					
Phase Two	**Country**	**Number of pages**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Days active**
1	Ireland	323	08.05.16	12.05.16	4 days
2	Finland	111	16.05.16	17.05.16	2 days
3	Australia	287	17.05.16	25.05.16	9 days
Total		**721**	**Timeline**	**2.2 weeks**	**15 days**

Table 3.17 Transcription Timeline

Document review: according to Stake (1995) the function of the researcher during data collection is to maintain vigorous observation, it is on the basis of this data that researchers draw conclusions or assertions. For assertions we draw from understanding deep within us, understanding that is derived from a mix of personal experience, scholarship and other research. The initial direction for data mining came from the participant interviews. Topics raised by participants drove the document review and gathering providing context and identifying the topics practitioners were discussing. Most of the observation was routine and systematic: the participant would mention an issue, recommend a document, the document was then sourced, read and annotated. As the research progresses the researcher begins to pay special attention to observations or topics raised that in other circumstance might not appear significant or indeed warrant attention. The practice becomes routine: an omnipresent curiosity for understanding the context in which things happen and experiences unfold.

Interviews with the practitioners revealed their experience of recruitment, terms and conditions of employment, incentives, CPD, professionalisation, quality

assurance processes as well as the culture and context of policy reform. By comparing practitioners experiences we get a senses of how these experiences interact with each other and contribute to the development of quality VET practice: how they are recruited, the standard and level of CPD provision, rewards and incentives, standards and level of professionalism, who identifies practitioner needs and how are those needs addressed, is CPD centralised, localised or fragmented, the history and context of policy reform, implementation and traction. Reflective notes gathered during the progression of the interview phase give an indications of the questions raised, which in turn drove the document mining and informed the literature review:

Reflective Notes Individual
What motivates individuals to become VET practitioners? How are they recruited? Who recruitments them? Is the vacancy full time, part-time or a casual contract? What qualifications are required? What are the terms and conditions of the contract? Is the successful candidate is a public servant or employee? Where does the locus of power lie in the organisation: if the system is centrally controlled it might restrict the decision-making powers of the head of the organisation at a local level or any influence they could have in terms of incentivising staff through annual assessment, bonuses, increments, CPD, career advancement. If the contract of employment is casual or part-time can the individual enjoy parity of investment in their CPD? On a practical level are they entitled to request substitution, time off, and resources to attend CPD. How are CPD needs identified? Are there barriers to access, what are the enablers? What is the quality of CPD like? Surface or deep learning? How do the conditions of employment impact practitioner experience?

Table 3.18 Reflective Notes Individual

Reflective Notes Professional Practice
Is professional practice systemised or individual? Is there a professional standard? Who decides what constitutes good practice? Is the training of an appropriate level and standard? Who pays? Is it human capital investment or individual, is it expensive? Is the training accredited? Is the focus on pedagogy, curriculum design, delivery and assessment or management development skills, does it encourage the development of research skills. Is there an element of work-based learning and collaboration with industry or are they following a popular trend? How is professional practice sustained? Do practitioners view themselves as professionals, experts or as temporary casual labours? Is there a safety net to catch the practitioner isolated from both peers and practice? Is there a representative body or a Union, are there partner organisations? Are practitioners empowered, do they have a voice? What impact does the quality of CPD, the standard of practice and the level of professionalisation have on practitioner experience? How is Quality Assuranced? Is there an accepted entry level standard? Is there some form of assessment or review? Are practitioners evaluated against an organisation, national or professional standard? Who agreed the standards? Is the evaluation school wide, does it include part-time and casual contract staff? Is assessment of performance linked to incentive or progression or is career progression linked to length of service and qualification? Is there a robust quality assurance system, is there recourse for independent review? What impact does quality assurance systems have on practitioner experiences?

Table 3.19 Reflective Notes Professional Practice

Reflective Notes Policy
What is the policy when it comes to reform? Is there a history or context to policy reform? Is governance unified or fragmented? Is policy driven internationally, centrally, by an expert institution, locally or individually? Is there a vision? Is there a policy a directive? Is it linked to recruitment, CPD provision or a national quality assurance or accreditation system? Where is the funding coming from, is it targeting an identified priority or addressing individual needs? How are the funds accessed, is the funding contestable funding? Who are the stakeholders? Have they a vested interest? Is there a dominant voice or collaborative agreement? What constitutes policy formation, industry needs or social capital investment.? Is there a reform agenda, is there evidence of reform? How is policy implemented? Is there a coordinated approach? Are policy makers working off reliable information and relevant data? Is the data collection system fit for purpose? What impact does policy reform agenda have on practitioner experiences?

Table 3.20 Reflective Notes Policy

At this juncture the researcher finds themselves using the knowledge gained, their experience and a finely honed expertise to interpret aspects of the phenomena appearing in front of them. The documents gathered span a wide range of print material: government publications, progress reports, interim and final evaluation reports, literature, autobiographies, research papers, newspaper articles and studies. The documents form a paper trail of context, development, activity, issues, responses and opinions as well as stimulating thinking, provoking thought and providing answers. The documents were catalogued and stored according to country or theme and as mentioned earlier printed, read and annotated. The goal

being to learn more about the phenomena and all the while looking for clues and insights, keeping an open mind and remaining sensitive to and sceptic of impressionistic or highly subjective data. As a process data gathering, reviewing, reading, annotating and interpretation is reflexive and highly interactive: someone might mention something that peeks your interest, you make a note, you ask about it in an interview, you download a study, you buy a book. Some clues become dead ends. Undertaking a review of the files in storage two such "dead ends" include: sick leave pre/post policy upheaval and attrition rates. The data stored electronically amounted to 5.53GB of computer memory, which translates to 1,269 documents. Twenty-seven lever arch files stored printed hard copy data and documents, thirty-two books were reviewed and over thirty A4 writing pads provided the repository for document analysis and reflective comment. The data found during the document mining phase was used in the same manner as the data emerging from the interviews and reflective observation to provide descriptive information, historical context and understanding, to verify emerging themes, advance new categories, track of developments and signal change.

Analysing data: here the stances of Yin (2014), Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) diverge most. The root of this divergence is located in their different perspectives in terms of conceiving reality and knowledge. Yin (2014) looks to examine, categorise, tabulate and test and is open to combining both qualitative and quantitative evidence to address the predefined theoretical propositions of a study. His approach is highly structured and analytic. For the researcher to reach an objective truth he prescribes both general and specific strategies (pattern matching, explanation building, time series analysis, program logic models and cross case synthesis) with overarching principles that provide for high quality

analysis, validity and reliability. Stake (1995) on the other hand defines data analysis as the researcher not only giving meaning to the impressions gathered from interviews, documents and observations but also to take apart that meaning. In this sense he is capitalising on the researchers impressions as the analysis. Stake does not dismiss the use of systems and protocols but he does give precedence to the researchers intuition and impression. Stake advises that data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and advances two strategies for data analysis: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation both of which assist the researcher to identify patterns in the data. Interestingly Stake acknowledges that these strategies do not constitute the right way to conduct case study data analysis and advocates for the researcher, through experience and reflection, to approach the data analysis in a way that works best for them. Merriams (1998) complements Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) in that she describes data analysis as making sense of the data through the process of making meaning: consolidating, reducing and interpreting what participants have said (interviews) and what the researcher has read (documents). Merriam (1998) complements Stake (1995) and advocates for simultaneous data collection and analysis as well as remaining open to design alterations as the study progresses and issues emerge. Although Merriam (1998) differs from Stake (1995) in that she provides useful concrete examples and clear guidance, in terms of the application of constructivism during the data analysis process, she concurs with his notion of categorical aggregation and the search for patterns. To this end Merriam (1998) provides a step by step guide to the implementation of data analysis outlining six strategies: ethnographic analysis, narrative analysis, phenomenological analysis, constant comparative method, content analysis and analytic analysis. As was mentioned earlier **ethnographic analysis** focuses on culture and the social

regularities of everyday life. The task of analysis is to reach across multiple data sources and condense them into sociocultural patterns. **Narrative analysis** is about human experience, emphasis is placed on the stories people tell, how the stories are communicated and the language used to tell them. Every utterance is regarded as data to be analysed while first person accounts form the narrative of the study. **Phenomenological analysis** looks to ferret out the essence of the phenomenon the aim is to arrive at a structural description of what the experience is. The **constant comparative approach** to data analysis is inductive by nature and aims to build theories. The process begins with the researcher identifying an incident or story, highlighting it and taking it forward to compare it with another incident in the data set. The comparisons lead to categories, which are compared constantly within and between levels of conceptualisation until a theory can be formulated. **Content analysis** provides for the content of the interviews, field notes and documents to be analysed and although the analysis is qualitative in nature, looking for themes and reoccurring patterns of meaning making, it can come across as quantitative in nature in that the units of measurement are analysed in terms of frequency and variety with a focus on the communication of meaning. Analysis is inductive and involves the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories with the aim of capturing the relevant characteristics of the interviews, field notes and documents being analysed. **Analytic induction** is a rigorous process that looks to successively refine hypotheses by testing each new case/incident against the hypothesis/explanation. The researcher purposefully selects cases that do not fit the hypothesis, the discovery of one negative case disproves the hypothesis.

In many respects all qualitative data analysis involves some form of **content analysis**: we look for themes, frequency and reoccurring patterns. However there was also an aspect to this research study that wanted to explore the ethnographic aspects of practitioner's experiences and to view meaning making within the context of the participants social and cultural patterns. As a novice researcher it can be difficult to grasp or make sense of the activity that takes place between the process of data gathering, retreating to your cave to apply your analytic powers emerging into the light with findings. Merriam (1998) provided an amount of guidance but also notes the process of data analysis as a mysterious metamorphosis.

In more recent years publications dedicated to explaining the process of data analysis have appeared. Braun and Clarke (2013) provide a comprehensive and practical beginners guide to data analysis while Miles, Huberman and Saldana describing themselves as pragmatist realists, a useful trait when you are immersed in the idiosyncratic messiness of life experiences, rather skilfully manage to strip data analysis back to fundamental principals (2014). The language is accessible and they speak from their experience of multiple case studies. Their approach aligns itself to an ethnographic methodology however they openly admit to borrowing from other techniques. Their aim being to move from one inductive inference to another using a process of selective data collection, comparing and contrasting data, looking for patterns and themes and looking for data to support the emerging themes all the while eliciting new inference, new data and enhanced conceptualisation. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) chart a pragmatic approach through the stages of: first cycle codes (coding), second cycle coding (pattern codes), analytic memos, assertions and propositions while also providing

for cross case and within case analysis with support and guidance in relation to making the transitions from coding to analysis to drawing conclusion and verifying data. The processes are grouped into four approaches: descriptive, explanatory, concrete or abstract.

In terms of the data analysis design and process for this study the focus was on VET practitioner experiences, their experience of CPD and the realities of practice as well as the context/backdrop to sectoral developments and policy reform and it is in this respect, and at this stage of the data analysis, that the study identifies with the ambitions of Myles, Huberman and Salanda (2014) who posit that the real world is both bounded and perceptually laden and that explanations flow from an account of how different structures produce the events we observe. Myles, Huberman and Saldanas provide a frame through which to identify the drivers (at the core of the phenomena) while also providing a rich description of the most likely forces at work be that individual, group/social processes, mechanisms or structures. The analytic sequences adopted are close to ethnography in that they stay close to the participant and their community however they also borrow from grounded theory in that they move from one inductive inference to another by selectively collecting data, comparing/contrasting material, looking for patterns and regularities, collecting more data and drawing inferences.

Data Analysis Findings: at end of the data-gathering phase there was one pile of twenty-four interviews transcribed and annotated and another pile of documents and literature sourced following discussions with the participants or sourced as a result of something said or observed. In the middle there was a pile of memos and post-it notes representing peeked curiosities, hunches, ideas to be revisited,

comments that seemed to surface repeatedly. It was at this juncture that the practice of data gathering merged with the process of understanding, constructing meaning and describing the phenomenon. The task became one of **organisation** and refinement to provide rich thick description of practitioners **experiences**, to interpret, to tell their story, to take the reader on a journey, to create a gestalt that would make sense to others and to provide a case study through which practitioners experiences could be **compared, contrasted and validated**. Questions of structure were focused on striking a balance between **descriptive excess** and reasonable conclusion. In some respects there was sense of being at sea coupled with a reflection that sometimes what the participant is not saying tells us more than the articulated word. People have different experiences and while no two experiences are the same an amount of commonality will exist.

The process of data analysis had actually begun instinctively during the initial scoping exercise and in earnest during the first interview through a process of simultaneous data gathering, identification, mining and reflection. The process was interactive and recursive. Tentative themes were developed, tagged and annotated from the outset. Adopting Miles, Huberman and Saldanas (2014) approach to data analysis the study progressed through three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display and drawing conclusions/verification. In terms of data condensation Miles, Huberman and Saldana look to focus and condense the data coming from interviews, documents, memos, field notes: they avoid the term reduction and the implication that something gets lost in the process. When it comes to displaying the data they recommend to organise and compress the data into information that is helpful to developing our understanding of what is happening positing that as readers we have a natural propensity to

simplify and find patterns, we tend to look for the piece of information that jumps out of a long exacting passage. At this juncture of the data analysis and reflecting on the more "locked-in" processes of Yin (2014) it would be fair to assess the approach of Miles, Huberman and Saldanas (2014) as more fluid and humanistic albeit equally rigorous in terms of documenting the process in an open and transparent way so as to ensure that the reader can track progress.

First Round Coding: the aim of the first cycle of data analysis is data management and coding. The focus is on data processing and the preparation of words collected (interviews, documents field notes). The task involves assigning labels (codes) to the data chunks and to develop a system to manage the data in a way that provides for storage and retrieval. Yin (2014) reflects that the ultimate aim is to link the questions to the data collected and draw conclusions.

The first step was to review the data and organise it into data sets/cases for the purposes of management. Each country was given a case label/identification code:

Case Label				
Case One		**Case Two**		**Case Three**
Finland		Australia		Ireland

Table 3.21 Case Label

Each case contained a number of participants referenced by an identification code:

Participant Identification Codes				
Case One		**Case Two**		**Case Three**
Finland		Australia		Ireland
Participant 10		Participant 14		Participant 1
Participant 11		Participant 15		Participant 2
Participant 12		Participant 16		Participant 3
Participant 13		Participant 17		Participant 4
		Participant 18		Participant 5
		Participant 19		Participant 6
		Participant 20		Participant 7
		Participant 21		Participant 8
		Participant 22		Participant 9
		Participant 23		
		Participant 24		
Total 4		**Total 11**		**Total 9**

Table 3.22 Participant Identification Codes

In terms of **coding**/labelling Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) provide the researcher with a suite of twenty-five coding choices grouped into six categories: **elemental coding** forms judgements about the data in terms of its merit, worth and significance; affective coding looks to peoples subjective experiences; literary and language coding seeks to explore human action and people motivations; exploratory coding is a process of deductive coding based on assumptions; procedural coding looks to testing and causation while grammatical coding plays a role in the mechanics of capturing data. **Elemental coding** is especially helpful in ethnographic studies. The use of descriptive labelling provides for social environments and social actions. The activity involves assigning a descriptive label/code to a block of the data in order to summarise the topic of the passage. Once the block of text is labelled the data can then be indexed and categorised. Taking each of the participant transcripts, and using an Excel spreadsheet to collate participant's quotes/comments, each sentence was reviewed for content once the topic was identified a label or heading was created under which the relevant quote was collated and stored.

Second Cycle Coding: involves organising the previously summarised segments of data into patterns of smaller categories and themes/analytic units. The aim is to pull the volume of data from the first round of coding/labelling into more meaningful units of analysis (Table 21) with the function to condense large amounts of data so that the researcher can begin to focus their attention: develop leads; work out schema; understand local interactions; cognitively map local incidents or plot the terrain. Pattern codes begin to emerge from behaviours that are repeatedly observed, actions, norms, routines, relationships, single case and cross case observations:

Example of Coding Template					
Line number	**Interview Transcript**	**Any thoughts/notes made during initial transcribing**	**First round coding**	**Second round coding**	**Third round coding**
A1	F: so today is the {date of interview} and I am here with {Participant 1} in {organisation name} previously {organisation name} and is now the{organisation name} and we are going to have a conversation about what {Participant 1} does and how she has progressed through the organisation, how she started here and basically if she has been supported in her career development during her time with the organisation. First of all I just want to ask you {Participant 1} about the structure of the organisation, it's kinda one of the questions here at the front. You mentioned to me just there that there is kinda internally maybe three walls within the organisation so could you just maybe give me a feel for how it works here?		Organisational culture		
A2	A: we have the adult trainers and they would be going on you could call them short courses but in truth in the duration they could be up to a year some of them are and there would be various qualifications so it works backwards really the courses tie in with the qualifications and then hopefully the qualification ties in with the job.		Learner dynamic		
A3	A: so where I am at I'm in the IT section and we work very closely together with the different courses that are run because we tend we are bringing in people that have no experience at all. So they have nothing in the IT now they could be like at the moment now things are picking up again but previous to that we would have people who would be unemployed electricians		Learner centered		
A4	F: ok				
A5	A: so they could be in retraining completely from the building industry, from or they could be just out of school.				
A6	F: so it's like a reskilling programme or?				

Table 3.23 Example of Coding Template

Once reviewed the themes were rearranged in hierarchical order: international, national, local, organisation, individual, practice content and "other": the latter accommodating topics of particular interest. Table 3.24 contains the list of themes while Table 3.25 contains a snapshot of both the themes and participants quotes in hierarchal order:

List of Themes
Globalisation or massification of education Internationalisation Changing paradigm shifts in education theories or reference to implication of National Legislation Employment: reforms changes in policy or priorities Labour Market Sectoral Developments National Legislation Education and Training: reforms changes in policy or priorities Education and Training Sector Developments **Organisational support structures:** • Management and Leadership • Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships • CPD strategised driven supported/own initiative **Self:** • Career Path to date • Qualifications • Career Trajectory Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time • Job Description/Role: educator v trainer v administrator • CPD Industry Expertise • CPD Teaching Expertise • CPD Health and Wellbeing at work **Teaching styles:** • new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged) • changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator • facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based **Peripheral competencies:** • Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student **Technologies:** • ICT Developments **Other**

Table 3.24 List of Themes

Sample from the Database							
Partic ID	**Country**		**Self**				
10	**Finland**	**Line No.**	**Career Path to date**	**Line No.**	**Qualifications**	**Line No.**	**CPD Industry Expertise informal/formal**
		J12	K: yes so I am actually this is my 4th year as a vocational teacher here in our institute which is a vocational institute in organisation location that's sort of a community 1 hour to the capital Helsinki around 50 kilometres from the capital so we provide education vocational education on this specific area in Finland which is quite large area and we have the tourism teach students we have approximately starting every year 1 class or 1 group about 20 - 25 students and totally the whole institute we have campuses in 3 different places	J98	K: and then I also worked as a educator or instructor for our own personnel and the new personnel so I did many different things but eventually I wanted to do something else so I after that worked in an airline and I studied I attended to this cabin crew or flight attendant basic training for that and I also worked as a flight attendant for a year and a half so bit of that and during that time whole time I studied a bit in the university doing the basic study of education theory	J16	K: yeah but the tourism subjects that I teach are basically the, the basic knowledge of tourism about the industry what it is and what does it mean for the economy and in Finland and then in Global then we have divided as there are 2 other tourism teachers in our institute so we have divided our depending of our background a little bit what I teach and what they teach so as my background is on the travel agency working in a tour operator I teach most of the travel agency lessons
		J14	K: but I am teaching the tourism subjects and as well I work with the students with some special needs because some of our students I would say approximately 15 to 20% have some learning disability so I am also working as a extra teacher for some language lessons for example where there are students who need some extra help with their studies and also we try to that way a sort of a integrate the tourism and the language studies	J102	K: yeah so degree and then continued to the polytechnics and did my bachelor degree in tourism I did that all the same time as I was working as a tour operator and finally in the airline	J18	K: and then I also have been working as a tour guide so I also have the guiding lessons so we don't give the qualification to work as a travel guide or as a tour guide but we give the basic information about the field of working as a guide or a
		J16	K: yeah but the tourism subjects that I teach are basically the, the basic knowledge of tourism about the industry what it is and what does it mean for the economy and in Finland and then in Global then we have divided as there are 2 other tourism teachers in our institute so we have divided our depending of our background a little bit what I teach and what they teach so as my background is on the travel agency working in a tour operator	J104	K: and then after working in the airline and then I did the professional teacher education	J20	K or a yeah so those are my main things and then for the past few years I have also had the international tourism as my special field so we will go through different the whole world basically in a sort of a areas of the continent and what type strengths they have for tourism and some specific countries they have quite well known for their tourism and their strengths and weaknesses and things like

Table 3.25 Sample from the database

Placing the themes into context: Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) note that pattern codes contain four interrelating summaries: categories and themes, cause/explanations, relationships with people and theoretical constructs. The ambition here was not only to summarise the data into themes but also to place the themes into context so as to explore relationships and the social regularities of everyday life. Miles, Huberman and Saldanas (2014) approach to *within case analysis* provides a frame through which to describe understand and explain what is happening within a case in order to achieve a sense of local reality.

To this end the themes were merged into their respective cases as defined by country context. With the themes merged and visible it was possible to review and weigh up the data summarised under each theme and within each country. It was at this point it became obvious that some themes had become redundant (highlighted below using strike through text) while others emerged into prominence (highlighted below using red text):

Finland preliminary, redundant and emerging themes organised hierarchically
~~Globalisation or internationalisation~~ ~~Changing paradigm shifts in education theories or reference to implication of massification of education~~ National Legislation Employment: reforms changes in policy or priorities Labour Market Sectoral Developments and National Legislation Education and Training: reforms changes in policy or priorities Education and Training Sector Developments • Change of Government national policies and priorities • Culture • Operational funding structures **Organisational support structures:** • Staffing Contracts terms and conditions of employment • Management and Leadership • Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships evaluation • CPD supports   ○ strategised driven supported/own initiative **Self:** • Motivations to become a practitioner • Career Path to date • Qualifications • Career Trajectory Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time • Job Description/Role: educator v trainer v administrator • CPD Industry Expertise • CPD Teaching Expertise • CPD Health and Wellbeing at work ~~**Teaching styles**~~ **Learner demographic**: • new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged) • changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator • facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based **Peripheral competencies:** • Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student **Technologies:** • ICT Developments • Evaluation of software and teaching tools **Stakeholder engagement:** • Partnerships with industry

Table 3.26 Finland preliminary, redundant and emerging themes

Australia preliminary, redundant and emerging themes organised hierarchically
~~Globalisation or internationalisation~~ ~~Changing paradigm shifts in education theories or reference to implication of massification of education~~ Role of V ET in Society Perception of VET Historical Context National Legislation Employment: reforms Labour Market Sectoral Developments National Legislation Education and Training: Education and Training Sector Developments • Impact of changes in Government • Impact of Government Policy driven by Marketisation Agenda • VET as an export commodity • Fragmented budgets • Contestable funding • Government and Stakeholder communication/collaboration **Organisational~~ support structures~~:** • Organisational culture • Staffing Contracts terms and conditions of employment • Aging profile of employees • Management and Leadership o ~~Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships~~ • Quality of Practice o Regulation/inspection o Compliance/Audit • CPD supports o strategised and driven supported by Gov/Org v own initiative o hiring culture – industry experts **Self:** • Motivations to become a practitioner • Career Path to date • Practitioner competencies o Qualifications o Industry expertise o Increased administration • Career Trajectory o Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time • Job Description/Role: o educator v trainer v administrator o Responsibility for intake: sales, marketing, income generation • CPD o Industry Expertise o Teaching Expertise o Health and Wellbeing at work ~~**Teaching styles**~~ **Learner** : • Learner dynamics o new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged) o ~~changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator~~ o facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based o ~~Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance,~~ Learner outcomes – output driven system **Technologies:** • ICT Developments o Resourcing the virtual classroom **Stakeholder engagement** • Partnerships with industry Partnerships with schools and higher education providers

Table 3.27 Australia preliminary, redundant and emerging themes

Ireland preliminary, redundant and emerging themes organised hierarchically
~~Globalisation or internationalisation~~ ~~Changing paradigm shifts in education theories or reference to implication of massification of education~~ Perception of VET Historical Context National Legislation Employment: reforms changes in policy or priorities Labour Market Sectoral Developments and National Legislation Education and Training: reforms changes in policy or priorities Education and Training Sector Developments • Impact of Government Policy driven by Economic Agenda • Fragmented budgets • Uncertainty of intake • Government and Stakeholder communication/collaboration **Organisational~~ support structures~~:** • Staffing Contracts terms and conditions of employment • Management and Leadership o Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships • Quality of Practice o Regulation/inspection v reflective practitioner • CPD supports o strategised and driven supported by Gov/Org v own initiative **Self:** • Career Path to date • Practitioner competencies o Qualifications o Industry expertise • Career Trajectory o Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time o Advancement • Job Description/Role: o educator v trainer v administrator o Responsibility for intake: • CPD o Industry Expertise o Teaching Expertise o Health and Wellbeing at work **~~Teaching styles~~ Learner** : • Learner dynamics o new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged) o changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator o facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based o Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student o Learner outcomes – output driven system o Securing jobs for learners **Technologies:** • ICT Development **Stakeholder engagement** • Partnerships with industry

Table 3.28 Ireland preliminary, redundant and emerging themes

Having captured the themes in context the focus now shifted towards sorting and reviewing the data according to participant context and country. Miles, Huberman and Saldanas (2014) notion of **attribute coding** provided a useful frame through which to sort and reference the data contextually. A case file was generated for each participant with the aim of capturing a profile of the individual: demographic information (lists of qualifications), responses and summaries to key questions (step changes in career trajectory or barriers/enablers to professional practice, views on policy developments and supports) and quotes. The case profiles also captured jottings, observations, topics that peaked interest or issues that warranted further investigation. The case profile for each participant was printed and reviewed as a self-contained unit:

Sample Case File		
Attribute code		**Description:**
Case		{insert name of country}
Participant		{insert participant pseudonym}
Interview		[insert interview reference number}
Interview topic		
1	Structure of the organisation	Autonomy in classroom Hierarchal management structure
2	Career path to date	Left college, worked for @ 2 years in industry, moved home to marry and start a family, took a job on reception to get foot in the door, started teaching introductory courses by
3	Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken	CV attached to file. Educated to third level in subject speciality, has acquired professional qualifications throughout career to stay current.
4	Career trajectory	Career trajectory: contract/terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time: had 2 years in industry before taking a job with current employer
5	The impact of sectoral developments on current practice	Disenfranchised, cynical, sceptical, "them and us", uncertainty as to employment, unsupported, feels she has to use her own initiative to get things done,
6	Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development	Teaching strategies for people with learning difficulties
7	Barriers	never been refused training
8	Enablers	As long as she can justify that training requests result in increased custom she is guaranteed approval for training
9	Views on policy developments in the sector	Forgotten about, not part of the new organization, misunderstood
10	Views on policy implementation	Something that is happening in an ivory tower,
11	Views on policy supports	No strategy depends on colleagues or own initiative to address needs,
12	Any other points raised by participant	

Table 3.29 Sample Case File

Each section of the case profile was merged/combined for the purpose of providing a consolidated overview for each country. The following table provides a sample of the responses collated across one group/country and depicts the structures of the practitioners organisation:

Sample Case File Consolidated				
Case Number		**Participant ID**	**Code Reference**	**Pseudonym**
Consolidated		**Consolidated**	**Consolidated**	**Consolidated**
1	Structure of Organisation	Autonomy in classroom Hierarchal management structure Internal decision making autonomous External stakeholders hierarchal government and national authorities Government, departmental hierarchical Her unit is responsible for CPD of practitioners Hierarchical Government Departments and Stakeholders Local management decision making but guided by Department Circulars which are open to interpretation Hierarchical Government Departments and Stakeholders Local management decision making but guided by Department Circulars which are open to interpretation He doesn't know he wasn't given an induction Hierarchical Government Departments and Stakeholders Local management decision making but guided by Department Hierarchical Government Departments and Stakeholders Local management decision making but guided by Department Circulars which are open to interpretation			

Table 3.30 Sample Case File Consolidated – structure of the organisations

Having consolidated the data themes and case profiles for each country it was now possible to begin the process of comparing and contrasting the data across the three cases/countries.

Cross case analysis: Miles, Huberman and Saldanas (2014) posit that cross case analysis provides a frame to not only describe, understand and explain but also to deepen our understanding of every day reality. Cross case analysis also has the added advantage of increasing generalisability by providing reassurance that the event or activity is not wholly idiosyncratic to the setting. Ragin (1987) employs two approaches to cross case analysis. The first is a case orientated approach, which considers the case as a whole entity and looks to configurations and associations within the case. The second is a variable orientated approach whereby the building blocks are the variables and their interrelationships. Variable orientated strategies look for themes that cut across the cases. For Denzin (1993) the issue is not so much about analysis as it is about synthesis and while we might hunger for the understanding comparative analysis brings the trick is to ensure that each case is understood on it's own terms and within its own context. Yin (2014), agreeing with Denzin (1993), applies cross case synthesis as an analytic approach, which treats each case as a separate study and then moves to aggregate or collect the findings. In this respect Yin's (2014) approach is more in keeping with ambition of this study in that there is an emphasis on individual constructs and providing the best possible space for subjective judgements. Yin (2014) suggests for the researcher to begin the process of cross case synthesis with the creation of word tables containing categories to display the data in and across the cases. The categories can then be viewed beside each other to provide for comparisons. The following table contains the categories that were identified earlier as data themes and combines them with the themes emerging from the case profiles. The categories highlighted in red denote the themes that surfaced to prominence during the data analysis process. If we take the category "national level" by way of example and draw a comparison across the countries it becomes

apparent that the historical context of policy reform evidences as playing a part in the everyday reality of practice for participants in both Australia and Ireland but not for the participants in Finland:

Cross Case Synthesis		
Case One	**Case Two**	**Case Three**
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	**Case file**	**Case file**
Structure of Organisation	Structure of Organisation	Structure of Organisation
Career path to date	Career path to date	Career path to date
Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken	Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken	Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken
Career trajectory	Career trajectory	Career trajectory
The impact of sectoral developments on current practice	The impact of sectoral developments on current practice	The impact of sectoral developments on current practice
Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development	Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development	Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development
Barriers,	Barriers,	Barriers,
Enablers	Enablers	Enablers

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Cross Case Synthesis Preliminary and Emerging Themes - Governance		
Case One	Case Two	Case Three
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	Case file	Case file
Preliminary and Emerging Themes	**Preliminary and Emerging Themes**	**Preliminary and Emerging Themes**
Governance	**Governance**	**Governance**
International Level:	**International Level:**	**International Level:**
mentioned but not a theme	*mentioned but not a theme*	*mentioned but not a theme*
National Level	**National Level**	**National Level**
	Role of VET in Society	
	Perception of VET	Perception of VET
	Historical context	Historical context
National Legislation: Employment Labour Market Education and Training Reforms Policy Priorities (Collapsed into one code)	National Legislation: Employment Labour Market Education and Training Reforms Policy Priorities (Collapsed into one code)	National Legislation: Employment Labour Market Education and Training Reforms Policy Priorities (Collapsed into one code)
Impact of changes to National Governance policies and priorities	Impact of changes to National Governance policies and priorities	
	Impact of Government policy driven by Marketisation Agenda	
		Impact of Government policy driven by Economic Agenda
Culture of trust in Government decisions		
	VET as an export commodity	
Operational Funding Structures		
	Fragmented budgets	Fragmented budgets
	Contestable funding	
		Uncertainty of student intake (impact no grant funding/Govt subsidies)
		Government and Stakeholder communication/collaboration

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Cross Case Synthesis Preliminary and Emerging Themes - Organisation – Management Structures and Supports		
Case One	Case Two	Case Three
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	Case file	Case file
Organisation	**Organisation**	**Organisation**
	Organisational Culture	
Staffing contracts terms and conditions of employment	Staffing contracts terms and conditions of employment	Staffing contracts terms and conditions of employment
	Aging profile of employees	
Management and Leadership	Management and Leadership	Management and Leadership
Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Evaluation Working relationships	Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships	Collegiality: Team Teaching Peer Learning Working relationships
	Quality of Practice: - Regulation/inspection - Compliance/Audit	
		Quality of Practice: - Regulation/inspection v Reflective Practitioner
CPD supports: - strategised and driven supported / own initiative	CPD supports: - strategised and driven supported by Gov/Org v own initiative	CPD supports: - strategised and driven supported / own initiative
	CPD supports: - hiring culture – industry experts	

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Cross Case Synthesis Preliminary and Emerging Themes - Self – Practitioner Professional Development		
Case One	Case Two	Case Three
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	Case file	Case file
Self	**Self**	**Self**
Motivations to become a practitioner	Motivations to become a practitioner	
Career Path to date	Career Path to date	Career Path to date
Qualifications	Practitioner competencies - Qualifications - Industry expertise - Increased administration	Practitioner competencies - Qualifications - Industry expertise
Career Trajectory - Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time	Career Trajectory - Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time	Career Trajectory - Contract and terms of employment: zero hours contract, part time full time
		Career Trajectory - advancement
Job Description/Role: - educator v trainer v administrator	Job Description/Role: - educator v trainer v administrator	Job Description/Role: - educator v trainer v administrator
	Job Description/Role: - Responsibility for intake: sales, marketing, income generation	Job Description/Role: - Responsibility for intake (or course gets dropped)
CPD Industry Expertise	CPD Expertise (Collapsed into one code) - Industry Expertise - Teaching Expertise - Health and Wellbeing at work	CPD Expertise (Collapsed into one code) - Industry Expertise - Teaching Expertise - Health and Wellbeing at work
CPD Teaching Expertise		
CPD Health and Wellbeing at work		

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Cross Case Synthesis Preliminary and Emerging Themes – Learners		
Case One	Case Two	Case Three
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	Case file	Case file
Learner Demographic	**Learner Dynamics**	**Learner**
new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged)	new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged)	new target groups changing profile of student (multiculturalism disadvantaged)
changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator		changing profile of outcomes entrepreneur/innovator
facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based	facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based	facilitator/learner centered approaches or skills based
	Learner outcomes – output driven system	Learner outcomes – output driven system
		Securing jobs for students

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Cross Case Synthesis Preliminary and Emerging Themes – Peripheral Competencies		
Case One	Case Two	Case Three
Finland	Australia	Ireland
Case file	Case file	Case file
Peripheral Competencies	**Peripheral Competencies**	**Peripheral Competencies**
Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student	Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student	Development of peripheral competencies: counselling, guidance, health and wellbeing of student
Technologies	**Technologies**	**Technologies**
ICT Developments	ICT Developments	ICT Developments
Evaluation of Teaching Tools		
	Resourcing the virtual classroom (platforms/supports)	
Stakeholder Engagement	**Stakeholder Engagement**	**Stakeholder Engagement**
Partnership with Industry	Partnership with Industry	Partnership with Industry
	Partnerships with schools and higher education providers	

Table 3.31 Cross Case Synthesis *cont*

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) offer words of warning at this juncture and advise the researcher to hold initial conclusions lightly and to maintain a degree of openness and scepticism as the final conclusion might not appear until the data collection is over while Yin (2014) advises the researcher to be prepared to develop strong plausible and fair arguments while doing the case study. To this end the cross case synthesis table provided a useful tool through which to begin the process of culling the wide range of documents and literature gathered to support and underpin the topics raised by participants during the interview phase and also provided a storyboard on which to base the design of the case reports.

Reporting the case: when it comes to designing a case report Yin (2014) offers four structural formats. The first is a single case structure, which describes and analyses one case. The next is a multiple case structure, which presents separate chapters or sections concluding in a final chapter containing cross case analysis and results. The third structure is relevant to both single and multi case formats in that it provides for the flow of the cases to be guided by the same set of questions and answers and can be useful for the reader in that they follow the sequential ordering of cases and therein begin to participate in the process of comparing/cross case analysis. The fourth format is used in multiple case studies only: the structure of the report does not have any chapters or sections dedicated to the individual cases but devotes the chapters and sections to cross case issues. For this study the report format is guided by multiple cases presented as single case studies each with their own separate chapter. A final chapter provides for cross case analysis. The cases will not be presented using a question and answers format suggested by Yin (2014) but will again be guided by context. The

application of a questions and answers format could have resulted in idiosyncratic and relevant themes being omitted because they didn't fall into the frame/line of questioning.

In terms of illustration or compositional structure Yin (2014) provides six alternatives: linear-analytic, comparative, chronological, theory-building, suspense and unsequenced. The structures are aligned to the purpose of the study for example a descriptive study would be at cross purposes if it employed theory building logic as a structure of presenting casual arguments or debating the value of further investigation into a hypothesis. When it comes to illustrating ethnographic studies involving the social and cultural regularities of life you are in the realm of describing participants perspectives and the subjectiveness of real life, which aligns itself to adopting a linear-analytic, comparative or chronological illustration of the case. Linear approaches are structured as sequential sub topics: the composition might start with a statement of the subject/topic and a review of the literature. The subtopics then proceed to cover the methods used, the data collected, the data analysis, the findings and end with a conclusion or discussion. Comparative structures are shaped to repeat the same case study a number of times with the aim of comparing alternative descriptions. Taken from a realist perspective the composition of the case report would aim to repeat a single set of facts within each iteration or case study. The repetition, a form of pattern matching, demonstrates the degree to which the same facts fit into different conceptual models. Composing the structure of a comparative study with a relativist perspective would involve the repetition of a similar set of episodes and being constructivist in orientation would focus on the multiple realities and perspectives of the participants/individuals. Each case would illustrate a different

perspective or individual take on things. Oxford studies (2016) provide some good examples of comparative studies and how trends and issues might inform teaching practice. For example they take initiatives like the Programme for International Student Testing (PISA) or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and look at how these initiative have impacted practice in terms of teacher accountability and testing. The realist application would look at PISA from the perspective of how it converges on a single model such as an education system while the relativist approach would look at PISA from the multiple perspectives/realities of teachers involved. Whether the illustration/composition of the case study is relativist or realist the main aim is to repeat and compare. Chronological structures on the other hand look to illustrate events over time. The sequence of the sections would look to provide background and context. There is an explanatory aspect to presenting events in chronological order in that describing the activity over time provides a space in which to raise questions or understand more about why things are the way they are. The one pitfall of a chronological structure is that the researcher can end up giving disproportionate attention to early events and insufficient attention to the later ones. The researcher can spend a lot of time composing the introduction including early history and background with the result that they leave insufficient time to write about the current status of the case. In terms of the illustration of this study the initial concept would have envisaged a comparative relativist approach however as was mentioned earlier the history and context of policy reform was a prominent theme in terms of the everyday reality of practice for participants in Australia and Ireland and as such the study moved forward giving consideration to a chronological structure. The chronological structure is not aiming to presume causal sequences but to provide a backdrop and context to

practitioner experiences, interpretations and perspectives. Constructivists view reality as being generated and constructed by people and therein posit that reality largely exists within people minds. However as Crotty (1998) advises there is also a job to be done by the researcher in terms of looking to describe both the **culturally derived and historically situated perceptions** of the social life-world.

Validating Data: constructivism in relation to data validation is interesting in that constructivism acknowledges multiple versions of knowledge and that knowledge is a product of the knower and the known. Both Stake (2014) and Merriam (1998) posit that it is impossible to apply the concepts of validity and reliability to qualitative research by virtue of the fact that validity and reliability were created with positivist inquiry in mind. To this end Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) would hold a very different position towards validity than Yin (2014). Yin describes construct validity as the **triangulation of data** through multiple sources such as chains of evidence and member checking; internal validity involves the use of established analytic techniques such as pattern matching while external validity would involve analytic generalisation. Reliability for Yin comes in the shape of protocols and databases. As was mentioned earlier the adoption of these protocols during the design phase is of paramount importance if quality and rigour is to be achieved. Stake (1995) meanwhile concentrates on the triangulation of data and provides four strategies: **data source triangulation which involves time, space and person**; investigator triangulation which involves multiple researchers in an investigation and theory triangulation which involves more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation and methodological triangulation and employs one or more methods to gather data such as interviews, questionnaires and documents. It is at this juncture Stake becomes concerned with accuracy,

explanation, discipline and protocols to ensure that the researcher is not solely dependent on their intuition and impressions to achieve accuracy and to avoid misrepresentation or misunderstanding. Stake intends for the researcher using his triangulation strategies to be in a position to confirm their interpretations, to increase credibility and to demonstrate the commonality of their assertions. Merriam (1998) believing that reality is holistic, multidimensional and ever changing (not fixed and waiting to be discovered, observed and measured) aligns her concept of validation to Stake in that the researchers depiction of the conclusion should contain enough detail to make sense and be credible to the reader. For Merriam validity is a thorny issue and in this respect she describes the use of validity in qualitative research as a "somewhat epistemological misfit". Merriam provides a summary of how the concepts of validity and reliability can be employed by the researcher to enhance their study and to this end offers six strategies to augment internal validity: triangulation, member checking, long term observation, peer examination, participatory research and disclosure of bias. In terms of ensuring reliability Merriam advances 3 strategies: explanation of investigators position in terms of the study, triangulation and the use of an audit trail. For external validity Merriam (1998) advises the use of thick description, typicality or modal categories and multi site designs. In terms of this study the triangulation of three cases assures validity in terms of data source triangulation involving time, space and person while reliability was addressed through the developments of protocols and databases while also employing Merriams advice regarding explanation of investigators position in terms of the study, triangulation and the use of an audit trail.

Before moving to the individual case studies it is perhaps timely at this juncture to provide some context with regards to **ethical considerations**, research **limitations and the researchers position**

Ethical considerations: ethical issues should be viewed from an overarching perspective. The research should not serve to dis-empower or marginalise a group and the participant should not be deceived in any way. Creswell (2003) advises for the participant and the researchers to share the same understanding of the purpose of the research and therein the data collected should not put the participant at risk. With this in mind, and prior to the commencement of the interview phase, consent forms and plain language statements were designed and submitted to the ethics committee in DCU for approval. The informed consent referenced applicable legislation including the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act. European Commission regulations on equity and participation were addressed and DCU Ethical Commitment Guidelines were also adhered to. Participants were assured that all information would remain confidential and that their anonymity would be preserved. Every effort was be made to ensure that the research was open and transparent. Consent forms and plain language statements were circulated to all participants for signature. The plain language statement included a summary of the research and outlined the participant's role in the study. Where relevant, approval was sought through the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the participating organisations. Parental consent was not necessary as the participants were over 18 years of age. Participants were made fully aware that the researcher had a duty of care to them and that any concerns would be given ethical consideration. Participants were

made aware that confidentially would be maintained and that their decision to participate in the study was based on their own free will.

With regards to the **limitations** of the research: while researching the VET systems for the three case studies it became clear that there was very little literature on either the history of VET or the development of the sector, particularly when compared to the vast amount of literature available and published in relation to schools and higher education. The main sources of information, and therein the data collection parameters of the study, were the participants interviews and subsequent field research, government reports, academic research and articles or presentations by people who have been involved in the sector for a number of years and having lived through the changes were now in a position to reflect on developments. The study reflects the experiences of a small number of practitioners in each country and therein may not reflect the views and experiences of practitioners in other countries and other organisations. Given the emergent nature of the study findings, the complexity, intrigue and impact of current political developments in all three cases the study was constrained somewhat by time and space, dissertation guidelines and protocols. Further comparative research involving a greater sample of countries would achieve greater generalisability and would lend itself to guiding practitioners towards developing organisation structures for their professional development while a phenomenological study into practitioners would take a step into exploring the essence of their experience which would be useful in terms of guiding the design of provision.

In terms of the researcher position: my fathers family were farmers and publicans in a small rural village in South Tipperary: a region where sense of community is very strong, due in no small part to Canon Hayes and Muintir na Tire. Tipperary is also the home of hurling where Archbishop Croke established the Gaelic Athletic Association to encourage the ideologies of cultural identity, cross community tolerance and pluralism through sport and shared cultural activities. My mother is from a large farm and engineering family in Mayo: an area known for being the third largest Irish-speaking region of Ireland and a society blighted by mass emigration. I was born in Dublin, the capital city of Ireland and while my formative years of formal education took place in Dublin my life-wide learning took place in rural Ireland. When I left school I emigrated to England where I got a grant from the European Social Fund to study Business, Finance and Law which is still a curiosity to me as the school subjects I excelled in were history, biology and art. When I left college I began a career as an economic development officer distributing regional development and European funds targeted at upskilling and reskilling people in the labour force. The projects were wide ranging, innovative and interesting: working to recognise the prior learning (RPL) of soldiers transitioning out of the army and engineering draftsmen transitioning to computer aided design (CAD). We also built an airport and developed large-scale training programmes for the now 10,500 staff transiting 17.5 million passengers a year. It was while working with the armed forces, that I developed an intellectual curiosity about the culture of organisations. After many years I returned to Ireland where I took up a post developing and implementing Lifelong Learning policy through the distribution of European funds targeted towards encouraging the mobility of vocational education and training practitioners, students trainees and apprentices. Again the projects were

wide ranging and varied but had the common theme to encourage the exchange of work-based learning and best practice through transnational partnership and collaboration. It was at this point I started to look at things from many angles. I developed an intellectual curiosity about the relationship between culture, education policy, practice and people. I began a degree in education and training which started me on the path to exploring histories, philosophies and pedagogies. The nature nurture debate has always been a fascination to me. I read philosophy, anthropology, psychology and study the human mind: enjoying the works of developmental psychologist Erik Eriskon and Torsten Husen who is renowned for his interdisciplinary approach and works in the area of comparative education, policy reform and psychology. I have a tendency to listen more than I speak, I write more than I speak, I read more than I write, I observe life and I keep a reflective journal. I have travelled and worked with colleagues all over Europe by virtue of my job. I have travelled and experienced the rest of the world with friends by virtue of my wages. Travel has given me a wide perspective on life, it has taught me that everyone has their own unique perspective, that context is important and to discount experience is to somehow deny a life lived. I hold the conviction that nothing is impossible given the time, space, understanding and support to develop. I am a humanist and non-judgemental; you will often find me in the role of mediator. I enjoy aesthetics and gravitate towards quality and authenticity. My Masters Degree allowed me to combine my financial background with my work in economic development, Lifelong Learning policy development, mobility, culture and psychology. This doctorate has given me the reflective space to consider the role philosophy plays in research methodology which in turn has given me a deeper theoretical understanding of the qualitative processes of case study, case study evaluation, forth generation evaluation and

action research that scaffold the operational activity of the Lifelong Learning Programme and are found in the works of Stake (1995), Yin (2014), Guba and Lincoln (1989) and McNiff (2012) the results of which are used to inform policy. Evaluating contestable funding programmes for 27 years has taught me to be focused and has developed the pragmatic skills of balancing quality and statistics with financial assessment, risk and governance. It has taught me to write bureaucratic reports, under tight deadlines, for Ministries and Government but it has also developed my intellectual curiosity for ethics and self-efficacy particularly the outsider/insider debate (Crossley, Lore and McNess 2016) and the relationship between the research, the researcher and the development of policy. I have developed the skill of reading European Commission technical documentation in French, then in German and later to interpret a translated Eurocratic-English into English. The relevance of clarity of expression and how important it is in international settings has developed my curiosity about language and how we construct it. The thing I have enjoyed most about this doctorate has been the participation: in many respects it has been a voluntary journey into meaning making and understanding undertaken by my curiosities. It has afforded me the time and the space to allow new curiosities to emerge and unfold, to reflect, to read more, to look again, to reframe, to understand and to be accepting that at the end of all my exploring I could well arrive back where I started only to know the place for the first time. I expect I will continue to be curious and I fully expect the curiosity to begin with the words "*that's interesting*" quickly followed by "*I wonder why that is*" and so the journey into understanding will begin again: life long and life wide.

