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# Changing relationships among VET clients and their consequences for localised VET planning

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## Abstract

*This paper sets out some of the consequences for vocational education and training (VET) policy and practice arising for the changing relationships among the four key VET client groups. These groups comprise Industry, Enterprise, Individuals and Regions. During most of the 1990s, government framed industry needs dominated vocational education policy and provisions. However, the last few of the 1990s saw a shift towards a VET system focused increasingly on enterprise needs. Yet this shift will do little to promote needs of other interests such as the aspirations of individuals and regions which have been overshadowed in the 'industry-led' era. For instance, the evidence suggests an erosion of national industry goals and procedures and a strengthening of an enterprise focus which has direct bearing upon the needs of individuals and regions. Changes to views of teachers' roles, the relationship between community service obligations and marketplace, conceptualisations of lifelong learning are some of the shifts arising from this changing focus within VET. In response considerations for a localised and co-ordinated planning approach which can account for addressing the needs of all four clients is advanced.*

## 1 Introduction

Throughout most of the 1990s, vocational education and training (VET) policy and practice has been strongly influenced by the guidance of 'industry'; through the spokespersons for industry sectors designated by government. Characterised as being corporatist, centralised and top-down, these arrangements privileged the views and interests of 'industry', which marginalised contributions from enterprises, teachers and other interests in VET curriculum decision-making. Mandation, regulation and even legislation were used in attempts to secure governments' industry-led VET policy objectives. However, it seems that industry leadership granted and supported by successive governments through this period failed to secure the key objectives of enhancing the quantum and quality of enterprise commitment to VET. Indeed, the sponsorship of and participation by enterprises in VET programs has declined in both its quantum and duration (Callus 1994, Guthrie & Barnett 1996, Misko 1996, State Training Board 1995, 1997). Attempts to centralise curriculum development provisions are held to have eroded their responsiveness and applicability to the enterprises where this knowledge is deployed (Billett 1996, Hager 1997, Yeung, Woolcock & Sullivan 1996). Therefore, in efforts to respond, the focus of policy is shifting to focus on enterprise needs. However, the demand-side of Australian vocational education system has always comprised more than industry and enterprises. The needs of individuals and regions or communities also need to be accounted for. Indeed the concerns of industry, regions/communities and individuals are currently transforming with a greater emphasis being placed on enterprise requirements. Reconciling and addressing the needs of all these groups has become a key concern for policy and practice in VET (Kosky 2000). Therefore, it is important to understand the consequences for how VET is to become conceptualised and implemented arising from these changes in relations.

The demise of the accord between government and organised labour, and the emergence of enterprise-based industrial arrangements, has seen the decrement of national industrial awards and a weakening of national initiatives such as core curriculum and industry competency standards which were designed to be applicable nationally. Concurrently, the needs and demands of enterprises have emerged (particularly of large enterprises), as a key focus for VET curriculum initiatives and practice. It seems Australian enterprises are increasingly favouring highly specific VET outcomes, rather than those proposed by industry bodies. Alongside the changing relationships between enterprises and 'industry' are the emerging demands of regions to have their particular needs recognised and addressed in ways that are most suited to their requirements (Schofield 1996). These demands included the valuing of local planning to address regional needs. A feature of these arrangements is the forging of strategic relationships between key enterprises and local TAFE institutes. In these arrangements, curriculum negotiations are increasingly being localised. This de-centering now seems permissible with some erosion of the centralist approaches to VET facilitated by and giving voice to the regional needs and the enterprises and interests that reside within them. This approach is currently being manifested in the Local Learning and Employment Networks that are currently being implemented in Victoria (Kosky 2000).

Finally, individuals are now being acknowledged as a group who are making a significant contribution not only to their own, but also to the nation's social and economic development (Chapman 1997). Given they make the major and growing contribution to the funding of VET provisions they also constitute part of the demand-side of VET. Also, the current conception of lifelong learning is pressing individuals to take responsibility for and leadership in the maintenance and development of their working knowledge throughout their working lives.

These emerging demands and transforming interests represent significant change for policy and practice within VET. It is no longer acceptable for curriculum to be wholly fashioned by national industry-based prescriptions. Enterprise needs, those of communities/regions and individuals cannot be accommodated under such prescriptions. Indeed, the recent Training Package approach adopted by ANTA and the LLENs initiatives emphasises this transformation away from the centre, placing a clearly situated focus on the negotiation of curriculum. Although critical of highly centralised industry-based approaches to decision-making in VET, Billett, Cooper, Hayes & Parker (1997) also identified inherent problems with enterprise-based curriculum approaches as potentially leading to learning outcomes that inhibit transfer and portability. This circumstance has consequences for the career pathways of individuals employed in those enterprises as well as the skills of the regional, state and national workforce.

