Parliament of Australia
House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

Submission by

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The House Committee on Education and Training is to inquire into the place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

- the range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs

- the differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs

- vocational education in new and emerging industries

- the accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students

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❖ The introduction of "**Block Credit**" arrangements by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) will maximise flexibility of schools to customise VET programs for students.

❖ Urgent **need for data**, in particular longitudinal data, relating to **student outcomes and pathways** based on specific VET industry program undertaken. Has VET made a difference to student transition pathways? Why/why not? What were enhancers or blockers? What needs to be done to improve effectiveness/quality of VET in terms of facilitating student transition?

❖ **Programs of regional significance** should be targeted (e.g. eco-tourism) for funding support with direct involvement of communities in the development, implementation and delivery of the programs a mandatory requirement.

❖ Vocational education programs in schools need to be **industry targeted** - target industry skills shortages and/or employment growth. Funding/support to provide schools with relevant current data regarding industry skills needs and projected employment growth. Targeted funding should also be provided to encourage schools to develop and implement of related VET programs.

❖ Teacher training to **integrate relevant VET trainer qualifications** such as the Certificate IV in Assessment & Workplace Training.

❖ **Teacher Industry Experience Program** (TIEP) - Many teachers have entered the profession directly from teacher training. VET programs that are offered by schools are primarily designed as industry entry level programs. It is contentious as to whether teachers are able to impart an appropriate industry perspective in delivering and assessing VET programs if they have no direct experience and/or knowledge of the industry outside the classroom environment. TIEP could be integrated with teacher training (i.e. teaching rounds / industry rounds).

❖ Schools encouraged to implement TIEP as part of **school PD strategy**. Heightening and maintaining teacher awareness of current industry standards, practices and future developments is of vital relevance to teachers in all disciplines and program areas. Teachers may have a rather myopic view of the world, in particular industry, and yet the expectation is that they prepare young people to enter society and pursue valued post-school pathways.

❖ School curricula tends to be relatively stable when compared to VET sector programs. VET sector programs need to be responsive to industry needs, changes in industry practices and standards etc. Commitment of schools to processes enabling **continuous improvement** is severely limited by the perceived need to maximise the student ENTER score as well as the reluctance of school personnel to embrace change as a necessity for achieving continuous improvement.

❖ A key objective of a school should be to serve the needs of students as they pertain to young people's preparation to pursue post-school pathways and ultimate transition to the workforce. The **impact of VET in schools on other program areas** should be seen as a necessary adjustment to school program offerings in response to changes in students' interests and, in particular changes in factors impacting on young people's ability to make a successful transition by accessing valued post-school pathways.

❖ Introduction of appropriate **VET offerings at Year 9** is critical to continued growth of VET and to the retention of students beyond the compulsory years, one of the primary objectives for VET in schools initiatives.

❖ From our first hand experience there is anecdotal evidence to support the view that school-based VET programs tend to better **prepare trainees for the uptake of valued post-school pathways**, whether this would be direct entry into industry and/or further education/training. There are a number of reasons for this, some of which are:

  ➢ schools have a more pastoral approach to education and training in that students that are not performing to expectations or not achieving course outcomes are identified and targeted for individual support

  ➢ teachers of VET tend to place higher expectations on trainees than stipulated in the training package/curriculum. Whilst strictly speaking students need only be assessed for competence against course requirements, training packages and curriculum documents do not tend to be precise in stipulating the standard to

which a competency or outcome needs to be demonstrated. It is perhaps expected that the VET teacher's knowledge and understanding of current industry standards, practices and expectations would guide their judgement.
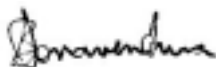
> schools tend to report to parents/students at least four times per year. Interim reports are normally issued at the end of terms 1 and 3, and detailed semester reports are issued at the end of terms 2 and 4. Semester reports also tend to include written comments which aim at highlighting student achievements as much as identifying areas for improvement. This provides not only substantially better feedback in terms of quantity and frequency but, more importantly, greatly assists and encourages students to improve.

> regular communication by schools with parents regarding their child's progress encourages and facilitates direct parental involvement in the child's education and training. This is enables the provision of significant additional support to the child over and above that provided by the school.

❖ **Access and equity** issues are at a critical point. Data is urgently required regarding the distribution of student participation in VET programs by industry and by region. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests schools located in less affluent areas are unable to offer VET programs that are equipment and/or facilities intensive. Most small schools or schools located in poorer areas tend to offer VET programs that are able to be accommodated in current school settings. For example, such schools may offer VET programs in Office Administration, Small Business or Financial Services. Little opportunity exists for these schools to offer programs such as Arts Interactive Multimedia, Engineering, Electronics, Food Technology or Hospitality.