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter was to discuss research methodology from the perspective of ontological and epistemological commitments and to provide and outline of the design choices that underpin the study. The study undertook a qualitative piece of research focusing on lived experiences and multiple realities of VET practitioners with the ambition to validate individual perspectives and meaning making as opposed to viewing the data as a unit of analysis. Endeavouring to understand how VET practitioners make sense of their world while also understanding their perspectives on their experience in their world, the study was driven by a constructivist philosophy and employed the research methodologies of case study to describe the participants, their world, their truth and the realities of their experience in it. The study was guided predominantly by the case study theories of Stake (1995) while also taking consideration of Merriam (1998) and Yin (2014). Understanding that truth is only true under certain conditions, at certain times and for certain people the study was interpretivist by nature and taking consideration for the participants experiences while also staying present to the individual, their narrative and their unique meaning; employed the data gathering tools of interview and document review. Employing a foundational structure that encompassed a review of three comparable cases studies (Finland, Australia and Ireland) also ensured validity and reliability could to be approached through a process of triangulation. Data analysis is an iterative process, going over and back, looking again, reviewing again, all the while having the presence of mind to stay true to the individual, their perceptions and the knowledge being produced. It also became clear during the interview stages that that the data analysis needed to take account for both culturally derived and historically situated descriptions that were emerging as having some primacy and as such led to the study being guided

by Myles, Huberman and Saladana's comprehensive understanding of qualitative data analysis (2014) combining thematic, context/attribute coding and cross case analysis. As is evidenced in the next chapter (which contains the three case studies of Finland, Australia and Ireland) the use of narrative and the rich thick description of practitioners experiences as well as the application of a chronological structure to the case study presentations allows not only for the illustration of events over time (including background and context) but also provides a space for the reader to participate in the meaning making: to undertake a journey, to raise questions and have a conversation about why things are the way they are and while in theory constructivism might stop there leaving the corollaries of the journey to the reader in practical terms this thesis will move forward to discuss the issues raised and in a final chapter will conclude with a set of recommendations that might inform future developments in the area of **professional practice** or be of **benefit countries** currently **embarking** on a **policy agenda of sectoral reform**.

Chapter 4 Case Studies Finland, Australia and Ireland

The aim of this chapter is to present the case studies of Finland, Australia and Ireland. The structure of each case study will begin first with the presentation of a graphic depicting each country's education system and by way of providing an introduction will take a snapshot overview of the population, official languages, education demographics including exchequer funded operational spend per pupil/student, a brief summary of education governance including VET strategic objectives and priorities for VET workforce development. The case study will then move forward to provide a chronological illustration of policy reform over time (including background and context) and through rich thick description and participant narrative the ambition is for the reader to gain an insight into **practitioners perspectives** on the realities of practice and teaching in the VET sector, their **experience of CPD**, identifying **key policy drivers** and reforms as well as the **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers.** In addition the chronological illustration of each case also aspires to provided a space for the reader to participate in the meaning making, to undertake a journey, to raise questions and to have a conversation about why things are the way they are in the hope that corollaries arrived at might inform practitioners and the future development of their professional practice or be of benefit to policy makers currently embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform:

Case Study One Finland

Education at a glance Finland:

Education System Finland

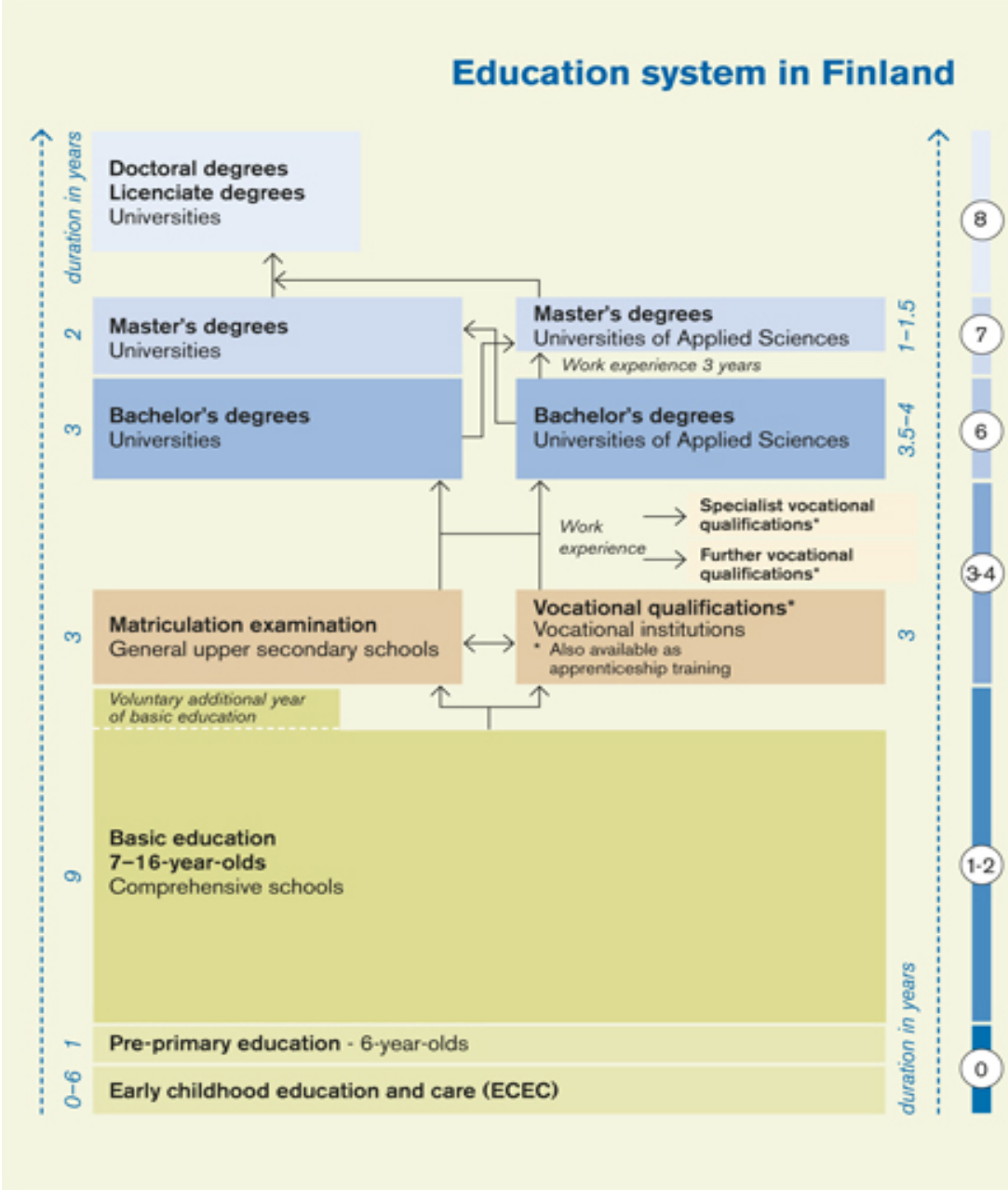


Figure 4.1 Education System Finland Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017

VET Overview *cont….*
Population: 5.5 million **Official languages**: Finnish and Swedish **Free education is a constitutional right:** "Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. The public authorities shall guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship" (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017) **Governance:** The system of administration is two tier, the Ministry for Education is responsible for education policy, preparation of legislation and State funding while the Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for national development, national core curricula & qualification requirements, support for evidence-based policy-making and services for learners. **Operational spend per pupil/student for 2015** Pre-primary education €5,859 Basic education €8,955 General upper secondary €7,747 Vocational upper secondary €11,503 **Education level of the working age population** 13 % basic education 45 % upper secondary education 42 % tertiary education In 2014 of the 57,853 students who completed basic education programmes 36% progressed to Vocational Upper Secondary with the balance 52% progressing to General Upper Secondary, 3% to Other studies and 7% choosing not to continue immediately. **VET strategic objectives** • Vocational Education and Training reform is a current priority with strategic objectives identified as: • Improving effectiveness (flexibility & individualisation, recognition of prior learning, learning environments) • Addressing Drop-out and exclusion (youth guarantee, funding reform, work-based learning) • Quality improvements (local development plans, quality strategies, competence-based)

Figure 4.2 VET Overview Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017 *cont*

VET Overview *cont…*
Key strengths of VET are identified as: • Close cooperation with the labour market • On the job learning • Individualisation strong **Key competences identified for Lifelong Learning include:** • Learning and problem solving • Interaction and cooperation • Vocational ethics • Health and Safety and ability to function • Initiative and entrepreneurship • Sustainable development • Aesthetics • Communication and media skills • Mathematics and science • Technology and ICT • Active citizenship and different cultures **Education Workforce Development** • Quality Assurance is identified as a tool for development with education providers responsible key quality priorities: • Self-evaluation • Skills demonstrations and competency-based qualifications • National evaluations of learning outcomes • System and thematic evaluations • International assessments

Figure 4.2 VET Overview Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017 *cont*

Perspectives on Reform:

Thirty years ago the Finnish education system was struggling, mediocre and inequitable while also being trade marked for top down testing, extensive tracking and highly variable teaching practices. Successive reforms transformed the system into one which is now consistently at the top of international education rankings. Finland is viewed as one of the most educated citizenships in the world (Sahlberg 2015). Based on **egalitarian principles of equity** and **fairness** as well as **equal rights** and **opportunities**, the system makes the most of limited resources and has become the object of fascination for educators and policy developers worldwide as Maria notes *"well yes it depends on the matters that we are dealing with but basically Finnish education is quite flexible in the decision making but then the laws that govern us of course force us to take certain steps in the decision making but .... we have more flexibility and we have a lot more freedom and also a lot more responsibility"(L78 L80)*. The Finnish Ministry for Education host on average 100 official delegations from 45 countries around the world annually (Anderson 2011).

To understand the success of Finland's education system and where VET is located within the structure it is necessary to take a look at the impetus behind **thirty years of successive reforms**, which were built on a vision for Finland that emerged out of the work of Statesmen and Scholars during the 1950's. Coming out of World War II, having fought for freedom and survived, the rebuilding of Finland had its foundations in **new social ideas** and **new social policy** which began with **political consensus** being a **precondition for reform** (Sahlberg 2015). **Grounded in research** and implemented in **collaboration** with **academics, policy makers and educators** the Finnish vision placed the

individual learner and **civic society firmly at the centre of the dialogue**. Renewal of the education system was the responsibility of three education committees. Holding over 200 meetings and conducting empirical studies in over 300 schools involving 1,000 teachers their reform agenda, and subsequently all future education policy decision making, was intrinsically grounded in research and advanced the premise that the **fundamental role of education** was to **educate young people** to realise themselves as **holistic individuals** possessing **intrinsic motivation** for further and **continuing education** with **social cohesion** as an important **goal** as Kella notes *"it is more motivating for them, they finally realise what they are aiming for .... and that motivates them more" (ref J64).* The Committee advised that **all learners be treated equally** regardless of their socioeconomic situation as Kella reflects *"yeah and it is sometimes difficult because the students come from such a different backgrounds and some of them are good in some other things and when you have a groups of 25 students it is very difficult that the good ones would get more motivating things to do and so that the little bit weaker ones they don't be left out" (ref J394)* and that the system should **avoid tracking** students to academic subjects or vocational studies, as was the case in the then **concurrent parallel education system**. **Traditional institutions were transformed** as noted by Maria "*the studies are organised in a different way.... it is not like periodical studies or terms" (ref L60)*. The structure and working life of schools began to change in order to unify the sector and bring coherence to subsectors of education with the result that private provision and **vocational education**, which up until then had been the responsibility of the Department of Vocational Education in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014), were merged into municipal structures and became **intrinsic components of the education system**. This proposal

stimulated further, indeed some would say harsh, **debate** between politicians, authorities, practitioners, academics and Finnish civil society about issues of **social justice** and **equal education** opportunities. The tenants of which would be realised and entrenched two decades later as the foundations of Finnish education policy (Sahlberg 2015).

Key to understanding how the principles of equity and equality gather traction in civic society is to appreciate that **Finnish values, cultural determinates and social cohesion are deeply rooted in fairness, honesty and a sense of social justice** (Chaker 2014). Finnish citizens have a strong sense of shared responsibility, not only for their own lives but also for the lives of others. Public health and education are easily accessible for everyone and are widely viewed as a public good and therefore **constitutionally** protected as a **human right** for all. Perhaps more telling is that twenty governments and twenty seven ministers of different political persuasions have managed the Finnish education portfolio since 1970 (Sahlberg 2015) yet the **steady pace of systematic reform** required to achieve the agreed principles of equity and equality for individual learners has **held steadfast** in it's **ambition** and **vision** as Maria explains *"yes well it is positive to notice that we have put the focus on the learner" (ref L535).*

Finns do not aspire to do everything the same way as others, to dress or to live like others, their **individuality** is blended with a **low degree of hierarchy** and willingness to work through things with each other to make **rational choices** (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2010). There are few, if any, educators in Finland who would say their system is the best in the world. Finland **did not join the race to the top of a market based standardised education system**, they **did not borrow** from **or rent a moral purpose for capacity building and education** that

is so often implemented irrespective of culture, country and context. Instead Finland chose to **inspire their own vision** of education **instilling** a **sense of purpose**, **collective responsibility** and **shared ownership** as drivers for those involved as noted by Maria "*we know that from the very practical point of view I mean the day to day teaching has changed from being a teacher into being a tutor or facilitator and that has come from the teacher training programmes and the need .....to guide them into the direction that they need .... I mean you learn from your students when they change or their ways of learning change then you just have to go along with that and try to think of better ways or flexible ways more encouraging ways.....as a teacher you don't have to know it all like you used ....we are creating the knowledge with the students together with them as one sort of way of learning" (L354, L402 L535)*. Their **recipe for reform** was a simple one: ask yourself if the policy is **good for the individual**, if you hesitate with your answer then don't do it (Sahlberg 2015).

The prominent political scientist Kuusi (1961) noted that having consolidated the values of **equity** and **social justice** as **principles of the welfare state**, **expenditures in education became investments** to increase productivity **as opposed to a necessary social cost to maintain an industrial society**. The system is therefore founded on the philosophy and assumption that public education has a role to play in educating citizens to think critically and independently (Sahlberg 2015) as Maria points out *"yes it is working and it has to work because well each individual has to be responsible for their own life"(ref L539*). **Reforms** therefore took the shape of **phased investment**/implementation with **each phase** conveying a certain **policy logic underpinned** by **theories of change**. The **first phase** focused on the concepts of **knowledge and learning**

which marked the 80's as a period of rethinking the theoretical and methodological foundations of teaching and learning encouraging practitioners' to reflect on how they teach and to research how learners learn as noted by Kella *" totally understandable that this will bring the teaching to a new level at least I was very satisfied with the teachers education that I got here in Finland it was many many lessons regarding the new learning methods and about the teaching itself ... I was sort of a very fresh to the new ideas ... I know the teaching methods and the way you are learning ... the students they really enjoy it" (ref J341).* The **second phase**, uninterrupted by the unexpected and jarring recession of the early 90's which brought Finland to the edge of financial breakdown, was marked by **liberalisation from governance, decentralisation and autonomy**. The locus of control was passed to local municipalities, local providers as Kella and Maria reflect "*the institutes make all the decisions, they decide" (ref J165) "the teams they have their independence and autonomy and how to organise the work... we have a holistic approach to all the work we do" (ref L330)* and more importantly practitioners themselves with a focus firmly on improvements through networking and self regulated change as Kella notes *"we have this networks seminars between the vocational tourism teachers so the teachers all around Finland will gather ... and I think that is quite important ... to change ideas and sort of network in all kinds of levels .. polytechnics and vocational level.. industry and academia" (ref J220 J224 J320).* The **third phase**, continuing undisturbed by the global financial downturn of 2008, is focused on **enhancing** the **efficiency of structures** and administration but is mindfully **avoiding any disturbance** of the sensitive **balance** between a well performing system and the **pursuit of efficiencies** as Kella reflects *"it is either a good or a bad thing and we try to find them good places where they have some good experiences" (ref J434).*

Unlike many of the contemporary education system reforms being implemented globally and in many of Finland's OECD counterpart countries, the Finnish system has remained **immune to the market driven policies of competition**, **efficiencies, standardisation and high stake testing**. Finland is a nation that lacks a reliance on externally collected data, education inspection, standardised curriculum, high stakes student testing and test based accountability or indeed the race to the top mentality so prevalent in many education reforms. Authorities, educators and civic society recognise that caring for and **educating individuals** is too **complex a process to be measured by quantitative metrics alone.** More over education policy is not only **intertwined with other social policies** but also, and more importantly, it remains cognisant to the overall vision and political culture of Finland. Indeed the more recent coalition Government of 2011 based their campaign to guarantee a study place or apprenticeship to all students under the age of 25 on estimates that a young person who doesn't complete upper secondary education will cost civic society 1.4 million US dollars in lost tax revenue, as well as the increased cost to health and social welfare attributed to unemployment (Sahlberg 2015). Their campaign was underpinned with additional supports and guidance specifically in the areas of life skills, growing into adulthood, work experience and pathways to further education and training qualifications (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014) as Kella notes *"we have in Finland we have this thing called Youth guarantee and it is a sort of a promise form the Government that .... all the young people .... they have promised that they will get an education place or a student study place or a work place .... or something they will get some support .... there is a guarantee that they have to the government is going to get them a place to work or the place to continue their studies" (ref J426).*

Finland is a small nation situated between the larger powers of the East and West, Salberg (2015) would posit that this has taught the Finns to accept existing realities and to avail of given opportunities with the result that diplomacy, cooperation, problem solving and **seeking consensus** have become **hallmarks** of contemporary **Finnish culture**: traits that have **played a role** in the equitable distribution of **good teaching and learning** within the education system and throughout Finland as Valter reflects *"we had tried different ways of teaching .... some of them have worked and some of them doesn't those who have worked we basically we do it all over again a bit adjustment each year and then if we have tried something and it's a total failure of course we don't do it again but basically the tools we have are our common experience with me and my colleagues which works and which doesn't and we try new things" (ref K144).* Successive **reforms** have **created an education system** that brings together a wide variety of individuals, with different life circumstances and aspirations, to learn in the same schools and classes which, it must be noted, required **fundamentally new approaches** to teaching and learning if each learner was to be afforded equal opportunity, a fair chance to be successful and to enjoy a life of learning. **Special education** experts became an integral part of the system given the impetus to identify and provide suitable interventions to assist learners to overcome learning difficulties. **Career guidance** and counselling is now a compulsory cornerstone of learners' decision-making processes assisting them to make appropriate and suitable choices regarding their future as well as forming the bridge between continuing education and the world of work as mentioned by Maria *"to guide the students ....values are created .. courage to learn, joy of working and fair play" (ref L364).* The **philosophy** being, not unlike that of **Dewey** (1916), that all individuals can learn if they are given the opportunity and support, that human

understanding and learning comes through diversity and that learning organisations should function as small-scale democracies. This requirement for the equitable distribution of good teaching practices led to a wide scale reform of teacher education in the late 70's with the introduction of laws that focused on teacher education and continuous professional development while also having an emphasis on transforming practitioners into high status professionals with a background in research as Maria explains "*so that tells you about our way of working so we are not afraid to tackle new things we want to learn we take risks in doing things in a different way and that gives us the joy in our daily work both for the students and the teachers and then it's all done remembering fair play rules" (ref L366).*

Before we take a closer look at the phased reforms of the 70's and 90's relating to practitioner qualifications, professional development and the elevation of educators to high status occupations it is important to note that the phased reforms relating to fundamental changes in the learning environment did not stop at the introduction of special education experts and guidance counselling. The reforms also envisaged fundamental changes to both the **organisation and structure** of teaching and learning. The 90's became the period during which **classes and groupings were deconstructed**, **grading systems** were **dispensed** with. Learners in Finland are not streamed; they have the freedom to choose and plan their studies. Advancement is guided by **facilitated learning** using **theories of cognitive development**. Progression is **self-directed** and **self-paced** as Maria reflects *"this qualification is about developing your own work, you have to identify things you would like to do and then you decide which area you will concentrate on" (ref L284)* using agreed personal learning plans which are

assessed regularly thus making the Finnish education system one of the most **individualised** in the world (Sahlberg 2015) *"I am in charge of their learning paths right from the beginning to the stage where they start getting ready for the qualification their competence demonstrations so they need a lot of guidance and a lot of help .... so I am with them there ....so they are working hard then they come to school once a week and then we don't have the time so it's better to arrange this guidance session when they are free and I am not so occupied with the daily duties here so it's nice to be able to do it when we can both concentrate on the process and talking to one another then I am available for them when they are available for me" (ref L414 L416).* The only standardised exam learners sit is the matriculation examination, which is the entrance test for university. The purpose of this exam is not only to ascertain whether learners have assimilated skills and knowledge but also to determine whether they have reached the level of maturity required to progress. Exam questions deal with issues of evolution, politics, war, violence, ethics in sport, drugs, dieting and life changing moments that require resilience such as losing a job.

Another **key** organisation and structural **priority** for policy developers during the reforms was to **increase the attractiveness** of VET, the result of which found vocational education and training **embedded into education structures**, **curricula and methodologies**. Their aim was to meet the expectations, knowledge and skill requirements of the vocational sector and the knowledge based economy. The **structure** of VET was **simplified**: 600 vocational qualifications were reduced to just 52 with 113 related programmes of study each consisting of 120 credits. VET qualifications were designed to balance general knowledge, vocational skills and professional competences (Stenstrom and

Virolainen 2014) as discussed by Maria *"we have over ten different further qualifications, one is secretarial qualification but then we have qualifications like product development, leadership and management" (ref L18)*. During the reform of 1999-2001 **on-the-job learning** became an **integral** component with learning environments (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2016) alternating between workshop and apprenticeship training both virtual and blended with one sixth of training taking place in the field. Assessment was designed to be progressive and was developed in collaboration with key stakeholders including the learning organisation, employers and employer representatives (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014). More over providers were required to promote transferability by way of ensuring that learners had access to continuing and higher education via polytechnics and universities of applied sciences. The so-called college level VET was removed from the system (Heikkinen 1997) vocational colleges and higher education institutes were merged into Polytechnics. VET was therefore streamlined into just two structures that of schools VET and higher education VET. Maria explains *"as a teacher you have a very close relationship with industry, to the companies, to the people who work there, how they operate on a daily basis and what skills competencies are important in the field we don't actually teach subjects we teach the profession qualification is typically two to three years and gives them a qualification for working life .. in business and administration normally they would go to work for some years and come back to us for further education or specialist qualification in their own field .. we have apprentice type education .. they are employed by a company and then they study with us and then we have government funding which means these students have funding to become full time students .. to study for five days a week for three years. it also give them access to polytechnics or what we now call universities of*

applied sciences" (ref L436 L438 L30, L32 L36 L52). Vocational students do not take the national matriculation exam but instead their learning outcomes and skills are assessed locally (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014). The National Board of Education issues recommendations to ensure equality of assessment. Certification takes the form of a 360° assessment including an interview with their teacher/facilitator, their employers supervisor/mentor, 4 to 10 skills demonstrations (Strenstrom 2009) and a self-assessment. The Vocational Education and Training Act was amended in 2014 to strengthen this learning outcome based approach (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2016). The content of core subjects was revised to increase flexibility, credit attainment was increased to 180 credits and a greater emphasis was placed on validation of prior learning, learning at the workplace and quality assurance. Assessment training for workplace supervisors/instructors has been reflected over the years in national strategy documentation. The Vocational Education and Training Decree (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016) focused on the viability of organisations in terms of sufficient numbers of staff and expertise while the Development Plan for Education and Research 2011 to 2016 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012) explored permanent funding models to increasing supports and build capacity. In 2010 the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a committee to look at quality improvements in VET. The resulting VET Quality Strategy document (2011) presented a vision for VET education and training whereby education would be increasingly implemented in the workplace in conjunction with work and in cooperation with industry. Fundamentally the document provides for workplace instructors to be supported in their activities and for the development of their skills through increased cooperation with VET providers (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2016) as Kella notes *"in vocational studies this on the job*

learnings are a big part of studies, they go to the work places and they work they have their practices there .... they will learn in the field in the companies where they work in industry .... there is a person there in the companies .... mentors for the students they are sort of a teacher at the work place who guide the students there and there are trainings to become a professional mentor it is a small course it takes sixty hours all together .... I go to visit the students and I talk to the mentors .... unfortunately not many companies are very willing to give their employees to attend this training because they have to pay them a salary for attending and none of them are willing to do it in their spare time or are willing but then they have to be very focused on the sort of mentor they want to be" (ref J190 J192 J198).

On the whole the restructuring VET and the reorganisation of the workbased learning system has been **received very positively** in Finland. The tradition of guidance has supported the advent of a strong model of on-the-job learning. The local organisation of work placements, communication and agreements between employers and educators regarding the share of duties and enhanced assessment has proved to be effective. Learners find it motivating to learn "real work", they develop as professional agents adapting to workplace learning, collaboration, self-assessment and in particular note a sense of improved independency, initiative taking and self confidence (Virtanen 2013). Drop out rates in school sector VET is in decline from 13% in 2001 to 9% in 2012 (Tilastokeskus 2014) as Kella notes *"unfortunately some drop the year, when the semester finished there were eight who graduated, five more during the autumn so they are going to be a little late from their original schedule but they will graduate" (ref J30).* Higher education VET has increased nominally (4% in 2001 to 6% in 2012) however there is some

suggestion that this could be because it is becoming increasingly challenging to find suitable work placements that meet the criteria for on-the-the job learning and other variables such as individualised training plans (Peltomaki and Silvennoinen 2003, Tynjala *et al* 2005, Virtanen and Collin 2007). More recently studies suggest that dropping out is closely connected to gender, age and employment which lends support to current concerns that male learners are becoming increasingly excluded from society as labour market requirements change (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2011). Therein VET practitioners have begun to widen their research fields to include teaching and learning methodologies for "at risk" groups (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014) as Kella describes *"I am teaching the tourism subjects and as well I work with the students with some special needs because some of our students I would say approximately 15% to 20% have some learning disability so I am also working on extra teaching for some language lesson they drop out of the studies and then by Spring time they might come back and discuss a bit what we can do and what's the situation and normally I say we try to find each student their own map .. the fourth year is an extra year for those who have difficulties finishing in three years we have training how to find the students with special needs and also to improve the home connection we try to lack the amount that sort of quit with their studies" (ref J14 J58 J236).* The VET student population increased from 190,993 in 2007 to 208,826 in 2010. VET learners now represent 50% of the student population (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2012). In addition studies carried out by CIMO indicate that just one year after qualification 74% of VET students were fully employed, 11% had transitioned to part-time study and 7% had continued to some form of education and training as Kella reflects *"most of them go to employment, of 20 students 14 will graduate" (ref J26).* During the last 10 years employment

of VET graduates has improved or remained unchanged despite the general weakening of employment in Finland (Statistics Finland 2013b). Demand for VET study places has outstripped supply (CIMO 2010), **vocational education and training is now fully embedded** in the education system and has **become a true alternative** for learners as Kella reflects *"yeah but nowadays it has changed and I think the main reason is that nowadays the students have the possibilities to continue their studies if they want to do their polytechnic so even to university and I think that has been a very very big reason for the appreciation vocational education has got it has a big influence but then the professionalism in the vocational education I think the teachers education is a very important thing" (ref J335).*

Sustainable leadership and **change management** were also key features of policy implementation. The **Ministry for Education and Culture** is the highest education authority in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education 2016). Their role is to **prepare legislation** and oversee the **public subsidisation** of all **education and training** provision (early childhood education and care, pre-primary, basic, general and vocational upper secondary to polytechnic, university and adult education). In 1991, as part of the reforms, the Finnish Board of General Education was merged with the Vocational Board of Education to form the **Finnish National Board of Education** (Cedefop ReferNet 2011) working with the Ministry for Education and Culture they are **responsible for implementing** national education **policy** (Ministry of Education and Culture 2112a). The Finnish National Board of Education is **also responsible** for **national qualifications** which are drawn up **in cooperation with** employer organisations, trade unions, the Trade Union of Education and student unions

(Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014) as well as being guided by National Education and Training Committees which are tripartite expert bodies established to monitor and anticipate the development of skills needs (Finnish National Board of Education 2016).

Local authorities and regional municipalities **determine policies relating to provision and access** to education. As **VET providers** they are responsible for organising training delivery and for **matching provision**/curricula with local **labour market** needs (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014). There are approximately 210 VET providers in Finland with one or more VET institution delivering education and training programmes locally. VET providers **decide independently** what kind of organisation they want to run, the majority are maintained by the local or joint municipal authority plus the State. About 40% of the institutes listed are privately owned however their numbers are small and account for only 20% of the student population. Funding criteria is uniform irrespective of ownership. **Budget allocations are not fragmented** they are tied to student numbers and held at consistent levels to **allow for long term** organisational **planning** (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014). There is some suggestion that the system of funding will be reformed in the future to include more of an emphasis on outputs (for example qualifications completed and employability of graduates). A structural redevelopment of the network of VET providers began some years ago with the aim of providing guidance and assisting providers to secure capacity given the possible decline in resources and any subsequent financial cuts (Cedefop ReferNet 2016).

Practitioners are viewed as an intrinsic component of sustainable leadership and as such determine the level and quality of practice. Before the 90's becoming a Principal was seen as a reward for successful service. Today becoming a **Principal** requires the completion of academic studies in education administration and leadership. The role is that of a **visionary** who understands and trusts their workforce, promotes teamwork, collegiality, personal monitoring and feedback, maintains a focus on learning, creates a positive culture in relation to teaching and learning expectations as well as maintaining civic and local industry engagement. Leadership and management tends to operate informally but effectively with the Principal acting as a key contributor and critical voice for local/municipal authorities when it comes to the shaping of policy and steering improvements which are very much driven by the needs of practitioners, learners and civic society (Salberg 2015). During the reforms of the 80's the qualification requirements for **VET practitioners** were redefined to increase the proportion of vocational pedagogy and to stipulate a **qualification** attainment of at least one level higher than the students. Extensive training to upgrade VET practitioner qualifications was implemented including a requirement to undertake 5 days a year in-service training. During the reforms of the 90's all educator qualification requirements and educator training programmes were harmonised, which resulted in VET practitioners being required to hold a tertiary degree. Provision was centralised to five polytechnics and 3 universities specialising in education, teaching and learning research (Numminen 2000). The level of respect for practitioners has been increasing gradually since the 90's when Dr Hirvi, Director General of the National Board of Education and leader of the reform agenda, advised that the development of a national vision for education could not be forced and that **practitioners and learners must have a place in the dialogue**:

trust, ownership and self evaluation being key divers of sustainability (Sahlberg 2015). Much of the professionalism evident in practitioners today is due in part to the growing prevalence of powerful teaching methods, pedagogic design and delivery, the demands of the learning environment and the expectations of learners and citizens as Valter *echoes "and of course our executives and headmasters they know what we are doing they are ok with it so everything we do is open everyone knows that doing it to evolve us and make our teaching better it's no use teaching in a way that no one isn't learning" (ref K174)*. Practitioners are **expected to exercise their professional knowledge and judgement** both independently and collectively and, in contrast to many of their contemporaries internationally, **they have the power and latitude** to follow through on their decisions as Valter notes *"basically I am in charge of curriculum we have a new one coming this Fall so I spend last year doing that and in some extent I am planning now how we are teaching these things that we need to teach our students and I actually execute them as well .... basically me and two colleagues who are their hands on teaching and .... we meet each other all the time .... we can throw ideas during the day and if we get the feedback from each other and if I think lets do this way and the other two guys think that's not a good idea then we maybe don't do it that way and if we try something we kind of observe how our students are taking it and do they understand what we are expecting them to do (ref K136 K148)*. Salberg (2015) notes in his conversations with practitioners that the loss of professional autonomy, for example an outside inspector judging the quality of their work or the introduction of a merit based measurement system (and not the issue of salary) would cause many practitioners to change their job. Furthermore as professionals they **expect to be given the time to accomplish their goals**: to plan, teach, diagnose, execute and evaluate

both inside and outside of normal classroom duties with the result that they spend relatively less time teaching then their counterparts around the world as Valter reflects *" basically I am full time teacher so it doesn't mean I am at the work place from 9 to 4 every day my work days vary differently there might be days that I don't have teaching at all there might be days where I have 8 hours there might be days I have 4 hours" (ref K223).*

Isolation being the enemy of all improvement, collegially the **system supports professional learning communities** and encourages networking between learning organisations, businesses, voluntary communities, government and non-governmental bodies. This **exchange of best practice and learning from peers** is also recognised as having the multiplier effect of unifying the sector and creating a common culture of education throughout Finland (Sahlberg 2015) as Kella comments *"we have meetings .... we gather ....we discuss about the industry in general about the school situation and about the students and you know all the things that are on the topic right at that point....teachers have quite a free hands to do what they think is the best thing to do .... there are some vocational institute that cooperate with the polytechnics quite intensively so it was it was sort of a great idea but now is has become the tradition" (ref J208 J214 J224).* As a consequence practitioners have a great deal of **professional autonomy** and **access to purposeful professional development**. Their task is not an easy one. VET is expected to prepare learners for an unknown future based on current knowledge (Nilsson and Nystrom 2013). Andreas Walther (2009) describes life for the individual living in a post modern society, with its multiple opportunities, as a life of yo-yo transitioning characterised by individualisation, inconsistency, prolongation, fragmentation and extended

periods in education or on the labour market. Stenstrom *et al* (2012) notes that one quarter of VET learners have **multiple qualifications** due in part to choice but also as a result of societal factors such as the **change and disappearance of current jobs and occupations**. This trend towards individualisation and increased flexibility has shifted VET practitioners towards **designing generalist competence** curricula that can be adapted and built on according to the specialist requirements of industry (Nilsson 2010). The importance municipalities and learning organisations are placing on **supporting VET practitioners** to **continue their professional development** and to maintain relevancy and currency with industry is becoming increasingly evident with a noted increase in **additional allocations** of up to 6% (on top of core funding) being invested in VET practitioner pedagogic knowledge and skills (Sahlberg 2015) and as Kella evidences during her CPD work placement in industry "*they don't pay the full one hour salary but I will get paid ….a little less than 70%" (ref J255)*.

This focus on **practitioner qualifications, professional development** and the transformation of practitioners to **high status professionals** has resulted in the Finnish education system of today being renowned for high quality teacher education based on research that has a solid foundation in practitioner engagement and development (Opetushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen (OPEPRO) 2014). In part this is due to successive and phased reform but **more specifically** between 2002 and 2009 the Finnish government agreed a series of policy initiatives aimed at **expanding the provision** of teacher education and to **provide supports for future workforce development**. Having commenced a work programme for teacher development the government's next step was to work towards the **legislative Act of 2010**, which **changed** the **qualification requirements** for the

profession as Kella reflects *"when I did my teachers education four years ago it was law that all vocational teachers they should have the qualification, there was sort of a rush to education all the teachers who had been teaching for twenty years without the qualification, they wanted to get the qualification" (ref J335)*. Vocational teachers were expected to possess an extensive knowledge of working life in order to provide on-the-job learning and demonstration of skills as Kella comments *" actually I have I worked in industry lets say all together 16 years" (ref J90)*. Cooperation with industry, networking, professional development and mentoring is key to anchoring the practice in industry. In terms of qualification requirements the legislation now provided for VET practitioners to have an appropriate Masters degree, a degree from a university of applied sciences, three years work experience and a minimum of 60 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits in pedagogic studies as Kella describes *" I also worked .... and during that time whole time I studied a bit in the university doing the basic study of education theory .... yeah so degree and then continued to the polytechnics and did my bachelor degree in [subject speciality] I did that all the same time as I was working .... and then after working .... I did the professional teacher education .... when I had finalised teacher education programmes so then I had the job here" (ref J98 J102 J104 J106)*. Underpinning the legislation of 2010 was the implementation of **two major initiatives**. The **first** being the national **Osaava programme** which was specifically aimed at targeting continuing teacher education and addressing concerns raised in relation to the variable teaching practices that were highlighted prior to the reform. The **second** initiative was the **National Teachers Survey Anticipatory Project** to Investigate Teachers' Initial and Continuous Training Needs (OPEPRO). The survey is undertaken every four years to collect national and regional data relating to age, structure and

qualification levels and provides government with a basis for continued policy development, guidance and provision including setting priorities for the eight universities (five of which are universities of applied sciences) responsible for educator provision.

With workforce development strategies in place, provision expanded and legislation for qualification requirements agreed**,** Helsinki University received an estimated 2,400 **applications** for 120 places in 2011 (Anderson 2011) by 2013 the figure had risen to 3,200 applications for 320 places. In total 20,000 applications were received by the eight universities delivering educator programmes across five categories of teacher education (Sahlberg 2015). Approximately 6,000 of the applications received were for VET teacher training alone (Finnish National Board of Education 2013). Standards are high and while aptitude and motivation have long been an essential component for selection, aptitude is now a formal criterion in the **selection process** (Kari 2001). Programmes are typically five years in **duration** to included Masters Degree qualification while VET programmes have flexibility and individualisation at their core as Valter comments *"basically to be a vocational teacher in Finland you need to be qualified you need to have this I can say 2nd level .. after that I moved into work life .. you need to have this professional period before you can be a teacher .. I applied and got accepted to vocational teacher school so we have a you have to study to be a teacher and I did that degree while working that took me two years .. I needed to update my this second level studies to this university of applied sciences and this update process took me about a year and a half .. so I was fully qualified as a vocational teacher .. I was fully trained there but then I did this [subject speciality] degree or diploma .. and after that .. I did the Masters Degree*

…on research .. basically we had these intense weeks where we got from Monday to Friday in University where the school was so I took free time from the work and of course at weekend and nights we had these assignments" (ref K58, K60, K66, K70, K74 K90)

A number of VET teacher training institutes operate in conjunction with the five universities of applied sciences. Qualifications can be completed in one academic year of full time study or one to three years for a flexible study programme which includes on-line components. **The programmes** are built around individual study plans and typically include basic studies in educational sciences, vocational pedagogy, teaching practice as well as a thesis and development projects (CIMO 2010). In terms of academic skills development their education is focused on thinking processes and cognitive skills required to design and conduct research, they are encouraged to link their studies to the development their own practice and that of their organisation. A particular principle of research based educator programmes is the systematic integration of scientific educational knowledge, didactics or pedagogical content knowledge and on-the-job practice to enhance pedagogic thinking, evidence based decision-making and engagement (Salberg 2015). The programmes also provided for skills and guidance for professional development and keeping up with changes in the world of work, particularly in the chosen field of expertise. Commonly emerging themes and identified challenges for current VET teacher training design and policy development is the provision of supports to ensure that practitioners practical vocational skills are maintained and that, given practitioners have a legislative responsibility to provide individual guidance and support to students, the **guidance component** of educator programmes be enhanced to improve training in relation to guidance for

adult learner cohorts, the **design of personal study plans**, **recognition of prior learning** and navigation of the **credit transfer system** nationally and internationally (CIMO 2010).

In 2013 the **number of VET practitioners** formally qualified across all VET categories was **24,622** with a gender balance of **58% female and 42% male** (Finnish National Board of Education. 2013). The OPEPRO survey undertaken in 2013 and published in 2014 notes that 95% of principals and lecturers in vocational institutions had attained the new legislative qualification level requirement, which the report notes was a clear increase on 2010 figures (OPEPRO 2014). The survey also notes 89.9% of principals and full time teachers were of the opinion they are qualified to perform their tasks. Qualification levels had a tendency to fluctuate according to the subject area: travel, catering, business and the humanities hold the highest proportion of qualifications while the natural sciences, technology and transport related subjects trended towards the lowest percentage of qualification attainment. In the case of teacher qualified practitioners the lack of a subject university degree tended to be most commonly cited reason for being unqualified (OPEPRO 2014) while subject qualified practitioners cite the lack of a pedagogic/formal teaching qualification as their reason for being unqualified (Cedefop ReferNet Finland 2016). In terms of dual qualifications 9.3% of principals and full time staff had both a subject speciality qualification and a pedagogic teaching qualification (OPEPRO 2014). This has led to a **recommendation** for universities to provide opportunities for subject-qualified practitioners to access pedagogic qualifications and vis versa. The premise being that by opening up **dual qualification** opportunities practitioners will be in a much stronger position to teach across the whole of the

education system. This would also allow for better management of organisational resources in periods of reducing public expenditure as over supply in one area could be justifiably met by under supply in another.

Once qualified, practitioners spend on average 4 hours a day in the classroom plus 3 hours a week in professional development (Sahlberg 2015). For VET practitioners the work load is defined by annual working hours ranging from 779 to 969 depending on the vocational subject, a teaching "hour" is a 45 minutes as Valter and Kella clarify "*every week is different which is nice and this 30 some hours its basically just teaching and the planning time is if you say that you have 1 hour teaching it is 1 hour teaching but in addition you have 30 minutes planning for each hour you teach actually .... 1 hour for teacher it's 45 minutes" (ref K225 K229) "the full time is 24.5 hours per week but that includes every hour there is counted ½ an hour preparation for teaching I think sort of preparing the materials going through the exams and all the preparation that includes for teaching so sort of a backway counted we will end up in the 20, I think that is 37 hour per week or something like that sort of the actual working time but they will count it as 24.5 hours per week and that's a full time but in the beginning in the 1st year I think they there was this thing that they had to give me at least 17 hours per week I think 17 hours is the minimum if you are not if you don't have the permanent position"(ref J146)*. **Induction** is in the hands of employers. Salberg (2015) points to the diverse practices of induction and mentoring: some organisations have adopted advance procedures and support systems while others have no defined plan or designated roles. **The Ministry of Education** recognised in their 2009 report *Ensuring Professional Competence and Improving Continuing Education* that the **current system of induction** was somewhat

daunting for candidates coming from highly organised programmes of education and that **weak coordination** between initial academic education, induction and CPD was due in part to **local governance and finance**. In order to address the issue, and in an attempt to bring consistency to provider workforce development planning and budgeting, the government is considering ways to strengthen the legal grounds for practitioners to ensure access to adequate professional in-service support funded by local authorities/municipalities. Currently the State contributes 30 to 40 million US dollars to the professional development of educators through university programmes and in-service training (Salberg 2015) while local authorities/municipalities make a similar contribution. In collaboration with local authorities and municipalities the Ministry for Education **plan** will see **public funding** for educator **professional development double** by 2016.

A **wide range of professional development** is considered as continuing education for practitioners ranging from certificate to doctoral level studies, specialist licences for example guidance counselling, specialist vocational qualifications, certificates in administration, participation in subject associations or trade union conferences, self motivated education, in-service and other collective agreement personnel training. The aim is to involve all personnel. **CPD is free** of charge to the individual as Valter explains *"for me who is actually working and doing these studies while I am working I don's see there is any limit but if you are a full time student there I am not sure if it is so but there might be a limit that you can do one for free and the next one you can do it for free but the third one you can't" (ref K425)*. **Employers** (in this case the local/municipal authority) **decided whether the individual can participate** in the training during working hours, receive full pay or other forms of compensation for travel and

accommodation expenses as Maria explains *" in Finland we have a very good system that you can take a leave if you want to to study further and there is this fund a special fund where you can apply for for funding while you are off work and actually it is quite a good way for funding your studies it's almost the same as if you were made redundant so actually you can get up to I think it's up to 70% of your normal pay for the period that you are on leave to study something" (ref L478)*. The employer also takes the decisions on substitution/cover arrangements (Cedefop ReferNet 2016). VET practitioners have the highest participation rates (80%) undertaking the current minimum requirement of three hours of **professional development** per year (Finnish National Board of Education 2013). The OPEPRO survey (2014) notes that 80% of practitioners and other educational personnel had participated in CPD. Many of the training interventions implemented by government were developed in response to needs highlighted by practitioners and while structures were put in place to provide opportunities for workforce development the survey indicates that a significant number (in excess of 12,000 practitioners) did not undertake continuing education in 2012. **Personal training plans** were identified by practitioners as essential tools in the development of their skills and education however at the time of the OPEPRO survey a small number (only 14.5%) had personal development plans in place. The survey rather curiously notes that given the progressive nature of workforce development initiatives set against a backdrop of high participation rates and allowing for an extensive and targeted national focus on professional development (which includes personal training initiatives) the development of individual training plans for practitioners is rare. Practitioners also highlighted the need for **increased opportunities** to **cooperate with industry** with the result that the Finnish National Board of Education introduced supports for practitioners to

undertake a form of **on-the-job training/professional development**, at five-year intervals, within industry Kella plans to avail of the opportunity "*I am planning to have the teachers on the job learning .... I am trying to find a place next year to work in industry and work in some company .... just to know what is going on in industry currently .... I can do it during the semester they give me free time from the institute to attend" (ref J246)*. The objective being to enable practitioners to update vocational skills, improve working life competencies, communities of practice and contacts with industry. A target of 20% participation was set which encompassed all personnel however only 5% of vocational practitioners availed of the opportunity to undertake on-the-job training/professional development in 2012 (OPEPRO 2014 and Cedefop ReferNet 2016). Finland is progressive in reforming its' VET education sector, providing clear policy direction and funding to implement well developed strategies that not only take account of research but are also driven by the needs of practitioners as Maria explains *"I think I need to be motivated then I can do anything and then if I don't have the motivation if I feel that I am forced to do something then that's it it motivates me less" (ref L490).* However as is demonstrated in their most recent observations and surveys into the field of practice there is a need for further research into **barriers to participation** in professional development and ultimately the continuing professionalism of VET practitioners such as *time* which was evidenced in this study by Maria *"barriers of course time sometimes makes it difficult when you are engaged in your work full time and the hours 38 hours a week are just the hours that the contract says but normally it is 50 hours a week that I normally work" (ref L470)* and Suri *"politics and the lack of money makes barriers for teachers .... the system in a way I also see it as a barrier that it is the organisation it kind of kills teachers with giving to much reporting and paper work and taking*

teachers time out of the teaching" (ref M382 M386) and Kella *"the first that came to mind was lack of time (J364)* and Valter *" but I think the time is some sort of barrier of course .... isn't that so much as you are your biggest barrier of course" (ref K431 K433)*.

