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INTRODUCTION

Australia is currently undertaking a national review and reform of its Vocational Education and Training qualifications (VET). This is also true for New Zealand, with both countries considering the role of industry as designers of their VET curricula. This study presents a case investigation of the design process for the curriculum used to train apprentice bakers in Australia. It examines the decision-making processes of Australian VET curriculum design, illuminating industry's role in this design and the contested space between stakeholders. The case study uses interviews with 13 key curriculum designers representing industry, governments, and training colleges, alongside discourse analysis of 29 public submissions and government policy documents. This case study is an extract from a larger research study published by the author (Guest, 2022) which examined the design of Australian VET curriculum, from its conception by governments and industry, through to its implementation by college trainers, and its ensuant influence over the vocational identity of learners. A more detailed elaboration of the case study can be found in the original publication (Guest, 2022).

The findings of this research identify industry engaging in competitive interactions where stakeholder negotiations are self-serving and focused on ensuring industrial competitive advantage. The findings also show industrial designers mandating assessments for teacher accountability, rather than as an educative tool for assessing learner knowledge and subsequent gap training. These outcomes present larger questions for both countries' national VET curricula as they prioritise industry's voice and move deeper into a competitive market model for VET education.

THE FOOD TRADES

The term "food trades" in Australia refers to occupations involved in the preparation, production, and handling of food (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). These include chefs, cooks, bakers, pastry chefs, butchers, and smallgoods makers, all assessed for the 2021 Skills Priority List (SPL) and found to be in shortage (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2021). Apprenticeships remain the primary educational pathway for employees entering these trades. However, apprenticeship completion rates continue to decline, drawing attention to the VET curriculum used to train people for these occupations (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

To address apprenticeship non-completion and declining VET enrolments, the last thirty years have seen significant changes to the Australian VET system. Politicians and bureaucrats reasoned that the previous system was poorly positioned for a globalised economy and rapid technological changes (Dawkins, 1988a). It was argued that the 'new world of work' would require an agile VET system to keep pace with rapid changes to skills and knowledge required by future industries (Dawkins, 1988b). Subsequently, in 1994, the nation moved to Competency-Based Training (CBT) whereby complex trade practices were atomised into discrete actions and explicit knowledge clustered within "units of competency." These units could be arranged into agile qualifications, adaptive to industry needs. As qualifications needed modernising, units could be added or replaced, with industry driving the creation of these components.

It was also argued that the existing vocational education sector had become over-reliant on Commonwealth government funding and systemic cost-efficiency changes were required (Dawkins, 1988a). In 1998, a "User Choice" market-based approach to funding training providers was implemented (Smith & Keating, 2003, p. 3). Under this policy, employers and apprentices would select a training institute, rather than defaulting to the nearest local training college (Nobel et al., 1999). The Commonwealth Government posited that competition would create a VET system more responsive to industry client needs and a marketplace that would use price competition to reduce costs (Ryan, 2011).

These reforms have been contested since their introduction thirty years ago; however, the framework remains. To analyse industry's role in shaping the Australian national VET curriculum, and the influence of competitive neoliberal markets over vocational education, this study uses a curriculum framework of the intended curriculum (Billett, 2011).

THE INTENDED CURRICULUM

The intended curriculum refers to aims, goals, and objectives of learning developed by influential stakeholders situated externally to the classroom (Billett, 2011). Governments, industry, enterprises, communities, and individuals are all stakeholders in vocational curriculum purposes and outcomes yet have divergent objectives. Government interests manifest in policy objectives, social development, and fiscal considerations (Goozee, 1995). Industry interests focus on skilled labour supply (Smith, 2010). Enterprise interests develop from human capital needs (Ashton, 2004). Communities require vocational courses that sustain development (Giroux, 2011), while individuals seek vocational knowledge and skills for personal goals (Dewey, 1938; NCVER, 2019).

These stakeholder interests emerge in competitive and complementary ways. Governments and industry groups may view vocational curricula as a mechanism for labour development and prioritise skills over developing good citizenry (Giroux, 2014; Kincheloe, 2005). Conversely, communities may call for a curriculum that develops critical and analytical skills for active participation in society (Dewey, 1916; Wheelahan, 2016). Such a 'student-centred' approach may be favoured by communities and individuals requiring a more generalised vocational curriculum with occupational emphasis (Dewey, 1938; Rushbrook, 2010). These divergent objectives are evident in the development of contemporary Australian VET curriculum known as "training packages."