As evidenced in the United Kingdom, the prospect of a specifically-focused enterprise-based system is most likely when it is accompanied by high levels of market-based deregulation. Therefore, rather than a highly deregulated VET system which uses the market rather than planning processes, it seems necessary to understand how best to offer a platform for VET which attempts to reconcile the needs of all the client groups rather than privileging the interests of just one. Instead localised arrangements need to comprise negotiations and co-ordination to balance diverse interests and needs. A requirement to negotiate situational curriculum factors associated with enterprise, industry, individual and regional needs has also emerged. This suggests a significant role for VET educators in fashioning curriculum responses to most suit the needs of the particular enterprise or TAFE institute and the communities they serve. Such a platform should seek to balance market-based reforms, highly situated curriculum responses with strategic goals for the skilfulness of the national workforce as well as those of individuals. Importantly, this also suggests a mature VET system with decision-making being founded on mutuality among the different needs and aspirations of all four of its client groups.

From an earlier analysis of VET policy (Billett et al 1997) it was proposed that the changing relationships and emerging requirements of the key VET clients groups should be as follows.

- Individuals: From individuals as economic units to individuals as aspirants with personal and professional goals
- Enterprises: From a fittedness with ‘industry’ mandate and regulation to acknowledging a ‘fittedness’ with their own unique requirements within an industry framework
- Regions: From national and state-based priorities to negotiated regional priorities
- Industry: From centralised prescription, mandate and control to facilitating individual, regional, state and national industry aspirations.

The investigation reported here aimed to understand the likely consequences for policy and practice within VET from these changing relations and emerging requirements to consider how to address the broader range of needs that constitute the ‘demand-side’ for vocational education. This appraisal seeks to account for the development, implementation and evaluation of VET curriculum, and the place and form of ‘industry’ advice and provisions of VET programs. The investigation examined the requirements for vocational education in three regions (a metropolitan, a provincial centre and a remote rural centre). It used two industry sectors (food processing and clerical) to understand better how the needs and goals of individuals, enterprises, regions and ‘industry’ can be addressed by VET policy and practice.

## **2 Procedures**

The procedures comprised an investigation of two fields of vocational activity (food processing and clerical work) in three regions within Australia. The aim was to identify the complex of factors that influence how best VET provisions should be implemented. As stated above, the basis for these factors are the needs and requirements of the key VET client groups on industry, enterprises, individuals and communities.

### *2.1 Phase One - Identifying and accessing the fields*

The two sectors of vocational activity were identified initially as reflecting both existing (Clerical) and emerging (Food processing) sectoral needs. In addition, regions that reflect both diversity but were representative of other Australian communities were identified. These were: (i) a metropolitan city; (ii) a provincial centre; and (iii) a remote rural centre. Key informants from each of the client groups (individuals, regions, enterprises, and industry) were identified and contacted in the three regions.

### *2.2 Phase Two - Mapping the fields*

Interviews were used to gather data from Industry, Enterprise and Community representatives. Focus groups were used with informants representing prospective, current and past students (Individuals) as were surveys. The interview and survey items focused on the needs of each group and relationships with the needs of other client groups. The interviews attempted to map an understanding of the client groups in the regions. Consultations were extensive, hence the use of combinations of strategies most suited to their needs. In each region 10 enterprises were interviewed across the two industry sectors, up to 10 community informants, and industry representatives for both industry sectors. Additional data was drawn from the TAFE Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), about the views of students who had attended TAFE institutes in the three regions.

### *2.3 Phase Three - Identifying transformations and consequences for VET policy and practice*

An initial analysis of the data was undertaken and a set of issues, consequences likely scenarios, and tentative recommendations generated in the form of a case study from each of the three regions. The analysis used, but was not held wholly captive by, the framework that was advanced in the earlier study (Billett et al 1997).

#### 2.4 Phase Four - Refining the analysis with key VET client groups

The case studies developed in Phase Three were returned to representatives of the key client groups in the three regions in order to gauge their responses and refine the findings. The refined case studies are retained as three separate products of the work.

### 3 Some findings

The findings provided evidence of changing relationships among VET clients and some of the consequences of that change. Further, the role of vocational educators, views about community service obligations and lifelong learning furnished evidence of the shift and contestation in the values, goals for and practices of vocational education in these regions. A few issues of a general kind are worth advancing from the data and the context in which it was gathered. Firstly, it is assumed that each informant represents particular views and values. As such this study did not seek to be wholly representative, because the idea of gaining a representative sample is itself highly questionable. It is only after gaining a clear insight into the context of any investigations, that an understanding of what constitutes representation emerge. Inherent in many of the responses was the current debate about the market's ability to deliver broad and strategic outcomes. However, these were not always consistently applied to the issues under discussion. Secondly, although not intended as part of this investigation, the role and standing of TAFE was frequently referred albeit unsolicited. There is much in the data to support the contention that the TAFE provision is highly valued by Individuals, Enterprises, Community and Industry informants. Again, respondents' values were evident. For instance, many of TAFE's detractors seemed to be so, not on the basis of evidence but on beliefs about TAFE arising as a public provider. These responses influence the important role that the client groups' values play in educational decision-making.