Of those fully qualified 48% are over 50 years of **age**, 30% are 40-49 years of age with the remaining 21% under 40 years of age. The share of practitioners under 40 years of age has declined across all categories which means that one out of ever two qualified practitioners in VET is aged 50 or over. The OPEPRO study points to over half of the VET teaching population being 50+, a trend that was interestingly corroborated in a similar workforce study undertaken by TAFE in Australia which indicated that 66.9 % of their VET practitioners were aged 45 and over (Mlotkowski and Gutherie 2010). It would appear that VET teachers are more likely to come to the profession following a career in industry which poses a considerable concern for countries like Finland who are experiencing an increasing interest in vocational education participation. Even with the shift to pedagogic expertise and resulting calls from the sector for greater support, the frequency of employee turnover is on a par with other professions on top of which 83% are content with their choice of profession. However, recent studies by Jokinen *et al* (2013) and Taajamo (2103) point to 10% of teachers and 20% of VET teachers transferring to another job in education while 10% of teachers and 20% of VET teachers left the profession to pursue a different career. Another cause for concern is highlighted with figures indicating that 20% of teachers had considered changing their profession and an even greater 25% of VET teachers considered changing employment. Given the unique and specialised requirements of the job such as knowledge, skills, pedagogic expertise, critical thinking and

research skills, self reflection and guidance as well as social and ethical aptitudes not to mention the practical working life skills such as management, planning, administration and ICT the implications of staff turnover are significant. While **retention** in the profession is a common challenge across Europe so too is the need to improve and maintain the **attractiveness** of the profession. Studies indicate that motivations to become a teacher in Finland include: an interest in education, an interest in the subject, being a positive role model and having the impression that the profession is meaningful and challenging as Suri explains *"so that I can guide my students to find their inner voice from somewhere that to give their to give them some guidelines that they could follow when I see what's their what they are strong or what they can develop what they can be that's the ideal" (ref M321)*. For VET practitioners however the interest tends to be stimulated by tasks undertaken in their own profession, a desire for professional development, career progression and interaction with people (Jokinen *et al* 2013). Practitioners also assert that **motivation** to stay in the job would be enhanced if salaries were increased and if the positive aspects of the role were promoted thereby improving public perception Kella also mentions terms and conditions of employment and discusses her initial contract as "luck" while permanency was awarded after three year of full time teaching *" I got a sort of a possibility to work here for 3 months in the beginning and after that there was another teacher who had sort of a study break for 1 year and so I got her substitute so in the 1st year it was more or less being a substitute teacher but a full time, I was quite lucky" (ref J142) " I didn't have the permanent position and what happened then was also that when I started in the Autumn doing the first 3 months and then I had that one year because I didn't have the permanent position I was unemployed for the first summer because normally what happens is that the teachers takes they have they get the*

salary from the summer but they don't have the teaching obligation" (ref J152) " I didn't have the permanent position here that came only sort of on my second or third year" (ref J160). Maria discusses the need to supplement her first years of teaching with other work *" my contract was that the employer guaranteed the 16 hours a week but but it doesn't I mean the pay is so little you can't possibly do that or you need another job (ref J143)* while Suri expresses uncertainty about the future *"this is my 6th year of teaching and the contract is made yearly it has been a full time contract but it is renewed each year actually just today I don't know how much I will be teaching next year my colleague she got her contract yesterday and it's its less hours than it was before and regarding that I didn't get one I called my Foreman today and she said because we don't know how many students there will be next year they don't know how many teachers they need next year so I this is it will be uncertain until the beginning of August" (ref M66).*

Both CEDEFOP (2004) and OPEPRO (2013) highlight the need for a focus on the **professional wellbeing** of practitioners to include not only their continuing education and professional development but also to address issue of **collegial supports** from management, peers and professional networks. Suggestions to improve well-being at work include: continuing education and training, peer support, **mentoring**, job coaching, work placement periods, team based learning and the development of communities of practice as Valter explains *"we have a twice a year we have this it's called suunnittelupäivät day when all the staff get in together and we have of course some common things that affects on each of our employees and we go through them and it's a whole day 8 hours and we have a day and basically 4 hours of that day we have some lecture talking about things that some way relate in our work as a teacher. It could be human managing or*

how to cope your keep up your yeah and basically how can we maintain our ability to teach and how to keep up good physics and some mental health and so on .... we have this "dodo" it's a Finnish so it is basically we have this little team in or organisation who will arrange sort of activities for the staff that keeps up develop your physical health or your mental health (ref K190 K193 K201 K205 K209). Moving the **decision-making** process closer to the schools and teachers has been a hallmark of the Finnish system since the 1980's. However as Niemi (2005) and Valijarvi (2006) conclude participation in the decision making process requires policy initiatives to ensure that practitioners have the necessary expertise to do so. Salberg (2015) is hopeful that the shift away from fragmented in-service training models and towards systematic improvements will build better ethical and theoretical groundings for effective and distributed leadership models.

Quality management and quality provision is one of the main objectives of Finnish policy developers, to this end they work closely with the European Commission using the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) and process which prioritises quality in the VET sector through the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQVET) initiative (2016) as well as European strategies such as Europe 2020 A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (European Commission 2010) which is currently being operationalised. At present there are two types of quality assurance mechanism in Finland: one includes normative mechanisms (licensing, accreditation, qualification requirements, skills demonstration, matriculation exam, financing, self evaluation and external evaluations) the second is a voluntary mechanism (quality management recommendations and quality awards). International policies relating to quality assurance, such as the European Union's Common

Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) in VET (Cedefop Panorama Series 2009) and the European Councils recommendation of 2009 establishing the European Reference Framework for VET (EQARF), play an increasing role in the development of quality management nationally however given that the **locus of decision making rest locally with VET providers** they are free to choose the types and level of quality management and self evaluation adopted by their organisation (CIMO 2010). The Finnish Board of Education is responsible for disseminating and promoting EQARF. Working in cooperation with VET providers, representatives, business, industry and students they have drawn up quality management recommendations and tools to support and assist VET providers implementing quality management systems but again it is up to the individual provider as to how much or how little of the system they want to operationalise.

According to surveys carried out by the National Board of Education (2004) the majority of VET providers use quality assurance tools for different purposes and while many of them had not implemented **systems of peer review** it was identified as a need and therefore highlighted for further development. It is probably worth mentioning that ineffective teaching was not the issue here; practitioners tend to work collegially and would routinely appraise each others' work as Valter explains *"and in Finland of course you don't get sacked just like that, in last year we had this when we get to the point that we have to many teachers so the school and employees and all this they form this kind of council that starts to negotiate what to do to minimise the .... so basically the idea is that we do everything not to sack teachers ....but if you aren't capable of teaching .... then you need to go" (ref K253 K255 K257).* The aim of a system of peer review

was to systematically provide further supports for, and to underpin, systems of distributed leadership and shared accountability which are intrinsic components of professional learning communities who benefit from self-reflective practice by building trust and communicating openly in relation to best practice as Maria explains *"no I enjoy it now I am sort of I feel part of the group it's nice to be a learner at the same time because I learn each day from my students I learn so much and to be able to say that hey I don't know it all but we can find the answer together" ...."actually we had this audit from it was by the national board of education earlier this year and in their report they said that it was quite refreshing to see that the whole organisation works together well are motivated and enjoy being together and I think you can see it in our daily work" (ref L453 L555)*. Some countries allow their education system to be led by non-educators, hoping that business style management will raise efficiency and improve performance, similarly local education authorities and administrators are sometimes people who have no experience of teaching or leading schools. In Finland educational leadership is without exception in the hands of professional educators, which has the added benefit of enhancing communication and building trust between the stakeholders involved. The Finish Board of Education subsequently implemented a Peer Review Impact initiative (2009) to enhance understanding, at provider level, of the interplay between quality assurance systems, evaluations and improvement of VET. The **dissemination** of quality and best practice initiatives is supported and recognized by The Ministry of Education and Culture through their **Quality Award** for VET initiative, which also plays a role in **raising the profile** of the VET sector.

Salberg (2015) would argue that better **educated practitioners** are not only more **effective educators** but that they are also better equipped to keep their **education systems healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the learner**. Professionalism as a characteristic requires for practitioners to be recognised as key contributors to social cohesion and social justice, autonomous and empowered to teach and learn, have access to and follow ongoing developments in their own profession and to freely implement new knowledge within their own practice (without fear of failure) while also recognising that strong foundations laid down by good quality teacher education be continuously advanced through ongoing, relevant, high quality and internationally recognised research and development initiatives. To do otherwise is to have a narrow view of human capital, a theme recently picked up by Hargreaves and Fullan in their award-winning book *Professional Capital Transforming Teaching in Every School* (2012).

Today when celebrating it's educational achievements Finland **publically recognises** the value of their educators and **implicitly trusts** their professional insight and **judgement**. Their experience highlights that it is not enough to pick the best and the brightest but demonstrates that the culture of teaching is based on professional dignity, social respect and a collegiality that empowers and creates a balance between teaching, learning, research and collaboration with other likeminded autonomous self-regulating professionals as Valter notes "*I think they are trying their best .. it is positive .... the Minister or Educations they came to our school they asked our opinion in terms of what part of the education is more important than the other so in that sense they heard us and they listened what we had to say and that was good but on the other hand you might say .... as humans*

we have a sort of an attitude towards all kind of changes so I don't want to be the one who is complaining on something that is just new only for something that we haven't done this thing this way before so I will try out and see how it works and if it doesn't work I can say to those guys that this works and this doesn't work" (ref K453 K459 K465 K468 K469 K473). Being an educator in Finland is closely tied to sustaining Finnish national culture and building an open and multicultural society as Suri explains "*culture is important I do understand that the teaching or the education has to be planned so that the work field the employers and the schools they meet but we can't forget the culture" (ref M279).* Working in education is consistently rated as one of the most admired professions, ahead of medical doctors, architects and lawyers (European Commission 2013). **Their role is viewed as being essential to building a welfare society** as well as transferring cultural heritage, values and aspirations: something Finland values given that they emerged from the second world war as a newly independent nation positioned between their former patrons and the now ever and omnipresent powers of globalisation. History left its mark on Finland. Their desire for personal development through education is evident, it is an integral part of their cultural DNA along with social justice, putting the individual at the centre of decision making, caring for others and happiness (Salberg 2015).

Summary:

The aim of this case study of Finland was to begin first with a snapshot of the population, official languages, education demographics including exchequer funded operational spend per pupil/student and by way of providing context, a brief summary of the education system in terms of governance, VET strategic objectives and priorities for VET workforce development. The case study then

moved forward to provide a chronological illustration of policy reform over time including background and context. We heard about the realities of practice from the practitioner's perspective as well as their **experience of CPD which in turn gave us an insight into key policy drivers**, the impact of policy reforms as well as subsequent **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers.**

Overall there is a strong feeling that when it comes to VET governance, policy reform, policy implementation, VET practitioner professional practice and continuous professional development VET practitioners have **ownership** of the vocational education and training system with **key policy drivers** identified as a strong, cohesive and acknowledged ideology built on the core principles of equality and fairness and a vision that places the needs of the learner at the heart of a collaborative decision making process .

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of governance and the **impact legislation**, **policy reform** and changing national priorities has on VET practitioners and their professional practice: VET practitioners in Finland introduced us to **an education system** that is integrated, cohesive and unified, has ambition and **vision** and is based on the egalitarian **principles** of equity and fairness. Social justice and equal education in terms of equal rights and opportunities are the foundation of education policy: free education is a constitutional right and all learners are treated equally. Political consensus is a precondition of reform which is grounded in research and a collaboration between academics, policy makers and educators; and which achieves traction in part due to Finnish values and culture and a social cohesion that is deeply rooted in fairness, honesty and a strong sense of social justice. Likewise the Finns value

individuality, have a low degree of hierarchy and tend to make rational choices: inspiring their own vision of education they have not joined the race to the top of market based standardised systems borrowing or renting a moral purpose for capacity building instead they have adopted a simple intention, collective purpose and shared ownership that asks first and foremost if the policy decision/reform agenda is good for the individual learner.

Capturing perspectives on the notion of professionalisation and the **impact policy reform** has on the structures and the role of VET practitioners in terms of the **management and organisation** of teaching and training, practice design and delivery such as workforce development, definitions and demographics, capacity building, standards and quality of practice, changing paradigms within education theory, pedagogic design and delivery, adopting learner centered approaches, widening target groups, labour market demands, the emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, organisational changes to the working environment vis a vis distributed leadership, teamwork, collaboration and extended partnerships with industry, collegial networks, ICT, administration, project management and wellbeing at work: Finnish VET practitioners identified for us that the **management, organisation and structure** of education is viewed very much as an investment to increase productivity as opposed to a social cost to maintain an industrial society; with the result that education reforms (which include VET policy and practice) have been taken using a phased approach: initially focusing on knowledge and learning subsequent to which was a focus on governance, decentralisation and autonomy with the third phase concentrating on efficiencies. Notably the pursuit of efficiencies is cognisant to avoid disturbances to a well-balanced system and as such the system has remained immune to the

market driven policies of competition, standardisation and high stake testing: government and civic society agree that caring and educating individuals is too complex a process to be measured by quantitative metrics alone. Organisation and structure is clearly defined: the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture prepare legislation and oversee the public subsidisation of all education and training; the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for implementing national education policy, national qualifications and cooperation with stakeholders including employer organisations and trade unions. Local authorities determine policies relating to provision and access while VET providers are decide independent and are responsible for delivery and matching provision to labour market needs.

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of the practitioner and the impact policy reform has on **professional development** in terms of adding complexity to the profession, encouraging a platform for a cohesive voice, including practitioners as co-authors of VET strategy and in the development of sustainable professional development and standards of practice including qualifications and training, continuous professional development, education and training, research and self evaluation, career planning and progression, employment opportunities and wellbeing: practitioners described the role of the **VET Practitioners** as an intrinsic component of a sustainable leadership model and as such practitioners have a place in the dialogue: they are expected to exercise their professional knowledge and judgement both independently and collectively, they are recognised as having power and latitude and as professionals they have a great deal of professional autonomy, they expect to be given the time to accomplish their goals and to freely access purposeful professional

development. Instilling a sense of purpose, collective responsibility and shared ownership budget allocations are not fragmented with the intention of allowing for long term organisational planning. When it comes to **professionalisation** and **standards of practice** the Finnish system is renowned for high quality teacher education based on research that has a solid foundation in practitioner engagement and development. Policy decisions on workforce development are also underpinned with two national data collection initiatives taking the form of a qualitative process with practitioners consulting on the future development of practice and a quantitative collection of workforce demographics to allow for workforce planning. VET practitioners are required to have at a minimum a degree level qualification plus industry expertise. Continuous professional development is viewed positively and as fundamental to practice. The system supports professional learning communities, the exchange of best practice and learning from peers and encourages flexible learning in industry so that practitioners can maintain relevancy and currency with industry. Practitioners typically spend fours hours of the day in the classroom and three hours a week in professional development. Challenges identified by practitioners include a recognition that today's VET learners require multiple qualifications if they are to maintain employment in today's market place which is typified by the disappearance of today's jobs and today's occupations and rather interestingly practitioners frame their challenge in terms of an ability to provide not only career guidance but personal development and counselling to help learners to develop resilience, to keep up with and adjust to the fast moving and changing pace of the world of work. Other challenges identified by practitioners include a desire to be more mobile across education sectors and the possibility for opportunities to open up in terms of accessing and utilising dual qualifications. Retention and

attractiveness of the profession were among the challenge identified by practitioners but only in terms is age profile (VET practitioners tend to come to the profession late in life having spent time in industry) and salary with the added complication of a type of probation period that can last for anything up to five years and takes the shape of successive short term contracts for specified and part-time contracted hours. Motivation to become a VET practitioner is not therefore one of job security, terms and conditions of employment or career trajectory but one that is intrinsically motivated by a sense of giving something back. That said motivation is a formal criteria during the recruitment process and once practitioners are successful in being awarded permanency they enjoy the same standards, terms and conditions of employment as their peers. In terms of enablers policy developers are briefed to ensure quality management and quality provision are the key objectives of policy implementation and having identified weakness in local governance and financing and in an attempt to bring consistency to workforce planning and budgeting are considering ways to strengthen the legal grounds for practitioners and to ensure access to in-service supports and funding: which interestingly legally places the locus of power with the practitioner. There is a drive to improve professional wellbeing at work and a recognition for the need to improve collegial supports, mentoring and team based learning as well as improving quality practice and development through self evaluation and peer review: the premise being that effective educators are better equipped to keep their education systems healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the learner.

Case Study One Australia

Education at a glance Australia:

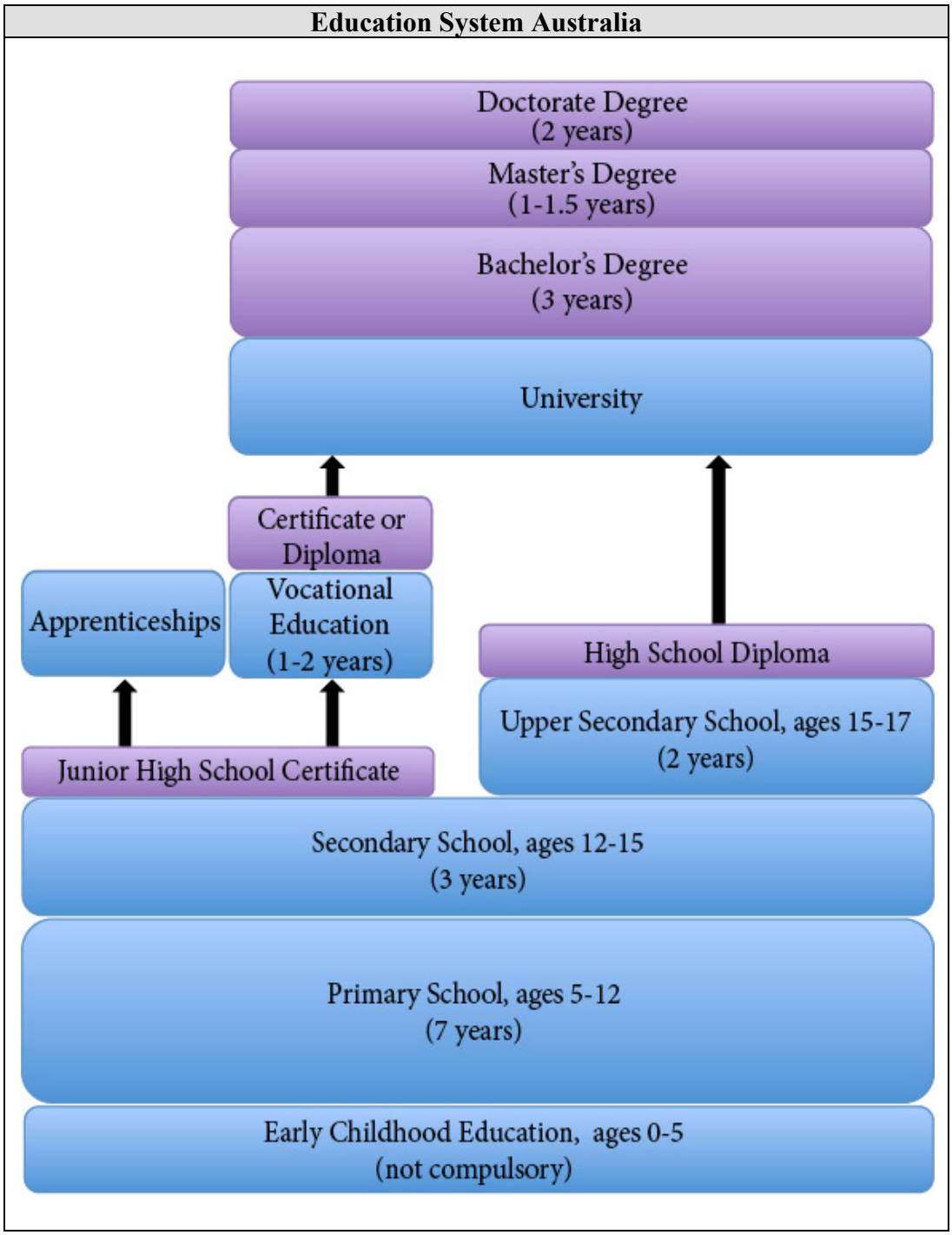


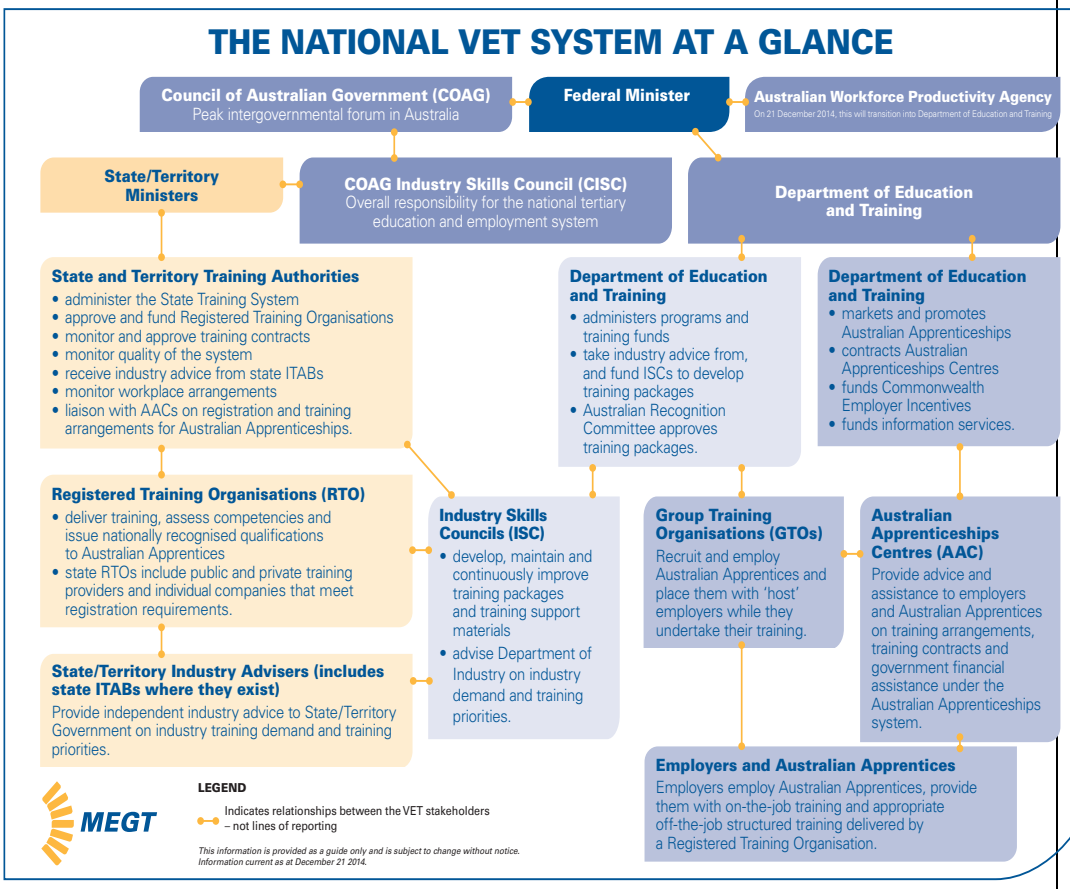
Figure 4.3 Education System Australia National Centre on Education and the Economy 2017

VET Overview

Population: 23,401,892

Official language: English

Governance:



VET in Australia is the constitutional responsibility of six States and two Territories (Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory) with the Commonwealth Government acting as a ninth partner (OECD 2009). Vocational education and training (VET) in Australia is provided at the general secondary and tertiary education levels, and employers are well-engaged in the system. VET can facilitate entry into the labour market through work-study programmes, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and private Registered Training Organisations (RTO's). VET in schools enables upper secondary students to study units toward a recognised VET qualification while completing a Senior Certificate. There is a well established flexible qualification system that provides autonomy and innovation and is underpinned with data and research.

Figure 4.4 VET Overview Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, OECD 2016 and National Centre on Education and the Economy 2009 *cont…*

VET Overview *cont …*
Operational spend per pupil/student for 2015: Pre-primary education $10,734USD in 2011 figures not available 2015 Primary education $8,289 USD Secondary education $10,932 USD Vocational upper secondary $6,631 Tertiary education $18,337 USD **Education population 2015:** 51% of all students in upper secondary education are enrolled in VET programmes. Of the total VET student enrolments for 2015: General education 49% Vocational education and training 51% **VET strategic objectives:** Current reforms have aimed to shape a more demand-driven VET system introducing more flexibility in the length of apprenticeships and ensuring support through a common procedure for assessing them. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments set VET targets to be achieved by 2020, including: to increase to more than three-quarters the share of working age Australians with a Certificate III level qualification or higher to double the number of Diploma and Advanced Diploma completions. The government also aims to improve apprenticeships, with targeted incentives for employers and students. Australian Apprenticeship Centres provide a single source of information and support for employers, apprentices and training providers as well as for individuals searching for an apprenticeship. The Australian Apprenticeships Access Program provides pre-vocational training linked to an apprenticeship pathway for vulnerable jobseekers. Mentoring programmes are also being developed which aim to increase completions. The Australian Qualifications Framework (2011) is the national policy for regulated qualifications, supporting the development of pathways that assist people to move between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market. The Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012) provides independent advice on skill needs in the Australian economy and on how to direct skills investment to improve productivity

Figure 4.4 VET Overview Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, OECD 2016 and National Centre on Education and the Economy 2009 *cont*

VET Overview *cont …*
Australia has been active on the skills agenda. The National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (2008, renewed in 2012) details national reforms, including a new entitlement to a subsidised training place for up to the first Certificate III qualification and income-contingent loans for Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications. The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development commits Commonwealth, state and territory governments to addressing access and social inclusion issues through collaborative action in skills. The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (2012) aims to help working age Australians increase their English language, literacy and numeracy skills for improved economic and social participation **Key strengths of VET are identified as:** Strong industry leadership National quality assurance (registration of training providers and qualifications) National training qualifications developed by industry Industry determined competencies for each qualification and A federal system **Education Workforce Development:** Is the responsibility of the individual VET Providers be that TAFE or the individual RTO.

Figure 4.4 VET Overview Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, OECD 2016 and

National Centre on Education and the Economy 2009 *cont*

Perspectives on Reform:

VET in Australia is the **constitutional responsibility** of six States and two Territories (Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory) with the Commonwealth Government acting as a ninth partner (OECD 2009). During the period 1996 to 2007 intergovernmental relations trended towards a centralised approach. A change in Government in 2007 saw the system move towards a **less centralised** position however more recent governments have **adopted a model of cooperative federalism** whereby Commonwealth, States and Territories collaboratively agree on priorities for reform and set targets through the Council of the Australian Government (COAG) (OECD 2009).

COAG is an **intergovernmental** forum comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The role of COAG is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of national policy reforms that require cooperative action by Australian Governments (iVET 2016), the effect being that national policy development and implementation proceeds consultatively by which time new policy put forward for formal ministerial decision has been agreed in principle by Australian and State Governments. In 2009 the Ministerial Council for Vocational Education and Training (MCVTE) which was the Government Ministerial body responsible for VET policy and planning was merged with the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) to form Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) (VOCED 2016). In 2011 MCTEE was replaced by The Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE).

SCOTESE is one of the Standing Councils that report to COAG and provides a mechanism for the development and implementation of national policy in a constitutional environment whereby formal authority for education and training rests with individual State Governments (OECD 2009).

In 1992 the **Commonwealth** put forward an economic strategy which included an **offer to assume full responsibility** for Australia's technical and further education provision (Keating 1992), the offer was **rejected** by the States who regarded the sector as integral to their economic interests and therein wanted to maintain control of their system (Goozee 2001). However an agreement was reached to **establish a national system for VET** and the formation of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) a statutory body which was set up to facilitate the joint investments of State and Commonwealth and to coordinate, plan and fund a national approach. In 2004 the Commonwealth transferred the responsibilities of ANTA to a Commonwealth Department and established a Ministerial Council on VET to ensure continued harmonisation of the national system and placed the reform of skills and workforce development on the list of priorities for COAG (Australian Government 2014) as Rebecca explains *" the [State Governments] meet under the COAG banner .... they have a whole series of Joint National Partnership Agreements they can be tiring but it also means things get addressed reasonably quickly so and there has been quite a lot in that space and that's I think a good thing because even when things are good there are reviews that are happening you know are we on the right track so I think that's a national strength as well" (ref S196 S200).*

COAG (2014) acknowledges that the chronology of events serves to highlight the **amount of reform** that has taken place in the sector as reflected by Maddie *" the policy was in the Department of Industry last year when I came back in May it is back in the Department of Education and Training which was the Department of Education only now it's the Department of Education and Training so we have moved back into Education. Now that would have to be the fourth or fifth move in the last I don't know how many years but we have had a lot of changes in that way so we sort of go from Industry to Education back to Industry back to Education and that I think that also, does it have an effect, only in the sense that you get different Ministers with different priorities" (ref P269, P271)* and yet, following criticism that VET has failed to deliver graduates skilled enough for the workforce, more reform has been tabled with the publication of the Governments White Paper on the Reform of the Federation (Australian Government 2014). The White Paper posits that shared responsibility has worked well in terms of VET policy, regulation and products but that a number of pressure points exist:

- Qualifications that are not providing training and skills required for the future workforce coupled with unacceptably low completion rates;
- The quality of learning experience coupled with the quality of qualification required by industry;
- A user friendly system, easily navigated by the learner which ensures students are choosing the qualification route they require/need;
- A balance of national and local training needs and priorities which are tied to the funding and training provision within each jurisdiction;
- The issue of VET and VET funding not being considered a priority by governments working in tight fiscal spaces: a decision that has led to a largely static or declining VET sector.

As Maddie reflects "*assumptions about VET you know that it is it's only purpose is economic and that it's an instrument for skills development so therefore it's wedged in between schools and university and it is the second choice so there is sort, they see VET as very important from an economic point of view not from a social point of view I guess but mostly workforce productivity and it is a simple instrumental view I think and so they are the assumptions underneath policy that don't take into account the complexity of it's implementation .... it's a industry led system an industry calling the shots .... we just want skills and we want them now .... yet we have we have got the community ..... and VET particularly is very much around chances for young people you've got learners who are sort of increasingly diverse and demanding about what they want and that's from a whole range of apprenticeships right through to you know masters degree .... the policy development and implementation there's a mismatch .... between that and what happens on the ground .... the VET system sort of gets pushed and pulled .... it depends on the Government of the day .... and industry so industry has a say industry is the God and so that's the way we go" (ref P263, P264, P267, P281).*

Of relevance to the discussion at this juncture is the Commonwealth Governments introduction of **VET-Fee Help** an income contingent loan scheme whereby repayments are not triggered until the learners' income reaches a certain threshold as Jane explains *"income contingent loans work in Australia is that until you actually reach a threshold as earning $54,000 per year you don't start to repay the debt so it means that you can have confidence that you can go in to the study start the study and then once you get a job and you are earning a good income then you will start to repay your loan" (ref O15).* The Vet-Fee Help initiative led some State Governments to adopt a demand driven funding model for providers

meaning that learners could exercise "choice" when it comes to picking providers as described by Maddie *"for example there's a whole lot of policy developments around marketisation of the sector that are a bit knee jerk that are trying to sort of control huge growth by private providers and pretty dodgy practices by some so I think I explained to you the VET Fee-Help systems whereby students can get a loan from the Government up front for a course which goes to a provider to support their training so all the private providers have gone out there and said biggie here's government money we can access for students some of them have gone from $5million dollars turnover to $100 million dollars turnover all on this sort of pretty questionable marketing practices you know like get an iPad you come and you don't have to pay anything and you know all this kind of stuff and they have really grown quiet quickly so that's sort of changed that policy setting has changed the behaviour of those providers and thus the behaviour of the practitioners" (ref P185).* Ergo, funding subsidies/provider income is generated by "guiding" individuals who are signing a contract of agreement to repay an income contingent loan to government through Revenue and who are trusting a government approved provider operating in a **marketised sector** to guide their decision about their education and training needs. As mentioned earlier both the Commonwealth and State Governments share the funding of VET. In terms of training subsidies the Commonwealth contributes 30% of the funding which in 2014/15 was estimated at $5.9 billion and includes an income contingent loan value estimated at $1.2 billion (Australian Government 2014). An estimated **3 million students** participate in VET with approximately 1.5 million students participating in government subsidised training programmes including 400,000 apprentices and trainees. Students in secondary school also have access to VET

programmes with participation rates averaging 240,000 in 2013 while the number of students coming from abroad averaged 135,000 (Australian Government 2014).

In terms of provision, the VET sector is made up of **4,600 public, private and community providers**. Estimates for 2013 note that half of all government subsidised training was delivered by public providers (TAFE institutes and other government training providers) with the balance being delivered by the 2,000 registered training organisations which includes a mix of private-for-profit colleges and not-for-profit community colleges/schools as well as enterprises delivering in-house accredited training. Around 80 education providers in Australia are registered to deliver both VET and higher education qualifications, 11 of the organisations are TAFE Institutes and a further 15 are universities. The recent opening up of government subsidised training places to private providers has seen their market share across Australia increase from 20% in 2009 to one third in 2014 (Australian Government 2014). In Victoria alone **private providers market share of government training subsidies rose to 60%** (Guthrie 2015) and as Maddie explains *"I find that really interesting how that's impacted on TAFE is that they have lost market as a result significantly so they are all saying this tightening of belts and new strategies about how to compete with these, how can we be more competitive and more innovative in what we do which equally is impacting on their practitioners you know the pressure is on because a lot of them have been made redundant so how do you get yourself up to speed in this new competitive environment it has had direct and drastic impact on them and on their practice"(ref P187).* That said, public sector investment in VET has been in decline since 2012, recent investment has focused on early childhood, schools and higher education. In real terms public expenditure on higher education increased

by 40% during the last decade. Key questions of fiscal sustainability contained in the White Paper on Reform of the Federation (Australian Government 2014) include the alignment of roles and responsibilities to ensure **fiscal sustainability** as well as quality, **the role the individual** plays in supporting their own education and the **role industry** and **employers** play in supporting workforce skills development but as Maddie reflects *"there is a bit of mistrust as well about what really is behind what's going on and you know a lot of it is about shifting costs from the public purse to the private to student and to industry and to the providers so there is a bit of mistrust" (ref P234).*

The Australian VET sector is a diverse space compounded by a policy approach that has opened up the marketplace to registered public and private training providers using a process of **contestable funding**. There is an ongoing struggle to position VET within the education system and to raise the perception and status of VET so that students, parents and employers view VET as a valid educational pathway. The system is under pressure to undertake the type of reform and systemic change that will better respond to labour market demands and a wider economy set in the context of a dual track economy which has the mining industry driven by technological innovations at one end of the spectrum and service industries driven by innovations in human capital at the other (OECD 2009). That said key features of the Australian VET systems are listed as:

- Strong industry leadership
- National quality assurance (registration of training providers and qualifications)
- National training qualifications developed by industry

- Industry determined competencies for each qualification and
- A federal system

The geography of Australia is a landscape with large distances between urban settings and remote rural communities, which adds complexity to the system of governance as Tessa describes *"we had in [location name] a little tiny place we had a trainer teaching Aged Care and the numbers were dwindling because there were you know 5 people in [location name], 5 in [location name], 5 in [location name], all these little tiny places and so we hooked her all up with video conferencing and she ended up with something like 200 people .... you go to a small location or a remote location and teach" (ref N72, N104)* . One of the advantages of a federal system is that it creates a **contestable policy space** whereby State Governments do not necessarily have to address the same problem in the same way. However, **in spite of a national framework**, the VET system has so far remained **highly localised** primarily because of the dynamics of jurisdictions and the system of decision making that is representative of a federal system and also because there are limited mechanisms in place to learn from best practice across the jurisdictions as Rebecca explains *" National and State Governments and that causes a great deal of complexity in the situation what happens is we have some national architecture .... we have State jurisdiction that controls the system so you have actually 8 models within that" (ref S122).* Tensions exist around the amount of regulation and complicated top down accountabilities/performance measures both on the part of the regulators as Linda explains *"our initial audit going in to an organisation that has been trundling along for years and we go in and do an audit the first audit 80% of it are not fully compliant with the standards .... within the 20 day rectification period some 60%*

.... can actually rectify and so you actually end up with hard core 20 to 25% not compliant so what that tells me and the vast majority a) they want to be compliant but b) they don't understand the standards they are working at .... we find as a regulator that people actually don't understand" (ref Q64, Q90) and on the part of providers as Jane Pauline and Tanya explain *"we now have a really large compliance department we have an audit department" (ref O78) .... "we have the minimum standards for registered training organisations that we must adhere to because we have to adhere to them and if we don't hit the non compliance obviously it's a big issue" (V440) .... "and I mean the kind of regularity ticker box technologies that they were having the kind of accountability regime that seemed to so tense .... they got more and more driven by these accountability frameworks and the more they got screwed by funding the more brutal it got" (ref P64)*. OECD noted in 2009 that the Australian VET system was suffering from "**initiative fatigue**" with a general agreement that the country needs a more coherent, flexible, responsive and innovative system that is capable of meeting economic and social challenges. The Abbot Government of 2013 responded with a White Paper on Reform of the Federation (Australian Government 2014) but as Maddie reflects *" we have had so much policy change in the last 10 years a lot of it has been a bit knee jerk and built around the political cycle so we had a whole for example we had a whole lot of policy change when the Labour Government was in and now we have a whole lot of policy change since the Liberal Government is in and they are huge changes and there is a bit of change fatigue and a bit of here we go again and a bit of loss of you know sort of a loss of trust" (ref P259, P261).*

Fortunately **research in the VET sector continues** and in this respect OECD (2009) notes that Australia has much in common with other developed countries in that research takes on a multidisciplinary approach with academics and contract staff from across the social sciences independently active in the arena. Having committed to a national strategy on VET in the 90's the Government's underpinned their policy decision with the establishment of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) a not-for-profit organisation co-owned by national, state and territory ministers responsible for VET. **NCVER coordinates and funds VET sector research** on behalf of the government through a national competitive grant system and is responsible for the governments longitudinal survey on youth, the collection and analysis of VET sector statistics/surveys and the coordination of the national programme for student and employer satisfaction surveys. In 1993 the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) while describing VET research in Australia as underfunded and fragmented with little or no relevance to policy or practice (McDonald *et al* 1993 and Smith 2001) highlighted the need for greater national funding and a more strategic approach to VET research. The Governments response was to appointed NCVER as manager of a new national research and evaluation programme, which not only raised the profile of NCVER but established a **robust statistical evidence base repository** for practitioners, employers, policy developers and the research community to draw upon. NCVER is acknowledged nationally and internationally as a leading centre for VET research: their VOCED database and website offers a unique service to VET researchers throughout the world (OECD 2009). A full list of the statistics collected by NCVER is outlined in their technical paper *Australia Vocational Education and Training Statistics Explained* (May 2014). OECD describe NCVER as vital to the development of a credible

and substantive research community while also crediting them for playing a role in training a highly skilled group of researchers with the capacity to move in to and between academia nationally and internationally (2009). The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) is another key research body noted by OECD (2009). Founded in 1997 AVETRA members include researchers based in universities, TAFE institutes, training managers, VET policymakers and anyone interested in VET research.

More recently however the **tensions that exist between researchers and Government** became apparent. The emphasis placed on NCVER to collect statistical data has resulted in considerable trust being placed on **quantitative evidence based policy development**. Professor Peter Shergold (2015) outlined the importance of good statistical data when it comes to informing the market and public policy investment citing Total VET Activity (TVA) and Universal Student Identifier (USI) as the two key streams of data used by policy developers in the analysis of VET market behaviour. A view supported by Senator Simon Birmingham (2015) who, as Assistant Minister for Education and Training with particular responsibly for VET and the opening of Australia's economy to Asia and China, agrees that the key to good decision making is reliable informatics and also comments that the recent decision to publish TAFE statistics was driven by a desire to increase competition and consequently enhance quality. Guthrie (2015) on the other hand speaking of his *Review of the Effects of Funding Approaches on Service Skills and Qualifications in Victoria* (Guthrie *et al* 2014) outlines the impact metric driven funding models introduced by the State in 2012 have had on the sector: subsidies were based on 5 incremental bands of funding ranging between $2 and $10 per hour per unit cost (a unit being a student) with the lower

rates of funding assigned to certificates where direct vocational benefit was lower in terms of public value and benefit to the economy. Evaluation meanwhile was grounded in an ex post facto system of statistical returns, which meant that the only leverage available to the State **when faced with poor quality provision that required decisions to pull funding were metric based and after the fact. Qualitative evidence had not been built into the evaluation criteria.**

During the period 2011 and 2014 the Victorian Government altered funding subsidies considerably, for example, the Certificate II in Nail Technology went from $9.32 to $3.00 per hour per unit cost while a Certificate I in Retail went from $7.46 to $1.50 per hour per unit cost. Understandably providers had to make budgetary adjustments. As a public body, with bigger commitments to operational costs, the TAFE sector could not compete with private providers who were in a position to respond to reducing subsidies by cutting operational costs accordingly as Jane explains *"one of the advantages of any private provider is really their ability to react to the market place really quickly so they are very nimble" (ref O49)*. Subsequently 60% of provision moved into the hands of private providers. This shift as evidenced by Guthrie (2015) resulted in 4**5% of Government VET subsidies "*being blown on providers who were only in it for the money*"** and as Jane explains as providers *"we keep the campuses out in the suburbs close to shopping centres and train lines because if people can actually get to the shopping centre to do their shopping then they will get to the college to do their training .... so a college would actually go into a building which has go 3 to 500 square meters....inside a shopping centre ....but close to the train line and they will be fully fitted out we don't own any of the premises .... we normally lease campuses for 3 to 5 years" .... we have a contract with the Federal*

Government to be a VET-Fee help provider and what that means is that we can help our students access those loans ....our VET-Fee help funded courses we have 15,000 and 20,000 students currently enrolled .... throughout the year they are all at Diploma level .... we have about 500 trainers" .... "so it is a private limited company?"...."absolutely it has 3 major shareholders and 3 or 4 minor shareholders and it's totally private .... moving to the independent consultant concept so that we don't get bogged down in the hierarchy of the business so that we could maintain our nimbleness .... so as the company has grown because when we started in 2008 the company only had probably 90 employees at most now they have got nearly 1,000 employees so the hierarchy has particularly in the last 6 months really grown" (ref O2, O25, O29, O30, O36, O78, O79). Early calculations estimated a wroughting of $4 billion in 2015 alone as Rebecca explains *"they had a big increase in volume but not necessarily an increase in quality in fact they had a significant decrease in quality and there has been significant wroughting and some people have walked away with millions of dollars of money of Government money and [learners] don't have a qualification worth the paper it is printed on"(ref S128).* Government in an attempt to avoid the system collapsing urgently began to rethink the funding model. The Minister for Vocational Education and Training announced a funding freeze and other emergency regulatory measures (Bachelard 2015) as Robert and Rebecca explain *"and they are cutting all the funding to our courses" (ref X97) "they have reduced their funding right across the country" (ref S128).* Corrective action was taken which included a move away from using the metrics of pricing and unit cost as blunt instruments of market control (Gutherie 2015) and as Laura explains *"we were trying to control wroughting in the system and the enormous budget blowouts that we had" (ref T48).*

The wroughting that took place in the sector, which was largely driven by private providers or "shonks and shysters" acting as salesmen using hothouse cold calling techniques to sign individuals into $20,000 VET-Fee Help income contingent loans (the lifetime limit for VET-Fee Help per individual goes up to a maximum funding contribution of $100,000) in return for poor quality online diplomas and a $300 laptop (Bachelard 2015), and the subsequent demise of the local TAFE became an election issue for citizens of the State Victoria (The Conversation 2014) as Laura explains *"erm yes but there has been some serious quality issues absolutely ....there have been courses delivered in a fraction of the time that you would expect, so the volume of learning what providers have done is totally switched that down and still getting the same funding .... we tried to fix that and that caused an uproar and the other thing was they would multiple enrol students ... there was a whole lot of providers giving iPads and free this and free that to incentivise students to enrol and sometimes students weren't even aware they were enrolling you know when you investigate they had no idea that they were actually a student" (ref T48).* The Labour Party running a campaign to save TAFE (Victorian Labour 2014) succeeded in **overthrowing the then Coalition Government** and subsequently mandated for their election promise to review VET funding within the first 100 days of taking office (State Government Victoria 2015) as Laura *explains "when the existing Government came in they said there will be a 100 days review on funding and it's predominantly about saving or rescuing the TAFE's" (ref T42).* The *Vocational Education and Training Funding Review Issues* paper was published in July 2015 which was quickly followed by the *VET Funding Review Final Report* of September of 2015 aiming to improve the quality, stability and sustainability of the VET marketplace by **recalibrating the system away from blunt metrics that respond to**

providers unethical and opportunistic behaviour and towards a system that favours the student and provides quality delivery and positive outcomes in terms of employability and continuing education (State Government Victoria 2015) as Laura *explains "the real push has been sustainability and stability of the system .... we had to actually clamp down on what's called foundation skills delivery which is numeracy, basic numeracy and literacy and employability skills you know low level quals because providers were enrolling university students we did a review [of foundation skills] and 1 in 5 students were had either a degree high level VET" (ref T48, T63).*

Beddie (2015) **supports the role qualitative research plays in policy development** and posits that **history also provides research**, and therein policy development, with an important backdrop in terms of causality, context, contingency and complexity. In other words: what worked and what went wrong. In this respect Goozee has published a number of landmark books tracking the history of VET in Australia (1995) and the development of TAFE in Australia (2001 and 2013) while Rushbrook in his seminal paper of 2010, *Bringing Cinderella to the Ball: constructing a federal system of technical and further education Australia 1971 to 1975*, highlights the impact government decisions have on the sector and as Tanya explains *"there is a history .... back in the 80's or mid 80's something like that there as a big split .... and it wasn't until as I say I think it was about the 90's that that got resolved .... and in that process there was a kind of a delineation .... compounded by the fact that the technical side was always seen as the manual labour relative to the mental labour .... this country has a remarkably conflicted culture and it is particularly acute at the moment I think there is a sense of despair I think about what is happening*

politically but in a way we have been flip flopping since the big reforms of the 90's and there were attempts at that stage to put in place forms of cooperative federalism and things like that you know but in more recent times it has been very very polarised" (ref P19, P114).

