



CHIEF MINISTER

PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
DARWIN NT 0800  
TELEPHONE: (08) 8901 4000

GPO BOX 3146  
DARWIN NT 0801  
FACSIMILE: (08) 8901 4099  
chiefminister.nt@nt.gov.au

19 SEP 2002

Mr Richard Selth  
The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Training  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Selth

I am responding to a letter from Kerry Bartlett MP, dated 16 August 2002, regarding the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training inquiry into vocational education in schools.

My government strongly supports vocational education in schools and we are pleased to submit our responses to the inquiry's terms of reference.

I look forward to receiving a copy of the inquiry results.

Yours sincerely

CLARE MARTIN



## **Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools**

Vocational Education encompasses Vocational Education and Training (VET), vocational learning and enterprise education. VET in schools, refers to accredited entry-level training that delivers skills and competencies aligned to the Australian Qualifications Framework. On completion of this training, a student receives either a qualification or Statement of Attainment and also gains credit towards the student's Northern Territory Certificate of Education. Vocational learning is general learning that includes employability skills, career education, community and work-based learning. Enterprise education is about developing a learning culture that equips students in identifying, creating, initiating, and managing personal, business, work and community opportunities.

### **NT Government goals for vocational education in schools to 2005**

- Provide increased opportunities for vocational education for 14- 19-year-olds.
- Improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for young Indigenous people through vocational education opportunities.
- Increase school attendance and retention rates for Indigenous students.
- Demystify and simplify VET for parents/guardians, industry, and students across the Northern Territory.

### **Situation analysis**

The Northern Territory has experienced strong population growth over the last two decades. The Northern Territory's population is expected to continue to grow 20.0% by 2011 (ABS 1362.7), while Australia's estimated increase over the same period is 12.2% (ABS 1362.7). The Northern Territory also had the highest proportion of people 14 years and under of any State or Territory, with 40% of people under the age of 14 being Indigenous.

Significantly the Australian Bureau of Statistics has indicated that 28% of the NT population is Indigenous when compared to 2% nationally (ABS 1362.7), with most Indigenous people in the Northern Territory living in regional and remote areas (ABS Cat no. 1362.7 Regional Statistics for 2001).

There are extremely low levels of numeracy and literacy among Indigenous people under 45 years of age. There are also many other challenges facing Indigenous Northern Territorians including poor health, family violence and substance abuse.

The Northern Territory employment environment is predominantly made up of small business. Of the 7100 people unemployed in 2001, 2400 were aged 15 to 24 (ABS Cat No. 6291 as sourced by SACES). Indigenous employment in regional and remote areas is very low. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's (ATSIC) Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) is the largest employer of Indigenous people in remote areas. There are approximately 8000 Community Development Employment Program places administered by ATSIC in the Northern

Territory. Without the CDEP places, the Northern Territory's unemployment figure would be about two times higher than it is at present.

Vocational Education has a crucial role in shaping our future. It can provide the foundation blocks upon which continuous learning may occur. We have to provide a system that encourages maximising learning and training opportunities and choices for our youth and provides a skilled workforce for prospective employers. If young people are not able to access employment and training, well over a third of young Territorians may end up living on welfare in future years.

## **Terms of Reference**

### **Range of vocational education programs**

VET in Schools continues to be an area of growth within the Northern Territory. Approximately 30% of senior secondary students undertook at least one module/competency within their Northern Territory Certificate of Education in 2001. Approximately 20% of students who undertook at least one VET competency, completed a full VET qualification. So far in 2002, over 800 students have had access to training within 57 VET in Schools programs that cover 17 industry areas. The average annual curriculum hours per student undertaking at least one VET module/competency also continued to grow with the average hours rising to 230 in 2001.

There has been an increasing awareness of Enterprise and Career Education evidenced by the growing number of schools participating in activities. More schools from across the Territory are expressing an interest in participating in activities such as E Teams, Young Achievement Australia, the Real Game Series and the NT Youth Business Awards. Career Education programs are usually delivered by classroom teachers (usually in Studies of Society and Environment). The recommended course of study is 40 hours in either Year 9 or 10.

