JMA ANALYTICS

Tying together performance management, PD planning and skills updating

An interview about the value of VETCAT™ with Anne Dening,
Senior Educational Manager – Innovations, Teaching & Learning, TAFE SA Regional

Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 1 March 2011. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by Dr John Mitchell and validated as accurate by Anne Dening.

Purpose and audience

The purposes of this interview are to:

- stimulate ideas about how to use VETCAT™ to revitalise VET practice

- encourage the development of a national community of practice among users of VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ who are focused on improving quality in their registered training organisations (RTOs).

The intended audience for this document are workforce development peers of Anne Dening who can use VETCAT™ to enhance VET practice.

Background

The VETCAT™ survey was conducted at TAFE SA Regional in June 2010. The Institute later received seven reports of thirty pages or more for VETCAT™ – one for each of the six faculties and one whole-of-Institute report. The Institute undertook CURCAT™ at the same time.

THE INTERVIEW

In terms of VET practice, why is it important to review and revitalise your TAFE teaching workforce?

It's always important as a continuous improvement strategy to keep reviewing and revitalising the TAFE teaching workforce, but I think there were some bigger almost external agendas if you like that push us in that direction. One is the whole quality in teaching and learning in VET agenda, that's become very much a national agenda. I'm observing what happens in faculties and thinking that people with only a Certificate IV in TAA (training and assessment0 are really not equipped to cope with the changing national agenda. And it is really obvious that these people particularly aren't equipped to cope with different cohorts

of students. I think too that that when you see TAFE lecturers interacting both with VET in schools and with the higher education and everything in the middle, it's a very complex field.

The other reason why I think it is important to review and keep revitalising VET practice is because we have an ageing workforce. From my perspective I don't want to bring the new ones into the same old environment: we need to make sure that they get brought into an educational environment that values education and not just the training.

The big four reasons we need to keep reviewing VET practice are the quality agenda, the Certificate IV issue, the ageing workforce and the changing cohorts of students.

What were some of the key insights provided by the VETCAT™ data about your teaching practitioners?

The first key insight for me was that we had a very small number of people who were assessed as advanced learning and assessment specialists and these were areas that I thought we needed to address. We had some skill gaps that were pretty fundamental, things like learning styles, learning theories, understanding of AQTF: they were pretty basic issues.

There were some real positives, though. While half the staff had a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as their highest educational qualification, we actually had 20% with degrees and 11% with post-graduate qualifications, and some with masters' degrees.

The other half had significant educational experience and so pinpointing who those people were so that we could use their skills, their experience and their educational knowledge was also important.

How has the VETCAT™ process been helpful to you, in your role, in reconceptualising and revitalising TAFE work and workers?

For us running the survey was fantastic because we got such buy-in from our staff. That told me something really important too: that not only was my role ready to move on to reconceptualising teaching but they were as well. It was obvious that they were very committed to doing the VETCAT™ survey: they were very committed and keen to find out the results and to see how the institute was going to use that.

If our people hadn't been interested in teaching and learning they wouldn't have bothered with VETCAT™, quite frankly. We went through a process of seeing the enthusiasm, capturing it and then using that momentum to drive some changes in things like a formal mentoring program that's been endorsed. A formal requirement that has been Executive-endorsed is for everyone to have 30 hours of PD per annum as part of a performance management plan. Tying together performance management, PD planning and skills updating really began with the VETCAT™ process and capturing that momentum.

What actions have you taken, or might you take, to unpack the VETCAT™ data and its implications with the faculties?

The headline things were me unpacking it for myself for each faculty and then going to the senior manager, unpacking it in conversations with them about the implications of their data, saying 'This is what your data says, these are the implications, this is what we need to do'. Then I was invited to each of their faculties. They have two-day PD planning days where

they get all of their staff from all around South Australia to come in and I made presentations at all of those meetings and answered all their questions. As I said at Executive today, every time I've put on a PD workshop the headline always is 'As a result of the VETCAT™ data'. This is to make sure that your skills are being recognised or your skill gaps are being filled.

I don't leave it to chance. I had a special workshop for the managers and another one for the senior lecturers, the people who are at the top of the classification steps and I briefed the Executive as a group. Also had a one-on-one with the Directors so that the Managing Director was kept in the loop all the time.

What new strategies (eg PD programs) have been or might be developed as a result of this dialogue across the Institute?

We've put in a formal induction program for our new lecturers which is compulsory. We're implementing a formal training plan for our sessional staff which will be compulsory. The first one for new lecturers consists of the first four units of the Certificate IV in TAE (training and education) and a requirement for them is to have a mentor.

For the sessional staff, I've asked one of the TAA lecturers to develop a customised program that will be about how to pull apart a training package. Obviously these people work with existing lecturers to satisfy the AQTF, but they do need to have some skills of their own, because they are professional in their own industry. I want them to understand that we're professional about education, and we have expectations about them as educators.

We've also implemented the mentor program not just for mentors of the new people but we've said lecturers at steps six, seven and eight need to be mentors. We've actually put some expectations on them to step up.

We've put in place methodology specialisation workshops as a recognition of what VETCAT™ also told us: that the blended learning methodologies are high-end skills. And they should be recognised as such by the Institute for the lecturers involved in blended learnign. It's no good being able to press the right buttons for online learning if you can't teach: the pedagogy that's the basis of it is really important as well.

So some of those initiatives have been put in place following VETCAT™. Another initiative is that I put out some innovation project money where I've put criteria around it which might be something as simple as a develop an e-learning strategy that encompasses a different range of student groups. The innovations project money is very keenly sought after.

I've also put in place a PD program for our managers for next year. Whereas some of the lecturers in the VETCAT™ survey identified AQTF documentation and policies and procedures were a nightmare for some of them, so we've put in place some strategies to help managers know what they should be requiring as well.

In terms of reconceptualising and revitalising TAFE work and workers, what do you expect to be the long-term benefits of VETCAT™ and these new strategies?

What I'm hoping to get out of all of these strategies that I've put in place is a group of professional educators who are confident and competent as educators as well as being up-to-date with their industry.