Questions remain as to who is considered qualified and reliable enough to provide the types of information required by decision makers and also in terms of what information is considered relevant be that formal/academic, semi formal, historical, popular/media, electoral or general tacit knowledge. OECD (2009) voiced concerns that **the culture of policy development in Australia is to take decisions without reference to research and before evaluations have been completed**, noting that there isn't sufficient enough evaluation available to provide for robust decision making particularly in the area of VET practice and where public funds should be invested. Their premise being that, in general, too many initiatives are launched without an imbedded system of evaluation, be that qualitative or otherwise as Tanya notes *"I was working in the University and so .... I decided that because of the changes that were going on in the policy environment I wanted to put in place a comparative project that would look at the schools in TAFE .... was quite a major project and which in fact we were never really never able to get published or anything because VET to be frank wasn't interested which I always thought was part of the problem really .... "there has been an ambivalence about the term research and ambivalence about the term profession and I think in a way some of that is a kind of boundary demarcation" (ref P1, P17)* . This concern is set against the back drop that the success of NCVER has led to an overreliance on statistical data as the evidence base for policy and practice decision making, even though a substantial cohort of VET

provision lies off the radar given that private providers are not obliged to report their activity to NCVER or to the Government, and coupled with an awareness that VET research is still very new as compared to schools and higher education as Tanya *explains "in terms of research you know there was almost no research in relation to VET .... so you'd get teachers research done all the time .... you get the bits of studies done by the economists .... the work was often harder, under researched and harder to get funding for" (ref P84, P86)*. During a gap analysis of VET research OECD (2009) noted the **changing role of the VET workforce** and the issue of **raising the status of VET** as emerging themes: both of which are pertinent and of benefit to policy developers and practitioners alike in terms of robust decision-making and providing a better understanding of the VET landscape in general.

Before we look at the changing role of the **VET workforce** in Australia and unpack some of the issues the sector faces in terms of perception and raising the status of VET, let us **first get a picture of who VET practitioners are**. Mlotkowski and Gutherie (2010) attest that the gathering of VET workforce data is problematic and reflect that we know less about VET practitioners than we do about school teachers and university lecturers. Their 2010 study indicated that 60% of VET practitioners are teachers, 37.6% are aged between 45 and 64. While the **male to female** gender balance is more or less equal the percentage of full time contracts is higher for males than females (53% and 47% respectively) and similarly more part time **contracts** are issued to males than females with the split being 51% and 49% respectively. Simons *et al* (2009) note that practitioners start on part-time casual contracts as Sophie explains *"so I started as what is called an hourly paid instructor .... and so I reckon that was probably after 5 years of that*

you have to be offered a contract but I think I, I don't think I was quiet that long I reckon it was maybe 4 years no I reckon sorry after 5 years you have to be permanent contract so no it was probably as an hourly paid and then then we were offered contracts with those contracts were mostly 12 months .... and then so after 5 years of being on contract then they have to or at that stage you have to apply for the position and win the position so it was advertised and then once you had won that position then you secure that position" (ref W89, W101, W103). Nechvoglod *et al* (2010) study in 2008 indicated a staggering 57% of all TAFE teachers were employed on casual/sessional contracts and rather interestingly, in this case, the gender balance trends towards more females being employed on casual contracts (62%). Coming into VET teaching from industry 42% of the practitioners who commenced teaching between the period 1997 to 2006 maintained a permanent job outside of VET as Robert explains *"it was part time cause I was still running the [business] .... casual contracts I came in on .... 6 month contracts" (ref W402, W404, W408).* When Simons *et al* (2009) reviewed the intake for 2006 this figure had dropped to 21% yet a mere 23% of the posts being filled in VET were being secured with permanent contracts. A staggering 41% of practitioners were unsure if they would still be in VET in 5 years.

Mlotkowski and Gutherie (2010) estimated that 31% of TAFE practitioners hold an education and training degree level qualification (or higher), 10% hold a VET **qualification in education and training** while the remaining 59% had no educational qualification as discussed by Robert *" I officially left school when I was 15 .... I didn't really go to school much you know so my schooling sucks you know .... because I came from industry .... it took me the best part of an easy 2 years I did get credit for some stuff that we had done here at TAFE like train the*

trainer and that sort of stuff" (W617, W619, W631, W659). When they looked at Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) the figures adjusted to just 5% of VET practitioners holding an education and training degree level qualification (or higher), 2%% held a VET qualification in education and training while the remaining 93% had no educational qualification. Francisco (2008) notes that casual/sessional contract staff do not get the same access to CPD as permanent staff.

In terms of **job description**, standards and attributes were developed by the Australian Teaching and Learning Council and the Victorian Institute of Teaching with an emphasis on theoretical insights into teaching and learning both value inclusive approaches to teaching, knowledge of content, pedagogic knowledge, assessing of learning and contributing to the profession. The CERT IV lists units of competency to include learning environment, learning design, delivery, facilitation and assessment (Wheelahan 2010) and at a more local level the VET Development Centre in Victoria as Maddie explains *"developed a whole capability framework for VET practitioners and designed all the training the PD programmes around that .... it is the only one left in a State in Australia that is specifically to develop the VET workforce" (ref P97).*

TAFE is Australia's leading technical and further education provider and as such is responsible for the employment and **professional development** of a significant portion of the VET workforce. Having over 100 years experience in the VET sector, TAFE set about professionalising their teaching staff/workforce during the 90's. A central plinth of their strategy was to development **mandatory competency** based accreditation for all practitioners (Wheelahan 2010). In the

80's TAFE, focused primarily on providing education for individuals to meet their freely chosen vocational needs and not solely for the supply of skilled labour for industry and commerce, experienced a significant growth in the demand for vocational education and training which resulted in a high demand for staff who were not only trained to teach but who also had the prerequisite of a period in industry developing their sector expertise (Guthrie 2010). New recruits coming from industry were given supports and time release for study to achieve the now mandatory teaching qualification, which was set at the level of UG2 (diploma) or PG1 (graduate diploma). Qualifications took the shape of induction to communication skills, basic teaching skills and lesson planning followed by a period of formal training (two days a week for two years) to develop teaching skills, communication, teaching and learning strategies, evaluation and the use of educational equipment and materials underpinned by CPD and mentoring supports. While the aim was to provide practitioners with an understanding of teaching and learning processes relating to technical education, **concerns were raised about the suitability of putting VET practitioners through a teacher training programme** that was more suited to schools education. The general consensus being that teaching in TAFE was **unique and required different approaches** to cater for a student demographic that was generally older, studying part-time, employed and required appropriate teaching styles to met diverse learning needs.

A number of reviews were conducted throughout the 80's and 90's and while the structure and content of the **emerging training models began to take account of the specific needs of VET practitioners** (such as assessing learner needs, management and administration, industry expertise, workplace content and the

more personal qualities of critical thinking, adaptability and problem solving) **key issues such as the length of training and funding became topics of debate**. Gutherie (2010) identifies the key contributors being the teachers unions and universities holding one position while senior officials and TAFE providers held another. Hall *et al* (1991) explains that the universities were not listening to the needs of VET sector practitioners and more specifically to those responsible for funding decisions who were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the "prolonged, padded out" and weighty content of the courses as well as the diminution of key issues relating to progression such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and accelerated pathways. At this juncture a radical approach surfaced, **TAFE proposed to make more effective use of their funding by taking responsibility for their own staff development**. But these were the halcyon days **before marketisation** of the sector, the inevitable **growth in private provision** and the **casualisation** of the VET practitioner workforce.

As Guthrie (2010) recollects the 90's was a period marked by an increase in private provision and the **introduction of competitive funding models**. TAFE as a public sector body no longer had the monopoly on training provision. The dynamic of the sector had become competitive and marketised with the tag line being "**growth through efficiency**". Predictably **industry** and commerce **became more vocal**. Their importance and their demand for skilled labour strongly influenced the content of curriculum. With the acquisition of skills now being addressed using "teacher proof" training packages **the role of the VET educator diminished** as did any justification for professional development, supports and funding. The Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (Cert IV) was born and became the minimum standard for VET practitioners who

were becoming an increasingly casualised workforce. With high demand and efficiencies as the key drivers coming from industry and set against the back drop of a casualised workforce, whose prior experience could be recognised and accredited as such, the **Cert IV** could essentially be delivered and **attained** over the short time period of **one weekend**. Gutherie (2010) also notes that some providers played "fast and lose" with RPL and the delivery of teaching and learning processes which raised questions about the rigour of assessment and the quality of competency ad Deirdre explains *"Certificate IV which is a mandatory requirement for you to deliver vocational qualifications bit of a mouthful there has been a real issue in that I could probably go on line now and pick up a qualification from a couple of providers, dodgy providers .... we could knock it off in 2 or 3 weeks right compared to another quality provider that might expect the same it would take 12 months" (ref R176)*. There are also question as to whether the Cert IV is capable of providing good teaching and learning theory as Jane explains *"there has been a lot of movement at least in the last 10 years in Australia trying to come up with some form of either accreditation or measuring stick to get trainers in the VET sector accredited so they can have this Cert IV in work place training or what's called the TAE but once they get that certificate they think life stops and they don't do anything else they don't continue on they have now got the certificate that it might be 4 or 5 years old and they have never looked at anything else again and that's the problem" (ref O204)*. Robertson in his review of VET teachers knowledge and experience (2008) had doubts as to whether the Cert IV could develop the level of content knowledge that differentiates a novice practitioner from an expert practitioner: he questioned whether the qualification had the capacity to develop the key competences and appropriate levels of self-reflection/self-evaluation required to teach in a

facilitated learning environment and whether it was capable of imparting the range of pedagogic principles required by practitioners teaching autonomously in diverse and complex learning environments.

As globalisation took hold the scope and nature of the VET system expanded. With changes to work and society, and even as a result of the global financial crisis, the VET sector found themselves being called upon more frequently to deliver on Government objectives: to raise the skills of its' workforce, promote social inclusion and increase the percentage of the population with post school qualifications (Wheelahan 2010). A booming economy tied to growth in Asia, growing skills shortages and an ageing population combined to put pressure on VET to deliver more skills and different skills (OECD 2009). The Dusseldorp Skills Forum (2007) reported that 18% of 15 to 24 year olds were neither in full time employment or in full time work albeit that attainment rates in tertiary education are high close to one in five young adults have not completed high school Certificate III education (which is equivalent to high school leaving cert).

Schools and higher education were coming under pressure to achieve a school retention rate of 90% by 2015 and to increase the percentage of adults attaining a bachelor degree to 40% by 2025 respectively. Commentators argued that schools and higher education were **unlikely to achieve their goals without support from the VET sector**. The magnitude of the governments equity and expansion plan had opened up a space whereby the nature of VET teaching came into focus (Wheelahan 2010). Discussions with Government regarding the **alignment of VET professionals** with their counterparts in schools and higher education began to gather momentum. As Guthrie notes there was a new or at least **reinvigorated**

interest in the VET workforce and indeed teacher training generally. The quality and nature of VET teacher training became a hot topic evidenced here by a breath of publications: Skills Australia published *Australian workforce futures: a national workforce development strategy* (2010), the Productivity Commission published *Vocational education and training workforce: issues paper* (2010) while the Australian Education Union published *Principles of new approaches to TAFE teacher* (2010). Victoria University prepared a paper for the National Skills Standards Council entitled *VET teachers, trainer and assessor capabilities, qualifications and development: issues and options* (Guthrie and Every 2013). Forward (2010) published *The quality of TAFE teachers* while Mitchell and Ward (2010) published a final report for the National Quality Council entitled *Carrots, sticks, a mix, or other options: a scoping report which considers the feasibility of options for a systematic approach to capability development of trainers and assessors in the VET sector*. NCVER recognising the importance of the topic commissioned: *Practitioner experiences and expectations with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment TAA40104: a discussion of the issues* (Clayton 2009), *Training and Assessment (TAA40104) in NSW community providers: participant intent and outcomes (*Walker 2010), *Professional development in the VET workforce (*Guthrie 2010a) and *Vocational education and training workforce data 2008: a compendium (*Guthrie 2010b). Notably the discussions are tied to VET professionalism: practitioner experience, the range and quality of awards as well as issues of breath of provision during initial training and throughout their career in terms of continued professional development.

The **process of realigning** VET practitioners with their peers in schools and higher education was the focus of three research studies commissioned, by the

Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWAR), to explore the status of VET teaching in Australia. The **first research study** managed by L H Martin Institute culminated in **five publications** which served to **capture the complexities of VET teaching** in order to make **recommendations** on the **quality of teaching, practitioner qualifications, continuous professional development (CPD), the impact teaching has on the quality of VET student experience as well as student outcomes** and how these can be evaluated:

- Literature Review: the quality of teaching in VET Wheelahan (2010)
- The Quality of VET: Options Paper Wheelahan and Moodie (2010),
- The Quality of VET: Overview Wheelahan and Curtin (2010)
- The Quality of Teaching in VET – Evidence. Moodie and Curtin (2010) and
- The Quality of Teaching in VET: Final Report and Recommendations Wheelahan and Moodie (2010)

In order to try to depict the complexity of evaluating the quality of VET teaching Wheelahan (2010) produced the following conceptual model which captures the many factors that influence and **support high quality VET teaching** as well as the qualifications and CPD required to underpin professionalism including quality indicators and evaluation frameworks:

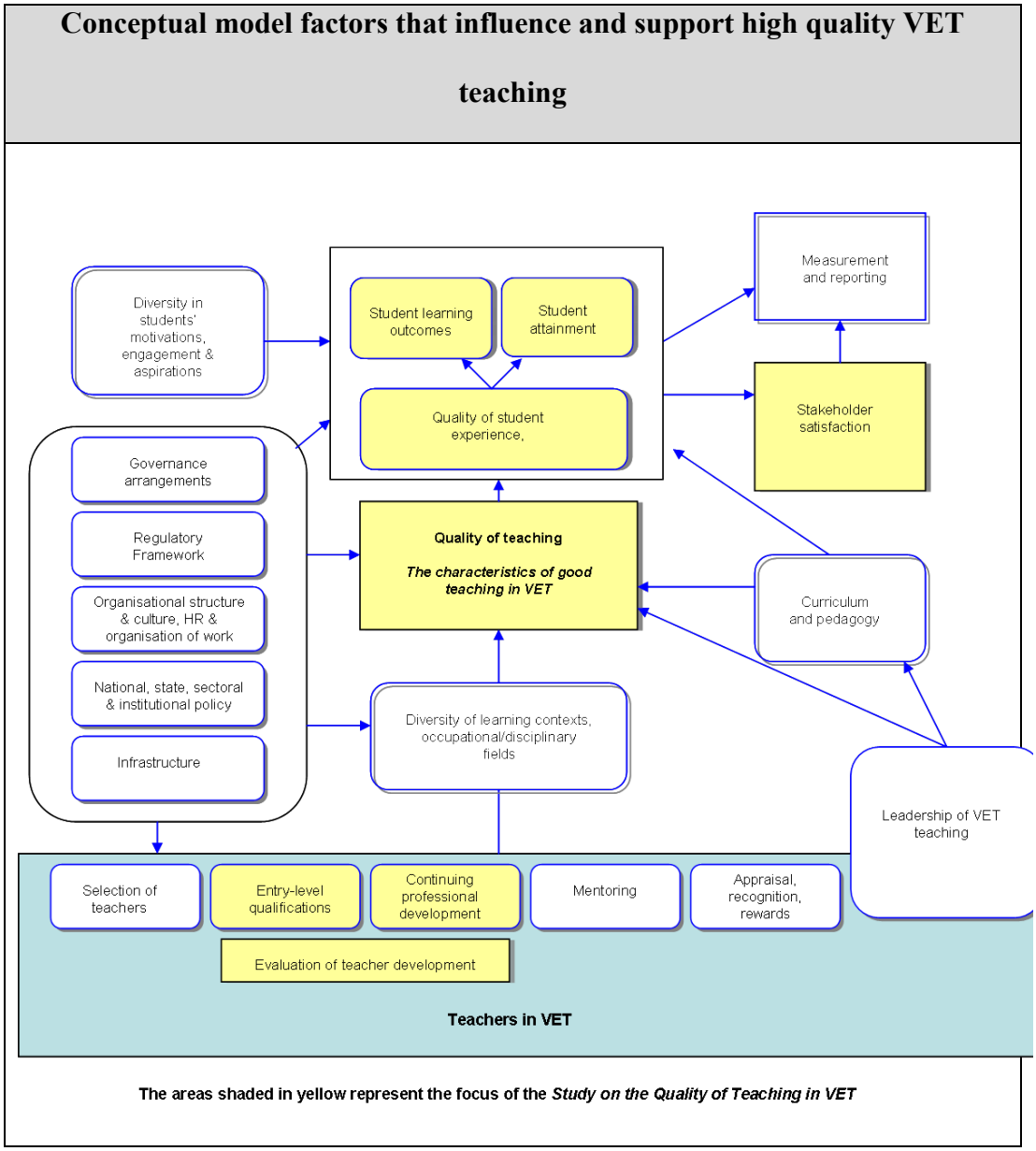


Figure 4.5. Wheelahan (2010) Conceptual model factors that influence and support high quality VET teaching

The **second study** commissioned by DEEWAR, undertaken by NCVER entitled *Initial Training for VET Teachers: a portrait within a larger canvas* (Gutherie, McNaughton and Gamlin 2010), had the task of trying to obtain a **clear picture of the demographics** of the VET workforce by mapping the range, type and focus of existing VET teacher training programmes, the characteristics of the learner accessing VET teacher training programmes and the extent to which these programmes differ by sector and State.

The **third study** commissioned by DEEWAR, combined research undertaken by Clayton, Meyers, Bateman and Bluer (2010) and published by NCVER entitled *Practitioner Expectations and Experiences with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104),* explored the **perceptions of new graduates** of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualification (which is the mandatory and minimum requirement for employment in the sector) and the extent to which they felt the Certificate prepared them for teaching.

Gutherie (2010) notes **a sense of déjà vu** and raises a concern that lessons have not been garnered from the past but he is optimistic that some good will come of a renewed focus on VET, albeit tinged with a fear that "*no matter how much you push the envelope, it will still be stationery*". As if calling upon VET stakeholders around the world to "get it right this time" Guthrie observes that Europe is experiencing a similar resurgence in the opinion that **VET practitioners be viewed as co-writers and change agents who play an important role in the economic and social development of societies** (Harris Simon and Maher 2009), noting also that an increased and broader emphasis on the role of the VET practitioner is critical to altering not only **perceptions** about the **attractiveness of the profession** but also highlighting the importance **their contribution** is in the **design** of strategies to **develop** and **sustain the profession**.

In terms of **perception** Gutherie (2010) raises the pertinent issue of where VET practitioners **place themselves on the education spectrum** and posits that as a group they are not easy to define; by virtue of the unique position they hold which straddles upper secondary, trade apprenticeships and tertiary education, a position that implicitly pulls the practitioner towards defining themselves as a either

teacher, master craftsmen or lecturer. As Guthrie (2010) notes some practitioners identify themselves as vocational experts who also teach while others view themselves primarily as teachers. This divide in identity had an **impact on the development of CPD** supports given that the culture behind each identity requires a different and nuanced approach. Apart from developing the practitioners skills, knowledge and personal competencies CPD supports also have the task of maintaining the practitioners' currency in their vocational sector as well as maintaining their credibility with students and industry.

Aligned to **diversity of definition** is the question of **diversity of provision** and what exactly is required to meet the education and development needs of practitioners teaching to the breath and depth of learner and qualifications that span upper secondary, trade apprenticeships and tertiary education. The difference in worldview contained therein typifies the **dichotomy of identity and struggle with balance**, not least of which is where to place the precious time and energy that is required to enhance skills, knowledge and industry expertise, as experienced by many VET practitioners. It becomes apparent that **a single unit of competence indeed a single concept of VET CPD is not viable given the diverse needs** of those who perceive themselves as trainers and those who perceive themselves as teachers coupled with the diverse natured and breath of provision as Sophie explains *"so I am including the English Language, Language for the Deaf and I am in Interpreting and Translating and Women's Education .... Literacy and Numeracy and then foundation skills .... and employability skills .... I am running a graduate diploma of Practice and Leadership .... and then also with some of the synchronise on line delivery .... from 2000 to 2014 I was heavily involved in work place delivery and so we had one group of 9 lecturers we would*

get Commonwealth funding and then we would go to employers and we would design programmes for them specifically and customise everything to their organisation using their policies and procedures and safety instructions and whatever" (ref W42, W43, W44, W63, W275, W321, W329, W414).

Perception also ties itself to the **sustainability of practitioners** in VET. Guthrie (2010) notes that sustainability is an issue for Australia and Europe who are looking to a future of **teacher shortages**: a trend that can only be exacerbated if the existing difficulties of **attracting, recruiting, training individuals** persist. **Casualised contracts** of employment, **poor induction** and lack of local support affect how practitioners do their job no matter how well qualified they are and is an issue that **places organisational culture**, **the structure of supports and human resource management firmly in the centre of the discussion** as Maddie and Jane explain *"we don't have a professional association we don't have a national strategy and we don't have a national body that is funded to support the development of the VET workforce particularly teachers that's always been a hole in it and my thinking about that is it's because there is this perception that you don't need it in VET, you need it in Schools and you need it in Higher Ed but you don't need it in VET so it's up to the institutes to do that" (ref P222) ...." I think that because they have managers in charge and they think it's just about the manager ....we don't need to send the trainers so they don't go to the grass roots sometimes it's a cost issue so they say it's not in our budget we don't have the finances to be able to do that but really at the end of the day it's about failing to .... take responsibility" (ref O204).*

A key issue of consideration when reform is on the agenda is the concept of the **professional body** or registration authority as a mechanism for regulation. Gutherie and Clayton in their 2012 publication *An Association of VET professionals: what's the story*? noted that there had been no national or broad based approach to VET workforce development since 2008 and as the appetite for reform began to gather momentum so too did the discussion of professionalisation. Skills Australia (2010) suggested a professional body to support the development of VET professional practice and raised the issue again in their report of 2011, which discussed the development of a workforce strategy while the Productivity Commission report of 2010 supported a strategy of increased attention on continuing professional development. Guthrie (2010) notes Wheelahan (2010), Wheelahan and Curtain (2010), Mitchell and Ward (2010) and Gutherie (2010a 2010b) amongst a body of researchers canvassing the sector for opinion. Wheelhan and Moodie (2011) found strong support for the establishment of a professional body with a national focus on research but also recommended that further research be carried out to examine the viability of such an organisation. The VET Development Centre in Victoria commissioned a feasibility study which undertook a review of literature relating to professionals and professionalism as well as an analysis of organisational documentation to help establish the key essence, features and possible model of such an association (Clayton and Guthrie 2011). An online survey of key stakeholders, individuals and organisations noted strong support for the establishment of a professional association but also identified issues of concern, not least of which was a natural suspicion around professional associations (funding is a real issue, the cost of membership has to be balanced with the benefits membership brings) and an acknowledgement of the scale of the task considering the size and diversity of the

sector nationally (the Productivity Commission's report of 2011 provides a conservative estimated of 73,400 public sector plus 150,000 private sector VET practitioners working in the sector) and the very real possibility that such an initiative could founder or be hijacked by particular interest groups in which case nothing would come of it. One of the key findings coming out of the survey was not so much the need for a professional body to regulate quality but rather to be a voice for practitioners who have been readily ignored during sectoral discussions as Tanya explains *"we looked at the state of VET research and basically the argument was that there isn't a strong there isn't a voice you know" (ref P84).* **Acknowledgement of their voice** would therefore take the structure of a professional body in the direction of being a vehicle to build critical mass and credibility, something that could well be achieved if existing bodies were to **find ways to work together collaboratively**.

In conclusion Wheelahan and Moddie (2010) in *The Quality of Teaching in VET: Final Report and Recommendations* advise a **staged approach to developing** the issues highlighted during their study, noting that some issues are easily addressed and do not require a number of step changes to arrive at a place where ambitions can be achieved, while others may take longer requiring an **initial period to augment** the status quo, followed by a **second intermediate stage of enhancement** after which they enter the **third and final stage of consolidation towards stakeholder ambition**. **Key to implementation** is cooperation and the **creation of considerable "buy-in"** on the part of practitioners, who are **still coping with the impact of years of divisive policy development** and a raised awareness that the alternative involves a greater reliance by government on regulation. Recommendations include:

- a restructuring of the VET workforce and the distinguishing of practitioners based on their level of responsibility with a view to creating cross sectoral teachers and trainers.
- the need for national staff data to assist with workforce planning, institutional benchmarking and transparency of outcomes
- the implementation of a national teaching and training award consistent with that of schools and higher education
- the integration of VET teaching and training qualifications, supports for new practitioners, CPD and the maintenance of practitioner industry currency with national policy and institutional strategies.
- External validation of VET qualifications as well as industry and professional recognition with the introduction of a professional body, standards for VET teaching and training, accreditation of qualifications, registration of practitioners and evaluation of the quality of practice
- Research into VET pedagogy and models of VET teaching.

Unfortunately the green shoots of national reform, which started to unpack the changing role of the VET practitioner and raising the status of VET by examining the supports and quality of VET practitioner development to enable a realignment of VET practitioners with their counterparts in schools and higher education, as proposed by the Abbot Government of 2013 in the White Paper on Reform of the Federation (Australian Government 2014), which cost the Government $5.156 million in staff costs to produce, were **scrapped in April 2016** by the newly elected Turnbull Government of 2015 (Borrello 2016). The challenge of raising the status of VET, developing supports and enhancing the quality of VET practitioners professional development in line with their counterparts in schools

and education is **now back in the hands of individual State Governments operating in a contestable policy space and within localised jurisdictions**.

Summary:

The aim of this case study of Australia was to begin first with a snapshot of the population, official languages, education demographics including exchequer funded operational spend per pupil/student and by way of providing context, a brief summary of the education system in terms of governance, VET strategic objectives and priorities for VET workforce development. The case study then moved forward to provide a chronological illustration of policy reform over time including background and context. We heard about the realities of practice from the practitioner's perspective as well as their **experience of CPD which in turn gave us an insight into key policy drivers**, the impact of policy reforms as well as subsequent **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers.**

Overall there is a strong feeling that when it comes to governance, policy reform, policy implementation, professional practice and continuous professional development: VET practitioners operate in a realm whereby marketisation and industry demand affect a system that **borrows/brokers** a purpose for vocational education and training provision from industry as opposed to one that owns or rents a moral purpose for capacity building. **Key policy drivers** identified as changes in political governance (and their respective political priorities) and the demands of industry with the policy principles of marketisation, fiscal sustainability and contestable funding. Policy development appears to be guided by business metrics while policy implementation has been weakened by years of

divisive policy reform. Learner participation is consistent with the demands of the marketplace.

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of governance and the **impact legislation**, **policy reform** and changing national priorities has on practitioners and their professional practice: VET practitioners in Australia introduced us to **an education system** that is the **constitutional responsibility** of six states and two territories with the Commonwealth Government acting as a ninth partner. Historically governance had move towards a less centralised position however more recent governments have adopted a model of cooperative federalism whereby Commonwealth, states and territories collaboratively agree on priorities for reform and set targets through the Council of the Australian Government. COAG is the intergovernmental forum responsible for the initiation, development, monitoring and implementation of national policy reform. The Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) report to COAG and provide a mechanism for the development and implementation of national policy in a constitutional environment whereby formal authority for education and training rests with individual State Governments. The effect being that national policy development and implementation proceeds consultatively with the result that by the time new policy is put forward for formal ministerial decision it has been agreed in principle by both Australian and State Governments. The White Paper on Reform of the Federation (Australian Government 2014) included the realignment of VET roles and responsibilities to ensure **fiscal sustainability as well as quality**; that the individual plays a role in supporting their own education and that industry and employers play a role in supporting workforce skills development.

Capturing perspectives on the notion of professionalisation and the **impact policy reform** has on the structures and the role of VET practitioners in terms of the **management and organisation** of teaching and training, practice design and delivery such as workforce development, definitions and demographics, capacity building, standards and quality of practice, changing paradigms within education theory, pedagogic design and delivery, adopting learner centered approaches, widening target groups, labour market demands, the emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, organisational changes to the working environment vis a vis distributed leadership, teamwork, collaboration and extended partnerships with industry, collegial networks, ICT, administration, project management and wellbeing at work: Australian VET practitioners identified for us that the **management, organisation and structure** of education is viewed very much as an investment in an industrial society. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was set up as a statutory body to facilitate the joint investments of State and Commonwealth and to coordinate, plan and fund a national approach. In 2004 the Commonwealth transferred the responsibilities of ANTA to a Commonwealth Department and established the Ministerial Council on VET to ensure continued harmonisation of the national system and placed the reform of skills and workforce development on the list of priorities for COAG. The National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Research (NCVER) manages a robust statistical evidence base repository for policy developers to draw upon. The Commonwealth contributes 30% to the VET funding budget, which includes funding for VET-Fee Help training subsidies/income contingent student loans. There are approximately 4,600 public, private and community providers with an estimated 3 million students participating in VET. Approximately 1.5 million participate in government

subsidised training programmes including 400,000 apprentices and trainees. The Commonwealth budget contribution for 2014/15 was estimated at $5.9 billion including $1.2 billion in income contingent student loans. The governments recent strategy to extended subsidised training grants to private providers has seen their market share across Australia increase: in Victoria alone private providers market share of government training subsidies rose to 60% and placed the viability of TAFE, who were established as statutory training bodies, in a predicament. The Australian VET sector is a diverse space compounded by a policy approach that has opened up the marketplace to registered public and private training providers using a process of contestable funding. Set against the challenging backdrop that sees policy priorities vacillate between political parties and between the ministerial departments of education and industry, and back again, the system is under pressure to undertake the type of reform and systemic change that will better respond to labour market demands and a wider economy. Constant vacillation, marketisation and a contestable funding space has effected a sector that is suffering from policy reform and initiative fatigue. Recent wroughting of the system has evidenced "45% of funding being blown on providers who are only in it for the money". Recent elections in the State of Victoria witnessed the Government losing office on the issue of VET provision and evident wroughting of the public purse. On taking office the Labour Government moved quickly to recalibrate the system away from the blunt metrics that respond to providers unethical and opportunistic behaviour and towards a system that favours the student and provides quality delivery and positive outcomes in terms of employability and continuing education. There is also an ongoing struggle to position VET within the education system and to raise the perception and status of VET so that students, parents and employers view VET

as a valid educational pathway. In spite of a national framework, the VET system has so far remained highly localised primarily because of the dynamics of jurisdictions and the system of decision making that is representative of a federal system and also because there are limited mechanisms in place to learn from best practice across the jurisdictions. **The culture of policy development in Australia is to take decisions without reference to research and before evaluations have been completed** in addition to which tensions exist between practitioners and government who place considerable trust in quantitative evidence based metrics during the development of policy and while field research continues apace with **practitioners and sector experts supporting the role qualitative research plays in policy development** and an acknowledgement that **history also provides valuable research** in terms of policy implementation causality, context, contingency and complexity, qualitative based evaluations have yet to be built into the process and as such have yet to achieve traction on the national playing field.

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of the practitioner and the impact policy reform has on **professional development** in terms of adding complexity to the profession, encouraging a platform for a cohesive voice, including practitioners as co-authors of VET strategy and in the development of sustainable professional development and standards of practice including qualifications and training, continuous professional development, education and training, research and self-evaluation, career planning and progression, employment opportunities and wellbeing: **job descriptions, standards of practice and attributes** were developed by the Australian Teaching and Learning Council and the Victorian Institute of Teaching with an emphasis on theoretical

insights into teaching and learning. The Cert IV also lists units of competency to include learning environment, learning design, delivery, facilitation and assessment. **Professional development** on the other hand had seen the development of mandatory competency based accreditation for all practitioners during the 90's however with the shift towards marketisation and a focus on **"growth through efficiency" the voice of industry and commerce became more vocal with the result that the role of the VET educator diminished. Industry called for** "teacher proof" training packages and as such the Cert IV was born and became the minimum standard for VET practitioners. The Cert IV could be delivered and attained over the short time period of **one weekend. Some providers played "fast and lose" with RPL which in turn raised questions about the quality of delivery, the rigour of assessment and the quality of competency.** This drive to the bottom has evidenced 31% of TAFE practitioners with a degree level education and training qualification (or higher), 10% with some form of **education and training** qualification and the remaining 59% with no qualifications in education and training. Practitioners spoke of CPD in terms of regulation and inspection, funding compliance and audit while skills gaps were framed in the context of being responsible for student intake (sales, marketing and income generation) and learning outcomes (assessment of learning and qualification attainment tied to income generation), resourcing the virtual classroom and partnership with industry. The sector has become increasingly casualised. VET practitioners tend to start their career by taking a part-time casual **contract. Figures estimate that over 57% of all TAFE teachers are employed on casual/sessional contracts with the gender balance trending towards females at 62%.** The casualised nature of employment also makes it difficult to gather data on the workforce, which is compounded by the fact that private

providers are not required to submit staffing returns. Practitioners perceptions of the role of a **VET Practitioner are diverse:** some practitioners identify themselves as vocational experts who also teach while others view themselves primarily as teachers. Given that the culture behind each identity requires a different and nuanced approach these divided identities are evidencing an **impact on the development of CPD** supports: apart from developing the practitioners skills, knowledge and personal competencies CPD also has the task of maintaining the practitioners' currency in their vocational sector as well as maintaining their credibility with students and industry**. A single unit of competence indeed a single concept of VET CPD is not viable given the diverse needs** of those who perceive themselves as trainers and those who perceive themselves as teachers coupled with the diverse natured and breath of provision. **There is a suggestion that the diversity of definition** and dichotomy of identity has left practitioners struggling to find balance. **More recently there has been push to** re**aligning VET professionals** with their peers in schools and higher education. The impetus has been driven primarily by stakeholders who are of the belief that schools and higher education are **unlikely to achieve Government targets on Lifelong Learning without the support of the VET sector. This reinvigorated interest** in VET practitioners standards and competencies has resulted in the Government commissioning three studies into VET focusing on: the quality of VET teaching and the qualifications/CPD required to underpin professionalism including quality indicators and evaluation framework; the establishment of a clear picture of workforce demographics and a qualitative review of the graduates perspectives on the Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualification. Perception was tied to recognition for the role VET practitioner play in terms of contribution, design and development of strategies to

sustain the profession as well as an acknowledgement of their voice. One of the key findings coming out of the survey was the need for a professional body and not one to regulate quality but rather to be a voice for practitioners who have been readily ignored during sectoral discussions. Perception was also tied to attractiveness of the profession: evidencing **teacher shortages and** difficulties **attracting, recruiting, training individuals**. Terms and conditions of employment including the proliferation of **casualised contracts**, **poor induction** and **lack of local support** were among the issues affecting how practitioners do their job no matter how well qualified they are and is an issue that **places organisational culture, the structure of supports and human resource management firmly at the centre of the discussion. Trust and cynicism** were also evidenced as key issues for VET practitioners who, exploring the concept of a professional body, evidenced a natural suspicion around professional associations and questioned the viability of the scale of the undertaking considering the size and diversity of the sector nationally. There was strong recommendation for government to get it right this time and an acknowledgement that government needs to create considerable "buy-in" from practitioners, who are still coping with the impact of years of divisive policy development and a raised awareness that the alternative would involve even greater reliance by government on audit, compliance and regulation. Practitioners held the view that the structure of a professional body should be a vehicle to build critical mass and credibility and that practitioners be viewed as co-writers and change agents who play an important role in the economic and social development of societies which in their eyes is something that could easily be achieved if existing bodies were to find ways to work together collaboratively. A staged approach to development outlined an initial period of augmentation, a second and intermediate stage of

enhancement and a third and final stage of consolidation. However the reform agenda which cost $5.156 million in staff costs to produce **was scrapped in 2016 by a newly elected Government and as such policy development and implementation bounced back in the hands of individual State Governments operating in contestable policy funding spaces and within localised jurisdictions.**

Case Study One Ireland

Education at a glance Ireland:

Education System Ireland

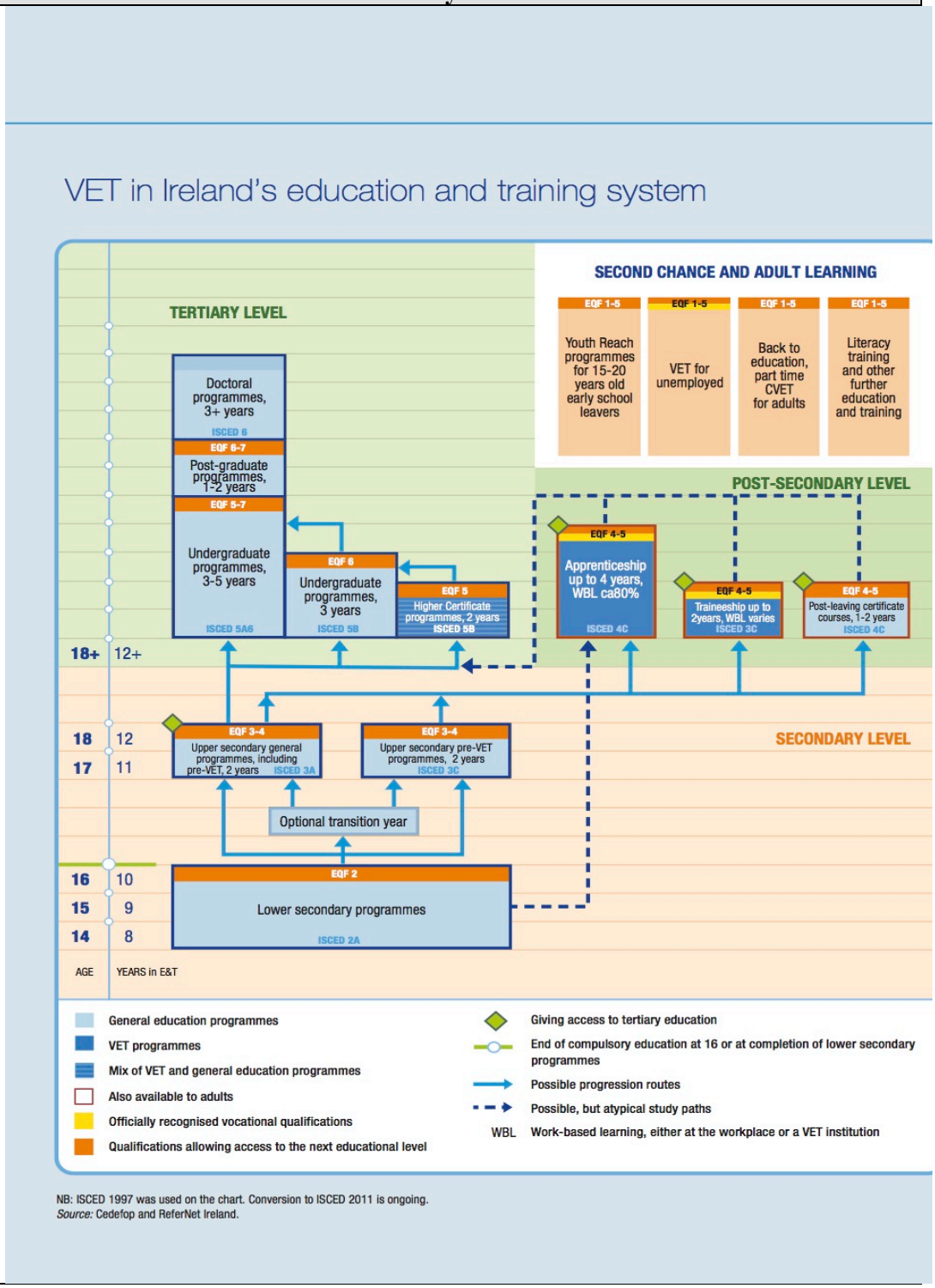


Figure 4.6 Education System Ireland CEDEFOP 2014 Spotlight on VET Ireland

VET Overview
Population: 4,761,865 **Official language**: English and Irish **Governance:** Vocational education and training provision is largely in the hands of the Further Education Sector (FET) comprising 16 State funded providers known as Education and Training Boards (ETB) with a small proportion of private provision. Responsibility for funding, planning and coordination of FET programmes lies with Solas the National Authority for Further Education and Training. Other statutory providers include Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) who are responsible for training in the seafood industry and Teagasc who are responsible for training in the agricultural industry. An amount of VET provision takes place in higher education. Higher VET programmes are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) the statutory body responsible for planning and policy development. **Operational spend per pupil/student for 2015** Pre-primary education $6,532 USD Primary level $8,002 USD Secondary level $10,804 USD Post secondary non tertiary level $12,630 USD Tertiary level $13,663 USD **Education population** All education 1,090,641 First Level 544,696 Second level 339,207 Post Leaving Certificate level 33,089 Tertiary level 173,649 **VET strategic objectives** Key challenges and policy responses include: • Attractiveness of VET, approximately 50% of upper secondary graduates progress to tertiary education with 22% entering FET which includes apprenticeship traineeships. Solas have been given the remit to increase participation rates in FET. • Expanding the apprenticeship system, a 2014 review of the apprenticeship system (DES 2014) identified 25 trades (with 80% concentrated in the construction related trades), recommendations were made to expand the sector to include: ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices and financial services. • Unemployment, in 2013 the average EU unemployment rate across Europe was 10.8% at the time Ireland evidenced an unemployment rate of 13% concentrated on those under 25 years (25%). The FET sector has been given the remit to ensure that learners are provided with skills training relevant to the labour market while assisting those with lower educational qualifications to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to progress, government schemes provide free training to gain in demand skills and access to work opportunities in identified growing sectors.

Figure 4.7 VET Overview CEDEFOP 2014, CSO 2015 and 2016 and OECD 2015 *cont*

VET Overview *cont …*
Key strengths of VET are identified as: Recent reform of the sector has focused on creating clear integrated pathways for learners, responding to the needs of the labour market and to this end Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying skills needs for the economy which is overseen by a government appointed future skills needs group made up of representatives from government including the Ministries for Education and Skills, Enterprise and Finance. **Education Workforce Development** In 2016 the Department of Education and Skills published an Action Plan for Education which included five high level goals one of which was to help those delivering education to improve (Department of Education and Skills 2016). The publication of a FET Professional Development Strategy is listed as a key action for Solas and Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) with investment and work packages tagged for delivery in 2017.

Figure 4.7 VET Overview CEDEFOP 2014, CSO 2015 and 2016 and OECD 2015

Perspectives on Reform:

Vocational education and training in Ireland first surfaced as an education provision in 1731 with the emergence of the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) which was founded with the objective to improve and promote education and knowledge in **agriculture and industry**. While the work of the society was primarily for like-minded **landed gentry**, the RDS heralded the **beginning of continuing and further education provision** in Ireland. In 1824 the Dublin Mechanics Institute expanded provision to the **middle classes**. Establishing **28 regional institutes** located in industrial areas their focus was on **science and technical education**. Universities soon began to open their lectures to the general public. In terms of a Government agenda on post primary education both the RDS and the Mechanics Institute were **funded by membership** while **the universities benefitted from government legislation and funding**. The RDS and the Mechanics Institute were initially set up to contribute to members knowledge in their specific fields of expertise and therein **provision was driven by the needs of the economy and industry**. In **1837 the Mechanics Institute expanded provision** to include a wider remit of education and cultural activities (Coolahan 1981). However membership continued to suffer due to the lack of a national primary education system and employers fears that workers were being radicalised. By 1887 the Mechanics Institute was replaced by the Kevin Street Technical Institute Schools and the Technical Instruction Act of 1899 had established a technical school in every local authority area (Cooke 2009). The RDS having become the leading institute for technical education expanded provision by merging with the School of Science applied to Mining and Arts and in 1867 they reconstructed to become the Royal College of Science of Ireland.

By 1890 Ireland had begun its journey towards divestiture from British Rule. At the time all legislation was enacted through Parliament in Britain and included education, agriculture and local government. In an era when travel was slow, difficult and dangerous it was neither sensible nor practical to govern from a fixed centre or capital therein principle authority in each county was devolved to an unelected grand jury made up of large property owners selected by the county sheriff. The grand jury reported to the Chief Secretary and the Lord Lieutenant who in turn were responsible to the Sovereign (Coakley and Gallagher 2005). The system of local governance was modernised by the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898, which transferred administrative functions to democratically elected county councils who subsequently established Technical Instruction Committees to administer the provision of technical and vocational education.