#### 3.1 Changing relationships

Across the subjects representing the views of industry and enterprise there was overall agreement that the focus for VET provisions was being directed more towards individual enterprises. From the industry representatives, the evidence for this claim was in terms of the types of provisions being enacted, the customisation taking place or about to take place and views about variations in industry-based provisions. Enterprise representatives spoke about the quality of negotiations, the mechanisms that permitted or inhibited their needs to be accommodated. These are presented in Table 1, which presents statements of evidence that such a shift has occurred from the perspective of both sets of informants.

**Table 1 - A shift to enterprises**

<i>Industry</i>	<i>Enterprises</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On-the-job provisions</li><li>• Customisation of training, (Training Packages)</li><li>• Shift in public provision</li><li>• Still retaining an industry influence</li><li>• Happening in different ways in different enterprises</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negotiation of course content and outcomes</li><li>• Ability to select modules to address needs</li><li>• Concerns about the degree of tailoring occurring</li><li>• Satisfaction with facilitated approach</li><li>• On-the-job provision reflect shift</li></ul>

From the Enterprise perspective, the most common goal was to secure a tighter enterprise focus in VET programs. It was held that the VET system had to be driven by enterprise needs. More negotiation was requested for these needs to be effectively addressed. This included VET providers developing an intimate knowledge of the enterprise, its goals and staff. However, there was some recognition of the need for a common base of portable skills from at least one clerical employer and concerns were raised by others that courses negotiated at the enterprise level had to carry nationally accepted recognition. The development of

enterprises' capacity to offer programs 'in-house' was seen as a role for providers, particularly TAFE. However, not all enterprises wished to manage the training of their employees. They viewed this as the providers' role because they had the appropriate expertise. Nevertheless, the providers were to be highly instrumental and responsive to one set of needs: the enterprises. In all, enterprises sought access to the curriculum and instructional expertise of the providers, in order to tailor provisions to their needs either through enterprise-based or provider furnished provisions that addressed their specific workplace needs.

Other client groups identified sets of concerns arising from the shift to an enterprise focus. Industry informants were concerned about the erosion of national curriculum and the standing of certification, and the potential for the content and goals of VET provisions to become too enterprise-specific. However, the consistent enterprise perspective was the requirement for courses to intimately address their needs and be customised accordingly. This posture is probably most legitimate when the course was funded directly by the enterprise. However, this was not always the case, particularly in the clerical sector. Yet, enterprises believe they were justified in their demands for customisation from providers in an increasingly competitive VET market, and in ways that may or may not be mindful of Industry concerns and goals. Enterprises want providers to develop rich and intimate understandings of their needs, the readiness of staff and tailor national prescription to the enterprise's own particular needs. It was evident that enterprises are demanding two levels of customisation. Firstly, that the vocational knowledge learnt is only that required by the enterprise. Secondly, that this knowledge needs to be embedded in the structural/organisational activities of the particular workplace.

However, the demands of enterprises are quite inconsistent with the level of their reported commitment to VET. The current reduction in the quantum of enterprise-sponsored training and an emerging preference for short duration entry-level training by enterprises emerges. This leads to important concerns about the wisdom of giving enterprises custody of the responsibility for the development and maintenance of a national base of skilled workers. Although much of the entry-level training has been enterprise focused, there have been college-based components to broaden the base of experiences. This may not be possible in programs that are increasing occurring wholly in the workplaces, as with Food processing and clerical work. Industry respondents expressed concerns about the erosion of national goals, the quality of provisions and certification and strategic goals for the skill development for the industry. These tensions are evident in two distinct views represented in Table 2.

Despite the rhetoric of the market-based provision enhancing the quality of VET, it seems that only the largest of enterprises would contemplate such interaction with multiples of providers in a true market sense. In particular, it seems unlikely that providers will be able to provide for small businesses' specific needs in a lean market-based situation. Nevertheless, there remains an expectation from small enterprises that their specific needs will need to be met. Importantly for national levels of skilfulness, there is a need for curriculum frameworks and educational practices, which are capable of addressing the needs of enterprises but also address, the needs of the other client groups.