Work experience programs are usually offered at Year 10, but may also be offered in Year 11 and/or 12. Students normally have to be at least 15 years old, but in special cases, some younger students are able to participate. All students must be briefed about their responsibilities in the workplace, in particular occupational health and safety issues (including sexual harassment), before undertaking work experience. This briefing is usually done as part of the Career Education program. Students undertaking VET in Schools programs may participate in structured work placement for up to 240 hours in the year with most programs having a recommendation of 120 hours.

One of the issues for the future is the low number of School-Based New Apprenticeships that are taken up in the Northern Territory, an average of approximately 20 per year. Two separate projects have been developed to identify the barriers to the implementation of School-Based New Apprenticeships and then facilitate the implementation for a targeted number of apprenticeships for both urban and remote youth in the Northern Territory. One project has started with the other project due to commence in the near future. It is expected that one of the outcomes of the projects will be that the number of school-based apprenticeships will increase to 50 in 2003.

### **Structure of vocational education programs**

VET in Schools programs are generally offered through either a cluster or school model. A cluster program is open to any school student in the region, regardless of school attended. These programs are generally offered on a one day per week basis. Cluster model programs increase the diversity and variety of options open to students. School programs may also be offered to students at a single school within the normal school timetable. A small number of school-based apprenticeships are also undertaken by students who are generally accommodated in schools through similar arrangements to the cluster model of release from school for one day per week.

All accredited VET training must be through a registered training organisation (RTO). This usually means that the RTO provides the trainer and the resources to conduct the training. There are eight schools that are RTOs. In some cases, a school and an RTO may enter auspicing arrangements.

Vocational education outcomes have been incorporated in the new Northern Territory Transition to Year 10 Curriculum Framework. The NT Curriculum Framework provides a single, inclusive, outcomes-based framework that has been developed through extensive and intensive consultation with schools and key stakeholders. It provides a structure that allows programs to be developed that ensure that all students achieve agreed vocational learning outcomes within local contexts and priorities. This will ensure that the foundation knowledge, skills and understandings are developed to assist in our youth making the transition from compulsory school options to post-compulsory school options and pathways.

### **Resourcing for vocational education**

The NT Department of Employment, Education and Training has a School to Work Unit, which is located in the Employment and Training Division with six positions. There is a new School to Work Strategy currently under development.

Funding available to organisations is generally based on a yearly application cycle. This makes for developing longer-term programs more difficult. To add to the difficulties with yearly applications, organisations may have to apply for funding from a number of agencies or sources that operate on a variety of different cycles.

The NT Government responded to the challenge of the provision of accredited VET in the remote regions with a commitment to the Training for Remote Youth project. This will provide funding for 2002 of \$1M, maintained in real terms over the next three years. This funding is for delivery of accredited VET to 14- to 19-year-olds in remote localities, who have left school or who have such poor attendance they are not considered to be at school. The Northern Territory Government is also seeking to secure an additional \$800K from ANTA to be used for Training for Remote Youth project for this calendar year. This project will ensure a substantial growth in VET activity over the next four years with an additional 700–900 student places available to young Territorians.

At the school level there has been one additional career counsellor position in each high school in the NT. These positions were created in 1994 to be additional to and not replace existing arrangements for career or personal counselling, and were to be dedicated to full-time career advising and related careers work. These positions are to

be used for careers counselling for at least 50% of the time, but wherever possible it should be full time. With these positions, it is up to the school to determine how the functions are deployed. In nearly all NT schools the careers adviser has a teaching load as well as their career advice role, and in some cases they have a full-time teaching load as well as their careers work.

### **Delivery issues**

Tension between industry and education requirements can create some difficulties. Industry may require students for set blocks of time, where issues such as length of time in placements, timing of the placement, hours of work, creates difficulties for schools and students, as students generally have to miss other curriculum opportunities. This problem is compounded when schools are unwilling or unable to change school timetables.

It can be extremely difficult to access adequate resources in remote localities, particularly when delivering a VET program for the first time. Establishment costs, with purchasing, transporting and installation, can be a contributing factor to the difficulty in delivering VET programs in remote locations.