VET programs offered to students via auspiced arrangements with local TAFEs tend to be offered on a fee-for-service basis. Whilst this has been an accepted mode of delivery and assessment, the progressive increase in TAFE fees and a proportional decrease in funding support for student access of specialist training by as a result of the exponential growth in student participation rates, have placed VET programs out of the reach of many students.

❖ **Implementation of Quality Standards for VET in Schools** - Whilst schools that have attained registration as Registered Training Organisation (RTO), for the delivery and assessment of VET programs, are required to comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF): Standards for Registered Training Organisations, schools that are auspiced by RTOs (e.g. local TAFE) may not necessarily be expected to comply with the AQTF standards. The credibility of VET in schools from an industry perspective would be greatly enhanced if all schools delivering and/or assessing VET were to adopt the AQTF standards uniformly.

❖ There is a need to truly recognise that **valued learning** can occur in a range of places beyond the four walls of the classroom. Research needs to be conducted into the identification of non-mainstream activities that incorporate "valued learning" and the recognition/certification of the corresponding measurable outcomes.

❖ There is what can be best described as a persistent community cultural block associated vocational education in schools which bears a direct relation to schools participating in **ENTER driven education**. Whilst university is the most effective transition pathway, the strong community perception that it is not only the more highly valued, but the "ultimate" goal, tends to devalue vocational programs and, subsequently, impacts on school management decisions regarding curricula.

❖ There has been significant growth in student participation rates in VET, 41% of all Year 11 and 12 students (2001) in Australia participated in VET studies. Also, initial pathways data (Teese, Victoria) indicates that the majority (95%) of VET students pursue further education or training, or enter the workforce. However, there has not appear to have been a commensurate decline in **youth unemployment**.

One possible factor is that only 60% of VET students actually undertake workplacement as part of their VET studies. Whilst there is no data to suggest a causal link between **VET student workplacement** and future employment outcomes, industry personnel have clearly indicated that they highly value industry experience. In addition, the quality and quantity of student industry experience has yet to be the subject of significant research and evaluation.

❖ Recommend strongly that research be undertaken to **map secondary student transition pathways**, identifying enhancements and blockers, and factors impacting on effective transition. This data should then inform VET program design and models for delivery.

❖ Innovation tends to be people driven, as is success. The **transposition of innovative, successful programs or delivery models**, from the case study stage to broad adoption, is highly dependent on the personal skills and attributes of those responsible for program development, implementation and delivery. Program design, content or structure alone do not guarantee program success or effectiveness. The personal skills and attributes of those responsible for development, implementation, delivery and maintenance are equally significant and often underestimated. Relatively little, if indeed any, consideration is given to the need to equip those whom we want to implement innovative, successful, effective and proven program initiatives with the necessary skills, be those management skills, people skills, administrative skills and the like.

❖ A strong case can be made for customising or designing programs to meet the individual needs, interests and/or aptitudes of students at risk. There does, however, need to be a balance struck between catering for individual students and providing the required competencies for **maximising employability**. For example, schools are perhaps not well placed to identify industries with high employment growth or industries where there are skills shortages. VET program design must be founded on a consultative process involving a mix of school teachers, careers advisors, training sector personnel, industry representatives, students and parents.

❖ There needs to be greater flexibility in the delivery, pace and setting of education and training in the senior years. Schools located in areas of high youth unemployment should be supported to develop programs based on **integrated delivery** with local TAFEs. Schools should establish Year 9 and/or Year 10 campus at local TAFE.

❖ Investigate the possibility of students negotiating and entering a contract of learning with program providers which may include school, TAFE and/or employers. This would facilitate student counselling, goal setting and identifying valued outcomes appropriate for the individual student.

❖ There is an obvious need to develop nationally consistent protocols for the **formal recognition of student learning**, qualifications and articulation pathways, by schools, VET sector, universities and industry.

❖ Investigate possibility of "**learn for the dole**" programs for high risk unemployed youth.

❖ Government resourcing/funding initiatives and/or models must have a long term perspective. Where possible and appropriate, resourcing/funding should be directly linked to **measurable student outcomes**. Investigate the possible use of an "incentives system" whereby there are incremental increases in program funding support based on actual post-program student outcomes after 6 months, 12 months and 18 months. This would encourage program providers to track student pathways, determine pathway enhancers or blockers, and continuously review program design, delivery and assessment. It would also direct funding to the most effective/successful programs.

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