**Table 2 – Issues arising from a shift to an enterprise focus**

Industry	Enterprise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eroding the portability of qualifications</li> <li>• Specificity of content and outcomes [parochial - customisation]</li> <li>• Erosion of national curriculum goals</li> <li>• Fragmentation of curriculum</li> <li>• Short-termism of educational goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer duration (higher award) courses through TAFE - shorter courses through enterprises</li> <li>• Has to be enterprise driven</li> <li>• Retention of national qualifications</li> <li>• Common base of skills is required</li> <li>• More negotiation required</li> <li>• Requires intimate knowledge of enterprise, structure, staff and goals</li> </ul>

- 
- Developing enterprise capacity to train
- 

Firstly, the shift in emphasis from national industry-based courses to enterprise-specific needs, has clear implications for vocational educators. Under the industry-based regime, teachers were to merely implement what industry had decided. Now, new roles emerge as the focus shifts to understanding and responding to enterprises needs. Therefore, it is important to generate a broader view of the expectations and roles of vocational educators.

### 3.2 Teachers' roles

Subjects from all four client groups were asked about how vocational educators could best assist the development of curriculum provisions that address the needs of the community, enterprises and individuals. The data on teachers' roles was categorised under the headings: (i) *Consultant*; (ii) *Curriculum developer*; (iii) *Instructor*; (iv) *Advocate and supporter of learners*; and (v) *Policy developer*. Table 3 presents the summarised data from the interviews and focus groups categorised under these headings in the form of subheadings of data responding to each category arrayed below.

**Table 3 – VET teachers' roles**

<i>Consultant and educational leader</i>	<i>Curriculum developer</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent consultant and 'honest broker'</li> <li>• Negotiating with enterprises</li> <li>• Knowledgeable in many areas</li> <li>• Add value to enterprise need analysis</li> <li>• Understand enterprise perspective</li> <li>• Provide leadership for community</li> <li>• Making enterprises self-sufficient in training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapting programs to enterprise needs</li> <li>• Identifying full range of needs</li> <li>• Understand enterprise needs through interaction</li> <li>• Work according to national standards</li> <li>• Danger of vocational educators pushing own product</li> <li>• Regular review of curriculum</li> </ul>
<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Advocate and supporter of learners -</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good teacher - varied teaching skills</li> <li>• Practical instruction and practice</li> <li>• Tailoring instructional needs to the workplace</li> <li>• Be concerned about learning and transfer</li> <li>• Communicates clearly with students</li> <li>• Need more indigenous teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporter, mentor and advocate for students</li> <li>• Compassionate about students</li> <li>• Motivates students and builds interest</li> <li>• Understand student readiness to progress</li> <li>• Counselling on pathways</li> </ul>
<i>Policy developer - dimensions of role</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to be aligned to and inform policy</li> <li>• Lobby for schools for VET programs</li> </ul>	

Issues associated with and concerns about the shift to an enterprise focus were evident in the responses to vocational educators' roles. Even where there was an apparently common view, the intent differs. The role in determining curriculum intents (aims, goals, and objectives) to reflect enterprise requirements was viewed as having particular and different attributes. Curriculum development was seen as situating curriculum at the enterprise level, albeit adapting industry prescriptions to enterprise needs, where it suited. Such an approach is analogous to the School-based curriculum movement (e.g. Skilbeck 1985), although determination of intents is focused on only two sets of interests. The implementation of curriculum (instruction) was seen as a process of good teaching to realise the goals set by enterprises. Addressing learners' needs was very much in terms of their ability to achieve the goals set by industry and enterprises. Taking another instance, enterprises viewed the role of instruction as teaching the content the enterprise requires and in ways that address

participants' needs. The students' responses support the former in terms of relevance to broader employment goals, rather than enterprise-specific learning, but the latter in the same way as the Enterprises. Yet, it was in the *Advocate* role where there was a concentration of student needs, not all of which are easily reconcilable with the characterisation of the *Consultant* and *Curriculum developer* roles which were so strongly proposed by Enterprises.

Consideration of individuals' aspirations is very restricted here, other than the provision of advice about a given educational or career. The findings suggest broader roles and some strong expectations of vocational educators. At one level there are demands to understand and address enterprises needs and on the other to mitigate against these specific needs in providing broader employment outcomes for students.

### 4.3 Community Service Obligations and the market

Community and Industry representatives were asked what they understood by the term Community Service Obligations (CSOs) and also about their relationship to the market. This was used to gauge whether the key role within the public provision of vocational education to promote wide access and support those who might be disadvantaged in the labour market still has currency with these client groups. The range of responses was indicative of how, for particular interest groups, the concept of CSO has particular meanings and relations to the provision of vocational education (Table 4). In appraising these responses, three categories can be identified. These are: (i) a direct obligation, (ii) an indirect outcome and (iii) de-emphasising community service obligation. *Direct obligation* is taken as a need to address social disadvantage and the 'provision of access'. As individual items these weighted most strongly. *Indirect obligation* is held to include the belief all education is a CSO, upskilling the workforce and the dual responsibilities involved.

