



VETnetwork Australia Inc

Your National Peak Body Supporting Vocational Education and Training in Schools
ABN 94619317099

PO Box 25
LYNEHAM ACT 2602

2 Bradfield St
DOWNER ACT 2602

Tel (02) 6241 4777
Fax (02) 6241 4799

VETNETWORK AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

PREFACE

VETnetwork Australia is the national peak body supporting vocational education and training (VET) in schools. Eighty percent of our national membership comprises VET teachers and coordinators in schools. Information in this submission is based on direct member feedback from a national survey conducted between December 2001 and May 2002. This submission contains “grass roots” information from VET in schools practitioners on self-identified needs and possible solutions. Survey respondents also came from industry, policy and research sectors to a lesser degree. VETnetwork Australia includes recommendations for action based on evidence and other research at the conclusion of the submission. This organisation is driven by the needs of the members.

The key role of VETnetwork Australia in 2001-2002 has focused on:

- information gathering and dissemination to members via publications (quarterly magazine and annual journal) and website. There is a strong focus on practical issues pertinent to VET teachers and teacher resources for delivery.
- delivering the 2002 National Biennial Conference which is the **only national conference focused on VET in schools issues. 700 VET teachers and coordinators nationally are expected at the conference in October 2002.**
- issues advocacy to Federal Government and other key VET stakeholders on behalf of members. VETnetwork Australia briefs Dr Nelson’s office quarterly and has a strategic partnership with DEST and other key VET organisations.

KEY POINTS SUMMARY

- **The biggest issue faced in delivering VET in schools is inadequate funding and resourcing with 57% of respondents (predominantly VET teachers and coordinators in schools) identifying this as their major barrier.**
- **Inadequate time for VET coordinators to run programs is considered the major issue in delivery of VET in schools by 34% of respondents (mostly teachers and coordinators).**
- **All issues identified below are of great importance and percentages quoted are not always an indicator of priority. For example, only 3% identified**

industrial conditions for VET teachers, which is probably a reflection that most practitioners are within a school and awards system and are not affected by this. Yet, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP) has quoted 6 months as the average time for cluster coordinators before burn-out. The meeting of basic needs is crucial to sustainability and long-term performance.

- **The training and resourcing costs associated with the constant change related to the ongoing development of VET in schools need to be acknowledged and funded.**
- **View the *recommendations for action*, as an informed plan based on critical issues and needs identified by teachers/coordinators combined with a strategic big picture view.**

BODY OF EVIDENCE AGAINST TERMS OF REFERENCE

The scope of the survey relates primarily to the first term of reference and comments are provided. The *recommendations for action* will include comments covering all terms of reference.

1. Range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs
- **Biggest issues faced in delivering VET in schools are (% identifying as a major issue):**

Inadequate funding and resourcing (57%). Under this category, the following sub-areas were identified: inadequate funding/resourcing, including lack of continuity of funding (55%); inadequate resources (20%); rapid growth of VET but not funding (10%); financial penalties in TAFE funding formula for additional delivery hours within budget (5%); access to computers (5%); and maintaining support by a range of industry representatives (5%).

Inadequate time for VET coordinators to run programs (34%). Three areas were identified as being of equal importance in this area. They were: inadequate time release for VET coordinators for workplace organisation and visits; inadequate time release for VET coordinators for tracking of students; and, inadequate time release for VET coordinators for organisation of budgets.

Constant rate of change for VET in schools (29%). The prime areas of concern under this category were the cost of implementing change and the difficulty (including time involved) in staying updated. The changes to training packages and the difficulty for large organisations to implement and maintain a change culture were also cited as issues.

Teacher qualifications, training and experience (23%). Major areas of concern were: adequately trained and experienced (industry areas) teachers/trainers and the AQTF, in particular, the cost and staff training involved in auspicating schools to deliver VET training. Other important issues raised in this area were the decline in industry release opportunities for teachers to keep up skills and maintaining industry currency and workplace contact. There is continued lack of recognition & appreciation by industry of what teachers do and the qualifications and training they have. This also exists in the reverse with teachers not aware of or unable to gain the experience (through return to industry) of current changes in their vocational teaching areas.

Student training, workplacements and employment outcomes (23%). The most significant areas of concern identified were the travel and insurance costs of workplacements and the competition for workplacements (resulting in difficulty of obtaining placements). Other issues raised were the students' ability to access and pay for courses (cost of TAFE courses prohibitive) and ensuring the employment connection for VET in schools graduates.

Perceptions and lack of knowledge about VET both within and outside schools (20%). Promotion of VET to parents and the wider community to ensure they have a realistic and current knowledge of what it is about and what it can achieve, was the top area of concern. Getting VET into the consciousness of school executives, non-VET teachers and other staff was also an issue, as was parity of esteem for VET in schools training against non-school VET training. There is a lack of recognition of the enormous amount of time and paperwork involved in managing vocational courses for RTO requirements.

