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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE HAIR AND BEAUTY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This paper presents the research findings from two focus groups and two case studies that explore the issue of workforce development for VET educators who work in the Hair and Beauty Industry. This research forms part of a larger research project funded in 2009 by Service Skills Australia: “New Deal” Project – ‘Workforce Development for the Service Industries VET Practitioners’. Two focus groups were conducted to gain a variety of perspectives on the issues facing the industry. Two case studies were then carried out.

These case studies will present different models of the way in which VET providers can respond to rapidly changing industry demands and they explore issues related to themes within the larger Service Skills Project. These themes include: the desirable attributes of the VET practitioner, organisational leadership, responding to the needs of students, industry partnerships, the development of pedagogical capabilities and the importance of the affective and emotional dimensions of work. A number of these findings are applicable across all industry sectors.

Introduction

In 2009, Service Skills Australia funded a series of ‘new deal’ projects. One of these, the ‘workforce development for service industries VET practitioners’ project aimed firstly, to understand the current situation of VET practitioners who work with the service industries, secondly, to develop a national workforce development strategy (WFD) for the service industries VET sector and, finally, to develop an evaluation strategy for the WFD.

This paper will focus specifically on the hair and beauty industry and the ways in which the industries’ registered training organisations can address the issue of workforce development. It will present the findings from two focus groups, and two comprehensive case studies, which were conducted during May, June and July 2009.

Literature Review

In early 2008, the hairdressing and beauty sectors in Australia employed over 84,000 people (88% female, of which approximately 45% worked part-time). The industry was made up of small to medium businesses, employing fewer than 20 people. (ServiceSkills Australia (SSA), 2009). Compared to other service skills industries, hairdressing and beauty had the highest volatility (the variance of the firm-specific shocks in a sector). This high volatility could have been the result of changes in the economic climate.

In 2008, the service industries' main shortages were in the areas of traditional trades, specifically hairdressing and commercial cookery. Shortages in these areas were partly due to a move away from the traditional trades as a career option and low uptake of apprenticeship pathways (Service Skills Victoria (SSV) 2008).

In the future, SSA (2009) suggests that time poor Australians with higher disposable incomes will turn to the hair and beauty industry to not only receive personal services but also to increase a sense of well-being associated with ideas of personal indulgence and 'time out'.

In 2008, South Australia, NSW and Victoria experienced high net overseas migration. The cultural diversity amongst the workforce and the customers means that the ability to work across cultures was becoming an essential skill (SSA, 2009). Birrell, Healy and Kinnaird (2007) reported that overseas commencements in cooking and hairdressing courses had nearly tripled between 2004 and 2006. They critically examined the standards of training and concluded that only a minority of those completing these courses and subsequently gaining permanent residence would ever actually enter the occupations in Australia.

The hairdressing sector seems to have fewer problems in attracting new employees but faces problems in retaining qualified hairdressers (SSA, 2009). In the case of the traditional trades such as hairdressing, the competition from other industries with more powerful and positive images pulls potential labour and talent away from this industry. The poor perception combined with relatively low wages also hinders entry into these sectors by young people (SSV, 2008). The introduction of Australia's first ever federal industry award is a major victory for the hair and beauty sectors in Australia and will take effect from January 1, 2010.

Business success largely depends on the quality of the customer service that employees provide and their specialist skills and knowledge. Hence the quality of entry level training, which involves a combination of technical and service skills, is of great importance (SSA, 2009). Whilst 79.1% of graduates of hairdressing training packages are employed after training, attention needs to be on the 20.9% of hairdressing and a lower percentage of beauty students that did not receive or choose employment after training. The relevance of training was rated highly by hairdressing graduates. (SSA, 2009) This contradicts Birrell et al's (2007) earlier finding regarding overseas students.

There were a variety of factors creating demand for learning and skills in the hairdressing industry in Australia. SSA (2009) predicts that management skills, the ability to budget, adapt to changes and market are seen as skills that will help reduce the annual rate of exits.

Hairdressing will continue to be a high training priority at Certificate III and IV level, driven by the skills shortages in this field. In the case of the beauty sector, SSV (2008) state that there is a need for Certificate IV- this will hopefully encourage an increase in practitioners becoming specialists in advanced beauty technology following the beauty diploma qualification.

SSA (2009) has identified a number of issues including envisioning that future domestic, social and economic changes that will have multiple effects on the hairdressing and beauty industries.

For these reasons the ongoing training of employees must be a priority for managers, to strengthen their employee recruitment strategies and staff retention plans (SSA, 2009). Leadership and management skills are particularly important for handling changes in Australian society. It is hoped that the implementation of the new federal award combined with the initiatives suggested by ServiceSkills South Australia (2008) in the Hair and Beauty workforce development project will revitalise and invigorate the industry.