**Table 4 - CSOs and the market**

Conceptions of CSO	Balance between CSO and market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection criteria used - no community service obligation</li> <li>• Industry obligation with work practice</li> <li>• Permit access to courses</li> <li>• Act within the community</li> <li>• Addressing disadvantage - access and equity - underachievers</li> <li>• Accessibility to justify government funding</li> <li>• Dual responsibility between government and recipient</li> <li>• Aiding disadvantage is an unfair tax on all</li> <li>• Upskill workforce</li> <li>• Continuance of enterprise more important than CSOs</li> <li>• All education/training is fundamentally a CSO</li> <li>• Communicate information about VET within the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation required to counter market excesses</li> <li>• Market creates instability and disadvantage</li> <li>• Loss of focus on longer term goals</li> <li>• Surplus funds only after market goals have been addressed</li> <li>• Pursuit of market goals may neglect local need</li> <li>• Industry-community partnerships address needs of migrants</li> <li>• Fight welfare mentality - Only when its relevant to industry should it be supported by the public purse</li> <li>• Private sector success predicates ability to furnish CSO</li> <li>• For VET to be viable it has to engage the market</li> <li>• Programs not viable without public funding [VET in schools]</li> <li>• Employer subsidies required</li> <li>• Service industry needs, but still accessible</li> <li>• ACE is better place to address equity needs</li> <li>• Public funding of access programs within a market system</li> </ul>

The question about the appropriate balance between CSOs and the market elicited responses that noted both concerns about and support for the market (Table 4). From these views, three categories of responses are evident from the Community and Industry informants. These are: (i) *concerns about the market approach*; (ii) *market has to come first*; and (iii) *accommodation with the market*. *Concerns about the market approach*, include the need for legislation to curb market excesses, the inability of the market to create stability and overcome disadvantage, the dependence of some programs on public funds, loss of a focus on longer term goals, and the potential neglect of local concerns. The *Market has to come first* view was evident in the responses about enterprise success predicating CSOs, only advancing CSOs goals when they are in the interests of industry and only funding CSOs from what is

left over having fulfilled obligations to 'support' the market (e.g. subsidies to enterprises). The *Accommodation with the market* view included making VET viable, employer subsidies required, partnerships with industry are required to secure goals for disadvantaged and the request to service industry's needs but still be accessible.

In considering community service obligations, it seems again that the relationship between the role of vocational education as addressing dual goals of the market and addressing disadvantage are characterised as being conceptualised only through an accommodation with the market. Some Industry and Community respondents did acknowledge problems with the market in realising their goals. Regional respondents noted, for instance, that not all the sectional interests of enterprises are addressed in the shift to the market approach. In particular, the interests of small and isolated enterprises seem jeopardised, by such arrangements. So while the emphasis in policy is directed to enterprise needs, they are unlikely to address the range of enterprises. Moreover, other long-held roles central to vocational education may be neglected, repositioned or subordinated to these needs.

#### 4.4 Lifelong learning (provisions, values and concerns)

The concept of lifelong learning has recently become part of government policy rhetoric. Lifelong learning used to be associated with individuals' personal development throughout their life. Now it has come to mean individuals' need and responsibility to maintain their skills currency throughout their working life, and at their own expense (Billett, et al 1997). This shift captures well the kinds of transformations taking place in public policy in western countries. Here, it is useful to monitor the transformation of this view and to gauge the ways those provisions available that permit individuals to maintain currency and progression. Consequently, subjects representing Enterprise, Industry and Community perspectives were asked what they thought the term lifelong meant. Then, they were asked how this provision was being addressed in current VET provisions.

Three interpretations emerged from analysis of the responses, to the first question. Firstly, the view that lifelong learning referred to "meeting ongoing skill development needs" and "ability to meet changing goals" was particularly supported by Enterprise and Industry respondents. Secondly, individuals learning ordinarily throughout their lives were proposed by Industry, Enterprise and Community representatives. Thirdly, Community representatives proposed continual training and upgrading of qualifications. It was the Enterprise and Industry respondents who proposed the economic viewpoint as an outcome of and goal for lifelong learning. Community representatives as well as Enterprises and Industry advanced learning as a continual process. So there was a division between a concern for outcomes and processes.

The responses to questions about the arrangements currently in place for skills maintenance and development to occur through individuals' lives, can be categorised into those referring to *Provisions, Values* and *Concerns*.

