



Policy Brief:

How can vocational lecturers bridge the gap between colleges and industry?

Lessons from the Department of Higher Education and Training five-year research programme on TVET

Executive Summary

This briefing note introduces the Quality Vocational Lecturers (QVL) toolkit for supporting 'quality' lecturers within technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. The QVL Toolkit was developed for the 'Quality of TVET college lecturing staff' project, as part of the five-year research programme on TVET for South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Whilst this research was based in South Africa, the QVL toolkit and model has implications for TVET policymakers more widely.

Context: the complex role of the quality TVET lecturer

The distinguishing feature of TVET in comparison to other forms of education is the direct connection between TVET and the world of work. Much TVET policy emphasises the importance of TVET in transforming societies and domestic economies. However, TVET-industry challenges such as limited work-based learning opportunities and job scarcity, fundamentally impact what it means to be a 'quality' TVET lecturer.

One answer, emerging from our research is to take a holistic approach to defining the 'quality TVET lecturer' which encompasses educational dynamics of teaching and student learning, external connections to industry, occupational knowledge and work, and wider dynamics in the TVET system which both enable and constrain the work of the TVET lecturer.

Key Recommendations:

- Pilot the Quality Vocational Lecturers (QVL) Toolkit in selected TVET colleges as a resource for TVET college leaders and DHET officials
- Align the QVL Toolkit with existing professional development frameworks (e.g. IQMS and SACE PDP systems) to balance performance management with all five QVL dimensions
- Bridge the TVET-Industry gap through investment in education research on TVET-Industry connections, particularly in rural and informal economic contexts
- Foster Communities of Practice and learning networks involving TVET lecturers, colleges, and industry stakeholders aligned to the QVL Toolkit, SACE and the DHET 2023 National plan for post-school education and training

CASE STUDY:

Defining and supporting the quality TVET lecturer

Our research had two overarching objectives:

- Identify how key stakeholders understand and define TVET lecturer quality
- Develop an evidence-based toolkit for TVET lecturers, college managers and policy makers that aids the development of quality TVET lecturers

Method and approach:

- Three concepts critical to the TVET lecturer role guided our work:
 - Knowledge – practical, theoretical, subject and pedagogic knowledge
 - Holistic competencies – the skills and attributes to relate theory to work contexts
 - Mediation - the ability to respond to curriculum, policy, student and industry priorities
- Literature review of over 100 academic articles to identify how quality TVET lecturers were understood in South African and international literature
- Surveyed 105 key stakeholders to identify perceptions of quality TVET lecturers
- Interactive workshops in 3 TVET colleges with 95 TVET lecturers to explore the classroom, industry and systemic dynamics of TVET lecturer quality



Image source: Jo-Anna Russon

Key Findings

- **Narrow definitions and holistic aspirations of 'quality'.** Much of the academic literature we reviewed did not define quality but reflected a narrow perspective of quality which emphasised qualifications and the knowledge and competencies for managing assessment. TVET lecturers also tended to equate quality with pedagogic development through the attainment of qualifications. In contrast, the survey identified a more holistic perception, with the ideal quality vocational lecturer encompassing aspects of pedagogy, vocational knowledge and competencies, workplace connections and societal responsibilities
- **Facilitating quality TVET lecturers in the skills ecosystem.** Many of the TVET lecturers we engaged with were motivated and passionate, and saw their work as a vocation, like that of a teacher or nurse, but were hampered by challenges in the wider skills ecosystem. Whilst TVET colleges and the DHET were viewed as pivotal in improving working conditions and funding for quality TVET, we also found limited engagement with the systemic dynamics outside of the classroom that can support the quality TVET lecturer, such as links with TVET and industry, and wider TVET/industry networks
- **The quality vocational lecturers (QVL) model.** Our model of the quality TVET lecturer encompasses the dynamics of student/classroom pedagogy and industry knowledge and competencies, whilst also recognizing the institutional structures and varying degrees of autonomy that can enable or constrain the work of the TVET lecturer.



Image source: Jo-Anna Russon

The Quality Vocational Lecturers (QVL) model

Our model defines the quality vocational lecturer as represented by five interrelated dimensions of quality:

- Pedagogy: being a good teacher: Foundational knowledge, concepts and competencies
- Workplace understanding: connecting curriculum and pedagogy to the world of work
- Relations to external stakeholders: connections and learning networks with industry, peers, professional bodies and key TVET stakeholders
- Future orientation: anticipate and be relevant to future orientations in work, education, climate, and the socio-economic environment
- Personal and professional values and competencies: passion, citizenship, and professional identity as a TVET lecturer

These five dimensions represent a holistic approach to supporting the quality TVET lecturer at multiple levels: individual lecturers, TVET colleges, policy and industry bodies, and the wider TVET system.