Research Method

This paper will discuss the findings derived from two focus groups and two case studies that addressed the issue of workforce development. Each focus group involved a variety of industry representatives, Skills Council representatives and industry associations. One focus group was held in Melbourne, Victoria and the other in Adelaide, South Australia.

Each focus group was facilitated by a member of the research team and participants were encouraged to discuss a series of prepared questions. Participants were asked to recommend RTO's for the case study phase of the research.

The case study phase of the research was also carried out in Melbourne and Adelaide and consisted of a series of in-depth face to face interviews and two telephone interviews.

Hair and Beauty Case Study Participants	Number
Senior Manager	2
Teacher/Trainer	4
Student enrolled in a Hair and Beauty course (1 international students)	4
Partnering Enterprises (including two telephone interviews)	4

Table 1.1: Hair and Beauty Case Study Participants

Case study design which, according to Yin (2003, p. 1) is the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, was selected for this research. He claims that case study method allows investigations to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. He defines five types of case studies used for social science research purposes: (a) the *critical case* (b) the *extreme* or *unique case* (c) the *representative* or *typical case*, which Bryman (2008, p. 56) refers to as the *exemplifying case* (d) the *revelatory case*, and (e) the *longitudinal case*.

Kemmis (1980) describes case study, like all science as a process of truth seeking. He states that it is not a purely mechanical process by which truth is “discovered” and claims that it is an empirical exercise that refers to the real social world. Case study design had been selected because of the intensity of the study required. Stake (1995, p. 8) asserts that we do not

choose case study designs to optimize production of generalisations and states that the real business of case study is ‘particularisations’ – where there is an emphasis on uniqueness.

Findings and Discussion

Focus Groups

The initial focus group research identified several issues which related to workforce development. In Victoria, focus group participants maintained that there was a skills shortage of appropriately trained people in the Hair and Beauty industry. There were several concerns about the quality of the trainers and it was felt that the current minimum requirement (Certificate IV-TAA) was perhaps not enough to prepare people for teaching. Participants suggested that the majority of teachers and trainers were not adequately prepared in terms of pedagogy specifically. The credibility and industry experience of trainers was another area of concern.

Concerns were raised about deficits in the training package- specifically the poor customer service skills of graduates and the ability of the teachers and trainers to customise the package to suit their students’ particular needs. Participants also commented that there was no commitment to workforce development in 80% of cases.

Another area of concern noted by participants was the current VET in Schools initiative and they stated that fast-tracking and students completing the twelve month course were “crucifying the hair and beauty industry”. Participants discussed the differences that they had encountered in the quality of the training between RTO based and apprenticeship based students and voiced their concerns about the poor image of the industry.

Case Study 1: TAFE Institute

The TAFE Institute was located a short distance from a large city centre and drew on a widely dispersed student base. The hair and beauty section of the Institute had established a reputation for innovation both in terms of industry arrangements and partnerships and the enthusiasm and commitment to high quality teaching and assessment. The TAFE hairdressing staff and management worked closely with two high profile salon chains: Hair Intensityⁱ & Fantasy. These partnerships involved collaboration in teaching and assessing and were predicated on a commitment by the TAFE Institute to respond to the articulated needs of the industry. The TAFE Institute operated both fully functional hair and beauty salons, which serviced a regular clientele and provided a realistic working environment for students.

The diagram below is a graphical representation of the TAFE Institutes model for industry partnership in delivery and assessment.

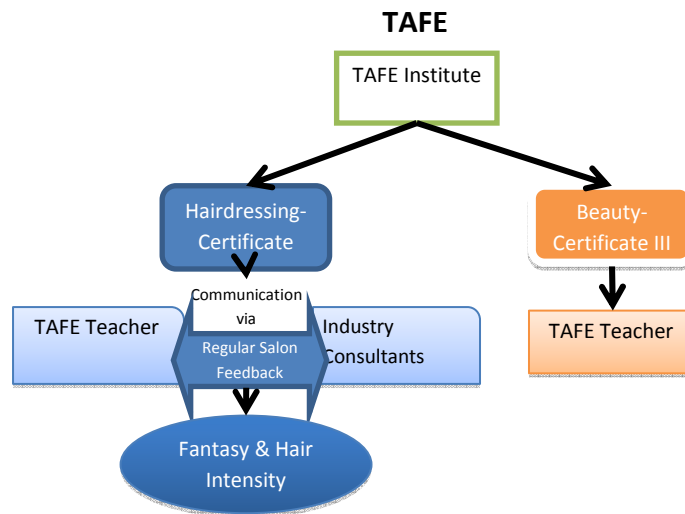


Figure I: The TAFE Institutes Model of Delivery: Hair & Beauty

Workforce development occurs predominantly on two levels. The individual teacher can be committed to personal and professional development and display a strong ‘disposition’ towards learning and maintaining currency. The RTO can be committed to developing the capacity of the organisation through the provision of targeted professional development that is integrated into the structure and planning of the organisation in tangible and observable ways.

