

OFFICE OF THE  
VICE-CHANCELLOR  
AND PRESIDENT



The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Employment  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Little

RE: SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION INQUIRY

Thank you for inviting Charles Darwin University to make a submission to the Inquiry into School to Work Transition. Please find our submission attached.

Charles Darwin University is a dual sector university and our submission focuses largely on student transition related to Vocational Education and Training. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further comment once the preliminary findings of this Inquiry are available.

Yours sincerely

Professor Simon Maddocks  
Vice-Chancellor and President

31 July 2017



# CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Employment

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## Inquiry into School to Work Transition

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## Inquiry Terms of Reference

*The Committee will inquire into and report on how students are supported from school to work including the following matters:*

- 1. Measurements of gain in school and how this contributes to supporting students to prepare for post-school education and training;*
- 2. Opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, including use of employment outcomes of students who undertake school-based vocational education or post-school tertiary pathways;*
- 3. Other related matters that the Committee considers relevant.*

## Introduction

Charles Darwin University (CDU) welcomes the opportunity to provide an initial response to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into School to Work Transition.

CDU is a small dual sector university (>12,000 HE, >11,000 VET students) and the only university based in the Northern Territory. We service the tertiary education and research needs of Territorians, as well as a significant number of Higher Education (HE) students from around Australia through our online programs and our centres in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Cairns. Around 89% of our commencing HE students are mature age, 70% study online and 64% live outside the NT.

The majority of our Vocational Education and Training (VET) students come from the NT, many through the VET in Schools program. Around 30% of CDU's VET students are Indigenous. We provide training at our eight NT campuses and centres as well as at over 130 remote locations throughout the NT on a drive in drive out basis in an effort to not only take training to communities when and where they need it, but also to establish a presence that 'normalises' further education and training in the experience of school students in those communities.

Our comments focus on the second of the Terms of Reference: *Opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, including use of employment outcomes of students who undertake school-based vocational education or post-school tertiary pathways*, and relate particularly to our experience in school to work transition and the role of Vocational Education and Training.

## Strengthening literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory years

In order to better support students in the transition from school to work, greater attention to language, literacy and numeracy skills is required. Consideration should be given to a broader understanding of language, literacy and numeracy (LL&N) for different contexts, in particular functional literacy for employability, further education and/or life skills. It is realistic to expect that the support needed by individual students to achieve literacy standards may vary significantly in the quantum, timing and location of that support; and this should be reflected in the funding provided to schools and VET.

Any standards applied to the measurement of LL&N must be unambiguous and it is important that they embrace a wide definition of foundation literacy and numeracy to include language standards that recognize the cultural diversity among the NT post-compulsory student cohorts.

The integration of LL&N into all teaching practices has proven an effective model to raise standards among VET students in the 16-20 age group. LL&N is not seen as a separate 'subject' isolated from other content areas, it needs to be a feature of curriculum, competencies and assessment. Underpinning any

systemic changes to embed LL&N teaching practices will be the need to ensure that teachers have the appropriate LL&N themselves and the teaching skills to impart these learnings to students whether in a school or a VET setting.

The capacity to embed LL&N into teaching practices should be a fundamental component of pre-service teacher training and VET teaching qualifications. Pre-service teacher training has an important role to play in instilling a sense of responsibility in teachers for the LL&N competency of students. Including LL&N in all pre-service teacher training will create generational change in education but there must also be immediate action by government to build the skills of the existing teaching workforce. Within the VET sector, organisations have taken it upon themselves to grow the LL&N skills of teachers.

We note that skilled LL&N professionals can be difficult to find and particularly scarce in regional areas. If NT schools and VET providers are to invest in the professional development of teaching staff to build LL&N among younger students, they need the research and resources (tools) to build these skills locally.

We believe a priority target group is those young students who won't engage in LL&N. Observations are that many young students who won't engage in LL&N need high levels of pastoral care and innovative teaching practices to motivate them.

## **Support for making informed education and training choices**

Young people who have considered a range of career options and have some inkling of future life beyond school appear to engage more purposefully with education. Learning that incorporates the opportunity for experiential learning and structured workplace based learning will provide a positive return in terms of students making more informed career choices that will enhance their success in employment. VET in Secondary Schools programs are a catalyst to better understanding career options. We consider that experiential learning/delivery models are critical to successful youth transitions and outcomes, and contribute to higher levels of work readiness. While we acknowledge that experiential learning/structured workplace learning is resource intensive in terms of facilities and administration, this should not be considered a barrier to further exploration or expansion of this area.

We would encourage broader thinking around individual learning plans for young people in secondary schools rather than just career plans, as many young people lack the maturity or foresight to plan in their teens for a specific career or occupation.

To be effective, any career/learning planning activities must be dynamic, well-resourced and regular. They should not be ad hoc or passive, such as the occasional one-to-one with a careers counselor, materials in a library or careers room or attending a mandatory career education class. Effective career planning in tandem with a learning plan should include the exploration of non-linear pathways with multiple entry and exit points in formal education, training and employment. It is our view that all careers counselors should hold appropriate qualifications for that role.