The path to **independence** advanced a sense of national identity. Organisations like the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association were established with the aim of restoring **cultural identity** through the promotion of Irish language and distinctive traditional national pastimes and hobbies. By 1904 popularity was such that over 600 branches had been established throughout the country. Participation was **voluntary** and was driven both by an **intrinsic sense of Irish cultural identity** and the **political emergence of the Free State** and as such the Associations were not in receipt of subsidies from the then ruling British Government (O' Murchu 2006). The Irish Cooperative Movement another such organically grown voluntary organisation was established in 1889 by Sir Horace Plunket to **promote rural economic development through cooperation**, **self help and local initiative**. Agriculture was Irelands most important rural economy

and Plunkett was right to assume that all major groupings across Ireland (politic, religious and civic) would be concerned.

The combined efforts of these voluntary movements brought weight on government to establish an administrative body: the **Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction** (DATI) was **established** in 1900. During this period membership to the Royal College of Science of Ireland was in decline due to political affiliations and members' fear of association with the result that the college was subsumed into the **Technical Instruction Section** of DATI who had a **remit** to not only "***provide technical training for ambitious boys and girls who had left school***" but to train their teachers as well (Cooke 2009). **Plunkett** was appointed the executive head of DATI and as such his **philosophy underpinned the work** of the organisation. Believing strongly in the role of the cooperative movement he opposed stronger State control and centralisation. By 1920 the Cooperative Movement had grown to 1,115 with a membership of 150,000 (Irish Cooperative Movement 2016). Key to the success of DATI was their recognition of the **principles of devolved power to local communities** and representatives from local committees, which included the Technical Instruction Committees (Cooke 2009). The significance of DATI was not so much the establishment of a government department but the recognition that policy development was driven at a local level by key stakeholders and that **education integrated with commerce was delivered in voluntary organisations**.

Between 1900 and 1907 DATI prepared annual progress reports in key policy areas. **Teacher supply and training** was a priority and rather than wait three years for the first crop of specially trained teachers DATI rolled out a strategy to

advertise for teachers in England, provide **scholarships** and organise teacher training **summer camps** while the **Universities** made special **provision** for **applied teacher training courses**. DATI awarded grants to the Technical Committees for the delivery of technical education. The grant rate was seven shillings and six pence per pupil per subject per session for commercial subjects, fifteen shillings for science and art subjects and 30 shillings for industrial subjects. A session consisted of twenty lessons of one and a half hours or thirty one-hour sessions (Coolahan 1981). In general technical instruction took place at night when students young and old had finished work however it became apparent to DATI that comprehensive day courses were required to meet the needs of the cohort progressing from primary to second level technical education. Between 1905 and 1919 total grants grew from £4,423 to £69,304. The student population totalled 44,458 and **teacher training** was being provided **for every type of teacher**. Following a period of programme consolidation and planning (which saw provision underpinned by the delivery of english, maths, science and drawing) DATI relocated delivery from rented accommodation to new technical schools and **established** fourteen **Day Trade Preparatory Schools** to deliver technical education and apprenticeship training (Coolahan 1981 and Cooke 2009).

Coolahan (1981) notes that the sector faced financial and organisational **difficulties**. The level of **remuneration** for technical teachers was not keeping pace with the cost of living. **Conditions of employment and tenure** were unsatisfactory and while attempts were made to improve conditions **progress was slow**. The outbreak of war, the subsequent devaluing of currency and a prejudice in relation to manual labourers ability to become socially mobile **hampered** long term planning for the **expansion** of technical education provision. However,

despite these difficulties the sector **made progress** and more importantly **laid the foundations** for a structure that was capable of great development. The only event that threatened the success of DATI (who had strategically, effectively and cooperatively worked with communities to address local needs) came about in the shape of interpersonal rivalry and party political gain when in 1906 the Irish Parliamentary Party hostile to Plunketts philosophy seized on his outspoken criticism of the **Catholic Church** and called upon a new Liberal Government in Westminster to set up a Commission of enquiry into the workings of DATI. Plunkett resigned before the report was published which ironically, having been established to politically condemn his leadership, commended the successful work of DATI and fully endorsed their record of achievement (Cooke 2009). **Interpersonal rivalry and party political gain** is still a valid concern today as Daniel explains *"at a particular level right you don't get support .... you can't be sure that nobody is going to turn around and undermine you, you are never 100% sure that that's not going to happen" (ref B394).*

As Ireland moved through the 1920's, a period marked by resistance, civil war and the declaration of independence (Coakley and Gallagher 2005) provision for further education was **maintained by the State and driven by voluntary associations.** Independence was achieved in 1922 however the political superstructure of the Irish Government and the modern Irish Civil Service developed gradually. Transitioning from a collegial group of 29 boards and commissions with a staff of 4,000 overseen by the Chief Secretary the **Department of Education** was formally **established** in 1924. There were forty-nine Technical Instruction Committees in existence with executive officers appointed to undertake secretarial and executive duties and while the Department

of Education was **contributing** £161,442 of national **exchequer funding** for the **provision of technical education** the **Local Government Act of 1925** had made **local authorities liable for security of tenure and pensions for whole time teachers**. In 1926 the Department of Education appointed a Commission to undertake a full-scale review of the technical education sector and as Coolahan (1981) notes **the new Department** of Education **felt** somewhat **freer to reform the technical education sector** while conversely **avoiding** any controversial reform of the primary and secondary sectors which was predominantly managed by the **Catholic Church**. The Commission **advised** radical change to meet the needs of traditional industry:

- the establishment of a system of continuing education with a curriculum based on manual and technical skills;
- compulsory attendance for young people between the ages of fourteen and sixteen;
- a **Vocational Education Act** to establish the sector incorporating continuing education and technical education;
- an **Apprenticeship Act** legislating for compulsory attendance in the first two years of apprenticeship training for skilled trades, **provision for higher technological work** and the involvement of state-sponsored industrial enterprises;
- intensive **training for teachers**, standard **conditions of employment** and standard salaries for whole time teachers.

DATI had been subsumed into the new Department of Education. Their first task was to legislate for continuing vocational and technical education (Cooke 2009).

The democratic relationship between DATI, local agencies and local communities had provided a model for going forward and as such the **Vocational Education Act of 1930** established the Technical Instruction Committees as statutory bodies, continuing to operate under the aegis of local authorities, and renamed as the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The structure of a Committee comprised fourteen members five to eight of which were local authority representatives with the remainder selected from employers, special interest expertise and trade unions (Coolahan 1981). The term of office coincided with that of the local authority. Each VEC had a **chief executive officer** (CEO) responsible for policy implementation. The system of **yearly budget allocations** was replaced with **compulsory rates of funding** to allow for **long term planning**. Thirty-eight VECs were established: their first priority was to provide buildings with approval granted for forty-six new schools, twenty-one school extensions and restoration works for forty-eight other schools. The Act provided for a **non-denominational** system of technical and vocational education giving **equal right of access and status** to all students irrespective of religious belief (Cooke 2009). **The mission** of the VEC was **philosophically** a **social** one delivering high quality post primary education locally encompassing provision for marginalised and underprivileged groups and to develop education services for prisoners, the travelling community, refugees and asylum seekers. **The Vocational Act did not provide** for **teacher training** albeit the Commission had identified existing arrangements as unsystematic and insufficient declaring it imperative to provide intensive teacher training as an essential prerequisite (Coolahan 1981). Agricultural training was transferred to the Department of Agriculture while apprenticeships fell under the remit of the Department of Industry and Commerce legislated for in the **Apprenticeship Act of 1931**. The

Act authorised the **Minister to constitute a district/area as a trade apprenticeship district** and to establish Apprenticeship Committees comprising employer, employee representatives and ministerial nominees with the responsibility to make rules and regulations for their particular apprenticeship however **their mandate was only to encourage (not obligate)** employers to train and instruct apprentices (Coolahan 1981).

The newly established VEC's continued to develop and advance provision. Lobbying for students to be afforded opportunities to access, **transfer and progression to higher technical education** they secured approval for five main colleges of specialisation: the College of Technology, the High School of Commerce, the School of Trades and Crafts, the schools of Domestic Science and the School of Music which together served a national and municipal role. Written and practical exams tested occupational efficiency in building, electrical mechanical and motor car engineering, applied chemistry, commerce, domestic science, art, farriery, telephony and telegraphy. Students were also put forward for City and Guilds examination awarded by the London Institute (Coolahan 1981). Teacher training on the other hand emerged as a thorny issue having been excluded from legislation neither a comprehensive plan or national strategy was introduced let alone developed with the result that workforce development was discretionary and **localised**: university graduates were not obliged to obtain a teaching qualification except in the cases they were employed to teach the Irish language or general education subjects (**certification** of which was achieved following successful completion of a **summer course** in Irish language and **teaching methodology**). Between 1931 and 1936 the staffing numbers in the VEC rose from 585 whole-time teachers and 550 part-time teachers to 777 and

644 respectively however Department reports note that the system of appointing and promoting teachers was not always satisfactory and commented that *"there are instances where intense local canvassing dominates the appointment of teachers and forces any judicial consideration of qualifications into the background*". Cooke (2009) notes this as a serious operational flaw of local representative systems and reflects that the Department were fully aware of official misconduct but made no attempt to bring parity to the situation.

O'Murchu (1984) reflects that the nature of the voluntary movement across Ireland, which was intrinsically linked to the struggle for independence, continued to safeguard the development of education during the establishment of the Republic and may explain, in part, why State and Church involvement in education and the notion of centrally driven policy continued to be a contested space going forward. Fulton (1991) examines State, religion and ruling ideas and notes that Republicans tend to be socialist in their orientation and that historically the Church had provided subordinate classes in Ireland a place of solace during the years of oppressive British rule. However a devotional revolution brought about by Archbishop Cullen radically transformed the Church from its group orientated approach to an individualistic view: rules were now enforced as opposed to principles being acknowledged. This shift in focus and power was to have a significant impact on Irish community and society. Independence achieved the Constitution of Ireland was enacted in 1937. Unlike most constitutions the role of the Catholic Church in society **was emphasised** (Coolahan 1981) as well as the emerging States philosophy in terms of the **role of the State, the church** and parents in relation to the education system. From a comparative point of view the positioning of the Church was remarkable and

unlike central and eastern Europe whereby political mobilisation was advanced through linguistics as opposed to religious denomination and ethnic tradition (Coakley and Gallagher 2005).

Coakley and Gallagher (2005) posit that society and political culture are intertwined and that political culture does not come about by accident: the same structural forces that help to shape political culture also influence it. Countries are shaped by the path they take to **culture, politic and economic development**. Cultural evolution concerns itself with the degree to which particular values dominate and the extent to which those values are challenged by alternative views such as those held by distinctive ethnic groups. Political development speaks to peoples experience of external influences, patterns of past dominance and the consequence of historical events while socio-economic development encompasses the extent to which society has industrialised, the nature of this process and its effect on social structure. In other words cultural make-up, long-term political experience and socio-economic development have an impact on citizens values at all levels be that profound and immutable or most immediate and superficial. Few States and their institutions are passive victims of their political culture: most and some vigorously will attempt to shape their citizens political values through **central control** and manipulation of mass media or, most powerful of all, **through the education system.**

Central control through the education system:

Subsequent to the Vocational Act of 1930 and following deputation from the Catholic Church the Minister for Education was increasingly being called upon to assure the Church that VEC provision was practical and vocational in content and

that the VEC's would not be allowed to infringe on the type of education provided by the Church nor would the VEC's make provision for religious education running counter to Catholic Church teachings. By 1931 the Department was issuing guidelines to the VEC's stressing the practical and vocational nature of provision but allowing them to retain flexibility in terms of delivery. However the years that followed were marked by a general unease on the part of the Catholic Church in relation to the lack of religious education in VEC schools: publically they argued that without religion education was only information, politics was factionalism and business was commercialism. In 1942 the Department issued Memorandum V.40 outlining the rational for continuing education, but more particularly detailed the precise and specific inclusion of religious provision as well as a greater emphasis on cultural studies. Memorandum V.40 represented a significant departure from the original concept and philosophy of technical and vocational education provision, which had been to train young people for entry into employment and to improve the skills of those already in employment. The entire **focus of the VEC now shifted** to ensure **religious education** and **cultural studies** were **central to provision**. Teachers of technical skills such as woodwork and metal work were required to serve an additional two years as trainee teachers to obtain a Ceard Teastas, which indicated their competence to **teach through the Irish language**. Rural and general science teacher training was **relocated** from Cork **to St Marys College** in **Dublin** while domestic economy teacher training was **relocated** to the **Dominican nuns** also located in **Dublin** and who had been **given State support and funding** to establish themselves as vocational teacher training centres. What was once a teacher-training course delivered flexibly during the summer was now a three-year course, centrally located in Dublin, with the award equivalence of a diploma

(Coolahan 1981). The **Apprenticeship Act** was also revised during this period however the provisions were not enacted until much later with the establishment of the National Apprenticeship Board in 1959. The Board had the **power and authority** not only to establish local apprenticeship and advisory committees but **to mandate employers** to send their apprentices on compulsory training courses. The Board also **regulated** for a Day Vocational Certificate to be the mandatory entry-level qualification for apprenticeship. The Certificate **required** for apprentices to attend technical school courses by block release, day release or part-time release. **The Board authorised certification** following successful examination (Coolahan 1981).

Contested space:

Between 1945 and 1960 the development of technical and vocational education in Ireland was very much focused on leadership and the **contested space** between the VEC's, the Church and the Department of Education. Restrictions imposed on the sector by Catholic Hierarchy working through the State and the Minister of Education continued to curtail the development of technical and vocational education until the 1960's. A Commission report on Vocational Organisation noting "*technical education as the keystone to industrial development and economic security*" emphasised the role of the sector commented that they were **not receiving the promotion they deserved** (Coolahan 1981). Cooke (2009) describes the period as being typified by leadership and retrenchment, denoting a cutting off, fortification or retreat from others. John Harris in his essay *The Policy-making Role of the Department of Education* (1989) notes the array of vested interests and a general **reluctance** on the part of the **Department** to consider any policy development that was seen to **challenge** the influence of

institutions, religious bodies or even individuals and also reflects on the unfortunate and **regrettable gulf** that existed **between professional civil servants** as administrators **and professional teachers** as educators.

As a statutory body the VEC could take autonomous action in specified areas, this led to disagreements in relation to the limits of responsibility. However ultimately the Minister had legislative authority to dissolve a Vocational Education Committee or to appoint an official to act in its place. In 1946 the Department of Education established the VEC CEO Conference as a bilateral platform through which to communicate views and opinions. In 1947 the Church called on the Minister to appoint a statutory representative Council on Education to "*safeguard this unchanging scheme of education"*. The Department would be statute bound to listen such a body. The **VEC's challenged the proposal** on the grounds that the Council would be made up of clergy looking to take control of public policy in education and as such would **threaten the democratic control of the VEC's**. In 1949 the Church put forward another proposal: a Parish Plan on Vocational Education, which would establish a new tier of local government in the form of a parish council to "*crystallise our national Christian philosophy as expressed in the Constitution*". This time the Department of Local Government opposed the proposal arguing against a new tier of factional local government when the county managerial system was struggling to establish itself (Cooke 2009). Between 1947 and 1950 a **number of proposals** were put forward to **integrate** local vocational schools with local church managed schools. The Department **dismissed** such proposals, albeit the introduction of Memorandum V.40 had aligned the ethos of provision to church doctrine, the two schooling systems continued to proceed in splendid isolation from each other for many

years. VEC's schools were co-educational and charging student fees of £3 per year they found themselves catering for a more than normative distribution of under-motivated students while Church managed gender segregated schools focused on a more academic provision and charged students £30 (Cooke 2009).

In March 1944 the Department passed an amendment to the Vocational Act of 1930: Department Inspectors were given the legislative authority to dismiss unsatisfactory teachers. Representative bodies and the VEC's strongly opposed the Amendment. Later that year the Department was advised that a **Senior Inspector**, who had assessed a temporary contracted teacher and blocked his upgrade to a permanent contract, was **shot dead by the teacher** (Cooke 2009) and as Kieron now reflects *"inspectors don't do Further Education" (ref 223).* By 1947 the Minister was being congratulated publically for the substantial increase made to vocational teachers salaries, conditions of service and remuneration. However by 1951 the issue of whole time and part time contracts and salaries resurfaced. The Church were maintaining a stance that teacher payments should be subject to Committee authorisation and published in local media. Practitioners organised themselves into representative bodies: the Teachers Vocational Education Officers Organisation (VEOO) and the Vocational Teachers Association (VTA), later to unite as the Vocational Teachers Organisation (VTO) and while the Church derided them for "*their lack of cooperation"* and "*being devoted to their own self interest"* they did achieve parity of salary for all teachers both primary, secondary and vocational. In the years that followed issues relating to employment law such social insurance protection for part-time teachers were addressed by the Department and as student numbers increased so too did the requirement for teachers. Between 1945 and

1960 the number of whole time contracts increased and part time contracts increased by 53% and 59% respectively. However concerns about salary, canvassing for contracts and the provision of teacher training continued to surface with attempts to resolve the issues falling between two stools of responsibility: the VEC operating under the aegis of Local Government and the Department of Education.

Coakley and Gallagher (2005) note that up until the first systematic examination of Irish political culture which got under way in the 1970's it was possible to describe Ireland as a society insulated from Europe by an all persuasive British influence with Irish people strongly attached to the Catholic Church adhering to a religious doctrine that was austere, puritanical, cold and authoritarian and distinctively characterised by nationalism, authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism and personalisation. Schmitt (1974) defines authoritarianism as being a central characteristic combining deference to the views of leaders with intolerance for those who dissent from those views. Societal attitudes demonstrated a strong pressure towards **conformism** especially in rural areas while **loyalty to leaders** (Church and State) created anti-intellectualism in the sense that **religious and political values remained unchallenged**. The characteristics of personalisation and individualism would appear to be incompatible with this however Schmitt defines personalisation as a pattern of social relations whereby people are valued in relation to **who they are and who they know** as opposed to the qualifications they hold which also implies a tendency to evaluate and **respond to the personal character of the individual holding the position of power as opposed to the authority associated with their office**. **Key features** include a **closely integrated** pattern of **social and political relationships** and **brokerage politics**

which is entirely compatible with the broader concept of individualism and which Gallagher (1982) defines as a **preference for individual action as opposed to cooperation** or as Kieron explains **"***yes they have a statutory responsibility now that was some scam to pull off" (ref C270).* Banfield (1958) talks of *amoral familism* defined as a suspicion of and sense of competition towards all those outside the immediate family and can be attributed to low levels of economic development and a legacy of foreign rule. Ireland was predominantly an agricultural country made up of small, scattered family farms: inheritance of which went to the eldest child who was destined for the Church, the next child usually went into teaching, another to the professions, one stayed at home while those unable to earn more than £8 a week were advised to emigrated (Cooke 2009). An anthropological study of Ireland pre European Union membership by Scheper-Hughes published in her now classic works Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics (2001) provides an illuminating insight into rural community life, land ownership, village hierarchy and the power of the Church.

Aligning Ireland to European Economic Community ideologies:

Up to 1960 change was slow, relatively stable and conservative however in 1961 Ireland, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Norway applied for membership to the European Economic Communities (EEC). By way of advancing Irelands commitment to the EEC the economist and then Secretary to the Department of Finance Dr. Whitaker published his Programme for *Economic Expansion* (Irish Government 1958). Meanwhile Reverend McCarthy Professor of Moral Theology addressed the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and spoke of Irish society as "*a pendulum swinging from an exaggerated individualism to the juggernaut of socialism*" but that "*man should aim to develop*

the whole person through Christian education" (IVEA 1954). Whitaker however viewed the role of the VEC's as being three fold in the provision of:

- day courses of a specially directed nature for young people;
- evening courses for adults and
- centres of training for people to live a full and contented life in rural surroundings.

Whitaker also believed that provision should be linked to people lives and located in the community providing a social meeting place and a source of culture. Whitaker's aim was to rouse Ireland out of economic stagnation and he put education to the forefront of the debate. The Minister for Education Dr. Hillery in support of Whittaker advised the VEC's to recalibrate and to prepare staff, students and the community to meet the future economic demands of the Common Market (Cooke 2009). Hillery also tried to unify the twin track secondary and vocational schooling systems. He was of the opinion that having two separate and distinct entities was a structural weakness. At the time curriculum decisions were completely controlled by the Department and so rather than attempting to dismantle the twin systems he developed a strategy to eliminate differences through changes in the curriculum (Barry 1989). The curriculums were fused and in 1967 free education up to post primary level was introduced (Cooke 2009 and Coolahan 2005) by 1970 the Vocational Act was amended to provided for expanded organisational partnerships.

Adult education programmes had become an area of significant growth for the VEC's. Their philosophy was one of economic pragmatism and once again provision was being **driven** primarily by citizens own **self-reliance** and in the domain of **voluntary organisations** such as the Irish Countrywomen's

Association (ICA), Macra na Feirme (a voluntary body representing farmers) and Muintir na Tíre (a voluntary body dedicated to community development) who in partnership with the VEC's began delivering outreach programmes to provide vocational education and training in local community centres. There were 503 outreach centres across Ireland. Attendance was voluntary and aimed at members of the community who could not attend class during the day. Juvenile Training Centres delivered woodwork, metalwork, arts and crafts with the aim of attracting young people to education. Learners benefitted from the VEC's experienced understanding of vocational guidance. Industry leaders (Henry Ford & Sons and Messrs Ferguson Limited) donated equipment and trained practitioners in engineering innovations. By 1962 whole-time teaching staff in the VEC totalled 1,826 and more notably the part-time teaching had risen to 1,896. The Civil Aeronautics Board based in Washington made a bilateral agreement with the Technical Institutes to deliver their Flight Dispatcher License making the beginning of the provision of customised specialist training at certificate and diploma level. By 1961 the VEC's student cohort had risen to 37,695 day students and 98,081 evening students with State grants in excess of £1 million (Cooke 2009). The vocational sector began to call for an opening up of access routes to university education and for the development of regional colleges of technology to provide higher technical education. The Association of VEC CEO's established a research committee to focus on operational activities: classroom design, equipment, purchasing, industry cooperation and provision. Students were encouraged to enter industrial production and technology writing competitions sponsored by the EEC while apprentices were encouraged to enter international skills competitions sponsored by employers, trade unions and the EEC. The State with clear economic and social objectives and in an attempt to

provide equality of educational opportunity had adopted a more aggressive role: education was now viewed as an economic investment linked to a demand for technical skills. The Minister for Education Jack Lynch intervened to reiterate the responsive democratic role of the VEC's and an intolerance of any vested interests that might limit the role of the VEC, apropos of which restrictions placed on the VEC's by the Church were dispelled.

Ireland was working hard to achieve pre-accession targets for EEC membership however the French President, believing British membership to be a Trojan horse for the United States, vetoed the 1961 membership application for all four countries: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and Norway. Ireland applied again in 1970. Agreement was reached with an accession treaty signed in 1973 (Coakley and Gallagher 2005). **Joining the EEC marked the beginning of a period of accelerated change in Ireland economically, culturally and politically**. Successive treaties as well as policy development in the areas of Education and Culture, Employment, Citizenship, Social Policy and Research coupled with a fundamental shift in the nature of economic and social structures as experienced by western societies transitioning from traditional to modern society began to shape and influence contemporary Irelands education policy and provision. The pace of change had a **dramatic impact** on the **power and influence** of the **Catholic Church**. Euro barometer surveys from 1970 note that 91% of the population attended Church once a week however by 2002 the figure had dropped to 54% (Coakley and Gallagher 2005). Between 1966 and 1996 there was a 92% decrease in seminary applications. The Catholic Church, whose role had been cemented through the education system and had remained largely unchallenged since the enactment of the Constitution no longer had the clerical

personnel to resource its schools and churches (Inglis 1998). The Church was suffering a crisis of authority. Coakley and Gallagher (2005) note that in terms of **national identity** 43% of Irish citizens were beginning to identify themselves as *Irish and European* while 43% considered themselves *Irish only.* **Politically** 50% of society demonstrated low trust in parliament, 49% had low trust in government and only 28% trusted political parties. In more recent polls 82% trusted the ordinary person on the street with 17% trusting government (Irish Times 2012) while national identity was holding steady with 51% identifying themselves as *Irish and European* while 41% identified themselves as *Irish only* (European Parliament 2016).

The role of the State in legitimising authority:

The drafting of an Education Act forces a political system to define it's objective for education and even to establish a **philosophy of education**, something that was **lacking in Ireland** until 1998. Harris (1989) posits that this is partly because the nature of education is such that too much change can work to destabilise the basic structure underpinning delivery in a way that is not beneficial to learners and partly because **government administrations** do not remain constant for long, patterns do not necessarily repeat themselves and the influence of individuals, **politicians**, civil servants, **institutes** and **statutory bodies** can be crucial when it comes to politically orchestrating and forcing change. Pioneering psychologist and educationalist Torsten Husen notes that education involves direct communication and personal relationships whereas bureaucracy involves hierarchal relationships: the system is the centre of concern, decisions are taken at the centre and transmitted out, the individual takes second place (Mulcahy and O'Sullivan 1989).

The **Vocational Act of 1930** was the first educational act of the Irish Government and while legislation remedied the main deficiencies of the old technical education scheme it was focused solely on the vocational education sector. Between 1930 and 1970 the Vocational Act was amended seven times. The **next major reform** of the vocational sector took place in **2013** with The Education and Training Board Act and The Further Education and Training Act (Department of Education and Skills 2016). Conversely an **Act of Education** defining a national objective on the whole of the education system **did not appear until 1998**. To date the Department of Education has administered twenty-nine Governments and a total of forty Ministers of Education albeit nineteen of those Governments were led by or in coalition with center-right political party Fianna Fáil (Department of Education and Skills 2016). Between 1972 and 1990 the Vocational and Technical Education sector was the responsibility of the Post-Primary Inspectorate within the Department of Education. A deputy chief inspector supported by an Assistant Chief Inspector formed the senior management team (Cooke 2009). Between 1991 and 2002 the Government appointed a dedicated Minister to Vocational and Technical Education during this period specific tasks relating to Vocational Education were assigned regionally to five Assistant Chief Inspectors. Ministers are accountable to Parliament and responsible for all aspects of policy and administration including the actions of departmental officials and civil servants: the decisions they make, the risks they take and any changes they introduce. Former Ministerial advisor Harris comments that the **policy making role** of the Department **varied considerably** from time to time and was greatly affected by the **influence of certain individuals** as well as by the **style of the Minister of the day** (1989). Harris posits that the structure and public nature of accountability imposes a degree of caution on the part of a civil

servant and fundamentally leads to a conservative modus operandi. During his tenure Harris was struck by the amount of **confusion and ambiguity** that existed in relation to **how decisions were taken** and **who actually takes them**. The balance a Minister strikes between their role as **statesman focusing** on the **next generation** and **politician focusing on the next election** often **dictate**s the extent to which the **locus of power shifts** towards the civil servant. **Ministers** are elected politicians: achieving success as a statesman often comes at the expense of addressing local issues while the loss of local votes can threaten a politicians re-election to Minister. Harris comments that change is unlikely to occur in periods when decision-making rests with civil servants operating in a hierarchal structure and because the **bureaucratic nature of accountability** and a general **reluctance to take risks**, **embarrass the government** or **upset the status quo**. Creative thinking can get stifled as it works its way up the hierarchal ladder and often **results** in the soft or **safe option** being taken for fear of creating a precedent. As a consequence the role of the Department in terms of policy decision-making is not fixed or immutable but rather it is exposed to prevailing winds be that the style and perception of a minister, the identified priorities of current government or the excessive **influence of particular individuals and groups** who might exert public pressure to block or impose change.

In their study of the evolution of State administration, Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2010) identify the 19th century as a period whereby government departments ceded powers to local authorities, boards and commissions. The 20th century on the other hand was typified by central government realising power: as Harris (1989) notes the Ministers for Education played an increasing role in education policy and decision-making while the Department provided ministerial

guidance and maintained relationships with outside agencies. In terms of State administration Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2010) reflect that the small number of eleven Departments established in 1924 remained largely intact and unchanged up until 1947. Following accession to the EEC and drawing on the French experiences of economic planning Departments of Transport, Power and Labour emerged. There was also a growing tendency to move portfolios between departments in an attempt to organise issues of complexity or rationalise groupings. Between 1924 and 1997 the Department of Education only held the portfolio for education. In 1997 the Department of Education administered the portfolio for education and science and in 2010 the brief was changed to education and skills.

The development of technical and vocational education in Ireland had shifted focused towards **European priorities**, investigation, consultation and **legislation** and while the sector continued to be defined by contested space and retrenchment the **dominant voices were now European Institutions**, the **Department** of Education and the **VEC's**. Economists were emphasising education as an economic investment. The social and individual return on investment was as much a priority as investment in capital plant (Coolahan 1981). Ireland had joined the OECD in 1961 and membership to the EEC had put them on a world stage open to the influence of large institutions like the Council of Europe and the UNESCO. In their 1972 report *Learning to be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* UNESCO anticipated a lifelong learning society, which at the time challenged conventional education thinking. Their aim was to assist governments with the formulation of national strategies to develop lifelong education provision: most of which lay outside the parameters of current education systems.

A wide range of studies and reports were commissioned to examine all aspects of the Irish education system. By 1974 education expenditure in relation to all public capital expenditure had doubled to 8.09% from 4.22% in 1960 (Coolahan 1981)

The EEC distributed funds for social and regional development their focus was primarily economic development they had no desire to interfere in the business of education policy. The funding was managed by the Department of Labour: organisations such as the Industrial Training Authority (AnCo) and the National Manpower Service began to expand provision (retraining, upskilling and apprenticeships) to address EEC and OECD identified priorities of disadvantaged youth, unemployment, redeployment, and emigration. **Ireland had become an attractive base from which to supply the European labour market**: training grants were not means tested, the growth in apprenticeships went from a registered cohort of 12,349 to an OECD projected need of 70,000 (Cooke 2009) as Daniel notes *"this is like a factory, it is a continuous intake all the time a conveyor belt (ref B186)*. In order to cope with increased administration the Government established numerous boards, institutions and bodies. Coolahan (1989) reflects that many of the **changes** made to the education system during this period **were driven by a government impetus to change policy rather than in response to demand**, which led to the Department being criticised for a l**ack of clarity and inadequate consideration for the consequences** of policy decisions as Sally explains *"we spend a lot of time **fire fighting** we are now nearly 2 years post amalgamation and we still have no structures agreed .. I don't know whether the Department did not anticipate the level of level of complexity that was going to be there" (ref E286, E290).* The focus on upskilling, retraining and further

education for adults had resulted in a radical expansion of provision, one in three of the population was engaged in formal learning, yet there was no unit within the Department of Education with overall responsibility for the sector. With **growth set to meet EEC and OECD targets** for increased participation the debate rather curiously reflected power play, economic and industrial development as opposed to discussion about what constitutes good practice in growth management, quality of provision, the needs of learners or indeed a philosophy on the education. IVEA Congress reports note "*Nowadays unless you can get a pressure group and exert pressure in the right places at the right time then you are going to be left behind*" (Cooke 2009). Increasingly stakeholders were calling on government to commission a White paper on education to establish a national strategy going forward. The VEC's and the Department of Education began to lobby the EEC for Social Funds. Up to now the EEC had focused funding initiatives on economic priorities however in 1976 they reached an agreement to recognise education as a right for every citizen and by 1984 the VEC's were delivering Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes using European Social Funds. Albeit rather curiously it later came to light that the Department of Labour had transferred £5 million to the Department of Education to fund VEC youth training programmes but for some reason the funding never reached the VEC.

The Labour Services Act of 1987 established An Foras Aiseanna Saothair (FAS). In 1998 the Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation appointed FAS as successor to AnCo, the National Manpower Service and the Youth Employment Agency. Adopting this highly centralised approach the Government also proposed for the VEC's to amalgamate and move to a regional structure: at this stage the VEC's also held a remit for further and higher education provision

through the Further Education Colleges and Regional Technical Colleges. The proposal for regionalisation took the shape of thirteen Local Education Councils. By 1997 the discussion had advanced to a structure of Regional Education Councils. The VEC's coming from a community based localised structure were vigorously opposed to regionalisation, which by now had progressed to Legislative Bill and was being debated in Parliament. The Education Bill was published in January 1997 to establish ten Educational Boards however a change in Government saw the Bill fall. The new Minister for Education, Micheál Martin a teacher by profession, published a very different Bill in 1998. The Bill was legislated through the Vocational Act (Amendment) 2001 and "ring fencing the role of the VEC" enhanced their status as statutory bodies responsible for local education while also securing the composition of the VEC's which included corporate governance, financial regulation and an obligation to produce five-year strategic plans with financial commitment underpinned by annual service reports (Cooke 2009).

VEC's continued to be responsible for employing teaching staff as Keiron explains *"salaries came through the VEC, the VEC's paid them but the money came from the Department" (ref C253)* and therein posts had to be sanctioned by the Minister. During the early 1970's teacher training colleges and universities made provision for Bachelor, Master and PhD level qualifications. The Educational Studies Association was established to encourage cooperation and promote research in education. Meanwhile the Department held the view that they would only provide short training courses where teachers were in short supply: in their opinion universities were responsible for qualifying teachers both academically and pedagogically. There was also no contractual obligation on the

part of the VEC's to release staff for in-service or continuing training, even though it was widely acknowledged at the time that initial training did not adequately provide a teaching career that could span forty years. Consequently CPD was usually extra curricular, self-motivated and voluntary in nature (Coolahan 1989) and as Keiron reflects *"by and large the VEC's were very much into supports and were very understanding of it and had a history in there, others hadn't a bulls notion and that's going to be the way it is" (ref C85, C87).* At a local level the City of Dublin VEC partnered with Trinity College and the Department of Education to establish the Curriculum Development Unit, which grew to promoted the concept of the vocational teacher as a researcher and initiate projects in the area of professional development. IVEA Congress reports at the time also note levels of dissention among staff: practitioners were now referring to themselves as the "Cinderella" of the education sector in terms of employment terms and conditions (Cooke 2009). In 1973 The Vocational Teachers Association was renamed the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) and expanded membership to practitioners across the education sector. In 1974 a proposal was made to Government to establish a professional registration body for teachers. The Teaching Council was eventually established under the Teaching Council Act 2001. However registration required for the applicant to not only be employed directly by the Department of Education but to work for an approved providers, which by and large precluded VET practitioners who were considered direct employees of VEC. Records indicate that State allocated exchequer funding to the vocational sector in 1981 amounted to £82,000, of which pension contributions totalled £1,800 and teacher training totalled £806. In 1981 the Conciliations and Arbitrations Council met nineteen times to discuss VEC employee terms and conditions. Morale was low. The integrity and partiality

surrounding the awarding of teaching contracts was still an area of dispute on top of which the tenure was uncertain: many posts had been awarded on a temporary basis as twenty years of protracted discussions in relation to regionalisation had effected an embargo on recruitment as Kieron and Sally note *"it's a ruthless system … the concept of flexible staff becomes huge issue and to have a flexible group of tutors or teachers or whatever .. ultimately they will have to be the opportunity to gain permanency somewhere along the line you know it's all very well doing 5 years of flexible work but you don't want to spend your life doing it…. education is a big social responsibility so to have people coming and going and a high turnover" (ref C145, C207, C208, C211) .. "staff are suffering a huge degree of burnout because the system has been under very great pressure since the moratorium came in .. we were all really short staffed and lost staff the amount of work actually increased so people were being expected to do much more with much less and I suppose then there was one pay cut after the next after the next and you know people are really at the end of their tether at this stage the moratorium removed all the promotional posts you have to wonder about the level of engagement you can maintain when you have no progression there is very little opportunity to move without losing contractual standing" (ref E438, E504).*

A European funded study undertaken between 1998 and 2002 to analyse the training needs of VET in Ireland evidenced a sector that was largely undefined: emerging in a piecemeal fashion as a result of economic and social priorities underpinned by targeted funding programmes (McNamara, Mulcahy and O' Hara 2005). Practitioners were addressing the identified priorities of European Institutes through a wide range of State bodies and funding initiatives: early school leavers, adult literary, second chance education, post compulsory school

education and training, reskilling and upskilling for unemployed and redeployment. A lack of national cohesion and the fragmented nature of sectoral developments undoubtedly resulted in cross over and duplication of provision as Sally explains *"it's a bloody mine field … it's a very fragmented sector and when I came in to this role first it was just so overwhelming the scope and the scale of the operation you know and even just getting to grips with all the rules … it took me 2 years to get my head around how they all really properly worked and all the rules and regulations" (ref E514).* The study of practitioners perceived training needs undertaken by McNamara *et al* identified that one third of full-time and half of part-time practitioners had no teaching/training qualifications. The study acknowledged the lack of a nationally recognised qualifications for VET practitioners and a debate to formally professionalise practice as a means of ensuring quality through standardised competences while also observing the breath, depth and flexible nature of practitioners as being a valuable interpersonal characteristic in terms of sector responsiveness. Practitioners identified a preference for professional development and training and commenting on the lack of a defined career structure identified personal development, organisation and personnel management, front-line counselling and learner-centered facilitation as key areas for development. The study concluded that VET practitioners needed to undergo additional training, that training should be obligatory for employment in the sector and drawing on the reflective practice theories of Schön (1983) advised for practitioners to begin the process of examining their philosophy on education. During this period the IVEA congress reports noted a lack of recognition for the teaching profession and reflected a period dominated by and disputes over substitution and supervision (Cooke 2009). The IVEA established four policy committees one of which was mandated to generate policy proposals for in-

service and career development however their focus appeared to concentrate on the operation of a home school liaison scheme and a review of teacher allocations in post primary schools.

The Government had published the much called for *White Paper on Educational Development* in 1980 however the inevitable and protracted debate resulted in some recommendations being superseded while others, necessitating legislation, charted their own course and progressed independently. A *Green Paper on Education for a Changing World*, which made a commitment to train and develop teachers, was published in 1992 however a change in Government rendered the Green Paper obsolete while the Regional Colleges Act if 1992 gave the Regional Technological Colleges autonomy from the VEC's and the Government Budget of 1995 removed fees for post secondary education up to and including undergraduate degrees. The vocational sector now employed 5,005 whole-time teachers with a student and adult education cohort of 192,043 and Department funding of £39 million. The Education Act was finally ratified in 1998 and provided, for the first time, a statutory basis for the education system. The Minister for Education and Science announced the Act as "*establishing a series of interlocking rights and responsibilities for the different partners in education*" an indication perhaps of their attempt to bring cohesion to the "*turf wars*" and acrimonious disputes (Cooke 2009). Following a study undertaken by the OECD in 2000, which identified 25% of the population between 16 and 64 as having the literacy levels of a 12 year old, the adult literacy bodies began to lobby government to increase their budget allocation of 0.015% (Cooke 2009). The first White Paper on Adult Education was published in 2000 with The National Development Plan of 2000-2005 providing €10.9 billion to finance

implementation. The funding of adult literacy programmes alone went from €1.1 million in 1997 to €16.5 million in 2002 while the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) funding allocation increased by €1 billion as Keiron *reflects "we would have initially had very high performing students .... you'd have had students coming with a very clear vocational ideas but then it seemed to change we got a lot more young unemployed back into education under pressure to do so and less clarity about the courses that they wanted to do they seemed to come in through the door without a sure knowledge of what they actually wanted to do" (ref C40, C44).* The Minister was again proposing for the VEC's to develop a regional structure of education provision.

Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2010) note the rapid increase in the use of **arms length bodies** set up to carry out the functions of government. Public sector reform and ideas of New Public Management had resulted in a reduced civil service and a shift towards delegating power to subordinate agencies: the extent to which the functions of government were being carried out by **buffer agencies** accelerated as Kieron reflects *"you would never know what the Department are going to do, they are going to do whatever they can to avoid anybody pointing the finger at them, probably another State Agency" (ref C83, C85, C87).* Tom Barrington founding member of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) found it difficult to untangle the **fragmented** organisational web of more than four hundred bodies carrying out administrative functions on behalf of government (1980). In an attempt to categorise their functions Barrington counted more than forty commissions, offices and agencies and an additional ninety state-sponsored bodies and in doing so surmised that unlike other jurisdictions their names did not provide insight into their powers, accountability,

funding or relationship to central government. Likewise Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2010) found no official definition for these public bodies: generic terms such as "state-sponsored body" or "semi-state organisation" grouped the functions and policy domains of the agencies while activity was predominately in the area of enterprise and economic development. The OECD commented that the emergence of state agencies in Ireland had come about as a result of ad-hoc expansion and not because of any structured programme or, as is the case with other countries, as a result of public sector reform (2008). Subsequently the OECD called on the Irish Government to be more coherent in their approach to the use and governance of structures and recommended for a clearer division between policy-making and policy administration as well as the adoption of functions such as budgeting, standardisation of financing, human resource management and planning. However, little came of the OECD recommendations: MacCarthaigh (2010) note that Government established 120 new agencies between 2000 to 2010 representing the highest increase since 1900. Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2011), in an attempt to analyse the need for such a rapid expansion, categorised the drivers as compliance with EU directives, demands for greater stakeholder engagement, the need to perform new tasks without affecting core departmental staffing and the requirements of administrative efficiency. The OECD had advised a reduction in public spending as a consequence of the fiscal crisis, rationalisation as a means to achieve greater administrative effectiveness and the need to secure a more efficient deployment of staffing, the effective configuration of departments and agencies and a move towards a more joined up government (2008) and while Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2010) acknowledge that a programme for agency reduction did began in 2010 but they also evidence Government rational for contraction as being ad hoc in nature: there appeared to

be **no clear rationale** terms of which agencies should be terminated, merged or absorbed on top of which difficulties arose in relation to integrating functions, managing contractual obligations, transferring property ownership and taking responsibility for incurred liabilities.

Kirp and Bayer's seminal works undertook a comparative study of liberal democracies and their reactions to the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. The study explores government response strategies (contain & control or cooperation & inclusion) serve to illuminate the social, cultural and political character of a country (1995). Gupta (2007) explores culture, power, institutions and practices in the context of a neoliberal world. Commenting on the role of the State in education Gupta questions whether the State is an active or passive participant when it comes to decision-making. Kierns (2015) in her recent study of *Biopolitics and Capital* in Mexico pays particular attention to the role of the State when it comes to the welfare of society: viewing scandals as social eruptions through which to question the role of the State in terms of legitimisation, mediation or disassociation of itself from institutional wrongdoing and itself. Kierns considers what makes a scandal and who takes the decision on what gets exposed. Exploring systems at a local level Kierns questions whether systems are fragmented, if they work in cooperation with stakeholders, if it colludes with itself and whether the image the State portrays in terms of the messages it send out externally to the public, internally to practitioners disenfranchised people. Kierns also raises questions of funding, the vested interests of stakeholders, the locus of power, who mediates, who advocates, are they colluding, have the players a foot in more than one camp, are they manipulating their position of power, whether motivational drivers maintain the

status quo, make money or improve practice and if individuals are visible do they have a voice and are they empowered as Anne explains *"there is a distrust .... so that was my voice in it, I don't approve, I am not being part of it .... I would have my say but the say [the voice] from higher up would be much louder than my say .... again the feeling is that we are being ignored" (ref A388, A482, A464).*

In November 2008 newspapers published articles revealing "*the shameless waste of taxpayers money*" and detailing expenditure of €643,000 on first class flights and four star hotels for FAS officials and their wives (Quinlan 2009). Set against a backdrop of austerity and following budget cuts that resulted in ordinary families being unable pay mortgages and oblivious to the depth of public anger the Director General of FAS insisted that he was "*entitled*" to command first class travel, as was his wife. The Prime Minister went on public record to defend him. Later that day the Director General resigned. The Prime Minister assured Parliament that the Director Generals severance pay was "*in line with public service norms*" and also commended him for being accountable and honourable in his actions. Opposition Ministers sought assurance that there would be no "*agreement on severance pay*" until the Director General had cooperated with the Public Accounts Committee investigating spending in the "*crisis ridden agency*". The Director General appeared before Public Accounts Committee: included in their report was detailed expenditure of €600,000 for a television advert that was never broadcast. In September 2009 newspapers revealed that the Director General had received a €1.4 million "*golden handshake*" following an intervention by the Deputy Prime Minister (who was also the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment and held the remit for FAS) and the Minister for Finance. The Public Accounts Committee were informed that the Director

General had threatened to take legal action if he was not "*treated reasonably*" and also that senior officials had not sought legal advice in advance of agreeing to his demands. The Prime Minister and senior ministers denied knowledge of the severance package: pressure was mounting for the Deputy Prime Minister to explain her actions. Meanwhile the resigning Director General also tendered his resignation as chairman of the Institute of Public Administration (Quinlan 2009). The Comptroller and Auditor General published findings from their investigation into FAS (2010) however by this stage the European Commission had put European Social Fund contributions to Ireland on hold pending their own investigation into FAS. The Secretary General of the Department of Enterprise admitted having concerns about what would happen if the Commission auditors discovered misappropriation of funds with reports indicating that FAS were in charge of administering €1 billion in European Social Funds and questions being raised about the allocation of €111 million. The Public Accounts Committee launched another investigation however their lack of progress reflected a lack of cooperation on the part of the Department of Enterprise: the Comptroller Auditor General stepped in to speed things up (Ryan 2010). Meanwhile the manager of a video production company was sentenced to four-years in prison for defrauding FAS of €600,000 (O' Donaghue 2011). By 2013 FAS was embroiled in a fresh scandal with senior figures under investigation for bullying and harassment: reports noted this as the fourth such investigation since 2009 (Phelan 2013). The Minister of Education and Skills dissolved FAS in October 2013 and signed both the Education Training Boards Act which merged sixteen FAS Training Centre's with thirty-three VEC's to form regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the Further Education and Training Act which established a Further Education Sector and appointed SOLAS as the overarching authority responsible

for the national funding, planning and co-ordination of education and training programmes (Solas 2014). Two thousand staff were employed by FAS: one thousand were transferred to the Department of Social Protection, eight hundred were transferred to regional ETB's and the remaining two hundred were transferred to Solas (Frawley 2013) as Anne *reflects "heart broken all their work thrown under the, you know, just brushed away and gone in disgrace with FAS, all the work that they have ever done is now just the butt of a joke it's very it's very very upsetting" (ref A492)* and as Daniel *notes "staff would have said .... we can't go to the pub because we are getting slagged or abused .... there was a stage where you just did not mention you worked for FAS it was a bad name .... a lot of people very very upset right and there would have been a lot of kinda emotional and verbal abuse that stemmed from abuse of power and abuse of money by a small number of people" (ref B374).*

By 2014 Solas had commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake a stakeholder consultation into the further education sector in Ireland. The ESRI evidenced based report, published in April 2014, represented the first ever attempt to map further education and training (FET) provision in Ireland with a view to identifying the principal features of the sector in a national and international context. The report identifies a lack of information on the number and profile of FET teaching staff complicated by fragmented funding initiatives and noted that practitioners were now required to have attained Teaching Council approved teacher education qualifications in addition to meeting degree qualification requirements. Stakeholder comments took account for the distinctive characteristics of the sector and a requirement for practitioners to be able to assess learners needs, to develop programmes of study in response to

those needs, to assess learner progress and to have good interpersonal skills. Stakeholders felt that practitioners required a teaching qualification and relevant up-to-date expertise in industry and cautioned against an over emphasis on formal qualifications that did not take account of applied skills such as hairdressing. Stakeholders also requested that either Solas or the Teaching Council take responsibility for redefining the teacher competence framework. Interesting CPD was viewed as a mechanism through which to increase flexibility in the sector when obsolete programmes had to be dropped in favour of emerging trends as Anne explains *"I would take my lead I would take my [CPD] lead for the class and if they say I need to do something I will do it .... you'd teach something where there is a demand for bums on seats .... I go down and knock on managements door and say these are the courses I want to do because it will lead to this course which will lead to these jobs and they will feed in from this course and that's where I am going to get my people they will say grand .... I have never been refused [the CPD] I have asked for" (ref A297, A304, A400, A408)*

In 2016 the Department of Education and Skills published an *Action Plan for Education 2016 to 2019* with a vision that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe in the next decade. With five high level goals the strategy aims to deliver systematic progress to improve learners experience, progress disadvantaged and at risk learners, help those delivering education to continuously improve, build stronger bridges between education and the wider community and improve national planning and support services as Daniel explains *"so you then had to take a strategic decision at a local level do you want to sit back and let the process happen .. or do you want to actively get involved"* (ref *B350*). The Strategy is to be monitored against timelines with

annual reporting and responsibility clearly assigned. The publication of a FET Professional Development Strategy is listed as a key action for the Department, Solas and the ETBI with 2016 tagged as the timeline for deliverables while investment in the professional development of teachers is listed as a key action for Solas tagged for delivery in 2017. Implementation of the strategy is the responsibility of the Department, Solas and the ETBI and includes the development of a database has been commissioned to supporting planning and investment following which a programme for capacity building will be implemented, the timeline has been tagged for 2018/19 but as Clare explains *"we think there is about 9,000 employed in the sector but pulling all the information together for us is a challenge, finding the numbers so hopefully making inroads …. there are people who are not on the books as individuals they are on the books as hours. So you could have somebody who is doing 3 hours under this one and 2 hours under this one but when you put that contract together it's a 37 hour contract" (ref D202).* In January 2016 the Department launched their long term economic plan in the National Skills Strategy 2025. In February DCU established the Further Education and Training Research Center (FETRC) with the ambition to examine how practice can influence policy and to ensure voices are heard. Smaller informal groups like the Further Education Network are also starting to emerge. In November **2016** Solas published Irelands **first ever strategy** to focus on the **professional development** of Irish FET **practitioners**.