The case study analysis revealed that workforce development for the VET practitioner is best undertaken when there are conditions that allow the RTO to:

- Build in the capacity to plan for strategic staff development by extending the budgetary periods thereby allowing flexibility and responsiveness across a longer time period.
- Foster strong leadership amongst staff and plan for individual professional growth.
- Create both an environment and management structure that allows for at least annual planning on the strategic directions to be taken in Professional Development of staff.
- Develop effective partnerships between industry and the RTO that are based on:
 - Respect for the ethos of the industry generally, for the ethos of the particular industry partner specifically, and for the exigencies of day to day delivery experienced by the RTO
 - Ongoing communication between the partners
 - Industry experience in its broadest and most realistic sense
 - Joint delivery of Training Package content
 - Clear assessment and reporting processes that reflect the information that industry requires to gauge student progress.
- Embed workforce development in the management processes of the RTO. It must be linked to performance management, the strategic planning cycle and the processes surrounding the selection for staff.
- Adjust delivery and assessment quickly to meet the changing needs of industry.

- Have a predisposition towards learning from industry partners and have the ability to resist the tendency towards institutionalisation.

Case Study 2: VIVA Academy

The VIVA Academy was established in 1975. The network of salons expanded from this point onwards to reach the standard of its current industry profile. At the time of the study, there were ten salons and two training academies. The VIVA Academy is described online as a modern training facility dedicated to delivering a strong classic foundation for up and coming ‘wanna be’ hairdressers. The Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Association (HBIA) awarded VIVA the ‘2009 Excellence in Hairdressing Education’ Award, the ‘2009 Teacher of the Year’ Award and the ‘2009 Student of the Year’ Award. The VIVA Academy was also awarded College of the Year in 2005 and 2006. The VIVA salons continued to gain national recognition with several staff members winning individual awards for creative work.

The business experienced some dissatisfaction with the training provided off the job by the RTO. The staff were being sent to TAFE colleges or schools and the manager was not very satisfied with the training that they were providing in terms of the ‘habits’ that were being instilled. In response to this dissatisfaction the manager established his own training organisation ‘just to train his own staff’ (Operations Manager). The success of this venture was described by the Operations Manager in terms of the ethos of the company and steady growth in the commercial profile and reputation of the enterprise:

Not anybody can come in and open up a VIVA salon. They must be VIVA trained, they need to know about the culture and how things are structured and they have to have technique. In order to keep our standard and reputation we need to make sure that they are similar in some form of way. Yes, it just works really well, because we see how with the trends in fashion come to the salon and we make sure that they’re delivered here. So without the salons we couldn’t keep up to date with what’s happening.

The salons had a highly public profile and students were frequently involved in activities such as photo shoots, fashion expos and hair design competitions. Staff were similarly committed to making public their achievements and involvements. As noted earlier, a teacher interviewed was the recipient of the ‘Teacher of the Year Award for 2009’. The teachers also had a deep sense that hairdressing was a career and a vocation and that they had a clear brief to expand the employment horizons of their students.

In this way they themselves were engaged in the workforce development of their own students. ‘It’s [the teachers style of training] also looking at workforce development as well, the research we’re doing, looking at what else they can be other than hairdressers, and wherever else they can go’ (Teacher)

The diagram below is a graphical representation of the structure of the VIVA Academy:

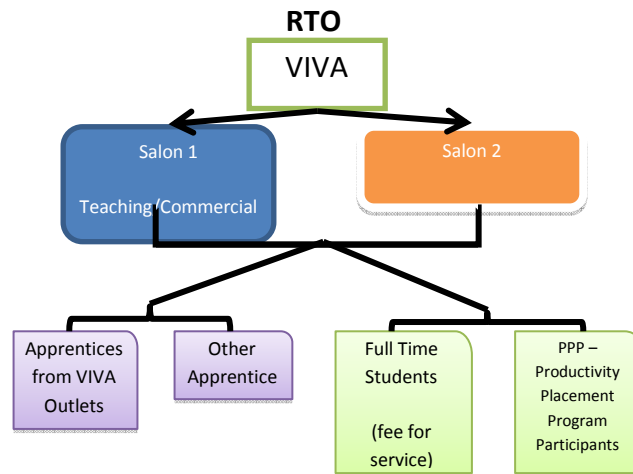


Figure II: VIVA Academy Structure

Participants commented on the relative importance of industry experience and educational qualifications. On balance participants felt that industry experience and currency was irreplaceable since they provided the ‘insider knowledge’ about the day-to-day activities and trends in the salons themselves. These opinions were linked to participant conceptions of hairdressing as an art and a vocation and the importance of staying in touch with these intangible aspects of the industry. The sense of commitment and excitement amongst the staff for their students, for the industry and for art and craft of hairdressing, was palpable.

I kind of loved this so much more than servicing a client, which I've been doing for 25 years. Just getting - seeing the light come on when a student gets it, is the most satisfying thing. There is a weight that lifts off you when you see that they get it and they just go on from there, it's great. It's satisfying and gratifying in so many ways and it's probably why I took it up. It is addictive actually (Teacher VIVA Academy).

This sense had one practical expression in the personal disposition towards constant learning and continual improvements in teaching and learning.

I still, 25 years down the track, I still have a mannequin attached to an antique dining table in my house. Every now and then I go up to it and try something because I see one of my students trying it and I want to be able to show them exactly what is the best approach (Teacher).

This disposition and enthusiasm was collaborative and ‘that’s kind of something we continually do... we constantly train with each other and I’m learning from my students every day’ (Teacher)

Conclusions

Comparative analysis of both case studies has revealed that workforce development for the VET practitioner is best undertaken when the RTO:

- Plans for strategic staff development
- Fosters leadership
- Encourages a hands on involvement by senior management
- Develops effective partnerships with industry.
- Adjusts assessment and delivery.

It was possible to identify from the data collected, a number of examples of workforce development that were effective. The extent to which these were part of a coherent set of policies or practices is debatable, but the examples do provide a range of ‘elements’ that could be implemented by RTOs delivering hair and/or beauty qualifications.

- A strong **partnership** between the RTO and specific industry partners (salons) frequently resulted in co delivery. Staff from the salon were mentored and supported in teaching and assessing situations. In some cases this meant that staff had ‘dual occupations’ in industry and teaching. This relationship contributed to industry currency and responsiveness, and built the capacities of the teaching staff.
- Examples of effective workforce development frequently focussed on the issue of **industry engagement**. Extensive, current and senior experience in the hair and beauty industry was highly regarded and informed the recruitment of staff. Staff development was seen as a way to increase the VET practitioner’s currency as was attending competitions and courses run by HABIA (Hair and Beauty Industry Association).
- In some cases the initiative, energy and enthusiasm of a head teacher or manager contributed to ‘informal’ workforce development. This person identified areas for change, arranged opportunities for staff growth and development and monitored staff performance closely. This **‘dispositional characteristic’** created the environment for staff participation in either RTO provided or self-initiated professional development activities. This disposition was able to thrive where teachers worked collaboratively and where the culture supported a concept of continuous improvement.
- **Leadership and management** were clearly interrelated and crucial factors in achieving an effective workforce development strategy in the hair and beauty industry.
- **Collaborative planning** for professional development as part of performance management and the broader strategic planning for the RTO guaranteed that workforce development was both embedded in the human resource processes of the organisation and supported by the budgetary planning for that organisation.

- Alongside this, the **focussed and targeted recruitment of staff** based on the current profile of the staff and projected future needs ensured that a developmental, rather than an ad hoc, approach was taken to workforce development.
- **Professional development** contributed to workforce development. This worked best where the activities were funded, strategic and well planned. It could occur in a number of ways- through working in the hair and beauty industry and through engagement with salons and the industry in direct and concrete ways, through internships, memberships of professional associations and industry experts' schemes. In some cases RTOs encouraged teachers to engage in **further pedagogical study beyond the Certificate IV TAA**, paid their fees, sometimes provided time release and tied promotion opportunities to successful completion of this further study.

Elements of effective workforce development in an RTO include:

- A strong **partnership** between the RTO and specific industry partners
- Employment of staff with industry **currency**
- Creation of **opportunities** for staff to maintain **industry engagement**
- **Collaborative planning** for professional development
- **Opportunities and funding to support professional development**
- **Focussed and targeted recruitment of staff**
- **Further pedagogical study beyond the Certificate IV**
- **Positive 'dispositional characteristics'**
- **Leadership and management**

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ⁱ Pseudonyms used