Employer considerations (6%). The one area raised here was the additional workload for the employer involved in employing a school-based trainee versus the employer incentives available to employ additional staff.

Employment conditions for VET teachers/coordinators (3%). The lack of award for VET teachers and coordinators is a problem, particularly for those cluster coordinators employed by a regional body (outside the school).

- **Most valuable services** identified as being offered by this organisation were: the provision of information via our quarterly magazine (74%); issues advocacy (54%); and provision of information to practitioners (54%). The quarterly publication was rated highly by predominantly teachers from the government & catholic school sectors, but also by some policy makers and "Others" (mainly coordinators in this category). Issues advocacy was rated highly by both industry & teachers.
- **Areas in which information sought.** The areas of content in the publication that was most widely read were professional development (60%), industry and employment (60%) and articles and issues (60%). Case studies were also read by 46% of respondents.

- **Better meeting teacher needs.** Several suggestions were received for improvements to publications that would better meet VET teacher needs. VET teachers/ coordinators asked for:
 - more best practice examples** i.e.. case studies - to learn without having to “reinvent the wheel” and waste valuable resources. These examples provide an incentive, a catalyst for ideas for teachers to customise and implement in their own schools/regions.
 - more information regarding accessible, quality and specific teacher resources.** Cost is an issue, as well as quality and relevance to levels and industry areas for schools.
 - the inclusion of a more country and regional focus**
 - greater accessibility cost-wise and time release-wise to professional development opportunities.**
- **Other valuable services requested.** Teachers identified other services that could be offered that would be of value, including (in order of priority):
 - information on and access to suppliers of specific curriculum materials**
 - more online facilities, including professional development**
 - access to experts in specific fields via our publications**
 - up to date regular information on changes in funding arrangements and school-based new apprenticeships**
 - practical assistance with Registered Training Organisation (RTO) audits.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The exponential growth of VET in schools over the last 5-10 years establishes it as the new “first point of contact” for vocational education and training, previously the role of TAFEs. To support this significant change the following measures are required:
 - an increase in funding and resourcing commensurate with the expansion of VET in schools is required.
 - dedicated VET in schools positions, in recognition of the workload, time and energy required by VET teachers and coordinators to provide a quality program including workplacements for students, return to industry and other professional development activities for teacher/trainers and marketing of vocational education and school-based new apprenticeships to parents and the wider community.
 - increased professional development for VET teachers/coordinators/principals. The scope of the VET role has widened

significantly with the inclusion of partnership work, requiring marketing and other skills. Teachers were not originally employed for these skills and upskilling is required.

- promotion of VET in schools being undertaken at a national level (suggest national integrated **current** marketing campaign) both within and outside schools.
 - resourcing (including financial and in terms of time) that reflects the real costs of change and allows schools to implement change.
 - financial or other support for key vocational education and post-compulsory education associations at national and state levels which are in touch with practical teacher/coordinator issues and deliver information and resource dissemination services, professional development activities and provide an advocacy voice for VET in schools professionals.
 - specific teacher training for VET teachers, that includes other qualification requirements for VET teaching such as the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. Lateral thinking in recruiting should be investigated eg. the Queensland University who is targeting industry people and training them as teachers.
 - greater national consistency in operational terms for VET in schools. This includes clear and transparent, procedures policies and practices.
2. Continuing work on achieving seamless transitions for students between educational sectors (school/TAFE/University) is valuable. Areas to consider are greater sharing of resources between TAFEs and schools, review of funding formulas that do not disadvantage schools for using TAFE training, and the cost of TAFE training.
 3. Recognition of the role of school leaders in the change process, and support for school leaders as a change leader. This may include professional development in the areas of leadership, change management, human resource management and business. VET should figure prominently as an integral component of school services in all school leader professional development.
 4. Review of school structures and operating procedures to make them more flexible and responsive to changing student, industry and educational needs. eg. new models for timetabling that accommodate VET placements in industry and the workplace.
 5. It is believed that further work on teacher standards and strengthening the teaching profession is essential. If VET in schools is included as a specific area in this work, it will serve the dual purpose of better informing the public about the benefits of VET in schools and raising external perceptions among parents and in the community.
 6. Review of Registered Training Organisations (RTO) role in schools. This requires significant resourcing and time in order to comply with AQTF standards. Each state has a different approach to RTOs operating as schools. With the growing success of partnerships with industry and private RTOs, each school should be able to choose which path is in their best interests taking into account local service providers and school resourcing.

VETnetwork Australia National Committee
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