Each training package contains numerous VET qualifications, with each qualification constructed on a framework of units of competency (Australian Industry Skills Council [AISC], 2019). Industry advisory bodies create training packages through consultation with industry stakeholders. These packages contain skills and knowledge required for worker participation within prescribed occupations and endorsed qualifications (ASIC, 2019). They are nationally endorsed qualifications and standards for vocational qualifications, intended to deliver a more agile system responsive to industry needs and better serving VET learners (Guthrie, 2009; NCVER, 1999).

Critics identify the training packages' purpose as extending beyond the vocational syllabus, positioned within broader political, ideological, and economic objectives (Billett, 2011; Toner, 2018a). Billett argues the packages transferred control of curricula from vocational institutions and teachers to industry (2011). Toner (2018b) argues these changes were part of a broader macro-economic shift toward cost-reducing free-market education based on neoliberal objectives. However, research examining the confluence of these macro contextual factors' influence over Australian VET curricula remains scarce, prompting this study.

What is evident is that the creation of training packages involves extensive industry consultation, which in turn creates its own set of challenges. Smith (2010) notes that the consultation process "can involve literally thousands of people and take extensive amounts of time" (p. 58) and stakeholder groups can pursue vested interests. Smith (2010) also identifies manipulation by training colleges lobbying for inclusion or exclusion of units to increase

their own operational profitability. These two issues raise questions about the intended purposes of industry and training colleges in designing the Australian National VET curriculum. Whose interests do these colleges serve? How has the confluence of competitive education markets and industry drivers shaped the Australian VET curriculum? These questions frame this investigation.

METHODOLOGY

This research examines training package creation, focusing on the bakery training package FDF10 Food Processing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Of all food trades apprenticeships, apprentice bakers had the lowest completion rates at 42.6 percent as of 2024 (Service and Creative Skills Australia, 2024). For this reason, the curriculum for bakery apprentices was selected. The study uses in-depth interviews with 13 curriculum design participants throughout various design stages. Participants are labelled as Representatives (for example, Rep. 1). Representatives from all levels of government involvement were interviewed, from State and Federal government bodies through to college trainers, large industrial chain bakery managers, and retail bakery owners. The research question asks:

> How do the industrial parties within vocational education design and negotiate the intended curriculum of training packages?

The sub-questions are:

> Whose interests do these industrial parties serve?
>
> How has the confluence of competitive education markets and an industry-driven curriculum shaped the Australian VET curriculum?

Beyond interviews with key stakeholders, the research draws on published government and industry literature and 29 public consultation submissions that informed the process (VETNet, 2015). Data extracted from submissions are labelled accordingly (for example, Submission 5). Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Human Ethics Sub-Committee of La Trobe Univesrity (Application No. E16-020).

The study uses discourse analysis to identify conceptual themes in submissions and interview data, focusing on the intended objectives of curriculum designers with the goal of understanding why certain knowledge is included in a training curriculum. Inductive methods interpret economic, political, and cultural meanings in the data discourse. A theoretical framework of the intended curriculum (Billett, 2011) has been used to analyse findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

> There's different sectors in the baking Industry. There's the retail sector, there's the artisan bakers and a supposed kind of in between, like just your Main Street baker and things like that. So, there was a lot of things going on in that sector where the Coles and Woolworths of this world wanted to have people go through training in baking and say that they are a baker, but they couldn't even bake a loaf of bread because they weren't required to for the jobs that they were actually going to fulfil. And then there were the artisan bakers who were saying "how could you be called a baker if you can't bake a loaf of bread?" (Rep. 5)

As Rep. 5 identifies, there is ongoing friction and influence between subcultures over the design process. The following section examines interview data from participants involved in the design process, clustered into sub-cultures with their cultural interests investigated.

Industry subcultures

The VET training package design process involves many committees and participants representing different sub-cultures with divergent interests. The negotiation of the FDF10 Food Processing training package was disputed by four main interest groups:

- Small retail and artisan bakers, referred to as "Artisan retail bakeries"
- Large manufacturing and supermarket chain bakeries referred to as "Large chain bakeries"
- Public state government-run colleges referred to as "Public TAFEs"
- Privately owned Registered Training Organisation colleges, referred to as "Private RTOs."

Artisan retail bakeries

Artisan retail bakeries perceived graduating apprentice bakers as having low skill levels and not being 'industry ready.' This is evident in the following interview response: "That's where there's been a systemic failure right across the board and we see ourselves with this dumbed-down version of training that at its worst delivers absolutely valueless training" (Rep. 2). Their solution was lobbying for complex technical units such as Produce Artisan Bread Products as 'core' or compulsory subjects.