The TVET-Industry gap:

The distinguishing feature of TVET is the connection to the world of work. The interrelated dimensions of the QVL model identify areas where bridging this gap can support the quality TVET lecturer.

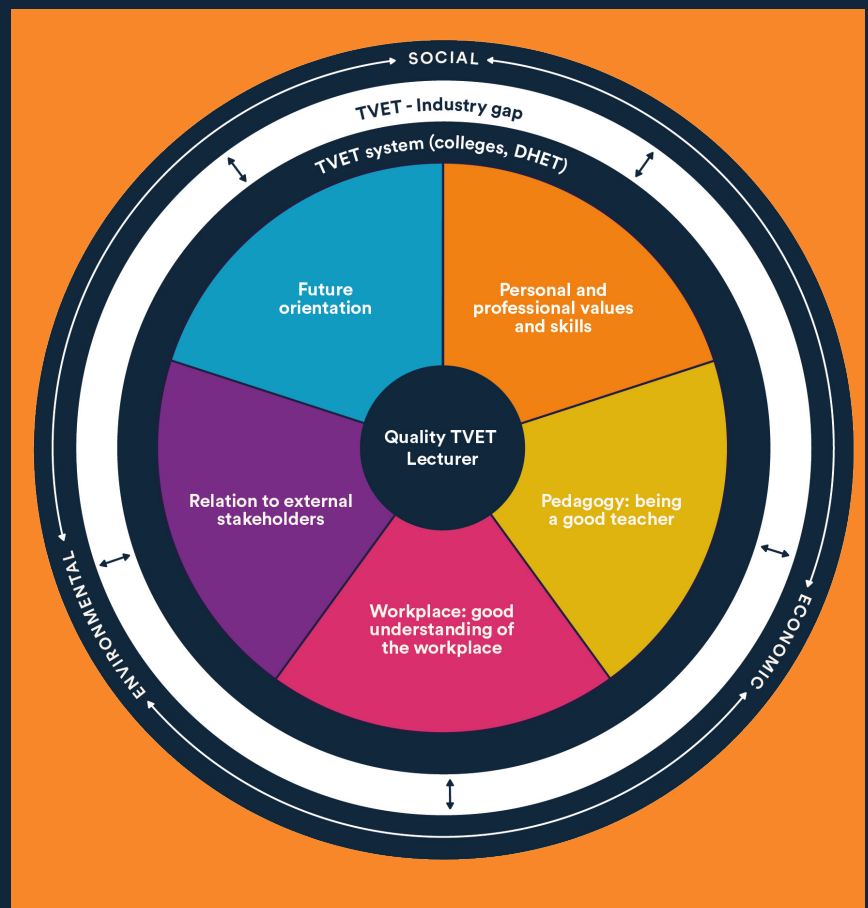
Conclusion

Our research revealed significant gaps in defining the quality TVET lecturer, leading to the partial identification of what is necessary to support this critical role. The QVL model offers a comprehensive framework that identifies five interrelated dimensions essential for supporting the quality TVET lecturer. This holistic perspective underscores the interconnectedness of quality vocational teaching with critical issues such as student outcomes, professionalization, and social justice.



The QVL model identifies interrelated dimensions for supporting vocational lecturers and bridging the TVET-Industry gap

Figure 1: QVL Model. Source: Jo-Anna Russon and Volker Wedekind (Graphics: Kit Studio)





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Further reading

[UNEVOC Nottingham resources](#)

[DHET TVET Research Programme](#)

[Wedekind, V., Russon, J., Lui, Z., Zungu, Z., and Li, M. \(2024\) What is a Quality TVET Lecturer?, JOVACET. 7\(2\), 22.](#)

[VET Africa Collective 4.0 \(2023\) Transitioning Vocational Education and Training in Africa: A Social Skills Ecosystem Perspective, Bristol: Bristol University Press. ISBN: 978-1529224634.](#)

[Hofmeyr, J. & Vally, Z. \(2022\) Towards the professionalisation of TVET lecturers, Johannesburg: JET Education Services.](#)

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This policy paper was supported by the Institute for Policy and Public Engagement. Find out more via our website nott.ac.uk/IPE or get in touch: theinstitute@nottingham.ac.uk



Image source: University of Nottingham image library