##### *Provisions of lifelong learning*

The existence of formal educational structures was proposed strongly by representatives of all three groups. The use of RPL, self-directed learning, combinations of on- and off-job provisions, mandated enterprise-based processes and the development of training cultures within enterprises were also mentioned. These means were supported by all three sets of informants. At its extreme, this view linked these provisions to progress within enterprises and demonstrates a particular set of values about VET provisions.

*"Linking performance appraisal with training and development - structured processes to determine and rectify personal and organisational deficiencies"*  
(Enterprise representative)

##### *Values*

The values underpinning how lifelong learning should be realised were proposed to be of three kinds: (i) the provision of opportunities, (ii) individuals' responsibilities and (iii)

something to be undertaken at the individuals' own expense. The responses for personal development include the development of interpersonal skills required for the workplace.

### *Concerns*

The concerns expressed by respondents referred to the inability of formal structures (qualifications and formalised courses) to reflect individuals' career progression, a lack of emphasis on 'learning to learn' skills, lack of appropriate provisions and a concern that access to modules rather than complete courses was happening. The latter was well illustrated by the low numbers of individuals actually completing the Certificate of Food Processing compared with those who have completed modules within this award. The issue of the failure of the formal provisions to address career path needs is note worthy. One of the Community respondents stated that these arrangements did not address the needs of the individuals' career paths.

“It doesn't – people don't do it that way. They branch out into other areas and training for this is not available”

In sum, the evidence suggests that the new conceptualisation of lifelong learning has become quickly embedded in VET. However, there appear to be problems with the current approaches within vocational education to assist individuals be able to realise these goals. Certainly, neither the industry-based or enterprise focused approach to course and assessment processes are well placed to provide courses and certification that is developmentally cross sectoral and flexible enough for unique combinations career trajectories.

### 4.4 Planning to address needs

Guiding this study was a concern to understand how best localised decision-making might best proceed. The mutuality of needs of all the key stakeholders (industry, enterprises, individuals, regions) is proposed as a means by which the full potential of VET can be realised and its maturity best developed (Billett et al 1997). Informants from the four client groups were asked how best the needs of enterprises, individuals and communities could be addressed in VET curriculum planning. Overall, there was little overt rejection of addressing mutuality in the needs of all four client groups (albeit directed in particular ways). However, issues about readiness, sectional interests, the particular requirements of enterprises and the difficulty with consultative processes highlight the complexity of this undertaking. The responses to how these processes should proceed were diverse, yet categorisable under three headings; (i) consultation; (ii) sectional interests and (iii) co-ordination.

### *Consultation*

Consultative processes that engaged and addressed the needs of all interested parties were advocated widely. Concerns were expressed about the adequacy of market-based approaches being used as substitutes for planning, as they failed to address local needs. Consultation was held to offer a capacity for the region to develop and submit a consolidated case to state or federal decision-makers and funding bodies. However, this approach to planning was viewed as problematic because of differing needs which may not be readily reconcilable (e.g. short-term and specific enterprise needs versus educational goals) through consultation. It was also held that the process might be dominated by those with the resources available and interest to participate. Added to this was a concern that the demands of the market would inhibit fruitful consultations (e.g. tensions between VET providers in a region). Aligned with these concerns was that of enterprises who claimed that participation in such arrangements were frustrated by the apparent irrelevance of what was discussed and proposed. Gaining involvement by all parties, including the reluctant, through consultation was seen as a key outcome.

### *Sectional interests*

Sectional interest, and particularly those of enterprises, was proposed by enterprises as a means of advancing the needs of all other client groups' interests. The view typified in the data was as follows - if enterprises prospered, they will provide employment and career

progression for local individuals, and the community will prosper and industry goals for levels of skilfulness will accordingly be addressed. It was claimed that not all client groups had legitimacy for inclusion. For example, students were proposed as not knowing what they needed to learn, therefore could not play a useful role. Yet, the evidence suggests that students were often far clearer in their goals for engaging in VET than where other interests (Billett 2000). In other cases, it has been also suggested that enterprises do not really understand their own needs or the processes for best realising their needs. Countering these views were concerns about a lack of diversity in student experiences, the reactive nature and highly specific focus of VET provisions in the workplace. That is, there were concerns that the full range of needs and requirements of communities and those who lived within them are not likely to be addressed because of powerful sectional interests.