Without doubt the sandal that precipitated a consolidation of the further education sector in Ireland has resulted in stronger vision for education and training and the number of recently published strategies suggests the impetus is there to deliver on ambition however as Paul reflects *"we don't have any means of ensuring it's*

implementation .... personally think it is a seriously flawed document I think it is written in a language that doesn't drive action because it is unclear we need to do it in a language that is operational and that is contexted in the reality of the time, my fear is the Department will say why are you not doing what you said you would do" (ref I208) and as Anne reflects she faces an uncertain future *" at the end of the day I would still have to do what they say but I would do it kicking and screaming, I been here 20 years, I don't know what the job will be or where that job will be because they could use my skills else where and I could not be teaching at all and I think that is quite possible and plausible .... very sad, the whole thing has been soul destroying" (ref A474, A484, A492).* Mulcahy and O Sullivan (1989) note Ireland has a **long history of stroke politics**, **sticking plasters, kite flying and moving with the prevailing wind**. **Policy decisions are rarely bridged** and tend to be **based on economic or political pragmatism as opposed to an agreed ideology** based on **human dignity, tolerance, active citizenship and well-being**. **Practitioner voices are rarely heard** as Daniel explains *"no nobody had a voice in this, the Department or the Minister of the day decided right ETB's are going to be formed (ref B346)* which is a view Kieron support *"I would say [the voice] is from the top down (ref C247).* Clare reflects *"culture is huge huge" (ref D150)* and is a view echoed by McDermot and Flood in their 2010 study of leadership: culture has a habit of eating strategy if you don't build a bridge to bring people with you.

Summary:

The aim of this case study of Ireland was to begin first with a snapshot of the population, official languages, education demographics including exchequer funded operational spend per pupil/student and by way of providing context, a brief summary of the education system in terms of governance, VET strategic objectives and priorities for VET workforce development. The case study then moved forward to provide a chronological illustration of policy reform over time including background and context. We heard about the realities of practice from the practitioner's perspective as well as their **experience of CPD which in turn gave us an insight into key policy drivers**, the impact of policy reforms as well as subsequent **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers.**

Overall there is a strong feeling that when it comes to governance, policy reform, policy implementation, professional practice and continuous professional development: VET practitioners have until recently been operating in the realm of a policy governance that is set to a prevailing wind with no clearly established national philosophy of education or defined objectives for education and training. Governance has vacillated between the agendas of outside governing bodies, international institutions, religious bodies, individuals or economic indicators: fortunately for the learner stability has been anchored in a grass roots voluntary sector based on the Cooperative Movement philosophy. Policy development driven by the loudest voice has affected a provision that is **renting a moral purpose** for capacity building as opposed to one that is owned and driven by an agreed collective ideology or brokered for the demands of industry with policy implementation that is fragmented and challenged by immutable localised management and organisation.

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of governance and the **impact legislation**, **policy reform** and changing national priorities has on VET practitioners and their professional practice: VET practitioners in Ireland introduced us to **an education system** that is a contested space with fragmented policy reform and localised/individualised development of practice. On one hand Ireland developed a vibrant technical education system with the objective to improve and promote education and knowledge in agriculture and industry. Funded by membership provision was driven by the needs of the economy and industry. On the other hand and in tandem with this Ireland also saw the rise of the voluntary sector: organisations established with the aim of restoring Irish cultural identity, music, song and traditional pastimes/hobbies. Provision supported rural economic development, self-help, cooperation and initiative while participation was voluntary and driven by an intrinsic sense of cultural identity and the emergence of the Free State. The growth of the technical education system and the voluntary movement eventually necessitated the establishment of a Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) with the remit to provide technical training for boys and girls who had left school and also to train their teachers. Interestingly the philosophy of DATI was that of a cooperative movement as opposed to state control and centralisation. DATI awarded grants to local technical committees for the delivery of technical education. Provision was predominantly that of education integrated with commerce, delivered in voluntary organisations while teacher-training initiatives provided training for every type of teacher with funding for scholarships, summer camps and applied teacher training courses. Key challenges for VET practitioners evidenced difficulties with unsatisfactory terms and conditions of employment specifically remuneration and tenure while a prejudice in relation to manual labourers being socially mobile

created a barrier to the development of long term planning or expansion of the sector. The only evident threat to DATI came in the form of interpersonal rivalry, party political gains and outspoken criticism from the Catholic Church. As Ireland transitioned to become an Independent State provision for technical and further education was maintained by the State and driven by the voluntary sector. The first Department of Education assumed the role of DATI was established in 1922 and in 1925 the Local Government Act made local authorities liable for the security of tenure and pensions for whole time teachers. The Vocational Act of 1930 then established a system of **local** Vocational Education Committees as statutory bodies to provide non-denominational technical and vocational education giving equal rights of access to all students irrespective of religious belief. The mission of the VEC was philosophically a social one delivering high quality post primary education **locally** encompassing provision for marginalised and underprivileged groups and to develop education services for prisoners, the travelling community, refugees and asylum seekers. The Vocational Act of 1925 did not provide for teacher training with the result that concerns about salary, terms and conditions of employment and the provision of teacher training has been an ongoing challenge for practitioners with repeated attempts to resolve issues falling between two stools of responsibility: the Department of Education and the VEC operating under the aegis of Local Government Act. In 1937 the Constitution of Ireland was enacted giving primacy to the role of the Catholic Church in society and in relation to the education system with the result that the entire philosophy of the VEC shifted to ensure religious education and cultural studies were central to provision while governance became a contested spaced between the Department of Education, the VEC and the Church evidenced by a general reluctance on the part of the part of the Department to consider any policy

development that was seen to challenge the influence of institutions, religious bodies or even individuals. The next shift in governance came in 1958 when Ireland began the journey to align itself with the ideologies of the European Economic Communities and as such the role of the VEC's was clearly defined as the provision of day courses for young people, night courses for adults and training centres for people to live full and contented lives in rural surroundings. The Church opposed the development. **Joining the EEC marked the beginning of a period of accelerated change in Ireland economically, culturally and politically** with the result that the **power and influence of the Church diminished.** What followed was a period whereby government administrations did not remain constant for long providing for a situation whereby prevailing winds give primacy to a variety of voices and funding streams (individuals, politicians, civil servants, institutes, statutory bodies, a fragmented organisational web of buffer agencies, international institutions and world organisations) orchestrated and forced change with the result that the drafting of an Education Act to establish a national philosophy of education or define an objective for education was not achieved until 1998 and was announced as "establishing a series of interlocking rights and responsibilities for the different partners in education", which gives an indication perhaps of an attempt to bring cohesion to "turf wars" and acrimonious disputes. With the focus of technical and vocational education sifted towards **European priorities** the sector continued to be defined not only as a contested space but was also typified by retrenchment on the part of the VEC's with **dominant voices in** the shape of world organisations (such as the OECD), **European Governance and Institutions**, the **Department** of Education and **the VEC's**. When we review VET specifically the first piece of legislation enacted was the Vocational Act of 1930 however the next major reform of VET

took place as recently as 2013 with legislative Acts establishing the Education and Training Boards and The Further Education and Training sector the impetus for which found premise a *"shameless waste of taxpayer funds"* and European Commission withholding funding pending an investigation into the misappropriation of funds.

Capturing perspectives on the notion of professionalisation and the **impact policy reform** has on the structures and the role of VET practitioners in terms of the **management and organisation** of teaching and training, practice design and delivery such as workforce development, definitions and demographics, capacity building, standards and quality of practice, changing paradigms within education theory, pedagogic design and delivery, adopting learner centered approaches, widening target groups, labour market demands, the emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, organisational changes to the working environment vis a vis distributed leadership, teamwork, collaboration and extended partnerships with industry, collegial networks, ICT, administration, project management and wellbeing at work: in terms of **management, organisation and structure** the Vocational Education Committees established under the Vocational Act of 1930 were structured such that a committee made up of local authority representatives, employers, special interest expertise and trade unions governed activities while policy implementation and day to day management was the responsibility of the CEO, yearly budget allocations were replaced with compulsory rates of funding to allow for long term planning. The newly established VEC's continued to develop and advance provision. Lobbying for students to be afforded opportunities to access, transfer and progression to higher technical education provision they secured approval for five colleges of

specialisation. Practitioner training on the other hand continued to emerge as a thorny issue having been excluded from legislation neither a comprehensive plan or national strategy was introduced let alone developed with the result that workforce development was discretionary and localised until 1937 when a policy agenda of centralisation saw teacher training relocated to Dublin with state supports and funding. Joining the OECD and the EEC in 1961 saw Ireland adopt a policy of Lifelong Learning by 1974 expenditure in education has double addressing the OECD and EEC priorities of disadvantaged youth, unemployment, redeployment, and emigration. Ireland had become an attractive base from which to supply the European labour market. The growth of apprenticeships alone went from a registered cohort of 12,349 to an OECD projected need of 70,000 while in 2000 the OECD having identified 25% of the population between 16 and 64 as having the literacy levels of a 12 year old saw the first White Paper on Adult Education published and underpinned by The National Development Plan of 2000-2005 which provided €10.9 billion to finance implementation. A**dult education programmes** had become an area of significant growth for the VEC's **although evidence seems to indicate that demand was being** driven primarily by **citizens own self-reliance** and in the domain of **voluntary organisations and the suggestion that** changes made to the system during this period were driven by a government impetus to change policy rather than as a strategic response to learner demand which led to the Department being criticised for a lack of clarity and inadequate consideration for the consequences of their policy decisions. VET practitioners meanwhile were still falling between the two stools of stools of responsibility: the Department of Education and the VEC operating under the aegis of Local Government Act with additional staff funding coming from the EEC employing an increasing cohort of casualised staff on short term temporary

contracts. In 1981 the Conciliations and Arbitrations Council met nineteen times to discuss VEC employee terms and conditions. Key issues included the integrity and partiality of awarding contracts and tenure: many posts were being awarded on a temporary basis while twenty years of protracted discussions with Government trying to shift the sector towards regionalisation had effected an embargo on recruitment. Morale was low.

When it came to capturing perspectives on the notion of the practitioner and the impact policy reform has on **professional development** in terms of adding complexity to the profession, encouraging a platform for a cohesive voice, including practitioners as co-authors of VET strategy and in the development of sustainable professional development and standards of practice including qualifications and training, continuous professional development, education and training, research and self evaluation, career planning and progression, employment opportunities and wellbeing: VET practitioners described their role as that of a temporary employee with casualised contracts evidencing uncertainty of tenure and insecurity while localisation defined the development of professional practice. There was no contractual obligation on the part of the VEC's to release staff for in-service or continuing training with the result that CPD was described as an extra curricular, self-motivated and voluntary in nature. When it came to **professionalisation** and **standards of practice** teacher training colleges and universities had made provision for Bachelor, Master and PhD level qualifications during the 70's and the Educational Studies Association was established to encourage cooperation and promote research in education. However the Department held the view that they would only provide short training courses where teachers were in short supply: in their opinion universities

were responsible for qualifying teachers both academically and pedagogically. European funded studies undertaken between 1998 and 2002 analysed the training needs of VET practitioners in Ireland and evidenced a sector that was largely undefined (emerging in a piecemeal fashion as a result of economic and social priorities underpinned by targeted European funding programmes) with one third of full-time and half of part-time practitioners having no teaching/training qualification. The study acknowledged the lack of a nationally recognised qualifications for VET practitioners and the need for a debate to formally professionalise practice as a means of ensuring quality through standardised competences while also observing the breath, depth and flexible nature of practitioners as being a valuable interpersonal characteristic in terms of sector responsiveness. Practitioners identified a preference for professional development and training and commenting on the lack of a defined career structure identified personal development, organisation and personnel management, front-line counselling and learner-centered facilitation as key areas for development while experts advised for practitioners to begin the process of examining their philosophy on education. More recently following major reform of the sector in 2013 with legislative Acts establishing the Further Education and Training sector and regionalisation of the sector into sixteen Education and Training Boards **standards of practice and the professional development of practitioners** is being addressed. Following stakeholder consultation challenges took account of the distinctive characteristics of the sector and a requirement for practitioners to be able to assess learners needs, to develop programmes of study in response to those needs, to assess learner progress and to have good interpersonal skills. Stakeholders felt that practitioners required a teaching qualification and relevant up-to-date expertise in industry but also cautioned against an over emphasis on

formal qualifications that did not take account of applied skills such as hairdressing. Interestingly CPD was viewed as a mechanism through which to increase flexibility in the sector when obsolete programmes had to be dropped in favour of emerging trends. Similar to their counterparts in Australia practitioners of this study framed skills gaps in the context of being responsible for student intake (sales, marketing and income generation) and learning outcomes (assessment of learning and qualification attainment tied to income generation), developing partnerships with industry and securing jobs for learners. Practitioners are now required to have a Teaching Council approved teacher education qualification in addition to meeting degree qualification requirements. In 2016 the Department of Education and Skills published an Action Plan for Education containing five high level goals the strategy aims to deliver systematic progress to improve learners experience, progress disadvantaged and at risk learners, help those delivering education to continuously improve, build stronger bridges between education and the wider community and improve national planning and support services. The Strategy is to be monitored against timelines with annual reporting and responsibility clearly assigned. The publication of a FET Professional Development Strategy is listed as a key action for the Department, Solas and the ETBI with 2016 tagged as the timeline for deliverables while investment in the professional development of practitioners is listed as a key action for Solas tagged for delivery in 2017. Implementation of the strategy is the responsibility of the Department, Solas and the ETBI and includes the development of a database has been commissioned to supporting planning and investment following which a programme for capacity building will be implemented, the timeline has been tagged for 2018/19.

Conclusion:

Having engaged with practitioners in each country (Finland, Australia and Ireland) discussing the realities of practice and teaching in the VET sector from their perspective and placing their experience of professionalisation, professional development and CPD in the context of governance, policy development and policy implementation: capturing and highlighting the impact of policy reform on the sector and specifically practitioners in terms of **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** we have begun **the process of cross case synthesis. Treating each case as a separately study** allowed for the emphasis to be placed on individual constructs and also provided the best possible space for subjective judgements. The aim of the next chapter will be to move the analysis forward to aggregate or collect the findings using the process of cross case synthesis containing categories to display the data in and across the cases: the categories can then be viewed beside each other to provide for comparison. The data grouped into categories as detailed in Chapter 3 Methodology Table 3.31 page 119 and going forward to the next chapter falls into discussion headings of:

- **Governance – policy development;**
- **Organisation - management structures and supports;**
- **Self - practitioner professional development.**

Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to move the analysis forward to aggregate or collect the findings using the process of cross case synthesis to provide for comparison under the discussion headings of:

- **Governance – policy development.**
- **Organisation - management structures and supports.**
- **Self - practitioner professional development.**

Governance – policy development:

VET practitioners experience of professional development appears to be guided by the history and context of policy reform and the establishment of effective governance in terms of accountability, decision-making, finance, systems of quality assurance, policy implementation, practice in the field and ownership.

When we look at **Finland** practitioners introduced us to an education system that is integrated, cohesive and unified, has ambition and vision and is based on egalitarian principles of equity and fairness. Political consensus is a precondition of policy reform which is grounded in research and a collaboration between academics, policy makers and educators: they have adopted an ideology, a simple intention, a collective purpose and shared ownership that places the learners needs at the centre of the reform agenda with the result that **changes in political governance have not led to radical changes** either **in terms of agreed strategies for policy implementation** or the agreed blueprint for a phased

educational **reform agenda**. In part this could be due to a clearly agreed and identified ideology and because the **central tenet** to all policy development is one of **social capital and cohesion with civic society** grounded in **equal rights and opportunities**: their first question always being **"how does this benefit the learner"**. Accountability rests with a **dedicated body**. The Ministry for Education and Culture is responsible for legislation and subsidisation while the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for policy formulation, development, implementation and coordination. The Finnish Board of Education is **also responsible for cooperation** with employer organisations, employer trade unions, the Trade Union of Education and student unions as well as the tripartite National Education and Training Committees established to monitor and anticipate the development of skills needs. The structure of national and regional authorities with representation from unions, employers and learners appears to be inclusive and **unified**. **Decision-making** benefits from **collective discussion** at international, national, regional and local levels with **grounded research, evaluation and fit for purpose data gathering systems** providing for **collaborative implementation**. A clear **vision** exists not only for VET delivery but also for the development of VET workforce and is underpinned by legislation and funding as well as a system of progress reporting, evaluation and reform. Education policy places an **emphasis on improving the quality and professional development of practice**. Research, evaluation and a system of identifying innovative practice as well as future needs **inform both the content and provision** of initial and continuous training. **Accreditation is aligned** to the **European** qualifications framework while **international** quality assurance initiatives such the European Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) and European Reference Framework for VET (EQARF) play an increasing role in

developing and implementing national policy. In terms of **quality assurance mechanisms** the Finns have established **two systems**: one which includes more **normative mechanisms such as licensing, qualification requirements, self evaluation and external evaluation** and **a second more voluntary mechanism which encompasses quality management recommendations and quality awards**. **Education is a constitutional human right and free** up to doctoral level qualification. In-service provision is **funded by government** through local authorities with decision-making and responsibility delegated to providers and practitioners alike. **Communities of practice, peer learning and cooperation with industry is encouraged** by both government, local authorities and providers and is supported through sectoral networks, meetings and conferences

Practitioners in Australia introduced us to a system of policy reform whereby policy reform and development is in many respects responsive to and **guided by the needs of industry**. The **dynamic** of the sector is one of **competition and marketisation** supported by **workforce development strategies, productivity reporting, skills indicators, capability studies and academic/expert positions papers**: systems that emanate from the total quality management systems of Taylor (1911), Drucker (1954), Ishikawa (1985) and Deming (1986) and Juran (1995), which in turn informs the development of practitioner professional competences and practice. The culture of policy development is to take decisions without reference to research, before evaluations have been completed and to place considerable trust in quantitative metrics, which has created tensions between practitioners and government. Years of divisive policy decision making has resulted in a culture of distrust in policy reform as well as a cynicism which serves to frustrate policy implementation and depress governments capacity to

create practitioner "buy-in" and achieve traction. The VET sector in **Australia** is a **diverse space compounded** by a policy approach that is **open** to the **marketplace** of private and public providers through a process of **contestable funding**. The Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) provides a mechanism for the development and implement of national policy, which is formally the responsibility of individual State Governments. The Standing Council reports to Council for Australian Governance (COAG) who oversee reform agenda requiring cooperative action by Australian governments. **Accountability and policy development** appears to **shift** from a centralised Federal governance approach to a less centralised State governance approach and back again with the result that when accountability **changes hands** current progress in terms of policy development may be **put on hold** or be **recalibrated** according to **political agendas.** The recent centralised Federal policy of marketisation led to considerable **wroughting of the system** and resulted in the citizens of one territory electing a new state government on a mandate to take back responsibility for VET provision. Evidence of **VET policy reform was placed high on the agenda** and a priority for their "*first one hundred days in office*" public accountability review. Changes in governance aside VET **professional development** appears to continue and **benefit** from **national quality assurance regulations, audit and compliance as well as evidence based research, evaluation and longitudinal data collection** which is undertaken by a network of national and local bodies, academics, experts, providers and practitioners. Beyond regulation authorities there **does not appear to be a national mechanism for qualitative progress reporting/evaluation** however the allegation that an over reliance on the funding metrics that exposed the system to wroughting and near collapse has effected a move away from blunt measurement

that responds to unethical and opportunistic behaviour. **Funding** for professional development is provided through a **combination of mechanisms** including **federal, state, employer and individual contributions**. Federal and state contributions are applied for and awarded to organisations/training bodies via **contestable funding mechanisms**. The funding is awarded based on **government priorities** and subject to the **approval of workforce development plans/strategies** outlined during the **application process**. **Employer** contributions target **organisational business plans** while **individual contributions** align themselves closely to **personal motivation and industry compliance/regulation**.

In **Ireland** VET practitioners experience of policy reform appears to be that of a **slow and arduous affair except on the occasions** when rapid change has been **necessitated by outside pressures or as a reaction to crisis**: the space is described as one that is **fragmented**, contested and **driven by dominant stakeholder agendas or international initiatives** (such as the OECD and European Union) which has **resulted in retrenchment and resistance at a local level**. To date the task of establishing a national policy for VET professional development has been frustrated: for many years the development of a national strategy in relation to the **professional development** of VET practitioners appears to have not move beyond practitioners lobbying for parity in terms of the **fundamentals such as wages and terms and conditions of employment**. Fragmentation affects **workforce planning and development: gathering data** on the numbers and people employed in the sector was also presented as an **arduous task** and made it **difficult to establish workforce demographics** or to

undertake gap analysis of skills and competencies through which to begin the process of **policy planning and development**. **Research and evaluation** is **commissioned** by ministries, government agencies **or motivated by personal interest** and is undertaken by a mix of consultants, research bodies and academia with professional bodies providing for external audit. **Funding** for professional development is provided through a **combination** of **individual** contributions, **international contestable funding programmes** and **national exchequer** budget allocations, decision-making and responsibility for which is **managed locally** by the head of the organisation. In terms of national **quality assurance mechanisms** accreditation for formal qualifications undertaken in approved institutes is aligned to the **National** Qualifications Framework, which is guided by the **European** Qualifications Framework initiative and awarded by the statutory authority Quality and Qualifications Ireland. Accreditation for in-service provision **and informal** learning is a **voluntary mechanism**. **Practitioner networks and peer learning is evidenced but** it appears to be **specific** to practice in terms of expertise/learner dynamic and is **siloed according to the particular funding initiative**. Outside of trade union representation there appears to be **no unified practitioner voice**. Historically the sector has been focused on the provision of education and skills development for employability, the ambition being to remain flexible and responsive to labour market needs. In more recent years equality of opportunity and access have been key aspirations. In many respects this concentrated focus on provision has perhaps resulted in a cohesive strategy for professional development being somewhat neglected. **More recently the sector has gone through major reform**. A national authority was established with responsibility for the further education sector as a whole. **A national strategy** was developed **in consultation with stakeholders and has resulted in a clearly**

defined focus that is **responsiveness to changes in the economy**. **Responsibility for implementation is delegated** to a structure of **regional** Education and Training Boards accountable to the national authority Solas. A **national strategy** specifically targeting the **professional development of practitioners has been developed**. It is envisaged that the process will take a phased approach to developing practice with infrastructure, funding supports and targeted initiatives being the initial priorities. **Responsibility is delegated to local managers** accountable to the **regional bodies** who are in turn accountable to the national authority. Practitioner networks, with a focus on quality of practice and evidence based research, are beginning to emerge. **The coming years will evidence** how the new collectively agreed strategy is implemented and whether regional management, local providers and individuals continued to engage with the process and **if traction was achieved**.

Organisation - management structures and supports:

When it comes to the organisation and management of professional practice the concept is used in a number of ways. UNESCO (2014) define **professionalisation as: a licence** to practice; **a distinctive occupation closed to outsiders**; **a relatively high level of social status and income**; **an independent body** that **regulates entry** and **overseas professional practice leading to self regulation**; **a set of norms and codes** shared by the profession and which **regulates conduct** or **appropriate training** to **acquire the knowledge to underpin practice**. **Professional development** on the other hand is evidence as **improving knowledge, updating and refresh skills**. It can take the shape of **in-service training**, residential programmes, placements in industry, mentoring, distance learning. It can be organised whole school or commissioned. **Funding**

can come **from central government**, which denotes a national objective **or from the organisational budget,** which suggests the training intervention is meeting a locally identified need. The influential writings of Dewey (1933) and his distinction between routinised and reflective thinking have been fundamental to the conception of professional development through reflection. In terms of cross case synthesis and comparing practitioners perspectives of in terms of their experience of professionalisation and professional development the focus of this section will be on the **organisation and management of structures and supports** in relation to quality assurance mechanisms: organisational support structures **established by government** and those **brought about by professional standards of practice**.

In the case of **Finland** when it comes the organisation and management of structures and supports to provide for professionalisation of practice the systems is developed collaboratively by government in consultation with stakeholders and practitioners. **Quality assurance mechanisms** appear to be robust with quality management and quality provision a key objective for policy development. In **terms of entry level qualifications** practitioners are **legislatively required** to have an appropriate masters **degree**, a degree from a university of applied sciences, **three years work experience and a minimum of 60 ECT credits in pedagogic studies**. The level of training is world renowned, **high in quality** and **centrally delivered** through **dedicated universities and polytechnics specialising in education**, teaching and learning and have their foundations in practitioner engagement and development. The training programmes are typically **five** years in duration and built on a **model of flexible delivery** to include educational science and vocational pedagogy and to encourage the development

of research skills through thesis and project work. **Aptitude testing and motivation** are intrinsic and **formal components of selection**. Practitioners are also expected to have **extensive knowledge of working life** in order to provide on-the-job learning and demonstration of skills. The extent to which quality assurance extends to part-time and **casual staff is less clear** however **the system** does have **professional autonomy at its core** and in keeping with the theories of Senge (2006) **encourages shared accountability**, **learning communities, peer review and self-evaluation** as opposed to inspectorate assessment. The Finnish Board of Education **guidelines for evaluation** have a foundation in best practice, research and international standards of quality assurance. Assessment does **not** appear to be **linked to an incentivisation scheme** and negative assessment does not appear to lead to sanctions such as warnings and terminations rather the quality assurance **environment encourages self-regulation**, **respect, collegiality, collaboration and an ethos of development without fear of failure** which suggests that recourse or systemised forms of independent review are the responsibility of the practitioner through the process of self reflective practice as espoused by Dewey (1933). National quality awards are a feature of staff incentivisation and play a role in raising the profile of VET practice.

In terms of **professional standards** VET practitioners in Finland are r**ecognised as high status professionals**, they do **not require a licence** to practice and the **occupation is not closed to outsiders**. A national body, working **in collaboration with stakeholders** and expert groups, serves to **guide practice** and the **development of training**. The national authorities **routinely** undertake to survey practitioner demographics and performance capacity as well as to **identify areas in need of improvement**. The level of training appears to be appropriate to

the practitioners needs, **standards** appear to be **attainable** with an emphasis on sustainability. A set of norms, **codes of practice** and ethical standards are **shared by practitioners** and although **driven by self-regulation and evaluation** the ethos of **seeking consensus** is considered to be a **hallmark** of good teaching and learning. **Purposeful professional developed is encouraged**. Individuality is blended with a low degree of hierarchy. **Autonomy is encouraged** and **distributed leadership is a feature of practice**. **Practitioners have the power** and latitude to follow through on their decisions, they also expect to be given time to accomplish their goals. Practitioners are **encouraged to become researchers**: **sustainable leadership** and change management are a **key feature of professional development**. Practitioners are also encouraged to progress into management roles; **attainment is not linked to length of service** and qualifications focus on education management and building leadership capacity. **The role is that of a visionary**. **Professional practice** in Finland is **distinctive**: their approach is to instil a **sense of purpose, collective responsibility and shared ownership** with the **practitioners voice** and **empowerment** at the core of professional development. Discussions appear to be **focused on issues of quality** as opposed to wages, terms and conditions of employment. The extent to which professional standards extend to **part-time and casual staff is unclear** however Finland has a strong commitment to in-service training: education is free and constitutionally protected as a human right. **CPD is also free** and **easily accessible**. Practitioners are required to undertake **five mandatory CPD days** a year. **Progression is self directed and self-paced**. Practitioners are generally **awarded credits** for participation in CPD. The credits are **linked to national and European qualification frameworks**. On **the job learning** is an **integral component of practice** and **partnership with industry is encouraged**.

Practitioners are encouraged to return to industry every five years not only update to update skills but to refresh knowledge and competences. It is acknowledged that practitioners migrating from industry need to develop vocational pedagogic expertise and as such opportunities for dual qualifications in this respect are being developed. The **system supports professional learning communities**. **Exchange of best practice**, **peer learning** and **mentoring** is encouraged and more importantly **built into contract hours**. Whether the system of peer review is effective when it comes to the casual part time and **contract staff** who **might be isolated from practice is unclear** but there is an acknowledgement at national level that the process of peer review needs further development.

When it comes to **quality assurance mechanisms** in **Australia** entry-level qualifications are guided by attainment of **Certificate IV combined with industry expertise.** The occupation **is not closed to outsiders**. **National research bodies** work **in collaboration with stakeholders and expert groups** to **guide policy developments**. **Regulation compliance** is a **mandatory requirement to access government funding**, which is **awarded through the mechanisms of contestable funding mechanisms**. The minimum requirement for practice is Certification IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Aside from organisation wide **compliance audit/inspection** and **management performance reviews** there appears to be **no national system of practice assessment and evaluation** be that peer review or inspection. **Professional standards** appear to aspire to an **industry standard but application is localised**. **Mechanisms for assessment are idiosyncratic to each training organisation**, organisational governance and terms and conditions of employment. **Assessment of performance** appears to be gauged in terms of **student supply and demand**

and career progression does not appear to be dependent on length of service. The system of audit and compliance appears to encompass part-time and casual contract staff. A key consideration during **recent reforms** was the establishment of **a professional body** or registration authority as a mechanism for regulation as well as an acknowledgement that practitioners should have a voice **however national authorities are cognisant** that successive and **divisive policy decision-making** has **damaged trust** and has left them with considerable ground to make up in terms of achieving buy-in from the sector.

In terms of **professional standards**: VET practitioners **do not require a licence** to practice however practitioners are **required to be qualification compliant** and adhere to **national quality assurance regulations**. National research bodies work in collaboration with stakeholders and expert groups to guide practice development and **implementation at a local and individual level**. In general **a set of norms and codes** of practice appear to **exist** and while certification compliance is a reality **the quality** of training has been exposed to wroughting with the result that **standards have been called into question**. **Funding** appears to be viewed as a **capital investment** and therein access to in-service training, **CPD** and content is at the **employer's discretion** and linked to terms and conditions of employment. Practitioners on part-time or casual contracts do not appear to have the same levels of opportunity or access. Practitioners are generally **awarded credits for participation in CPD** and while the credits are **linked to a national qualification framework** and standards are both flexible and attainable the **quality of provision** and assessment leading to awards has recently **come into question**. The **voice of industry strongly influences the content of CPD**, the move towards teacher proof training packages has led to the

role of the VET practitioner as an educator being somewhat **diminished**. Practitioners experience appears to be one of **self-employed entrepreneur responsible for student intake (demand) and the supply of provision in accordance with industry trends and contestable funding priorities**. The result of which appears to be **a system of quickness to market** in terms of the structure and content of **CPD/training interventions. Sustainability** in terms of communities of practice appears to be **self-motivated** and it is **unclear** as to whether there is a **safety net** to catch **practitioners** who might be **isolated from their peers** and practice developments: although as mentioned earlier the establishment of a professional body is under discussion. There is a sense that **practitioners view themselves as experts**: **discussions** tend to **focus on productivity** and **an ambition to stay abreast of compliance, regulation and contestable funding criteria as opposed to issues of quality** in terms of professional develop or wages/terms and conditions of employment. There is an acknowledgement at a national level that the changing role of the VET practitioner needs to be supported and that the status of the profession needs to be raised. Recent studies have identified the factors influencing and supporting high quality practice, the levels of qualification and CPD required to underpin professionalism, demographics and perceptions of practice. There is also an **acknowledgement that practitioner's play a critical role in terms of co-writing policy and professional development and a realisation that there is no silver bullet** in terms of Certification IV being the one single unit of competency **through which to achieve the breath and diversity of provision required by practitioners.**

In **Ireland** when it comes to **quality assurance mechanisms** the accepted entry level standard tends to be **guided by degree level qualification combined with industry expertise/practice**. There appears to be **no national system of practice assessment and evaluation** be that peer review or inspection. **Mechanisms for assessment** are **localised and idiosyncratic to the training organisations** in terms of organisational governance and individual terms and conditions of employment. **Assessment and evaluation of performance** appears to be gauged in terms of **student supply and demand** and does not appear to extend to part-time and casual contract staff. It was **unclear** as to whether **a negative assessment leads to a positive training intervention or sanction**s such as warnings or termination and as such it was **difficult to ascertain whether there was recourse for independent review**. **Career progression** tends to be **dependent on length of service** while **advancement** to management **depends on length of service and qualification**. **Recent reforms** have established a national body with responsibility for developing a **national strategy** for the **professional development** of practitioners, **however implementation** has been **delegated** to **hierarchal structure made up of regional bodies and local management**.

When it comes to **professional standards practitioners do not need a licence** to practice. Recent developments evidence a **policy direction moving towards** the alignment of VET practitioners with their counterparts in schools education who are required to **register with the national regulatory authority/council**. There is a **fee for registration, paid by the practitioner**. Registration is **renewed at regular intervals** and **requires** the practitioners to **maintain a level of continuous professional development based on CPD hours or credits achieved**. Terms and conditions of employment for school educators is

contingent on national regulatory authority endorsement. At the moment VET professional **practice is not distinctive or closed to outsiders**, although **achieving security of tenure**, **income and other benefits** including permanency is a **complicated and lengthy process**. There is **no evidence** of an **independent professional body advocating for or setting standards for practice** and as such it was **difficult to establish whether professional development is progressive, continuous, structured or accredited**. When it comes to **norms and shared codes of practice** the system appears to be **flexible** with **practitioners operating** within their **programme funding silos**. **Sustainability** in terms of communities of practice appears to be either tied to contestable funding mechanisms or **self-motivated**. **Appropriate training**, topics and content aimed at acquiring knowledge **to underpin practice** is **localised** and at the **discretion of employers or self-motivated staff**. It was difficult to establish whether CPD workforce planning trends towards encouraging research based skills development, work based-learning, collaboration with industry or pursued popular trends. **Funding is viewed as a capital investment** and therein **access** to in-service training and CPD is at the **discretion of local management and linked to terms and conditions of employment.** Practitioners on **part-time or casual contracts do not** appear to have the **same opportunities or access** to in-service training and it is **unclear** as to whether there is a **safety net** to catch **practitioners** who might be **isolated from peers** and practice developments. **Self-motivated individuals** undertaking independent study/education with approved providers are incentivised through **revenue allowances**. Practitioners appear to **view themselves as both self-employed experts and entrepreneurs responsible for student intake (demand) and the supply of provision in accordance with industry trends and contestable funding priorities**. **Discussions** centered on **insecure tenure of**

contract, **terms and conditions of employment** and **moratoriums blocking permanency, advancement and progression**.

Self – practitioner professional development:

When we look at **recruitment** across the three cases we get a feel for what **motivates** and attracts **individuals** to work in VET, the structure of **contracts**, the **terms and conditions of employment**, **incentives and career advancement**, **staff development**, **barriers and enablers** in terms of **access to provision** and the **practical resourcing** of professional development in terms of **time-off and substitution**.

In **Finland** becoming a VET practitioner is a **highly regarded profession**. **Motivation** appears to be at the **intrinsic** level of being exposed to the profession, enjoying it and proceeding to attain the qualifications required to obtain employment: which can take five years or more. Practitioners **enjoy a professional status equivalent** to that of **doctor or lawyer**. **Recruitment** falls into **two categories** those who **plan teaching** as **a career** and those who are approached with an offer of ad-hoc hours be they **canvassed as an industry expert** or to **cover sick leave** and therein the vacancy can be full time, part-time or casual contract. **Applications** to enter initial **teacher training exceed supply**. **Selection criterion** includes screening the candidate for **aptitude and motivation**. When it comes to **terms and conditions of employment** the **route to achieving permanency depends** on whether the individual **approaches** the profession as a **qualified teacher or** as an **industry expert migrating to the profession**. As a **qualified teacher permanent contracts** are **awarded on entry**. However **industry experts migrating** to the profession appear to **undertake a**

journey of phased entry: **the initial contract is often temporary and paid by hourly rate, hours are gradually increased, contract renewal is often dependent on the student intake until eventually and following a number of successive contracts permanency is awarded**. Once **permanency is achieved** individuals enjoy the **same standards, terms and conditions of employment as their peers**. The system **doesn't appear** to be **incentivised by bonus type mechanisms**. **Recruitment, induction and promotion** appear to be **controlled by the head of the organisation** and while **funding comes from government via local authorities** it is the **head of the organisation that holds the locus of power in terms of decision-making**. There is **recognition** at national level that the **current system** of induction **needs to be improved** at a local level in terms of inadequate co-ordination and financing. Government is looking **to strengthen legislation to shift the locus of power to practitioners**, to ensure access to adequate in-service support as well as making a commitment to double the funding envelope for professional development by 2016. In terms of **career trajectory** the system appears to be **well defined and structured**: practitioners require a **degree level qualification** to practice and a Masters level qualification to segue into management or government administration. **Career trajectory** is **not solely dependent** on **length of service and qualification**: **practitioners discuss progression** not only **as legitimate and possible** but **also in terms of testing themselves** "dipping their toe in the water without fear of failure" to gauge their suitability and fit. When it comes to professional development and **access to CPD**, as was mentioned earlier, education **is free** up to doctoral level and CPD is **fully subsidised by government**. Extended **leave of absence to study** is also **subsidised** with the individual being supported with living allowance up to 70% of current salary. In addition practitioners are **timetabled**

for four hours of professional development **per day** plus an additional **three hours per week**. While funding and access is not an issue it is **unclear** as to whether **part-time or temporary contract** staff enjoy **parity of investment in their CPD** in terms of the organisational **resourcing, requesting time off**, **substitution and supports to attend CPD**. Practitioners highlight **time and self-motivation** as being the **biggest barriers to participation**.

In **Australia motivation** to become a VET practitioners appears to be more of an **organic process** at the level of being **exposed** to the profession, **enjoying** it and **proceeding to attain the qualifications** required to obtain employment: which can **take one week to achieve.** Becoming a VET practitioner has shifted from being a position with good career prospects to being a **casualised contract** however more **recently** it has began to **re-emerge** as a **relatively attractive full time career proposition**. **Recruitment** falls into **two categories** those who **plan teaching as a career and** those who are approached as **freelance contractors** with an offer of ad-hoc hours be they **canvassed as industry experts or to cover sick leave**. The vacancy can be full time, part-time or casual freelance contract. The **demand for teaching staff** is **dependent on market demand** and with the recent **policy decision to open up access routes to learners through grant-aided mechanisms** the sector has been through a period of **rapid expansion**. That said, as a consequence of **wroughting in the system**, VET practitioners are **now facing into a period of consolidation and contraction**. There is also an acknowledgement at national level that **divisive policy decisions** have had an **adverse affect on attracting and recruiting individuals** to the profession. Research is underway to begin the task of aligning VET practitioners with their peers across the education spectrum. **Selection criterion** is heavily **focused on**

industry expertise and does not include screening the candidate for aptitude and motivation. When it comes to the **terms and conditions of employment** the route to achieving **permanency** also undertakes a **journey of phased entry**: **the initial contract is often casual, hours are gradually increased, and contract renewal is dependent on the student intake/demand**. **Vacancies** are **open competitions** with practitioners submitting their applications to a **process of interview, selection, offer, acceptance and contract of employmen**t. Once **permanency is achieved** the individual enjoys the **same standards, terms and conditions as fellow employees**. The system **does not appear to be incentivised by bonus type mechanisms**. R**ecruitment, induction, promotion and dismissa**l appear to **be controlled by the head of the organisation** and particular to internal procedures. Recent studies acknowledge that casualised contracts, poor induction and lack of local supports affect how practitioners do their job. In terms of **career trajectory** practitioners in **larger organisations** appeared to have a **well-defined and hierarchical career structure** moving through **levels of advancement** and **linked to performance**. Career trajectory is **not solely dependent on length of service and qualification**. Organisational structures provide for **segue into management** roles up to and including **head of school and directorship**. **Practitioners discuss progression as a legitimate option**. When it comes to **professional development** access to **CPD is managed locally** by the **head of the training organisation** and it is **unclear** as to whether **part-time or temporary contract** staff **enjoy parity of investment be that time off, substitution or additional supports to attend CPD.** Practitioners highlight the **marketised nature** of the sector and the **drive to keep costs low**, which often **results in operational costs such as CPD being cut** when **organisations** are **competing** against each other **on price**. Practitioners mention **funding and time**

as being barriers to their participation in CPD. In terms of the **quality of professional development** there was an acknowledgement that the **narrow focus of the Cert IV and a concentration on skills acquisition does not expose the practitioner** to the notion of **personal development of practice. There is no expectation for practitioners to advance beyond Cert IV** and therein **the impetus for professional development** is **optional, self-motivated and usually in response to regulation compliance requirements**.

In **Ireland motivation** to become a VET practitioners appears to be either a **chosen career path** or as a result of an **organic process** at the level of being **exposed to the profession, enjoying it and pursuing it aggressively** both in terms of achieving expert status, recognition and a level of **permanency**. Becoming a VET practitioner is a **relatively attractive career prospect** however **achieving permanency is difficult and requires tenacity**. Recent policy reforms have begun the process of aligning VET practitioner status with that of their peers across the education sector. There is a long history of practitioners lobbying for parity of employment terms and conditions. **Recruitment** falls into two categories those who **plan teaching as a career and those** who are either c**anvassed as industry experts or approached as freelance contractors** with an offer of **ad-hoc hours or to cover sick leave** and therein the vacancy can be full time, part-time or casual contract. The **demand for VET practitioners** is to a large extent **dependent on market demand**. When it comes to **terms and conditions of employment** the route to achieving permanency depends on whether the individual approaches the profession as a qualified teacher or as an industry expert migrating to the profession. As a **qualified teacher permanent contracts are awarded on successful entr**y. However **industry experts**

migrating to the profession appear to undertake a journey of phased entry: the initial contract is often temporary and paid by hourly rate, hours are gradually increased in accordance with market demand and contract renewal is dependent on yearly student intake. **Following a number of successive temporary contracts** the individual is **legally entitled to a contract of indefinite duration**. In the event a **permanent post** is advertised the **competition** is open to the public with practitioners s**ubmitting** their **applications** to a process of **interview, selection, offer, acceptance and contract of employment.** Historically **the integrity and partiality** surrounding the awarding of permanent contracts has been called into question with distrust and cronyism set against a backdrop whereby tenure is uncertain and the system typically resorts to awarding temporary contracts of employment as a result of a systematic and routine government embargo on recruitment. Once **permanency is achieved** the individual enjoys the **same standards, security of tenure and terms and conditions of employment as fellow employees**. **Recruitment, contracting and promotion** require the training organisation **request Ministry authorisation** and there is a **history of moratorium** when it comes to receiving official sanction. **Induction** appears to be **controlled** by the **head of the organisation and local management**. In terms of **career trajectory** advancement into management roles is **dependent on length of service and qualification**. The system **doesn't appear to be incentivised** by bonus type mechanisms, **if anything the reverse appears to be commonplace** with imposed **moratoriums on recruitment, grade advancement and salary increments presenting as routine barriers to be surmounted**. Practitioners **do not** appear to **identify** with the notion of a **career path or career trajectory beyond** achieving **permanency**. When it comes to **professional development access to CPD is managed locally** by the head of the

training organisation however **funding comes via Government who retain decision-making powers** which **often read as blocking access/advancement or inertia as responsibility for workforce development falls between two stools of responsibility**. **Practitioners** speak of a **reluctance to request CPD without evidence of employer/market demand to provide justification**. The **fast pace turnaround** of programme content and delivery was **discussed in terms of uncertainty and survival and therein provides a disincentive for long-term planning of professional development**. The experience is therefore not unlike that of VET practitioners in Australia whereby the content and structure of **CPD favours quickness to market training interventions to ensure practitioners avoid stagnation**. Practitioners also mention **ministry/organisational approval, time and personal finance as being barriers to participation in CPD**. It is unclear as to whether part-time or temporary contract staff enjoy parity of investment be that time off, substitution or additional supports to attend CPD.