CDU VET is keen to support school careers educators in the NT who do not have sufficient experience or contemporary understanding of the VET sector and whose advice may be limited by their own university education experiences. As the common pathway into career counseling at schools is from classroom teaching, it would be valuable if pre-service training for all teachers in future included consideration of and exposure to the VET sector, both in theory and practice, and applied learning and the relationship of specific disciplines to career options.

How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices? Traditionally the focus has been on preparing young people for the workplace and not on preparing employers (the workplace) for young people – attention must be given to both aspects of work preparation. Roles such as workplace learning coordinators are well placed as the bridge between RTOs, schools and employers. Industry has a vital role to play by offering well-structured workplace experiences for students - moving beyond mere 'work experience' to providing a meaningful experience that includes coaching, mentoring and applied

practices. On a practical level, frequent involvement of industry in schools, through a range of engagement strategies and project based learning activities for students from years 9-12, would build linkages between employers and schools.

## **Further strengthening completions in the school sector and the VET sector**

Reasons for non-completion of qualifications in employment based VET pathways, such as apprenticeships and traineeships, are complex and include issues such as employment conditions and effectiveness of support in workplace learning environments. Research indicates that a high proportion of those who fail to complete their apprenticeship drop out in the first 12 months. It is therefore important that strategies are put in place to support apprentices and trainees during this critical first year. Mentors, pastoral carers, apprenticeship field officers and supportive workplace supervisors, have the potential to improve apprenticeship completions by addressing issues of serious bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, both direct and indirect, that have had adverse implications for apprentices and trainees in the workplace, their employers and their families. Targeted initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of apprentices in workplaces will in turn help to improve the retention of apprentices and trainees.

As noted earlier, the provision of high quality structured workplace based learning experiences can be critical to enhanced work readiness. CDU supports structural arrangements in the school system that encourage students who want to study part-time and engage in the workforce.

CDU invites the Inquiry to research the outcomes of learning models based on institutional specialisation in curriculum and qualification to improve quality of provision, and support increased student attainment of Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification. A single institution cannot offer all things to all people – it is largely forced to cater to the mainstream and may reduce offerings to ensure viable numbers or alternatively, to be fully comprehensive, it has to be a very large. It may be possible to use the district provision model to offer a broader scope of options to assist both with student retention and student engagement – both precursors to improved student completion of qualifications. We acknowledge that this option may suit urban settings with sufficient population density to support a range of providers in a local area and will not necessarily be feasible in regional and remote areas with sparse population.

## **Lifting qualification completion rates for young people in the schools and VET**

Students need access to qualified careers professionals and online information that is current and accurate. Sound advice and quality information will provide a platform for qualifications choices that have greater prospects of completion. Parents, family and friends also influence students' choices and sustained communications strategies need to be directly targeted to these groups. In other settings several strategies have provided some success in raising completions of qualifications:

- High levels of pastoral care appear to have paid dividends in engaging students to complete qualifications including high levels of support at the front-end to set a firm basis for interaction and relationship building. Over time, the level of support may diminish but it needs to be firmly in place at the beginning to engage each learner and agree individual learning goals. Individual learning plans to manage learning have the added benefit of providing a focus for completing a qualification.
- Industry specific Training Packages form the basis of the delivery of VET qualifications. Training Packages by their very nature have a narrow vocational approach to skills and knowledge development that may not be the best vocational education approach for young people yet to make firm career choices. The 'fit' of training packages to the VET needs of young people may need to be reviewed.

## Articulation from school to VET and higher education

In addition to the points already made above, students need a clear understanding of what pathways are available to enable them to articulate from school to tertiary educational and then onto the workforce. There is scope for improvement in this area.

Information available to the public needs to provide clarity and balance around VET, HE and employment options. Successful transition to VET is linked to educating parents about applied learning methods and pathways outcomes. Exposure to the benefits of applied learning need to occur early in the secondary school experiences so that parents and students build an understanding of applied learning and pathways to and from learning qualifications and can see the progression from secondary to tertiary education.

Establishing these understandings would assist in creating certainty in parents' minds about the outcomes of these courses and enable them to confidently support their children to make better choices. Internet based information will be preferred by the vast majority of young people and increasingly, their parents. Media sites such as SkillsOne (see <http://www.skillsone.com.au/>) are important sources of information about careers and VET linkages. There also needs to be readily available up-to-date information about the supply of available and potential jobs.

## Conclusion

Student transition to the VET sector, higher education and full-time employment may be improved through:

- Depth and breadth of career planning and development of individual learning plans
- Review of processes solely using ATAR for selection processes
- Greater pastoral care for 'at risk' students
- Sustained organisational partnerships between the VET and HE sector and with industries
- Professional development for careers counselors and education of influential adults in young people's lives
- Consideration of Language, Literacy and Numeracy standards
- Student centred models for transition and success