#### *Co-ordination*

The regional co-ordination of VET provisions was proposed to plan and manage the needs of the four client groups. Without an understanding of VET by all client groups, broad consultation was seen to be premature and problematic because the different needs may fail to be reconciled. The co-ordinated approach was supported by Industry informants as the means to address the divisions of interests among the client groups and as a means to consider the range of provisions more objectively. The need to involve providers such as TAFE was proposed by Community and Enterprise informants in an approach to local planning that identifies and draws upon community needs. It was held that the majority of the local VET expertise resided within providers (such as TAFE), thereby making their contributions to localised planning useful. However, the full benefit of their contribution and advice may not be realised unless the demands of the market can be mediated. It was stated that such a co-ordination has potential to be strategic and avoid reactive and short-term market-based provisions. Again, such a process could result in a consolidated case to engage in negotiations with state and federal decision-makers and funding bodies.

There was broad support for planning VET provisions that address all client groups needs. This support was polarised around the processes of best reconciling those needs and concerns about whose voices should be heard, the informed nature of those voices and mechanisms which can reduce the differences in interests and the ability of the market to address needs. Opposing this is a market-based stratagem that subordinates planning to an inevitable outcome of market forces and needs within the community. However, the most strongly favoured approach to addressing mutuality of needs was through co-ordination. Of the three proposed approaches, this elicited the most favourable responses and least number of inhibiting concerns. This conclusion again suggests that reconciling different needs cannot be left to market forces alone, as they are not capable of achieving this goal. Instead for planing to progress that address the concerns of the entire demand-side of VET, guidance and co-ordination and consultation are likely required.

#### **4.5 Addressing the needs of the demand sides**

The subjects were asked about how their needs were and were not being addressed by current VET provisions. They were also asked about what they want from the VET system. In this way these items provided some basis to consider the actual --- 'what is' --- against the desired --- 'what should be'. This data was also intended to identify common or distinct needs among the client groups (see Table 5 to Tables 8). Commonality of responses across all groups was associated only with the provision of courses. Flexibility, relevance and currency were commonly supported, as was their ability to address individual needs. The competence of teachers and the need for accredited courses were the only other areas of commonality was evident across all four groups. There were areas of commonality between; (i) Industry and students about the need for appropriate infrastructure; (ii) among enterprises, community and students about the importance of meeting individuals needs; (iii) between industry and communities about wider enterprise participation in VET and particular wider participation by small business; (iv) between enterprises and community about improving business outcomes

and (v) between community and students about realising individuals' employment and career goals.

Some of these commonalities are easily understood. Regions, Enterprises and Individuals want VET provisions that address individuals' needs from perspectives of the community, employer and individual need. Similarly, regions and enterprises have common concerns with the local enterprises prospering, providing employment and stimulating economic activity and enhanced profitability outcomes for the latter. Industry and Regions also were commonly concerned with the wider participation by enterprises (particularly small enterprises) in VET. For the former, it is about increasing the quantum of training. For the latter, it was about opportunities for individuals in the region to engage in entry-level training.

However, there are differences between the client groups' views about some needs. Take, for example, outcomes of VET programs. Enterprises want outcomes tightly aligned to their activities and goals. They want the two levels of customisation highlighted earlier; skilfulness defined in terms of their needs and the vocational activities integrated with the particular mix of requirements of the enterprises activities. For example, a clerical worker in a retail setting has to understand and be competent with a particular set of clerical procedures. Yet, the clerical worker is also required to engage in main stream retail activities as part of their work activities. The clerical assistant who has also to provide product advice when the sales representative is away from the workplace, provides another example of this two levels of customisation of skills customisation. In contrast, students want outcomes that are associated with employment, but are not so specific as to inhibit their movement to other workplaces. They also want outcomes associated with career advancement and access to higher levels of education. Industry has other goals that sit between enterprises and individuals, but are in some ways closer to the latter's. So whereas, the enterprises are concerned about employability in their workplaces, students want outcomes that transcend this specific goal and see them positioned for careers rather than a specific job, industry wants adherence to hard-negotiated national industry frameworks. Quite different assumptions underpin these goals.

**Table 5 – Industry needs**

Industry needs associated with process included:	Industry needs associated with process included:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• infrastructure to provide courses which were current, relevant, and flexible;</li> <li>• competent teachers (industry specific knowledge);</li> <li>• mechanism which addressed enterprise needs within industry frameworks ; and</li> <li>• external auditing and reliability of assessment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• skilled workforce (flexible, self-directed, safe, certificated);</li> <li>• accredited courses</li> <li>• wider participation, especially by small enterprises; and</li> <li>• career pathways for workers.</li> </ul>

**Table 6 – Enterprise needs**

Enterprise needs associated with process included:	Enterprise needs with outcomes include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• courses customised to enterprise needs;</li> <li>• courses addressing employees needs;</li> <li>• flexible, well-prepared, current, relevant and cost effective provisions;</li> <li>• a capacity to offer in-house;</li> <li>• competent teachers (skilled, intimate knowledge of enterprise); and</li> <li>• high levels of interaction with and competition among providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific job-ready skills (technical, organisational, personal and attitudinal);</li> <li>• measurable outcomes relevant to improving business; and</li> <li>• accredited courses.</li> </ul>