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter was to move the data analysis forward to aggregate or collect the findings using a process of cross case synthesis to provide for comparison under the discussion headings of:

- **Governance – policy development.**
- **Organisation - management structures and supports.**
- **Self - practitioner professional development.**

As case studies into the professionalisation of VET practitioners Finland, Australia and Ireland reflect **three quite different approaches** to practitioner

professional development yet similarities exist. It is also evident that when it comes to **policy implementation** and ability to **achieve traction** the sector is guided by both the **history and context of policy reform** and the establishment of **effective governance:** each is **driven b**y a focus be that **an ideology**, **an aspiration** or a **goal concerning economic growth and productivity**. In situations **where governance is unified and cohesive** and where the workforce is secure in terms of tenure/terms and conditions of employment the **development of professional practice** appears to be **high in quality** and **autonomous in nature** however in situations where the **space is contested**, **where accountability is fragmented** and where the workforce is insecure the **development of professional practice** appears to be **localised and modest with varying degrees of consistency**. There is evidence that **professional development** and the **quality of practice** is a consideration and **is recognised** during the process of **policy reform** however the **strength of policy reform** in the case of Australia and Ireland can be **exposed to the winds of change** in terms of **government/political priorities** while **traction** appears to be **influenced** by decisions taken in terms of **organisation management structures and supports and** the **locus of power** in terms of **accountability, decision-making, the scaffolding provided by quality assurance mechanisms**, **the development, implementation and coordination of policy**, **the mechanisms for funding as well as the nature and scale of practice in the field**. **Professionalisation** can act as a resource to **sustain and improve the quality of practice**; if used in the right way **it can motive practitioners towards self-improvement and high performance. Alternatively is can be employed to training staff in new processes, procedures and practices**. **An effective system** will not only **identify the needs of staff and match training provision accordingly** but will **also quality assure**

provision through assessment, evaluation and accreditation of providers. Ideally the **content of provision** should not only **address the needs of the practitioners in terms of building capacity but also introduce innovations**. Quantitative metrics can provide an evidence base to advance practice but in situations where there is a lack inclusion or indeed a space provided for the practitioner to participate in the stakeholder dialogue of sectoral development the process has a tendency to become frustrated. **Effective systems** also **allow for practitioners to progress through and up to higher-level academic qualifications**, which is a key consideration given that quality of leadership in education is critical to change and improvement. When we review the cases of Finland, Australia and Ireland in terms of the professionalisation of the **practitioner and professional development** brought about by professional standards of practice **the concept of professionalisation** appears to place an **emphasis on experience, training qualifications, research and publications** while **professional performance** on the other hand tends to **measured through total quality management systems**. **Professionalisation** also seems to r**esult in practitioners having a voice when it comes to shaping practice in terms of quality assurance**, **qualifications, career structure, rewards and evaluations**. On the whole **practitioners** appear to be a **highly qualified and competent group** of professionals who are by an large intrinsically motivated and strive to maintain the professional development of their **skills, knowledge** and personal competences in order to keep up with changing pace of today's jobs and today's occupations while **remaining flexible and responsive** to the demands of industry and the changing needs of the **labour market.** In addition to which practitioners are **cognisant of learners needs** and feel a responsibility not only to facilitate learner centered approaches to skills acquisition, knowledge attainment and the

development of personal competences but also to develop professional competence in the area of **psychological supports and counselling in order** to **help learners develop the resilience** required to keep up with and adjust to the fast moving and changing pace of the world of work. Yet conversely when it comes to policy reform and development they present a group who are not heard when the **system scaffolding** and **organisational structures** that should serve to include them are not a feature of the decision making process of professionalisation of practice, policy development and policy reform.

Having collated practitioner experiences and perspectives in relation to the realities of practice and professional development and having analysed and compared the data findings in terms of governance, policy reform, history, context as well as organisation, management structures and supports, self and practitioner development using a process of cross case synthesis the aim of the next chapter will be to consolidate the findings into a set of recommendations that might serve to inform the future developments of **professional practice** for practitioners or be of benefit to countries, policy developers and stakeholders **embarking** on a **policy agenda of sectoral reform**.

Chapter 6 Recommendations

The aim of this chapter is to review and consolidated the case study findings into a set of recommendations that might serve inform the future development of **professional practice** for practitioners or be of benefit to countries, policy developers and stakeholders **embarking** on a **policy agenda of sectoral reform**. The recommendations presented for consideration will be structured using the headings identified in the previous chapter and will not only reflect practitioner's experience of the realities of practice and their professional development but also their experience of the impact of **policy implementation** and the **achievement of traction** being guided by the **history and context of policy reform** as well as **country, context and culture:**

- **Governance – policy development.**
- **Organisation - management structures and supports.**
- **Self - practitioner professional development.**

Governance - policy development:

Developing an understanding of the realities of VET practice as well as practitioners experience of CPD and reflecting on the similarities and comparisons of experience we gain an insight into how policy **is developed** and how **reform agenda is implemented**, **funded and coordinated** which in turn led to the identification of **key drivers, issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** that have an **impact on policy development** and the **achievement of traction.** With policy reform as a backdrop to VET practitioners professional development,

the three case studies revealed three very different approaches to VET governance, policy development, the implementation of reform agenda and the development of practitioner's professional practice; that said elements of practitioner experience and areas of commonality were evidenced that warrant consideration by both policy developers and practitioners.

When it comes to **country, context and culture** VET practitioners provided us with a narrative through which we began to consider the degree to which VET policy development and VET practitioners professional development responds to the **history and context of policy reform** and goes some way to underpinning the work of CEDEFOP who during their 2004 study of European VET Systems noted the degree to which VET policy touched on the regulation of society (through skills development, knowledge, economic performance and social institutions) and rather interestingly began to identify the notion of culturally orientated VET. Focusing on the alignment of policy to a Lifelong Learning agenda, CEDEFOP applied the theories of Hofstede (1993) and Georg (1993) who exploring national mentalities and work cultures proposed that "*work culture, like culture in general, actually conveys a vague idea in a consistent context*". What CEDEFOP discovered (and what VET practitioners to this study evidenced) was the incredible persistence of culturally inherent values, traditions and national mentalities, concluding that **when we take cognisance of culture, country and context** we begin to **understand** how **national responses to *"structural change and processes are governed*** *by a considerable and* ***dogged tendency to cling to tradition"***.

When it comes to **adopting models of education and the identification of ideologies/aspirations and ambitions** VET practitioners to this study provided a narrative through which we began to question whether countries and governments **"own, broker or rent"** their national education systems or indeed the processes through which they develop and implement policy. A topic raised by renowned educationalist Pasi Sahlberg, international expert in the area of policy reform and special advisor to policymakers, who recently began to highlight the adoption of market based standardised education systems that borrow a moral purpose for capacity building. Sahlberg also reflects that this template for education policy appears to be inculcated by governments as a self contained unabridged unit, packaged and ready for wholesale implementation regardless of country, culture and context (2015). The **subsequent disconnect between policy development and national implementation** is a familiar topic of discussion for educationalists around the world. As Fordham Institute (2017) posit there is plenty of evidence in terms of what works in education however it appears governments are never quite sure how to bridge the gap between the development of smart policy and the scaling up smart policy: **in essence they are never quite sure which policy lever to pull in order to achieve traction**.

In Finland we are introduced to a system whereby VET practitioners have ownership of the vocational education and training system with **key policy drivers** indentified as strong, cohesive and acknowledged ideologies built on the core principles of equity and fairness, and a vision that places the needs of the learner at the heart of a collaborative decision-making process. When it comes to the **impact of policy reform** on professional practice, VET practitioners introduced us to the notion of education as an investment to increase productivity

as opposed to a social cost to maintain an industrial society and as such policy development is planned using a long term phased approach with the result that progress remains immune to changes in political governance and market driven policies. While in the case study of **Australia** we discover a system that borrows/brokers a purpose for vocational education and training with **key policy drivers** identified as changes in political governance and the demands of industry with policy principles of marketisation, fiscal sustainability and contestable funding. Set against a backdrop that sees **policy priorities** vacillate between political parties, ministerial departments and industry, practitioners experience of policy development is that of a system guided by business metrics whereby policy implementation has been weakened by years of divisive policy reform and where practitioners evidence a cynicism and distrust in policy reform agenda in addition to which they have no voice in the dialogue. When it comes to the **Irish case study** we experience a system that has historically set its sail to prevailing winds with no clearly established philosophy of education or defined objectives for VET. Governance has vacillated between the agenda of governing bodies, international institutions, religious bodies, individuals or economic indicators. Practitioners experience of **policy development and policy implementation** is articulated as a frustrated effort to advance development through a system that is fragmented and challenged by immutable localised management and organisation and one where they have no voice in the dialogue.

Recommendations:

It is highly unlikely that most if not all policy developers would have the luxury of pressing "alt, control, delete", to wipe the hard drive clean and to go back to the beginning to restructure their national VET system, as was the experience in

Finland. In addition to which, as is evidenced in the case studies of Australia and Ireland and highlighted by Salberg (2015), the agenda and drivers for national policy development often belong to others (be that industry, outside governing bodies, international institutions, religious bodies or individuals) and it is in this respect that the suggested starting point for policy developers and practitioners reading this study is to **shift their focus and to reflect on their experience** of governance and policy reform and also to **consider how key drivers impact** on the professionalisation of VET practitioners and the development of practice (be they as a result of **culture** and **historical context** or contained in a **model of education** adopted by a country/government or acknowledged as the **ambition/focus of the system** of education in terms of an **ideology**, aspiration **or an ambition** concerning economic growth and productivity). The identification of key drivers and how they impact policy implementation **provides us with an insight into why power shifts** (as in the case of Australia and Ireland) **or stays steady** (as in the case of Finland).

In his study of governance Náim (2013), ranked among the top 100 influential global thought leaders, speaks of the disconnect between policy development and policy implementation and governments **ability achieve traction** and **frames it** in the context of **key drivers being power**: the expectation of power and the actuality of power and in doing so touches on the vacuum between the expectation and actuality creating a paralyse in terms of decision-making. This paralysis can often render policy development and policy reform as weak and malfunctioning. Power as a concept may feel like an abstract concept to us however our experience of the ebb and flow of power can have a visceral and lasting effect (as we noted in both the cases of Australia and Ireland). Náim notes the reflections of

Joschka Fischer, former chancellor and foreign minister in Germany, who as a young man was both allured and fascinated by his perception of power however he comments that when he achieved his high status and position the biggest shock he got was the discovery of how limited the actuality of his power was in reality. **Náim prompts us to consider power in terms of the ability of different players and interrelationships to affect the outcome of a situation or conflict and in this respect touches on the notion of distributed power** or distributed leadership (as experienced by VET practitioners in Finland). When power shifts (as in the case studies of Australia and Ireland) either because of a more persuasive pitch or the offer of larger rewards, the landscape is often reorganised and potentially in drastic ways and can create a tipping point where things start to get interesting: the system upends, the sector transforms, opportunities as well as opportunism crop up and culture kicks in.

While **comparative research** at this level **is useful Náim counsels** that to try to predict shifts in power is to run a fools errand however he does advise for us to focus on and try to **understand the trends that shift the distribution and nature of power**, **the key drivers, the barriers and the arena/context**. By way of example the implementation of a new regulation might cause barriers to go up, views to become entrenched and control to consolidate and it is at this point the erosion of existing structures begins. The knock on effect going forward being that formation or reformation of rules/regulations and policy development becomes harder to rewrite, circumvent or indeed in some cases to access. This decay of power affects all realms of organised human activity, some in more ominous ways than others and can render the organisation and management of the structure either paralysed by vetocracy or immobilised by a thousand small micro

powers. As capacity diminishes execution stalls, deadlines are missed, financial commitments and promises are not honoured and trust is damaged (as was evidenced in the case of Australia and Ireland). Considering **issues of cynicism** and **trust** as barriers to policy implementation achieving traction Náim reflects on of how trust is won and lost: and advising that the key to **restoring trust** involves the **identification of clearer ideals**, a move towards **less hierarchical structures** and the development of **closer relationships** with stakeholders and members, which in part echoes the leadership principles of Covey (1989). Adopting a more **networked approach**, one that is relatively **flat,** more **attuned to the needs** and expectations **of stakeholders** and members, **open** and **adaptable** to suggestions and **ideas** and one that is open to new members and the advancement of their agendas. An issue that was touched on by Cort (2009) who argued that for policy implementation to be successful **practitioners need to be active participants in the change process** and Gutherie (2010) who called for practitioners to be viewed as **co-writers and agents of change** and to include them as a **unified body in the dialogue** (**not just as a metric through which to measure the checks and balances** of audit compliance) as was evidenced in the case of Finland where connection between policy and practice is viewed very much a consultation and collective decision-making process between government, stakeholders and practitioners. **Trust** for Náim is about making stakeholders and **members feel** that they have a **direct impact**, that **their efforts** are **indispensible** and that **their leaders are accountable**, **transparent** and **not beholden to dark or opportunist interests** (aspects of which were experienced in the case studies of Ireland and Australia where opportunistic and unethical behaviours led to wroughting of the system). Náim (2013) rather interestingly recommends for us to be **careful** of the **nature of power** dispersed through systems of federalism, political alliances and

coalitions, international organisations, internationally accepted rules, norms, checks and balances between branches of government and moral or ideological ties collected under banners such as social democracy or socialism. Larsen would posit, following his review of *New Thinking in Comparative Education* (2010), that during periods of rapid change (which is a characteristic of the current age of globalisation) it is useful to focus policy development on transitions, disjunctures, transformations or new combinations of different models as opposed to the political types of capitalism and socialism which are not static. **For Náim** (2013) however **the issue is** one of **routinely trotted out quick fixes**, checks and balances which to him represent answers to an old problem (one that dates back to Greek city-states and is perhaps typified by the metric based system experienced by Australian VET practitioners) but **instead advances** the idea for **countries to give birth to their own institutional responses and innovations**, **to organise public life in a way that allows for personal autonomy and a critical reflection (that is not anti-intellectual but rather asks questions of itself) and is therefore better equip to keep the system and its structures healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the individual**/learner (as in the case of Finland). To begin the process of developing a system whereby responses are owned by the institution Náim plots the decay of power against widely desired values such as political and social stability, reliable public institutions and economic vitality and then inverts it:

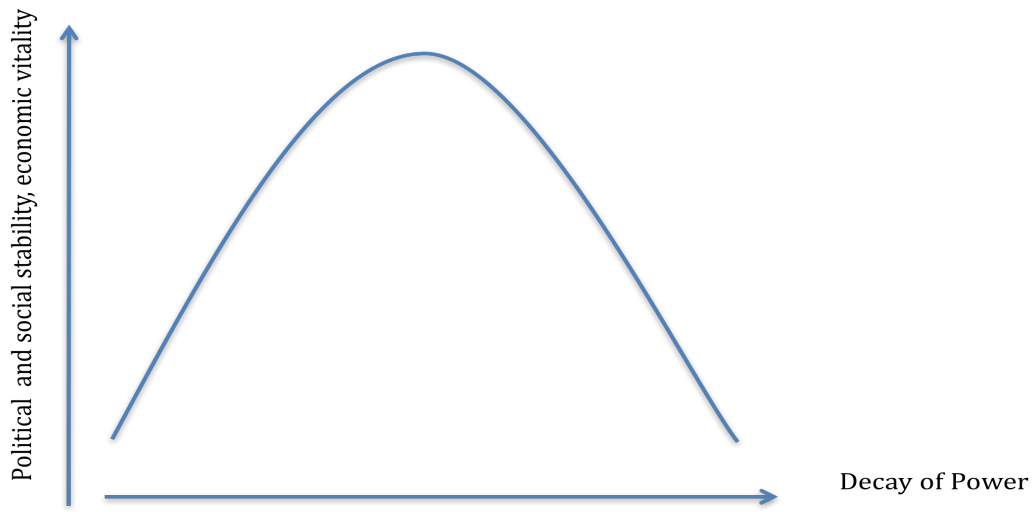


Fig 6.1 The Decay of Power: Inverted U-Curve (Náim 2013)

The left of the horizontal axis represents a situation where maximum power and concentrated power resides in the hands of a few be they monopolies or structures of tight control in political and economic life that typically deliver inadequate levels of social well-being. At the other extreme and to the right of the horizontal axis is the situation where power is hyper diffused and diluted and where typically the collapse of order brings about a state of anarchy. Within these parameters/contexts the challenge is to find ways to inhabit the middle of the curve and in doing so to focus particularly on situations of massive and rapid change. **The breath of the band we identify within the middle curve represents the level of tolerance we are prepared to accept**. The horizon of policy development is typically crowded by issues but you tend to find that ultimately people can live within quite a **broad range of tolerance** when the pursuit of **policy development is focused** on **improvements and benefits** such as **pluralism**, **initiative** and a sense of meaning **or to confront crises** in order to find purpose and to get things done: people tend to respect honesty given it is our vulnerabilities that connect us as human beings.

Organisation - management structures and supports:

When it comes to the realities of practice and experience of professional development, VET practitioners gave us their perspective on the **impact policy development** has on the **management and organisation of VET** teaching and training. Practitioners not only describe development of VET policy and practice in terms of systems bounded by history and context **with a tendency to cling to tradition or as** national education system that is own, broker or rent a moral purpose for capacity building but also in terms of an eco system of **complex interrelationships:** be that political and economic in terms of governance; historical in terms of policy reform agenda and the achievement of traction; organisational in terms of the structure and management, nature, breath and quality of provision; ideological in terms of the paradigms and theories used to design and deliver education and training that is both particular and unique to VET; professionally in terms of the development of practitioners and practice and morally in terms of the needs of the learner and the attainment of knowledge, skills and personal competence vis a vis the demands of the labour market, industry and employers. VET practitioners also provided us with a narrative through which we began to consider the degree to which the concept of **professionalisation and professional development** responds to acting as a resource to sustain and improve quality in the field by way of motivating practitioners towards self improvement, capacity building, quality improvements and field advances that have a foundation in practice engagement, assessment and evaluation or one that concentrates on high quality performance indicators, processes, procedures and practice measurements. Reflecting on the similarities and comparisons of practitioner experience in terms of the organisation and management of VET professional development and in terms of the concept of

VET professionalisation and professional development acting **as a resource to sustain and improve the quality of practice** we began to gain an insight into how workforce development is managed, how capacity building is approached as well as the role **support structures** play not only in the development of practice standards but also in terms of the quality and sustainability of professional development and in doing so we began to identify a number of **key drivers** and areas of commonality that warrant consideration by policy makers and practitioners alike when it comes to building the scaffolding that provides for the develop practice.

In Finland we are introduced to a system whereby the **management, organisation and structure of education** is viewed as an investment to increase productivity and as was mentioned earlier this clear ideology gave way to a long term planning approach to education policy reform: the second phase of which concentrated on decentralisation and autonomy. Organisation and structure is clearly defined. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for legislation and the subsidisation of all education and training, the Finnish Board of Education is responsible for implementation of national policy, national qualifications and stakeholder cooperation while local authorities determine policies relating to provision and access. VET providers are decidedly independent and responsible for delivery as well as matching provision to labour market needs. In terms of **key drivers** stakeholders and members are briefed to ensure that quality management and quality provision are key objectives for policy implementation. When it comes to the **concept of professionalisation** VET practitioners are very much considered co-authors of VET strategy as well as the development of sustainable professional development, standards of practice

including qualifications and training, CPD, education and training, research and self evaluation. A national body working in collaboration with stakeholders ad expert groups guides practice and the development of education, training and CPD. VET practitioners in Finland have a place in the dialogue and expect to exercise their professional judgement both independently and collectively: they are recognised as having power and latitude. A set of norms and codes of practice as well as ethical standards exist and are shared by practitioners. The process is driven by self-regulation and evaluation with an ethos of consensus building underpinning the concept of good teaching and learning. Autonomy is encouraged, with distributed leadership and grounded research as key features of professional development. Professional practice in Finland is distinctive, the aim is to instil a sense of purpose, collective responsibility and shared ownership, the practitioners voice is empowered and at the core of professional development. In terms of **key drivers**, progression is self-directed and self-paced and includes formal education and training as well as informal flexible approaches to learning such as professional learning communities, collaboration with industry, on the job learning, mentoring, peer review and peer evaluation. The ambition is for practitioners to pursue purposeful professional development with a focus on quality. **In Australia** practitioners introduced us to **organisation and management system** whereby the education system is the constitutional responsibility of six states and two territories with the Commonwealth government acting as the ninth partner. The system has shifted to a model of cooperative federalism whereby the Commonwealth, states and territories agree collaboratively on priorities and set targets through the Council of Australian Government. COAG are responsible for initiation, implementation, development and monitoring of policy reform while SCOTESE provides a mechanism for the

development and implementation of national policy in a constitutional environment whereby formal authority for education and training resides with individual states and their respective governments. Although management and organisation is clearly defined the policy space in terms of setting objectives is described as challenging with priorities vacillating between the policy directions of different political parties and their ministerial departments or industry. In terms of **key drivers** stakeholders and members are briefed to ensure that fiscal sustainability and quality are the key objectives of policy implementation and that individuals play a key role in supporting their own education and that industry and employers play a key role in supporting workforce skill development. When it comes to the **concept of professionalisation and professional development** standards of practice are aligned to industry standards while application is a localised affair with assessment idiosyncratic to the performance management protocols of each training organisation and tied to student supply and demand. In general a set of norms and codes of practice exist: and while certification is a reality of compliance and national quality assurance regulations, the quality of provision has been exposed to wroughting, opportunistic and unethical behaviour with the result that standards have been called into question. While practitioners view themselves as experts, sustainability appears to be self-motivated and discussed in terms of productivity and an ambition to stay abreast of compliance and regulation in order to remain competitive when it comes to applying for government funding which is based on contestable funding mechanisms. More recently it has been acknowledged that the changing role of VET practitioners needs to be supported and that the status of the profession needs to be raised and that practitioners play a critical role in terms of co-writing policy and standards for professional practice. A key recommendation of recent reforms was to scope

the development of a professional body or registration authority not only as a mechanism for regulation of practice standards but also to provide a platform in recognition of practitioners voice in the dialogue. In terms of **key drivers** regulation compliance is a mandatory requirement when it comes to accessing government funding and as such proof of mandatory accreditation is an intrinsic component of both statutory body audit/inspection and organisation performance review. CPD is strongly influenced by the voice of industry while access is at the discretion of head of the training organisation/employer with quickness to market being a key feature of training interventions/practice development. **In Ireland** practitioners introduced us to **organisation and management system** whereby VET education had its foundation in system of localised voluntary organisations governed by a committee made up of local authority representatives, employers, special interest expertise and trade unions and managed by a CEO. Yearly budgets allowed for an element of long term planning however at the time of inception supports for practitioners were excluded from legalisation which meant that a comprehensive plan or a national strategy was never developed with the result that the professional development of practitioners has continued to fall between two stools of responsibility: the local authority and the Department of Education. Workforce development has to date been predominately a discretionary and localised affair while practitioners describe the structures and management of professional development as individual and self motivated. **Key issues** for practitioners are also very much focused on terms and conditions of employment, the integrity and partiality of awarding contracts and permanency of tenure with government routinely effecting embargos on recruitment. However in 2013 the sector went through major reform at which point further education was established as a sector of education provision. The Department of Education and

Skills subsequently published an Action Plan for Education (2016) with the strategy objective to deliver systematic progress to help those delivering education to continuously improve. The strategy is to be monitored against timelines with annual reporting and responsibility clearly assigned. In terms of **key drivers** stakeholders and members are briefed to focus on creating clear integrated pathways for learners and responding to the needs of the labour market. When it comes to the **concept of professionalisation and professional development** mechanisms are localised and idiosyncratic to the training organisation/employer with evaluation of performance tied to student supply and demand. There is no evidence of an independent body advocating for or setting standards of practice and as such it was difficult to establish whether professional development is progressive, continuous, structured or accredited. When it comes to shared norms and practices the systems appears to operate within target group funding silos and is motivated by individual practitioners commitment to the development of best practice in their specific "silo" be that a focus on barriers to access, transfer and progression for adult returners or early school leavers: Sustainability of which is either tied to contestable funding mechanisms or self-motivated. Access to CPD, appropriate training content and the quality of knowledge attainment to underpin practice is at the discretion of local management and linked to terms and conditions of employment or is self-motivated. It was difficult to establish whether training interventions encouraged research based skills development, collaboration with industry or met an identified need however practitioners did discuss CPD in terms of the pursuit of popular trends. Practitioners view themselves as self-employed experts responsible for student intake and as such **key drivers** are discussed in terms of quickness to market training interventions and a desire to stay abreast of

contestable funding priorities and industry trends. More recently the publication of a FET **Professional Development Strategy** is listed as a key action for Solas the national authority responsible for funding, planning and coordination of FET and the ETBI as the representative body for the sixteen education and training boards responsible for the regional provision. Implementation of the strategy includes the development of a national database to support a programme for capacity building, planning and investment.

Recommendations:

On the topic of **organisation, management, structures and supports** the three case studies evidenced different approaches to the development of practitioner's professional practice. However practitioners did evidence similarities. In situations where **governance is unified and cohesive** the development of **professional practice** appears to be **high in quality** and **autonomous in nature** however in situations where the **space is contested**, **accountability fragmented** and where the workforce is insecure the **development of professional practice** appears to be **localised and modest with varying degrees of consistency**. There is evidence that professional development and the quality of practice is a consideration and is recognised however the **strength of development** appears to be **influenced** in terms of who holds the **locus of power**, **accountability, decision-making, quality assurance mechanisms**, the development implementation and coordination of codes of practice and standards, the mechanisms for funding as well as the nature, scale and quality of practice in the field. When we review **the professionalisation of practice** and **professional development** brought about by professional standards of practice, we become

aware that **the concept of professionalisation** appears to place an **emphasis on experience, training qualifications, research, dissemination, publication and partnership** while **professional performance** on the other hand tends to **measured through total quality management systems**. **Professionalisation** seems to r**esult in practitioners having a voice** in the dialogue and in the decision-making process when it comes to **shaping practice; developing quality assurance mechanisms**; developing **qualifications and designing professional practice content**; **career trajectory, structure, rewards and evaluation** while professional performance aligns itself with audit compliance and target setting with practitioners evidencing as self employed entrepreneurs responsible for student intake, sales and marketing as well as income generation supply and demand. When it come to stakeholder engagement we reflect on practitioners being encouraged to develop partnerships and work in collaboration with industry however the concept of professionalisation goes a step further in terms of encouraging practitioners to network horizontally with their peers in the exchange of best practice and to collaborate on developing practice standards as well as innovations for future advancement while vertical networks with schools and higher education target not only the mutual exchange and development of practice but also student advancement in terms of access, transfer and progression. **An effective system** should **identify the needs** of staff **and match training provision** accordingly and **also quality assure** provision through assessment, evaluation and accreditation of providers. Ideally the **content** of provision should not only **address the needs** of the practitioners in terms of **building capacity** but also introduce **innovations**. **Effective systems** should also allow for practitioners to **progress through and up** to **higher-level academic qualifications**, which is a

key consideration given that quality of leadership in education is critical to change and improvement.

Rather interestingly renowned author Charles **Handy** (1999) admits that when he first started to **study organisations** he expected a certainty and absolute knowledge in the behavioural science: he anticipated that the laws governing the behaviour of people and organisations would be as immutable as the laws of physical sciences. What Handy found however was concepts and ideas abounding, no laws, patchy efficiency and a realisation that the most exciting of ideas did not work. Handy began to realise that people in organisations had no predictive certainty and for two very good reasons: the multiplicity of variables and interrelationships and an inherent human ability to override the things that could influence their behaviour. To this end Handy **recommends for organisational phenomena to be explained through the forms of contextual interpretation used by historians** and in doing so Handy maintains that we stand some chance of predicting trends with some degree of confidence. Being careful not to undertake an exercise in nostalgia or as John Steinbeck author of Mice and Men reflects (Barr and Tubach 2001) "*to know a man well never leads to hate but to develop an understand of each other leads to kindness"* and therein the exercise of contextual interpretation becomes one of understanding not only each other but also what can happen when people go slightly mad. During his study of organisations, structures and people Handy (1999) lists over sixty variables that can lead to ineffectiveness including: location; resources; economic environment; training; personal situation and age and also notes that for reasons of complexity theorists have tended to focus on groups of variables such as motivation, organisational culture or leadership. Handy reflects that in his experience

reductionism is only effective when it comes to focusing on and detangling each variable and that selective focusing tends to un-focus a lot of the other variables that are at play throughout the system and structure. For this reason Handy chooses to discuss organisations, structures and people through a set of themes: **people, power and practicalities**, which in his opinion are generic and durable; and which allows for his work to then focus on diagnosing what lies at the heart of effective organisation management and structure. As Pettigrew notes in his foreword while analytic fashions have come and gone Handys' work which was first published in 1976 has stood the test of time principally because people are still concerned with how to motivate, influence and lead, build and run effective teams as well as developing organisations and people.

Discussing the **nature and history of organisations** Handy introduces us to the seven schools of thought. The first is Scientific Management which was built on the theories of F W Taylor (1911) and concerns itself with planning ahead, counting things and movements, allocating tasks and responsibilities, limiting your span of control and reviewing results. Although Taylors theory was commonsensical for its time people (as a variable) were left out of the equation. Human Relations based on the theories of Chester Barnard (1948) insisted that organisations were co-operative communities not machines, authority came from within not above and informal groups as well as peoples hearts and minds were important considerations. Bureaucratic organisations were the study of Max Weber (1947) who felt that bureaucracy was a necessary part of organisation, although his opinion was not well received it played an important part in identifying that the only people who approve of bureaucracy are those who like to know where they stand, what they have to do, who is in charge and what the rules

are. Selznick (1957) studied power, conflict and decisions in organisations and found that organisations are not as logical as they seem, different parts have different goals and will fight to secure them. Power, its quantity and its distribution and conflict impact on the way decisions are actually made as opposed to the way they should be made and in this respect Selznick identifies that human beings are inevitably limited in intelligence, information and time: people do not necessarily go for the best possible solution but the one that will do. For Selznick organisations should be understood in terms of how decisions are taken and by looking at the way the organisation talks to itself: its vocabulary. Woodward (1958) researched organisations and technology and pointed out that technology and the work you are doing makes a difference to the type of organisational structure you use: mechanised operations need a lot of bureaucracy whereas one off productions require temporary groups and delegated responsibility while stable environments are better suited to bureaucratic structures and fast changing environments are better suited to flexible arrangements. The school of systems theory views organisations as open systems taking in resources as and when they need them, working on them and then pushing them out transformed. In systems thinking everything affects everything else, everything is part of something bigger and nothing can stand on its own or be understood on its own. Although the work of Peter Senge (1990) has made systems theory practical and useful the general consensus is that systems thinking rather like economics, has a tendency to explain everything but predict nothing. Institutional theory on the other hand comes from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology and posits that each organisation has a history, its own goals, sits in its own environment, has its own pattern of influence and its own way of doing things and as such organisations are therefore not naturally cooperative places:

they need bureaucratic rules however logic does not necessarily prevail because different people see things differently and have different priorities in addition to which technology and the marketplace have the ability to make things impossible. Theorists began then to refer to organisation culture, implying that every organisation has it's own way of doing things with the implied corollary that their way was not necessarily the best way.

Discussing **organisation culture** Handy notes that just as countries have values, beliefs and cherished philosophies (shaped by history and tradition, climate, the size of the country and prosperity) that affect the way society is organised, so to is the case for organisations. Except that when we discuss organisations we are struck by different atmospheres, different ways of doing things, levels of energy, individual freedoms, personalities, career aspirations and deep sets of beliefs about the way work should be organised, how authority should be exercised, who and what gets rewarded or controlled as well as sets of norms and values such as dress code and work hours: all of which reflect the organisation, structure and system. Handy reflects that the experience of large multi nationals suggests that a strong company culture makes for a strong organisation but also warns that not all cultures suit all purposes or people. Cultures tend to be founded and built over years by dominant groups within organisations and while the culture might be strong it might not be appropriate forever. Handy also reflects that people are often culturally blinkered and have a tendency to believe that what works well in one place will work well everywhere else albeit in his experience this is not the case and while literature in the field of **organisation culture** is growing **Handy** has rather usefully distinguished the field into the **four key drivers of power, role, task and person**. Approaching organisation culture from this perspective

Handy not only illuminates organisation culture but also provides us with a level of **understanding** and insight in terms of the **structure and systems**. For policy developers and practitioners reading this research the organisational drivers of **role culture** and **task culture** will be readily identifiable and of particular interest in terms of developing an **understanding** of both **influencing factors and implications**. But first let us look at the structure of the **power culture** which is best depicted as a web with a central power figure emanating rays of power and influence that are connected by functional strings spreading out from the centre, each power ring is focused on it's own activity or influence. The organisation is dependent on trust and empathy for effectiveness and on telepathy and personal conversation for communication. There are few rules and little bureaucracy. Control rests in the hands of the key figure located in the centre while decisions are made as result of influence as opposed to procedure or logic. Power culture organisations have the ability to move and react quickly however whether they move in the right direction depends on the quality of the figure at the centre, succession planning is often key to their continued success. Individuals employed in power cultures will prosper and have job satisfaction if they are power orientated, politically minded, risk-taking and value security however size is a problem for power cultures in that the web can break easily if it seeks to undertake to many activities with the result that web type organisations usually grow by spawning other organisations. The power culture judges results and is often typified by high turnover of middle management and low morale with individuals failing or opting out of this competitive atmosphere. **Role culture** on the other hand is typified by bureaucracy and is best depicted as a Greek temple. This culture works through procedures based on logic and rational while the role of the organisation rests in the strength of its pillars, functions and specialities: the

finance department, the purchasing department, the training department. The pillars interact using procedures and protocols: job descriptions, authority definitions and the circulation of communication memorandums. A narrow line up of senior management assumes the role of coordination and providing each pillar does its' job the outcomes are as planned. Rather interestingly in this culture the role or job description is more important than the individual doing the job. Individuals are selected on the basis of satisfactory performance and the role is described in such a way that a range of individuals could fulfil the requirements. Performance over and above the role description is not required and attempts to do so would have the effect of being characterised as disruptive. The locus of power rests with the position: personal power is frowned upon, expert power is tolerated, rules and procedures influence decision-making. Efficiency boils down to the rational use of allocated resources as opposed individuals. The role organisation is successful as long as it can operate in a stable environment. When stability is threatened the organisation becomes insecure in that it is slow to predict change and slow to change even if change is identified as being necessary. Newcomers to the environment may struggle in that their ambition is usually to survive and grow as opposed to being viewed as stable and predictable. Rewards tend to be given to individuals who satisfy and do their job up to a standard, which can be frustrating for the individual who is power-orientated, wants controls over their work or is results orientated. Government administrations, monopolies and oligopolies are typically identified as role cultures. The organisation that has a **task culture** is job or project orientated and depicted as a net with the power and influence residing at the intersections and knots: so called matrix organisations. The emphasis of the task culture is wholly focused on getting the job done and to this end the culture serves

to bring together the appropriate resources, the right people at the right level and then lets them get on with it. Influence is based on expert power as opposed to position or personal power and is widely dispersed. Outputs are very much a team effort, which serves to obliterate individual objectives, status or style. The task culture uses the unifying power of the group to improve efficiency, it is extremely flexible: groups or project teams are formed, reformed or disbanded for specific purpose. Individuals working in task cultures typically have a high degree of control over their work. Judgement is based on results and easy working relationships within the group while mutual respect is based on capacity as opposed to age or status. The task culture is appropriate to situations where flexibility and sensitivity to the marketplace is important and particularly where the market is competitive, the product lifecycle is short and where speed of reaction is important (aspects of which are characteristic of VET providers/training organisations with the objective of delivering training that responds to the needs of the labour market). Task cultures thrive on speed of reaction, integration, sensitivity and creativity as opposed to depth of specialisation. Control is a thorny issue for task cultures: essentially control is retained at the top and through the allocation of projects. Vital projects are given to good people with no restrictions on time, space and materials. The culture tends to flourish when the climate is agreeable, when the product is all-important, when the customer is always right and when resources are available to those who can provide justification. In situations where resources are not available, when money and people have to be rationed and when management feels the need to control: team leaders will tend to compete and use political influence to win resources while staff morale tends to decline along with job satisfaction and it is at this point in time the psychological contract changes to one whereby individual

objectives taking primacy over team culture. In essence the task culture tends to change to that of a role or power culture when resources are limited or when the organisation is unsuccessful. That said the task culture is the culture most in tune with the ideologies of change and adaptation, individual freedom and low status differentials. P**erson culture** organisations place the individual at the centre and if a structure does exist its sole purpose is to serve and assist the individuals within it. Person culture organisations are best depicted as a cluster or a galaxy of individual stars: typically small consultancy firms, barristers, architects, hippy communes, and families. Control mechanisms or management hierarchy structures are impossible in these organisations: the psychological contract states that the organisation is subordinate to the individual and in fact depends on the individual for its existence. Influence is shared and the powerbase is that of expert: individuals do what they are good at and are listened to only when the topic is appropriate to their expertise. If we take a family during Victorian times we see a clear power culture structure with tasks and responsibilities apportioned, moving into the sociological features of today's society we find family units have evolved to a person culture with shared influence and roles that are apportioned according to expertise. The structure of a kibbutz on the other hand is striving towards a person culture but in an organisational form. Rather interestingly Handy posits the role of professor in a university, a specialist consultant in a hospital or a city architect as having a person-orientated culture in that they tend to do what they have to do but the organisation is essentially just a place for them to do their thing with some accruing benefit to the main employer. Individuals with person-orientated culture are not easy to manage: being specialist usually means alternative employment is easy to source or that the individual acts to protect themselves by achieving security of tenure. In conclusion Handy reminds

us that culture is something that is either perceived or felt and as such he acknowledges that while the four cultures he describes are not rigorously defined they are representative of prevailing characteristics.

Reflecting on Handy's (1999) study of **the nature, history and culture of organisations** we can identify many of the experiences discussed by practitioners to this study. The field is multi facetted and wide and echoes Handy's initial reaction to organisational theory when he surmised that concepts and ideas abound however there are no laws and patchy efficiency. The experience of this study set against Handy's observations should perhaps lead us to conclude that there is indeed no "silver bullet" when it comes to the practical application of organisational theory particularly when we take consideration of the complex interrelationships and diverse organisational cultures that support VET practitioners and their professional development. However this is where Handy's theory comes to the fore. Much like Náim (2013) Handy provides us with a framework/key drivers in the form of **people, power and practicalities** however to make them applicable to the development of systems Handy couples this with the **prefix "if I".** The combined effect of which turns the process of structuring organisations and management supports into a **practical application** and one which is not just about understanding people but also understanding how to turn them into productive, useful communities while also understanding power in terms of context, history and purpose and turning that understanding into something practical and useful. Handy advises four stages to the process: **questioning, conceptualisation, experimentation and consolidation**. Beginning with **questioning** ask yourself is there a problem, what kind of problem it is and what do you need to know in order to deal with it. Without this

process of questioning our tendency is to take on trust the system of belief as being apposite and useful: our tendency is to work from experience outwards while learning tends to be preceded by questioning. Having explored the nature of the problem the task now becomes one of conceptualisation or placing the problem into a general context (otherwise the experience runs the risk of becoming an anecdote as opposed to an experience we can learn from). The next phase is experimentation or testing of the concept in that better understanding leads to a better prediction (and because no experimentation effectively renders the concept to remain a theory). The final stage is consolidation: with the concept internalised and the experiment phase over the test results become the basis for future action and therein habitual behaviour is affected and altered: the lesson has been learned. The Sage Handbook of Organisation Studies (2006) portrays Handy's process in their chapter *Researching Organisations Using Action Research* and noting an explosion in interest, describe **action research** as a range of approaches involving interventions that take place within organisations with the intent to bring about practical transformation and advancing knowledge: notable theorists in this area include Argyris and Schon 1991, Elden and Chisholm 1993, Schein 1995, Raelin 1997. Presented as phenomenological methodology to research organisational processes and practices action research sits naturally alongside the ethnography theories of Thomas 1993 and Tedlock 2000; case study theories of Stake 1995 and Yin 2002 and the development of grounded theory found by Glaser 1992, Strauss and Corbin 1998 and O Connor *et al* 2003. The distinguishing features of action research (as opposed to other types of research) are that it involves the researcher and members of the organisation in matters that are of genuine concern to them with the intention to take practical

action, influence the decision making process, change behaviour and benefit the organisation.

Adopting Handy's prefix approach of **"if I"** in conjunction with the topic headings of **people, power and practicalities** and applying the quality assured processes of **action research** theory as **key drivers** within the vertical and horizontal organisational mechanism/**organisation structures and management supports** that currently serve to support VET policy developers and VET practitioners in **the development of professional practice** would not only ensure a unified and cohesive development of practice but would also go some way to acknowledging through close interaction that practitioner's play a critical role in co-writing policy and advancing the development of practice while also ensuring that developments are driven collectively by members and have a foundation in **identified needs** (not one that is strategised from the top down) and with a focus on practical application that includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence based research (as in the grounded research approach of Finnish policy development and practice) thereby placing both policy development and practice implementation in a better positioned to not only **gain traction** but also to **achieve sustainability**. Ideally the activities supported through the application of action research supports (something that can be applied to organisation management supports and structures both vertical and horizontal in both government and state bodies, stakeholder organisations, providers/training organisations and with individual practitioners) would not only introduce innovations to the sector but would also address the needs of practitioners in terms of capacity building while also affording them the opportunity (given time, operational funding and resources) to have their research accredited through

higher-level qualifications which should therein lead to **high quality practice standards** and open practice to the concept of **self evaluation and critical reflection (that is not anti-intellectual but rather asks healthy questions of itself)** which in essence is the act of **professionalisation and professional development.**

Self - practitioner professional development:

When we review the realities of practice and practitioners experience of professional development in Finland, Australia and Ireland participants to the study not only describe the development of VET policy and practice in terms of systems bounded by history and context **with a tendency to cling to tradition or as** national education system that is own, broker or rent a moral purpose for capacity building or as a **complex eco system of interrelationships** guided by **management and organisation supports and structures** that are culturally responsive (in terms of people, power and practicalities), **bounded by nature and history** and framed by **locus of power, role, task and person** but also in terms of the **concept of self as a practitioner** in terms of **position**, **function and voice** and as such provide a dialogue through which we begin to reflect on **key drivers** of **motivation, recruitment, contract of employment**, **terms and conditions of employment** and **career advancement** while **barriers to development** evidenced as **access to provision** and the **practical resourcing of professional development such as time-off and substitution**. Reflecting on the similarities and differences and comparing practitioner experiences we began to gain an insight into how the **VET workforce is managed** and what **employers and practitioners expect when it comes to terms and conditions of employment:**

considerations which warrant reflection, by policy makers and practitioners alike, when it comes to recruitment, employment and career trajectory.