### **Impact on other programs**

The NT Department of Employment, Education and Training instigated student destination surveys in 2002, to assist in the reflective evaluation of VET in Schools programs within six months of the completion of the program. The initial baseline data shows that the majority of students are still at school after the completion of their VET in Schools program. This is expected, as most students undertake the programs during Stage 1 (Year 11). Over 20% of respondents indicated that they are in full-time work with the majority of those indicating that the VET in Schools assisted them in choosing their pathway.

### **Difference in systems**

Communicating the differences between general education and vocational education to all stakeholders is another challenge. A coordinated marketing strategy will be implemented across the Northern Territory over the next three years to demystify the various components of vocational education for all stakeholders.

A national approach for teachers in schools to access workplace learning opportunities within industry is needed. Professional development is required for teachers, and teachers in training, in the area of vocational education. Currently there are several units that may be undertaken in teacher training or renewing teacher knowledge programs in which the basic elements of vocational education are explored, particularly VET in Schools. An increased understanding of the various elements of vocational education is required to ensure that teachers are able to maximise the learning opportunities for students.

Under the Australian Quality Training Framework all staff involved in accredited VET training, must have current relevant industry contact and/or experience and a level of competence at least equal to that being delivered and assessed. Assessors of VET must have a minimum of three units of competency from the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training.

## **Qualifications**

VET in Schools is offered under a variety of models, depending on what best suits the school and the community. VET curriculum is currently offered as stand-alone curriculum that is not embedded in NT Board of Studies courses. When VET in Schools was first implemented in the Northern Territory, most competencies were embedded within NT Board of Studies curriculum. It was found that industry and other training providers did not accept this readily. To maintain the integrity of VET and the NT Board of Studies curriculum the Department moved to stand-alone VET. Whilst VET competencies are recognised through the NT Certificate of Education, students are unable to gain a Tertiary Entrance Rank through VET. The Northern Territory is using Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia curriculum where there is an option for using curriculum in which VET competencies are embedded and students could gain a Tertiary Entrance Rank. At this stage no Northern Territory school has picked up this option.

As students can undertake any VET competencies and gain credit towards their Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE), there are more students gaining an additional number of units of credit within their Northern Territory Certificate of Education.

## **Pattern of industry acceptance**

Often the needs that have been identified by industry, do not match the programs that students wish to undertake. This has caused a tension between industry and schools, with both needing to market the program to all stakeholders.

The identification of NT employment and training needs will be done through the Labour Market Analysis, which will be conducted in the near future.

Other community needs may include addressing social issues through strategies such as increasing retention of students in school.

While there may be a perception nationally from industry that VET in Schools programs are substandard, there seems to be little actual evidence in the Northern Territory. During recent Worldskills Australia regional competitions students were given the opportunity to compete and showcase the high standards being achieved in their training. A number of anecdotal comments were made as to the high standards of the students' work. The marketing to demystify and simplify VET will also assist industry to gain a better understanding of VET in Schools.

## **Vocational education in new and emerging industries**

The identification of new and emerging industry needs in terms of employment and training should be available through the NT Labour Market Analysis, which will be conducted in the near future. In the past, the advice was sought from the NT Training Advisory Councils. The cessation of the Commonwealth funding for the Training Advisory Councils, has led to the move towards outsourcing for labour market information from expert economic analysts. The development of a skills needs database will allow the storage, collation and conversion of raw labour market analysis and forecasting data into meaningful reports by vocational and regional needs.

### **Accessibility and effectiveness for Indigenous students**

The geographical remoteness of a vast number of the students presents difficulty in accessing trainers and resources. While the Training for Remote Youth project has made additional funding available, there is a limited number of trainers and resources available to deliver programs in remote locations.

Many of the students in remote locations require additional assistance, e.g. mentoring support, transportation to facilities, accommodation facilities for trainer and/or students, and/or literacy and numeracy support. While there may be some additional funding available to remote communities, the funding comes from a range of agencies, all with different reporting requirements. This is a difficult and complex task for staff in a small school, in a remote location.

Access to appropriate workplace-learning opportunities for students in remote locations remains a challenge that is currently being investigated. Programs funded under the Training for Remote Youth project are required to include workplace-learning experiences.

### **Conclusion**

The Northern Territory Government requires Federal Government understanding of the particular challenges facing the Northern Territory. At the same time, we require the ongoing commitment of the Federal Government to work with the Northern Territory Government for the best use of funding and resources.