**Table 7 Individuals' needs**

Individuals' needs associated with processes included:	Individuals' needs associated with outcomes included:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive and supportive teachers;</li> <li>• flexible, well-prepared, current, relevant and cost effective provisions;</li> <li>• infrastructure to support quality provisions; and</li> <li>• provisions addressing individual needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning new and updating knowledge;</li> <li>• realising employment, self-employment, career goals; and</li> <li>• pathways to higher levels of education and promotion.</li> </ul>

**Table 8 Regional needs**

Regions' needs associated with process included:	Regions' needs associated with outcomes include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consultation with and interaction among providers (teachers) and local community;</li> <li>• responsive to local needs;</li> <li>• flexible, well-prepared, current, relevant and cost effective provisions;</li> <li>• having competent teachers (industry specific knowledge); and</li> <li>• provisions addressing individual needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provisions which lead to employment and support career progression;</li> <li>• enhanced sponsorship of ELT by enterprises;</li> <li>• wider participation, especially by small enterprises;</li> <li>• measurable outcomes relevant to improving business; and</li> <li>• accredited courses.</li> </ul>

Identifying a basis for reconciling these different needs in order to advance mutuality, the following might be advanced is no easy task. However, it seem that a regional basis for realising community needs are largely realisable through addressing enterprise needs, those of individuals and the industry goals in terms of greater participation by enterprises in VET, particularly in entry level training. This has a special significance for the two non-metropolitan centres. It is important to emphasise that each region has particular requirements. It was possible to identify a set of variables as a basis to identify the particular VET requirements of regions. These include:

- Type of industries (scope, specialisation)
- Employment opportunities (types, modes, scope)
- Educational provisions (scope, access, modes, relationships)
- Demographic factors (age, ethnicity, language, educational achievement, size etc)
- Goals/needs (development, consolidation, variation/diversity)
- Regional structures/identity (visibility, opaqueness, identity)

Each of these variables has particular consequences for vocational education provisions. Some, but by no means all of individuals' aspirations appear to be realisable through enterprise goals when they are mediated by industry frameworks and certification. If enterprises' short-term goals are to be addressed through their own requirements, but arguably their long-term goals need to be realised through industry and the region goals. It also seems industry goals are in turn dependent upon those of enterprises, regions and individuals. However, while these shared needs provide a basis to advance mutual concerns there are also differences that set each sector apart. This is captured well in the tension between flexibility and relevance. Enterprises' notion of relevance is to their own requirements, and rather than seeking flexibility they want rigidities. The rigidities are in terms of both process and outcomes. So whereas individuals reported wanting outcomes to permit and support a diversity of options (job - career - educational - promotional opportunities), enterprises want outcomes focused on their vocational practice and organisational structures. Flexibility for

enterprises refers to providers being flexible in addressing enterprise needs. Students want flexibility in provisions, scheduling and pathways. In terms of outcomes, students want transferable knowledge, not just that related to the requirements of a particular enterprise, even the one that is providing their training.

## 5 Concluding comments

So, there is evidence of consequences of a shift in a focus from industry to enterprise. Not all of these consequences are in the interests of other groups or even enterprises themselves. With that shift are changing conceptions of the values that underpin VET provisions. These changes could be merely coincidental with the ethos of the market that is in part responsible for the shift in focus itself. Equally, admitting other voices into deliberations about VET is likely to result in a greater diversity of views, which may not easily be reconciled. Yet, the legitimacy with which enterprises are stating their needs is at least shared by the claims of individuals and the potentially unique requirements of regions. Interestingly, the very time in which enterprise are now strongly asserting their needs is also a time when there is a collapse in the participation in VET by enterprises. In contrast, individuals are making an increased commitment and the analysis of their intentions shows them to have the strategic qualities so sought after in enterprises, yet they remain largely removed from the decision-making process. Equally, as detailed above, regions have unique sets of needs that need to be addressed. It will be interesting to watch the implementation of the LLENs initiatives in Victoria to understand how some of the concerns, tension and distinct goals are worked through. Maybe the common concerns will be a sufficient focus or perhaps the co-ordinating role of government agencies will be required to ensure that diverse interests and concerns are heard and accommodated in localised decision-making. In some ways, it is far easier to establish and propose national mandates and engage in localised negotiations. In the former, the policy development processes may be easier, but they have been found to be wanting in their implementation. Conversely, the negotiating bases at the local level will be central to the quality of VET curriculum decision-making at the local level. This requires processes that privilege a broader set of views than just either industry or enterprises.

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