In **Finland** we were introduced to a system whereby becoming a VET practitioner is a highly regarded profession, **motivation** appears to be **intrinsic** and practitioners enjoy professional status equivalent to that of a doctor or lawyer. **Recruitment** however falls into **two categories**: those who approach teaching as **a career** and those who are approached by training organisations with the offer of **ad-hoc hours** be they canvassed as an industry expert or to cover sick leave and therein employment is grounded in full-time, part-time of casual zero hour contract terms and conditions. Individuals who qualify as teachers are usually awarded **permanent contracts** on entry however experts migrating from industry will typically undertake a **phased entry** with the initial employment based on **temporary part-time** hourly rate terms and conditions. In this situation contract renewal is often tied to student supply and demand or until such time as permanent contract status is achieved. Interestingly **professional development** and **qualification attainment** is **not hindered** by temporary employment status as education and training up to doctoral level is a statutory right and free. Practitioners are timetabled for professional development hours which includes peer meetings and collaboration however resources to attend CPD such as time-off, substitution and out of pocket expenses are at the discretion of the employer/head of the organisation with the result that practitioners with temporary contracts of employment often find themselves attending training in their own time outside of paid contracted hours and therein bear the cost of related expenses personally. Acknowledging the localised and discretionary nature of access to CPD and CPD resources has initiated a move on the part of government

to provide for legislation to **shift the locus of power to the individual**. When it comes to career planning, progression and wellbeing practitioners discuss **career trajectory** as being both **legitimate and achievable** and also in terms of testing themselves to gauge their suitability and fit "*dipping their toe in the water without fear of failure*". Rather interestingly practitioners equally speak of owning the decision to reassign themselves should the actuality of advancement not suit their personal competences or if they realise their skills are better suited to a different area of practice: which again indicates **the locus of power rests with the individual** and is indicative of a system that encourages **high levels of trust**, **shared ownership**, **a low degree of hierarchy** and **rational decision-making and quality** as **key drivers**. In **Australia motivation** to become a VET practitioner appears to be a more organic process at the level of being canvassed to provide expertise, exposure, enjoying the experience and proceeding to attain qualifications in order to obtain employment in the sector. Becoming a VET practitioner has shifted from being a highly regarded profession with good career prospects to one which is casualised and temporary in nature. **Recruitment** falls into **two categories**: those who approach teaching as **a career** and those who approach the practice as **freelance self employed contractors**. The demand for teaching staff is dependent on market forces underpinned by government marketisation policy and contestable funding supports. Experts migrating from industry will typically undertake a **phased entry** with the initial employment based on **casualised** hourly rate **contract terms and conditions**, which are tied to student supply and demand. Permanent contract vacancies are open competitions with applicants submitting to a process of interview, selection, offer, acceptance and contract of employment. Once permanency is achieved induction, promotion and dismissal are controlled by the head of the training organisation and guided

by internal procedures. In terms of **career trajectory** practitioners move through a well-defined and hierarchical career structure with levels of advancement linked to performance review. Practitioners discuss advancement to directorship level as a **legitimate option**. Access to **CPD** is **managed locally** and at the **discretion** of the head of the training organisation and is discussed in terms of quickness to market training interventions. Practitioners also highlight that the marketised nature of the sector often results in CPD being the operational budget which is most frequently subjected to cuts in periods when there is a drive to keep costs low in order to maintain a competitive advantage in the market place. When it comes to **motivation** to attend CPD practitioners cited time, resources and funding as barriers to professional development. There is no expectation for practitioners to advance beyond the minimum requirements for practice standards and therein the impetus for **professional development** is optional and **self motivated** with **regulation compliance** or **contestable funding mechanism** criteria as **key drivers**. More recently studies carried out to ascertain VET practitioners feeling towards the development of a **professional body** evidenced **trust and cynicism** as barriers to implementation given governments track record with divisive policy development, a suspicion of professional associations and questions regarding the viability of the scale of the undertaking in terms of the size, diversity and nature of practice which is compounded by territory and state jurisdictions. **In Ireland motivation** to become a VET practitioner like Australia appears to be a chosen career path or an organic process. **Recruitment** falls into **two categories**: those who approach teaching as **a career** thereby following the tradition route of obtaining a degree and a teaching qualification and those who approach the practice as **freelance self employed contractor.** The demand for VET practitioners is tided to market demand and student intake. Permanent

contract vacancies are open competitions with applicants submitting to a process of interview, selection, offer, acceptance and contract of employment. **Achieving permanency is difficult** and requires tenacity. Experts migrating from industry will typically undertake a **phased entry** with the initial employment based on **casualised** hourly rate contract terms and conditions. There is a long history of practitioners **lobbying for parity** when it comes to **terms and conditions of employment** and wages. **Moratoriums, temporary contracts, integrity and partiality** are routine features of employment with practitioners registering as unemployed in order to claiming social security benefits in the months between academic semesters. In more recent years **employment law** and unions have worked increasingly to **apply counter controls in terms of governance** and in a bid to constrain managerial actions with the result that individuals in receipt of a number of successive temporary contracts are now legally entitled to a contract of indefinite duration (CID). While providing for a greater degree of protection the CID does not enjoy parity with permanent contracts of employment. In terms of **career trajectory** advancement is dependent of length of service and qualification attainment. Practitioners do not appear to identify with the notion of career path or career trajectory or indeed professionalisation or professional development beyond achieving permanency. **Access to CPD** is managed locally and at the discretion of the head of the training organisation while funding comes via government who retain decision-making powers. Practitioners speak of a reluctance to request CPD without evidence of market demand or student intake as justification for the training intervention. The fast pace turnaround of demand driven provision has created an environment whereby **key drivers** echo **uncertainty, survival** and a **quickness to market** impetus **to avoid individual obliteration**. Practitioners also mention ministry/organisational **approva**l, **time**

and personal finances as barriers to participation in professional development. The notion of a **professional body** of practitioners was **not discussed** or even muted as a concept to provide for professional development: either from the perspective of individual professional practice or collectively as an approach to providing practitioners with a voice in the dialogue of sectoral development.

On the whole **practitioners** appear to be a **highly qualified and competent group** of professionals who have achieved status and recognition as experts within their respective industries, have attained pedagogic training and who are not only intrinsically motivated but strive to maintain professional development in terms of **skills, knowledge** and personal competences to keep up with changing pace of today's jobs and today's occupations while **remaining flexible and responsive** to the demands of industry and being **cognisant of learners needs** both in terms of learner centered approaches to skills acquisition, knowledge attainment and the personal competences required to keep up with and adjust to the fast moving and the changing needs of the **labour market.** Yet, except in the case of Finland, when it comes to policy reform and the development of professional practice this dynamic group of highly competent and responsive practitioners are not involved in the dialogue. The **organisations and management support structures** that serve to include them do not appear to recognise them either as a key voice or intrinsic to the decision-making processes in terms of either policy development, policy reform, the **professionalisation of practice or professional development**. **Key drivers** do not appear to be motivational on the part of practitioners or an unwillingness to be inclusive on the part of government but are grounded in **organisational issues tied to security of tenure**. The temporary nature of workforce contracts has rendered practitioners

as an **invisible workforce** with insecure terms and conditions of employment which are routinely awarded on the basis of zero hour, part-time, temporary or semesterised according to the academic year while also being tied to student intake, supply and demand with sales marketing and income generation the responsibility of the practitioner. Practitioners function in the environment of an insecure workforce and as such are paid an hourly rate based on contact hours which is not inclusive of CPD hours the impact, when compared with their counterparts who have achieved permanency and security of tenure, evidences as a lack of CPD support, organisational resources and financial supports compounded by a loss of earnings. S**ecurity of employment** and **high expectations,** both on the part of the employer and the employee, are a key feature of the terms and conditions of employment for VET practice in Finland. However interestingly VET practitioners in both Australia and Ireland evidence **insecure terms and conditions employment** while **key drivers** in terms of **employment expectations** echo uncertainty, survival and a quickness to market impetus to avoid individual obliteration. In Ireland particularly **employment expectations** appear not to develop beyond an ambition to achieve parity of terms and conditions and permanency/security of tenure.

Recommendations:

The **changing nature of work**, **terms and conditions of employment and casualisation** of workforce contracts has become a permanent feature of organisational life (Blyton, Heery and Turnbull 2011) and was considered by Handy (1999) who noted that the traditional assumptions of concentration plus specialisation equals efficiency, hierarchy as natural, labour as a cost and

organisation as property were losing value and that the future would see fees replace wages, tools replace machines, a communication revolution and economics based on quality. Handy advanced that this new future would present challenges to people and organisations and discussed ideas of **organisational federalism**, **spliced careers** and **new patterns of planning**. Federalism differs from decentralisation in that power is not delegated but resides in the centre for the benefit of all. **Federal organisations** are build on the principle of subcontracting and, apart from a professional core who will have achieved security of tenure and whose role it is to co-ordinate a small range of autonomous operations through a system of distributed leadership, the organisation is structured around a contractual fringe of individuals and groups who can do the work more cheaply and therein activity is hived off to a basic workforce who are employed increasingly through part-time or on temporary contracts which have the effect of providing for flexibility. Handy envisaged that the relationship would be purely instrumental, money in return for time, and that individuals would not expect career development but would bargain hard for better pay and conditions, move elsewhere readily if they are offered better terms and conditions and would expect to find work satisfaction in other parts of their life. In terms of organisational culture the professional core would operate as a task culture with flat structures and lots of consultation while the contractual fringe, made up of person culture individuals, would need a **role culture structure to co-ordinate the services** they provide to the organisation. Discussing **spliced careers** Handy envisaged three categories: end-to-end, alternating and complementary. The end-to-end career involves individuals, who on reaching their forties/fifties, look for more flexible contracted hours outside of the firm and therefore the terms and conditions of their contract of employment gives way to self-employed terms and

conditions. The alternating career applies to professionally skilled individuals who alternate periods of employment with periods of self-employment and for Handy this conjured up the idea of individuals taking sabbaticals for development and continuing education paid for by the state (as in the case of Finland), by the organisation or the individual and for professionally skilled individuals opting in and out of the workforce according to domestic responsibilities. According to Handy any growth in certification bodies would be as a direct consequence of a growth of this alternating workforce. The complementary career focuses on part-time employees who do not require the same guarantees as full-time workers. This cohort of part-time worker would exist on the margins of society made up of individuals who combine part-time work with self-employed work before transitioning to full-time legitimate self-employment.

For Handy (1999) the spliced career of the future presented challenges for human resource management in terms of increased career options tied to increased career counselling and increased administrative headaches tied to the flexibility and variability of employment contract terms and conditions. The questions that permeated the debate however, and which would require major rethinking, were concerned with **individuals and their rights**, **provisions for workforce training and development** and pensions. At the time Handy felt that as his notion of blended self-employment became more commonplace the notion of unemployment would decrease in relevance: aspiring for the world not to viewed bilaterally as employed and unemployed. What transpired however was a pervading concern about the dynamic of the labour market and general unease about the change in direction. The shift towards blended employment rather than being greeted by what Handy anticipated as "*a mix of delight and apprehension*"

was evidenced by uncertainty and insecurity (Heery and Salmon 2000) with individuals operating in market driven economies tending to experience robust management approaches to employment whereby employees (at all levels) were brought into the organisation and then swiftly dismissed with the aid of flexible contract terms and conditions. While human resource management on the other hand argue for practices that lead to higher performance and that emphasis employee commitment to the organisation through the promotion of job security and fairness of treatment. The contrasting approaches of both market driven policies and human resource management began to raise questions not only for employees in terms of self-development and enhanced employability but also for employers concerned with both issues of attraction, retention and knowledge drain and responsible for workforce planning, resourcing and facilitating professional development. When Handy (1999) discussed **patterns of planning** he did so on the premise that organisations traditionally approach the future by attempting to **reduce uncertainty** and given that whole theories of management provide for controlling the organisational environment and making predictions about the future, based on evidence, and that to do otherwise is risky and potentially self destructive and requires for organisations to adopt experimental approaches akin to systematic gambling which exposes them to greater risk. The trick according to Handy would be for organisations to develop patterns of planning to ensure **management of the change-over period** that occurs between one product life cycle ending and another beginning.

The ever increasing uncertainty and insecurity of tenure brought about by temporary, contingent and part-time contracts of employment formed the basis of a **study** undertaken by Heery and Salmon (2000) entitled the ***Insecure Workforce***

which was reassessed by Blyton, Heery and Turnbull in a subsequent study entitled *Reassessment of the* ***Employment Relationships*** (2011*)*. The premise for which was a widely held belief that **jobs were becoming less secure** both as a result of the global economy and as a result of strategies of economic shortermism fostered by financial institutions and the financial markets in conjunction with an appetite for deregulation on the part of governments. Both Heery and Salmon (2000) and Blyton, Heery and Turnbull (2011) evidenced that **employees** were not only becoming increasingly **vulnerable and exposed to exploitation** but that the shift provided for an **erosion of workforce commitment**, **political alienation** and reduced **consumer confidence**. Subsequent studies by Edwards (2003) evidenced that the trend towards flexible and fragmented wage structures has resulted in reduced consumer confidence, which exacerbated parts of the economy towards inflation. Heery and Salmon (2000) particularly observed the experiences of **public sector workers**, managers and trade unions in order to explore the impact insecure employment was having on **wellbeing**, family relationships and housing consumption and commented that, while job security had been a defining feature of public sector employment, the risk averse, time serving bureaucrat was no longer immune. **Restructuring of the public sector** had gathered pace partly as a result of exposure to commercial pressures and partly because neo-Taylorist management techniques had led to a break with the traditional model of public sector employment. The new rhetoric of "*change is inevitable*" and "*job security being an outdated notion*" had shifted the dialogue to one that **focused** predominantly on **"*employability*",** which effectively **absolved management of any responsibility** to provide employees with job security and was evidenced by a mounting salience of political debate across Europe, North America, the Far East, Australia and New Zealand. Heery and

Salmon (2000) evidence **economic risk being increasingly transferred** from employers **to employees** as a result of **shortened job tenure**, **contingent terms and conditions of employment** and **remuneration** and that the resulting insecurity was damaging long-term economic performance through the promotion of employment relationships founded on **opportunism, mistrust and low commitment**; and conclude that the insecure workforce not only involves management but implicates human resource management, industrial relations, labour economics, the sociology of employment, occupational psychology and social policy.

While some anticipated the **insecure workforce** as a defining feature of the age we live in, given risk and instability are **characteristics of contemporary living** (Elliot and Atkinson 1998, Beck 1992), others became concerned about **unethical behaviours** and opportunism and as such the insecure workforce was elevated to a position of **critical concern** for international agencies such the OECD and the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) who began to focus their attention on the impact shortermism was having on the world of work and published a number of studies including: *Employment Outlook 2014 How Good is your job – measuring and assessing job quality* (OECD 2014), *Measuring and Assessing Job Quality* (OECD 2015), *Aspects of non-standard employment in Europe* (Eurofound 2017), *Fraudulent contracting of work: Fixed-term contracts (Belgium, Estonia, Spain)* (Eurofound 2017), *Exploring the fraudulent contracting of work in the European Union* (Eurofound 2016), *Working time developments in the 21st century: Work duration and its regulation in the EU* (Eurofound 2016) and *Recent developments in temporary employment: Employment growth, wages and transitions* (Eurofound 2015*)*.

With research predicting that the shift towards an insecure workforce is imposing **sever costs on both individuals** and wider society advocates from the world of artificial intelligence (AI), including pioneers and disruptors based in Silicon Valley, greeted predictions with a degree of marked scepticism positing that society needs to **cross the rubric** and look to a future that finds **new ways to redistribute wealth**. Believing that human beings are predisposed to finding ways to occupy their time the AI community opened the debate to the notion of citizens being given a stipend equivalent to that of a working wage which would not only enable them to live comfortably but also to own a house, support a family and prosper. In turn individuals would be freed up to be innovative and industrious with their time as opposed to earning a wage through the traditional contract of employment with the employer paying a wage/fee in exchange for labour/work specifically costed and based on market rates (BBC 2017). Crossing the rubric was in essence the subject of Blyton, Heery and Turnbull's 2011 study. Reflecting on employment developments during the twenty-year period since they first presented their insecure workforce thesis Blyton, Heery and Turnbull note that developments had gathered pace but at different levels of the employment relationship and were also predominantly related to either globalisation and the growing influence of the financial markets on new business models or new ways of working in industry driven by the information technology sector. Blyton, Heery and Turnbull conclude that the resulting tensions have not only **forced a debate** about the **employment relationship** in terms of **ethical behaviour** and crossing the rubric **to redefine a new concept of work** but are increasingly raising concerns about aspects of **social responsibility and work-life balance**.

Reflecting on ethics and philosophy Blyton, Heery and Turnbull (2011) explore both the **employment relationship** and the **concept of work** in terms of **"*knowledge work"*** and also how it might look in the "***new workplace***" and raise questions about the "***voice of the worker*"** and how they might be represented. Focusing on the relationship between public management reform and public service work the study rather interestingly notes that sectors operating in competitive marketised environments (reflective of Australia and Ireland) increasingly rely on their employees willingness to deploy their skills and initiative (something that is more prevalent today than it was a twenty years ago) and evidence **managerial processes as being critical** to employees experience of work in terms of being treated fairly and equitably, being involved in decision making (**having a voice**), having scope to use and develop skills (**professional development**) or alternatively being subject to unreasonable levels of work intensity, direction and control: experiences that hinge critically on **how management organise** workforce and conduct processes of securing labour (**recruitment**). Blyton, Heery and Turnbull reflect that in more capitalist countries where policy direction is market driven both the **law** (employment), **bodies** responsible for professional standards and unions are **increasingly** working to **apply counter controls** that not only provide for healthy **governance** but also **constrain managerial actions**.

Reflecting on the **employment relationship** and **the concept of work** Blyton, Heery and Turnbull (2011) explore the dynamic of the relationship: how it is constructed, the income it provides, the contract duration, the working hours and the degree of job security and posit that decent pay, reasonable working hours and some degree of job security are all indicators of the **quality of the job.** Blyton,

Heery and Turnbull comment on the impact quality of the job has on peoples ability to organise, plan and live fulfilling lives outside of work and make the broader point that paid work is much more than an effort/reward exchange but has important implications in terms of health, personal development, families and communities and (given that for the majority of work is inherently a shared, collective and cooperative endeavour for employees) is a central tenet to how we as individuals construct our lives, develop a sense of meaning and maintain our identity in contemporary society. Blyton, Heery and Turnbull do however acknowledge that the employment relationship is fundamentally an exchange between the employer and the employee, based on rights and formal obligations (McGovern *et al* 2007) and also that the relationship is based on a set of informal obligations: **unwritten rules**, **assumptions and expectations** that provide for what Rousseau (1995) describes as the **psychological contract** (and it is here that the dynamic becomes interesting in terms of VET practitioners and their professional development). Reflecting that the emergence of the insecure workforce has prompted **a change in the employment relationship** in terms of the balance of expectations and the psychological contract Blyton, Heery and Turnbull (2011) argue that approaches of shortermism and opportunistic bargaining are not only eroding employee commitment but also acting as a **disincentive for employers to facilitate or resource staff development and training**. Cappelli *et al* (1999) also posit that the new forms of high performance work organisation (reflective of knowledge work and the new workplace) require committed, flexible and highly-trained employees which is being hampered by the spread of workforce insecurity. Browne *et al* (2000) comment that some aspects of employment have remained highly standardised however Anxo *et al* (2000) evidence a greater deployment of flexible labour and an increase in managerial

expectations in terms of what constitutes a fair days work while Green (2006) concludes that jobs have become more demanding. The exorbitant rise in employer expectations first coined by Coser as the "*greedy organisation*" (1967) provided for the slow and subtle expansion of employee duties identified by Van Dyne and Ellis (2004) as "*job creep*" while the increased use of email and mobile phones acknowledged by Green (2006) as "*effort based technological change*" has contributed to time pressures and an erosion of the boundaries between work and leisure (Bittman *et al* 2010).

Responding to questions raised in relation to the concept of work and worker representation Gollan and Xu (2015) discuss whether employee participation really does increase **employee voice** or whether it is simply an agenda that promotes the interests of employers. Mapping the history of **employee participation** Gollan and Xu review 1960 to 1970 as a period of industrial democracy being represented by unionism and collectivism (Cressey 1995). By the early 1980's the focus of employee participation had shifted towards managerial driven human resource management type approaches, having the primary objective to improving organisation efficiency and productivity, emerging from the USA. In more recent years there has been a shift towards non-unionism and individualism as evidenced in countries like the UK who have a neo-liberal orientation (Royle 2011). Changes in the nature of work (from an industrial orientation to a knowledge orientation) have had the effect of shifting employee representation from that of empowerment (typified by union representation) to high commitment and performance (typified by human resource management approaches). In more recent years the dialogue has witnessed a shift towards "*employee engagement*", "*employee voice*" and its antithesis "*employee*

silence" (Royle 2011, Wilkinson et al 2010 and Donaghey et al 2011). While much of the research is concerned with industrial relation issues such as the representation gap and power imbalances between labour and capital or human resource issues of employee participation and organisational efficiency (Heery 2009, Abbot and Williams 2014), there is a growing alternative strand of research concerned with the marginalisation of employee participation (Kessler and Purcell 1996) including employee silence (Donaghey et al 2011) and part-time employees (Heery 1998) and looks to non-union forms of employee participation (be that individual or representative) with a focus on the depth and scope of decision making, the amount of influence employees can exercise over management and the organisational levels at which decisions are made (Badigannavar and Kelly 2005, Butler 2005, Dundon 2002, Godard and Frege 2010, Gollan 2006 and 2007, Kaufman and Taras 2010, Kim 2009, Upchurch *et al* 2006 and Watling and Snook 2003). The move towards researching non-union forms of employee participation is viewed as both positive and legitimate in that some forms of participation are designed to give workers a voice (but no more than a modest voice) in the decision-making process, while other forms of employee participation are intended to give the workforce a more significant involvement in organisational governance and as such there is a general recognition that research needs to look at multiple channels of participation if we are to explore fully the extent of workplace democracy (Kaufman and Taras, 2010; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). Gollan and Xu (2015) rather usefully contextualise the discussion into key drivers, motivation and rational and also review developments from both the employer perspective of profitability, efficiency and trust and the employee perspective of interest, autonomy and wellbeing while also bearing in mind that participation in the workplace has a foundation in both morals and ethics,

economics and pragmatism. While much of the research evidences a focus on short term impacts such as productivity and profit, there is evidence of more long term objectives which include the notion of **building trust and partnerships** between management and labour (Kessler and Purcell 1996). Comparing short term impacts with long term objectives Kessler and Purcell rather interestingly demonstrate that long term measures are more effective and have a strong positive effect across critical stages of the decision-making process in terms of identifying the nature of a problem, taking action and achieving traction and is linked directly to the highest trust-improvement scores.

More recently Harley *et al* 2010 and Knudsen *et al* 2011 began to focus research on the (under-investigated) impact **employee participation** has on both the **employment relationship** and on the **quality of the job** and evidenced strong ties to concepts of industrial citizenship, workers rights and organisational democracy (Harrison and Freeman 2004) which have a grounding in the fundamental principals of free speech and human dignity; often expressed through political, moral and religious debate. Knudsen *et al* 2011 reveal that **high levels of participation go hand in hand with the quality of the job** and that enabling employees to have an input into the decision-making process not only creates better decisions but also enhances employee business acumen and commitment. Boxall and Purcell (2008), supporting the debate, comment that employee empowerment as we know it has transpired to be somewhat of a modern myth when it comes to Total Quality Management (TQM), team based work and consultative committees; evidenced by a growing body of research into theories of employee silence (Donaghey et al 2011) which focus on how employees exercise voice and why they opt for silence and suggests that policy interventions should

look to motivate managers to work in partnership with and become more responsive to their employees. Knudsen *et al* (2011) put forward a typography of employee participation that groups workplace into four models (bipartite, HRM, hybrid and democratic) and note that organisations with the highest participation levels and which include elements of both collective participation and high quality scores for the best work environment were found to be the organisation cultures with a grounding in democratic principles. The notion of **management and employee partnerships** is a relatively new concept and requires for dense supportive systems based on a vision of corporate governance that is inclusive of stakeholders rather than one that merely takes consideration of their perspectives (Martinez Lucio and Stuart 2005). In practice this requires management to work closely with employees to balance democracy with efficiency and to manage workplace threats and psychosocial wellbeing: practices that are most advanced in Scandinavian countries and Germany and are characterised by "*bargained corporatism*" rather than "*contestation*" or "*pluralist bargaining*". That said there is a notable gap in the research when it comes to employee voice expressed in the form of employer/employee partnership particularly when it comes to the mutual interest of long-term viability and sustainability of the organisation (Samuel 2007). Gollan and Xu (2015) conclude that the models of sustainable human resource management that stress the centrality of employees and also place an emphasis on the concept of partnership between management and employees (Dunphy et al 2003 and Ehnert 2009) are likely to become necessary going forward (not just sufficient) when it comes to organisational sustainability.

Given that the concept of the **employee participation** in the form of employer/employee partnership is still a relatively new concept Professor of

Occupational Psychology, David Guest, (supporting the shift away from market imperatives and human resource management) advocates for us to consider both uncertainty and the insecure workforce as a subjective phenomenon (something perceived and experienced), which to some extent can be managed (2000); and suggests for employers and employees to pay careful attention to the **psychological contract** and as such provides us with a useful frame through which we can begin to engage with the process by providing for environmental conditions. Guest posits that, while rhetoric tends to focus on self as an entity taking ownership of self-development to enhance employability, organisations must acknowledge that in order to attract and retain employees requires for an organisational **environment** that presents **opportunities** for employees to development and in so doing so employers would therefore be expected to endorse and facilitate professional development through the provision of access to opportunities, resources, experiences and contexts. Guest defines the notion of a positive psychological contract in terms of trust in management, judgements about fairness and belief in terms of the extent to which management can deliver on promises such as job security, career opportunities and job demands underpinned by the adoption of progressive human resource practices that foster a climate of employee involvement. Guest posits that positive psychological contracts are more likely to evidence a workforce that is more committed, satisfied, has better employment relations, is highly motivated and more likely to engage in organisational citzenship; and also notes that under these conditions employees with temporary and fixed terms contracts do not feel any more uncertain or insecure about their work than their counterparts employed through permanent contracts. Guest advances a number of strategies for organisations to adopt which place an emphasis on employability and also rather interestingly are structured

around an internal placement programme and also advises for strategy implementation to be underpinned with an agenda that concerns itself with evaluation (underpinning the recommendation for action research support structures advanced earlier in this chapter). Guest supports and also advances the concept of employer/employee partnership, but much like Gollan and Xu (2015) concludes that the concept needs time to develop and requires more research. In terms of enhancing the psychological contract when it comes to employability and systems of internal placement Guest places an emphasis on employees continually enhancing knowledge, skills and experience and notes that organisations with a reputation of enhancing worker employability are more likely to attract talented people: more over a focus on training and development provides for functional flexibility which permits better utilisation staff. Guest advocates for employees to spend time in planned learning and as such encourages organisations to support the concept of the learning organisation, which aligns itself with the theories of Senge (1990). However Guest, given his experience of organisations who have happily signed up to the aspirations of the learning organisation, advises that what often transpires is a range of diffused practices that are either poorly thought out or buried beneath faddish organisational initiatives such as rebranding the training department into that of a university. In his experience issues of diffused practice usually have a foundation in management incompetence and are tied to doubts about how far the organisation is willing to go in terms of pursuing policies that provide for enhanced employability and typically take the shape of: learning centres that are not used, mentoring systems that come under time pressure when the changes to managers work load render them unable to fulfil the their role as informal mentor or a rhetoric that serves to make the organisation sound and look good as opposed to one that is real. To this end Guest advises that for the learning

organisation to be effective (both in terms of enhancing employability and providing for the psychological contract) requires for the development of a coherent human resource strategy whereby employability relates to quality as well as functional flexibility (in that employees are encouraged to fully utilise new skills) and is underpinned by a formal system of monitoring. When it comes to the notion of internal placements Guest has a focus on the positions that become surplus to requirements or new opportunities that open up. Guest clarifies that while the system and process of internal placement has traditionally been tied to the internal transfer of employees his concept advances a structure that focuses on multi-skilling project teams and is underpinned by an education and training facility responsible for short term project activities (a form of peer to peer learning supported by experiential learning and action research techniques): the purpose of which is to encourage innovation, flexibility and change and also provide employees with an opportunity to refocus and redevelop their careers (as opposed to being driven by a quickness to market impetus to avoid individual obliteration). Guest advises that for the education and training facility to be effective requires for active facilitation of training and development and career counselling as well as for recruitment procedures to give primacy to internal selection: all of which requires a committed as well as a credible management and strong support at senior level. Guest evidences that employees leaving the organisation do so on a different and less threatening basis: suggesting the individual exercises rational choice as opposed to being driven by the instinct of survival.

Guests suggestion for the psychological contract to provide for an organisational **environment** that both enhances employability by providing opportunities for

training and development and uses support structures in the shape of an education and training facility coupled with a human resource strategy of internal placement responds to Handy's (1999) patterns of planning which not only places the responsibility for employee education and training development on employers but advances the notion of organisations working out ways to management the change-over period between one cycle ending and another beginning and also speaks to the nature of the contractual fringe, made up of person culture individuals, requiring a **role culture structure to co-ordinate the role and services** they provide to the organisation.

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter was to review and consolidate the case study findings into a set of recommendations that might serve inform the future development of **professional practice** for practitioners or be of benefit to countries, policy developers and stakeholders **embarking** on a **policy agenda of sectoral reform**. The recommendations presented for consideration not only reflect practitioner's experience of the realities of practice and their professional development but also their experience of the impact of **policy implementation** and the **achievement of traction** being guided by **history and context of policy reform** as well as **country, context and culture** that not only reflects national responses to **structural changes and process** that are **somewhat governed** by a **dogged tendency to cling to tradition.** Developing an understanding of the realities of VET practice as well as practitioners experience of CPD and reflecting on the similarities and comparisons of experience we began to gain an insight into how policy **is developed** and how **reform agenda is implemented** which in turn led us to identify **key drivers, issues, challenges, barriers and enablers in terms of**

policy development achieving traction. With policy reform as a backdrop to VET practitioners professional development the key drivers and challenges provided for a review of theoretical perspectives in the areas of **governance and policy development**; **organisation-management structures/supports and** s**elf - practitioner professional development.**

In terms of **Governance – policy development** the study found models of education that take ownership of clearly identified ideologies/aspirations, that place the learner at the heart of collaborative processes and that remain immune to changes in political governance as well as models of educations that are driven by policies of marketisation or outsider agenda and that broker or rent a moral purpose for capacity building and as such have a tendency to evidence vacillation and a subsequent disconnect between policy development and policy implementation. It is in this respect the study looks to concepts of power: the expectation of power and the actuality of power and in doing so touches on how the vacuum between expectation and actuality can create decision-making paralysis that renders policy development and policy reform as weak and malfunctioning. The study also prompts us to consider power in terms of the ability of different players and interrelationships to affect traction and in this respect touches on the nature of power, what happens when power shifts as well as the notion of distributed leadership, stakeholder networks and member participation. The study also touches on processes of accountability and transparency advising against an over reliance on metrics as the tool of choice particularly when it comes to governance and compliance both in terms of procedures that expose the sector to opportunistic and unethical behaviours that lead to wroughting and in terms of evidence based policy development. The

study advocates for countries to give birth to their own institutional responses and innovations and to organise public life in such a way that allows personal autonomy and critical reflection: a system that is not anti-intellectual but rather asks questions of itself and therein become better equip to keep itself healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the individual.

In terms of **Organisation - management structures and supports** the study found for organisational systems that are not only bound by culture and context but also by an eco system of complex interrelationships and it is in this respect that we began to consider the degree to which the concept of professionalisation and professional development responds in terms of acting as a resource to sustain and improve quality in the field by way of motivating practitioners towards self improvement and capacity building as well as quality improvements and field advances that have a foundation in practice engagement, assessment and evaluation or that concentrates on high quality performance indicators, processes, procedures and practice measurements The study also prompts us to consider how workforce is developed, how capacity building is approached and the role support structures play in the development of practice standards and in terms of the quality and sustainability of professional development and it is in this respect that the study looks to structures that are unified and cohesive where the development of practice is of high quality and autonomous in nature or situations where the space is contested, where accountability is fragmented, where the workforce is insecure and where the development of practice is localised and modest with varying degrees of consistency. It is in this respect the study looks to the locus of power in terms of accountability and decision-making and also in terms of quality assurance mechanisms, the development, implementation and

coordination of standards and codes of practice as well as the mechanisms for funding and the nature, scale and quality of practice in the field. It is here that we become aware that the concept of professionalisation appears to place an emphasis on experience, training, qualifications, research, dissemination, publication and partnership ergo that the practitioner has a voice in the dialogue and the decision-making process when it comes to shaping practice, developing quality processes, designing qualification and practice content, evaluation, career trajectory, stakeholder engagement, industry collaboration and peer to peer networking. While professional performance on the other hand concerns itself with total quality management systems aligning itself to audit compliance and target setting with practitioners evidencing as self-employed entrepreneurs responsible for student intake, sales and marketing as well as income generation supply and demand. It is in this respect the study looks to concept of understanding organisational structure both in terms of nature, history and culture as well as people, power and practicalities and advocates for a system of supports to encourage action research based development of professional practice involving policy developers and practitioners both horizontally and vertically. Such a system would go some way to acknowledging the critical role practitioners play in co-writing policy and advancing the development of practice as well as ensuring advancements are not only driven collectively but have a foundation in an identified need as opposed to being strategised from the top down thereby placing policy implementation in a better position to not only gain traction but also achieve sustainability. Ideally, given time space and resources, this system of capacity building would also afford practitioners opportunities for accreditation and therein expose practice to concepts of self evaluation and critical reflection, which in essence is the act of professionalisation and professional development.

In terms of **self - practitioner professional development the** study found for practitioners notion of self, their position, their function and their voice in terms of motivation to become a VET practitioner, recruitment, contracts of employment, terms and conditions of employment and career advancement. In terms of barriers to professional development we became aware of issues of access to provision, practical resourcing such as time off and substitution and issues of parity for the contractual fringe of practitioners operating in an environment of a casualised workforce which includes ad-hoc zero hour/part-time/temporary contracts, phased entry, fragmented and discretionary CPD with security of tenure and career trajectory tied to student intake supply and demand. It is in this respect the study looks to the locus of power in terms of the individual. In systems where the individual is perceived as a highly regarded professional, career trajectory is viewed as being legitimate and achievable with high levels of trust, shared ownership, low degrees of hierarch, rational decision-making and includes quality as a key driver. However in systems where becoming a VET practitioner appears to be a more of an ad-hoc organic process, with industry experts being canvassed for their skill and knowledge and eventually migrating to a career as a VET practitioner, there appears to be a phased approach to entry typified by temporary and casualised contract terms and conditions with career trajectory advancement subject to performance review, lobbying for parity or sheer tenacity, with employment law and representative bodies working to apply counter controls in terms of healthy governance and in a bid to constrain management actions. In general access to CPD across the sector is localised and discretionary with power tending to reside in the hands of the head/manager of the employing authority/body. Systems driven by policies of marketisation discuss access to CPD in terms of regulation compliance, quickness to market training

interventions, survival and also as the resource most likely to be subject to funding cuts during periods when the organisation is effecting cost cutting exercises to maintain competitive advantage in the market place. It is here that we became aware of a body of highly motivated and competent practitioners who have achieved status and recognition as experts within their respective industries and who have attained, somewhat against the odds, pedagogic training and who are intrinsically motivated to maintain their professional development in terms of skills, knowledge and personal competences while also remaining flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the labour market. Yet when it comes to policy reform and the development of professional practice this group of highly competent and responsive individuals are typically not involved or are silent in the dialogue. It is in this respect the study looks to the concept of workforce and of employment expectations: in terms of organisational federalism, spliced careers and new patterns of planning and the emergence of unethical behaviours, the insecure workforce, the invisible workforce, employee voice, employee silence, the changing nature of the employment relationship and crossing the rubric to find new ways of redistributing wealth. The study raises questions on the part of employees in terms of self-development and enhanced employability and on the part of employers concerned with issues of attraction, retention and knowledge drain and responsible for workforce planning, resourcing and professional development and in this respect prompts us to consider the psychological contract, the quality of the job and the concept of employee/employer partnership. The study places responsibility for professional a development into the organisational environment and into the hands of management with an expectation to endorse and facilitate professional development through access to opportunities, resources, experiences and contexts. The study also reveals that high levels of participation

facilitated by education and training facilities underpinned by coherent human resource strategies evidence a workforce that is more committed, satisfied, has better employment relations, is highly motivated and more likely to engage in organisational citizenship; and that enabling employees to have an input into the decision-making process not only provides for better decisions but encourages career redevelopment and provides for a commitment to professionalism which goes hand in hand with organisation sustainability.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the professionalisation of vocational education and training (VET) practitioners. Responding to a **gap in empirical research** the study undertook a case study analysis of VET **policy reform** and VET **professional development** in Finland, Ireland and Australia. Exploring policy developer and practitioner **perspectives** on the **realities of practice** the study reflects practitioner **experience** and in doing so identifies **key policy drivers**, **issues, challenges, barriers and enablers** that provide for policy implementation and the achievement of traction which might be benefit to countries currently embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform or practitioners concerned with the future development of professional practice.

Undertaking a **literature review** the study **contextualised vocational education and training** in terms of governance, policy development, policy evaluation and field research that both explores and highlights the development of VET as well as VET practitioners and their professional development across Europe and in Australia and in doing so **identified a number of key drivers.** In terms of governance and policy development the literature review identified systems of policy reform agenda that focus on lifelong learning for the knowledge economy but that places the learner at the centre of the dialogue as well as policy reform agenda based on principles of marketisation that focus on the needs of industry with the ambition to remain open, responsive and flexible to labour market demands. In terms of step changes in policy development the literature review identified a number **of priority areas** that relate specifically to management, organisation, design and delivery of VET, the expansion of target groups, the

widening range of economic and social collaborations/partnerships, the emergence of new skills requiring quickness to market responses, the pedagogic design and delivery of new skills including elearning tools and the provision of guidance and counselling to learners. The literature review also identified **key challenges and bottlenecks** that impact VET practitioners professional practice directly such as the implementation of reform agenda that have the effect of adding complexity to the profession, the absence of a good definition and statistics through which to effectively analyse and plan for or evaluate workforce professional development, the slow development of a set of practice standards, the slow development of qualification requirements that allow for mobility across jurisdiction or indeed to provide for better terms and conditions of employment and also raised question in terms of practitioner voice or indeed the absence of voice either as a collective or cohesive contribution to policy advancement or practice development.

Reviewing the case studies of Finland, Ireland and Australia we were introduced to three quite different approaches to VET **policy reform** and VET **professional development**, and yet similarities exist**.** When it comes to policy implementation and the ability to achieve traction we experienced **a sector that is guided by both the history and context of policy reform**. We also become aware of systems of governance, organisation environment, structures and management that are not only guided by history and context but are also **bounded by country, culture and context and that have a tendency to cling to tradition**. The case studies also identify national education and training systems that own, broker or rent a moral purpose for capacity building: be they driven by an agreed ideology, an aspiration or a goal concerning economic growth and productivity. Generally

speaking, as human-beings, when we own something our decision-making processes are usually quite considered however when we borrow or rent something our perception tends to be that someone else is making the decisions therein when things go wrong it is usually with disastrous effect. In situations where governance is unified and cohesive the VET workforce is secure in terms of tenure/terms and conditions of employment, practice development is autonomous in nature and high in quality however in situations where governance is a contested space the workforce evidences as insecure with the development of practice fragmented, localised and modest with varying degrees of consistency. There is evidence that professional development and the quality of practice is a key consideration for the sector and is recognised during the process of policy reform however the strength of policy reform, particularly in the case of Australia and Ireland, is exposed to winds of change when it comes to government/political priorities and outsider agenda while traction appears to be influenced by decisions taken in terms of organisation and management structures/supports and the locus of power in terms of accountability, decision-making, quality assurance mechanisms, the development and coordination of policy implementation, funding mechanisms and the nature and scale of practice in the field. When we look at the power dynamic we began to identify a **complex eco system of interrelationships** that are guided by both **organisational environment and management systems** and which are not only **bounded by nature and history** but are culturally responsive (in terms of people, power and practicalities) and framed by **locus of power** in terms of **role, task and person.** In turn this leads us to consider the degree to which the **concept of professionalisation** responds to **professional development** either as a resource to sustain and improve quality in the field by motivating practitioners towards self improvement and capacity

building; improvements and field advances that have a foundation in practice engagement; and assessment and evaluation or as a system/mechanism to concentrate on quality performance indicators, processes, procedure and practice measurements. We also become aware that the concept of professionalisation appears to place an emphasis on experience, training, qualifications, research, dissemination, publication and partnership and that practitioners have a voice in the dialogue as well as in the decision-making processes when it comes to shaping practice, developing quality processes, designing qualifications and practice content, evaluation, career trajectory, stakeholder engagement, industry collaboration and peer to peer networking. While professional performance on the other hand concerns itself with total quality management systems and aligns itself to audit compliance and target setting with practitioners evidencing as self employed entrepreneurs responsible for student intake, sales and marketing as well as income generation supply and demand. The **increased uncertainty** and insecure nature of practitioner contract terms and conditions of employment and lack of practitioner voice in the dialogue introduced us to concepts of the **insecure workforce and employment relationship** and while some would advance the insecure workforce as a defining feature of the age we live in, given risk and insecurity are characteristics of contemporary living, the study evidenced **unethical behaviour and opportunism** as being a **disincentive for employers** to facilitate or resource **staff development**. Reflecting on the employment relationship the study opened a dialogue through which we began to explore the "***new workforce***", quality of job, **employee representation** (voice), **employer/employee partnership** and the **psychological contract** touching on the role of **organisation environment** and **management**.

In terms of recommendations that might serve to inform the future development of professional practice or be of benefit to countries, policy developers and stakeholders embarking on a policy agenda of sectoral reform the study consolidates key drivers into a review of theoretical perspectives providing for **governance** in terms of policy development, **organisation** in terms of management structures/supports and **self** in terms of practitioner professional development. When it comes to **governance** the study looks to **concepts of power**: the vacuum between expectation of power and the actuality of power and also prompts us to consider power in terms of the different players and interrelationships and in this respect touches on the nature of power and what happens when power shifts. The study recommends for countries to give birth to their own institutional responses and innovations and to organise public life in such a way that allows for personal autonomy and critical reflection: a system that is not anti-intellectual but one that asks questions of itself and therein is better equip to keep itself healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to the individual. When it comes to **organisation** in terms of management structures/supports the study looks to **concepts of workforce development, capacity building, the role of support structures** in the development of quality and sustainability and it is in this respect the study reflects on organisational structure both in terms of nature, history and culture as well as people, power and practicalities and recommends for a system that supports and encourages a system of action research based development involving both practitioners and policy developers horizontally and vertically: ensuring that advancements are not only driven collectively but have a foundation in identified need, as opposed to being strategised from the top down only, thereby placing policy implementation in a better position to not only achieve traction but also to achieve sustainability. Such a system of capacity

building would also expose policy developers and practitioners to **concepts of self-evaluation and critical reflection**, which at its core is the essence of professionalisation and professional development. When it comes to **self** and recommendations in terms of practitioner professional development the study looks to the **concept of self** as a practitioner both in terms of position, role, function and voice and in this respect touches on **motivations** to become a VET practitioner, recruitment, contracts of employment, terms and conditions of employment and career advancement and recommends for a system that places responsibility for professional development into the organisational environment and into the hands of management with an expectation to endorse and facilitate professional development through access, opportunities, resources, experience and context. Concluding that high levels of participation facilitated by education and training facilities underpinned by a coherent human resource strategy evidences a workforce that is more committed, satisfied, has better employment relations, is highly motivated and more likely to engage in organisation citizenship: enabling employees to have an input into decision-making processes not only provides for better decisions but encourages career redevelopment and provides for a commitment to professionalism which goes hand in hand with sustainability.

Generally speaking for something to define us requires for our identity to be wrapped up in it, events on the other hand shape us as individuals and as such both the **historical context** of policy reform as well as the **culture** of country, organisation and practitioner **plays a role** in both **defining and shaping the professionalisation** of VET practitioners and their **professional development** and also in the **ability of policy implementation to achieve traction**.

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Appendix A

Professional Doctorate

Professionalisation of Vocational Education and Training Practitioners

Fiona Croke

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Section 1.1: Plain Language Statement

All involvement in this research study is voluntary and as a participant you may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed.

Programme Title: DCU Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership.
Under: The School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9.
Researcher: Fiona Croke
Research Area: Professional Development of Vocational Education and Training Practitioners.

Research Purpose:
The aim of research paper is to explore the professionalisation of vocational education and training practitioners. By undertaking a comparative analysis of national reforms and initiatives across Europe and Australia this study hopes to identify best practice and approaches of benefit to countries, like Ireland, who are currently embarking on a policy of major sectoral reform, identifying key challenges and meeting the needs of VET policy developers and practitioners.

Involvement in the Research Study:
As a participant in this research study you will be asked to participate in one interview. The interview will be audio-taped. The estimated time commitment should be no more than one hour.
The aim of this field study interview will be to explore the vocational education and training practitioners and more specifically to identify current and best practice in the area of qualification standards and continuous professional development:

- Career path to date
- Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken
- Career trajectory
- The impact of sectoral developments on current practice
- Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development
- Barriers, Enablers
- Views on policy developments in the sector
- Views on policy implementation
- Views on policy supports.

It is hoped that through your active participation the findings of this research will provide information and clarity regarding current qualification standards, common themes in current professional development undertaken as well as identifying key areas for development into the future.

Every effort will be made to efficiently and concisely conduct the research without impacting on your daily work/ life. This research study should not incur any risk on your behalf either in your professional or home life. All necessary access and permissions will be secured prior to your participation. The research will conform to all applicable legislation including the Freedom of Information Act, and the Data Protection Act. All personal information will remain confidential and anonymous and will be preserved solely for production in the researcher's research doctoral thesis.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to seek independent advice, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

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Section 1.2: Informed Consent

Title: Professionalisation of Vocational Education and Training Practitioners.
Under: The School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9
Researcher: Fiona Croke

The aim of research paper is to explore the professionalisation of vocational education and training practitioners. By undertaking a comparative analysis of national reforms and initiatives across Europe and Australia this study hopes to identify best practice and approaches of benefit to countries, like Ireland, who are currently embarking on a policy of major sectoral reform, identifying key challenges and meeting the needs of VET policy developers and practitioners. The aim of this field study interview will be to explore:

- Career path to date
- Qualifications attained, Continuous Professional Development undertaken
- Career trajectory
- The impact of sectoral developments on current practice
- Future requirements for Continuous Professional Development
- Barriers, Enablers
- Views on policy developments in the sector
- Views on policy implementation
- Views on policy supports.

Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read (or has someone read to you) the Plain Language Statement Yes/No

Do you understand the information provided? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Are you aware that your interview will be audiotaped? Yes/No

All involvement in this research study is voluntary. As a participant you may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed. The research will conform to all applicable legislation including the Freedom of Information Act, and the Data Protection Act. All personal information will remain confidential and anonymous and will be preserved solely for production in this researcher's Professional Doctorate Thesis.

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of this consent form. I therefore consent to take part in this research project:

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date:

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Section 2: Participant Profile

	Descriptor	Details	
1	Name		
2	Contact details		
		Address	
		Work number	
		Mobile	
		email	
3	Occupation		
	Date of Interview		
	Structure of Organisation		

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Section 3: Interview Questions

	Question
1	Tell me about your career path to date:

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Section 3: Interview Questions

	Question
2	What qualifications have you attained to date:

	Question
3	What Continuous Professional Development have you undertaken to date:

	Question
4	What impact has this had on your career trajectory

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Section 3: Interview Questions

5	In your opinion what impact have sectoral developments had on you current practice:

	Question
6	In your opinion what are the future requirements for continuous professional development of VET professionals in the sector:

	Question
7	In your opinion what are the barriers to continuous professional development of VET professionals in the sector:

	Question
8	In your opinion what are the enablers to continuous professional development of VET professionals in the sector:

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Section 3: Interview Questions

	Question
9	What are your views on policy developments in the VET sector:

	Question
10	What are your views on policy implementation in the VET sector:

	Question
11	What are your views on policy supports in the VET sector:

Thank you for creating space in your day to discuss your experience but most of all thank you for your time and your energy
Your input is very much appreciated!

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