The artisan retail bakeries saw poor training practices facilitated by colleges as an issue. They viewed mandating more complex skills sets as core units and including more assessments as solutions. They were concerned with 'tick and flick' practices, where colleges prematurely pass students to access government funding. Under funding arrangements, colleges receive funding when students pass each unit and again upon certificate completion (Burke, 2018). To safeguard skills acquisition, they argued for workplace assessments under business owner supervision: "They had things in there like mandatory workplace assessment, that had to be done so many times, it worked out a couple of hundred workplace assessments .... it was unrealistic the number of assessments the student would need for a unit" (Rep. 3).

Declining skills was considered by the artisan retail bakers to be a future industry issue. They were concerned apprentices wouldn't be equipped with necessary skills required to ply their trade. Their solution was prescribing excessive assessment supervised by employers in workplaces—an attempt to regain curriculum control and improve training outcomes.

Large chain bakeries

Conversely, large chain bakeries opposed including more complex core units, such as Produce Artisan Bread Products, arguing they would no longer be able to train apprentices exclusively onsite. In the subsequent upgrade of the training package that followed these negotiations, the Produce Artisan Bread Products unit remained an elective and was therefore a flexible inclusion.

> It [vocational training] has been designed over the period of time to just be delivered in the workplace and be versatile enough that it can be delivered in any workplace. Because of that, we end up with young bakers who only have the skills that they know in the one workplace. They do not have the skills required by other workplaces. (Rep. 3)

In Australian apprenticeship training, employers can elect for entirely on-site training without college attendance, as is evidenced in the above quote from Representative 3. This Workplace Training and Assessment (WTA) model is popular with large chain bakeries like Woolworths, Coles, and Bakers Delight. These industry members saw complex skills inclusion such as those found in the Produce Artisan Bread Products unit as detrimental to business interests. The training provided required specialist equipment, requiring apprentices to complete the unit at the RTO college and removing them from their workplace. The large chain bakeries believed that off-

site training would impact their business productivity. They wanted apprentices to remain in the workplace and learn only relevant business skills. These identified negotiations between large chain bakeries and artisan retail bakers demonstrate instrumental purposes where apprentice education is restricted and subordinate to industry interests. While artisan retail bakeries concerned themselves with cultural decline through disappearing trade skills, large chain bakeries focused on material and economic business priorities.

Registered Training Organisations: Public TAFEs and Private RTOs

Public TAFE representatives were concerned with low skills and knowledge levels in performance criteria and joined artisan retail bakeries arguing for more complex core units. "It didn't have 'you make bread from scratch' and some complained about that" (Rep. 8):

> If we just looked at bread alone, forget everything else, but just bread training could actually be delivered by an RTO in as little as one three-hour lesson on white bread alone. At its absolute worst, that's what it looks like. (Rep. 2)

However, not all colleges agreed with the argument made for more complex skills sets. The private RTOs who operated WTA models of delivery disagreed. Under the WTA model, all training is delivered by the college informally at the apprentice's workplace. The college is not required to maintain a training campus and would be unable to conduct training in units containing complex skills if the business could not provide the equipment and expertise. This would mean that they could not train apprentices in units such as Produce Artisan Bread Products and subsequently would not be able to train an apprentice to completion. As a consequence, they would lose funded training hours and apprentice student numbers, imposing a significant financial impact on their business model. The private RTOs voted against the inclusion of the unit Produce Artisan Bread Products and were ultimately successful in having the unit excluded.

The political mediations between private RTOs and public TAFEs over knowledge inclusion that would affect their enactment of their curricula speaks to a commodified understanding of vocational education, where the material interests of designers shape the knowledge inclusions of training packages. The prevailing economic context of competitive markets is shown here to influence how complex and important skills and knowledge can be removed when impacting with the profitability of private colleges.

NEGOTIATED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

For public consultations, training package designers sought public opinion through website announcements and industry bodies. Twenty-nine submissions were received from RTOs and baking industry businesses. Thematic coding identified a heavy focus on the topic of assessment, with "assessor" and "assessment" mentioned 177 times, compared to minimal mentions of "skills" (28), "knowledge" (8), or "performance" (5) (VETNet, 2015).

Assessment was all submitters' primary concern. Baking industry businesses argued for increased assessment volume to manage graduate capability outcomes. RTOs argued against assessment due to delivery model costs. Notably, little mention was made of skills, knowledge, or apprentice learner advocacy, with only two RTOs addressing learner needs. The artisan retail bakeries concerned with low skills and knowledge specification saw strict assessment criteria as quality assurance for graduating apprentices. They argued for more assessments in workplaces, witnessed by qualified tradespeople. Public submissions stated:

> Using 'FDFRB3005 Bake Bread' as an example—observing 10 times and assessing a minimum of 5 times seems excessive. Suggest a minimum of 3 assessments is more reasonable. There seem to be a large number of units with this level of proposed rigour, and I suggest they are all reviewed. (Submission 5)

> Following discussion with yourself [*sic*] I fully appreciate your comments that our funding model is not your concern. However, if we don't work together and lobby the government on this, then TAFE will always have difficulty providing the Industry with the training it desires and is seeking from us. (Submission 5)

Stricter RTO assessment impositions were viewed as political manoeuvres to manage teacher performance. Large chain bakers didn't support the arrangement, believing employer co-assessors would distract tradespeople from work: "When they are at work, they work. We don't want the trainers to be in the workplace interfering with our machinery or production line" (Submission 10).

Both public TAFEs and private RTOs opposed assessment increases, believing financial impacts would render their business models unworkable. In a VET curriculum, assessment serves several functions. For educators, assessment tools integrate quality teaching and learning by serving diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes. The evidence from the submissions identifies assessments being used for the purposes of control and accountability when prescribed by industry, rather than seeing assessments as educational tools for knowledge evaluation and gap training. Consequently, the curriculum narrows towards exam-relevant content rather than broader competencies like problem-solving or adaptability. The Australian context further narrows the curriculum towards the goal of collecting evidence for government funding and competitive marketplace survival. Findings of this research indicate that the inclusion of assessment was considered an opportunity to manage RTO and teacher performance rather than the purpose of reporting student progress.

> The [named government department] is grappling with this all the time with these competing interests (of the sub-cultures. The time lags and the interest groups having dug in to achieve particular sets of outcomes are really quite involved; it's quite a complex negotiation. (Rep. 11)

At the time of this case study, training packages were reviewed based on four-year rotations. That is, every four years, it was a policy requirement that training packages be reviewed and updated. The negotiations over the design of the FDF10 training package extended over a period of 13 years, an extraordinary length of time for a training package review. The political tensions between designers had meant that when viewed against the current government's own standards, the skills and knowledge contained within this training package were out of date by nine years. This identification brings into question the initial introduction of a CBT curriculum and its ability to produce agile qualifications which adapt to industry needs. Its also questions the role of industry at the heart of the intended curriculum, where the designers' purposes and objectives can be seen to prioritise employer outcomes, rather than apprentice learning opportunities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The vocational education curriculum is shaped by the intended purposes of its designers (Billett, 2011). Billett's definition of an intended curriculum asks the reader to question the intended purposes of the designers of the vocational curriculum. Australia is in the process of reviewing and reforming its national VET qualifications, a movement mirrored in New Zealand. This study provides an important reflection point for both countries as they undertake reforms.

The study examines the negotiation between designers and identifies examples of how self-interests are prioritised in the process. Due to the conflict between subcultures in the design process the training package review process had taken 13 years, leaving the curriculum outdated. Artisan bakers were focused on the cultural survival of their craft skills and sought comprehensive control of the curriculum content, its implementation, and the use of assessment to ensure quality. Large chain bakeries were not interested in training that would equip apprentices for their future vocations as bakers and employment in diverse business models. Craft skills were of no use to their business, and they would not fund training in complex skills and knowledge which had no clear benefit for their business models. While both public TAFEs and private RTOs were aligned in their concern for the use of assessment by industry as a tool for quality control, they disagreed over the inclusion of units containing complex skills and knowledge. Notably, they disagreed not because of concern for student development, but rather because of their business models and ability to survive within a competitive market.

The findings show the intentions of industry to represent interests that are complex, divergent, and far from univocal. In Australia the government intentions for VET curriculum place "industry at the heart" (Joyce, 2019). It is argued that with industry as the designing drivers of the skills, knowledge, and learning outcomes of our VET qualifications Australian graduates will develop the contemporary capabilities they require for the future world of work. Furthermore, the government creation of a competitive marketplace is promoted using the neoliberal terms of user choice, and client-driven and economic rationalist language of efficiency and agility. Yet this case study identifies that employers make the choices over training curriculum design and implementation, and the decision-making process is lengthy and delayed by political manoeuvring over its control.

The dynamics of this case study make an important contribution towards a theoretical understanding of the intended curriculum of Australian VET, with important reflection points for our neighbours across the water. It demonstrates how prevailing global economic ideologies can influence government policymakers. Government policy is influenced by global economic ideologies, and curriculum designers may adopt paradigms that prioritise workforce needs at the expense of holistic individual development. Ultimately, the findings show how social and institutional structures influence which forms of knowledge are legitimised and embedded within training packages, particularly in apprenticeship education.

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