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Introduction

A student's perspective:

I am doing the retail operations traineeship ... [it] is the only thing that has really kept me at school. I got to grade 10 and I did not know if I can do it anymore, and then I got offered my traineeship. It is one day out of school and it is really good. That is what has kept me at school.¹

A local business perspective:

I love the program but I have the feeling ... the whole program could crash, despite what any businessperson would do ... I feel it is the exceptional and extraordinary efforts of teachers and personnel that are holding it together, and maybe the support of the business.²

A teacher's perspective:

A lot of teachers come into the system in isolation ... vocational education is not important, especially in the traditional areas of maths, social science and English, and that is where there are huge issues ... I feel the emphasis needs to be ... on getting teachers to making a pedagogical mind shift and understand that it's not their subject in isolation that is important. They have got to place that student in the real world and that involves work, employment, further training, everything.³

1 Ms Sarah Cole, Student, Marymount College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2003, Burleigh Waters, Qld, p. 222.

2 Mr Neil Druce, Managing Director, Green Grove Organics, *Transcript of Evidence*, 1 July 2003, Junee, NSW, p. 787.

3 Mr Damian Shuttleworth, Manager, Enterprise and Industry Program, Mandurah Senior College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 August 2003, Mandurah, WA, p. 857.

Vocational education in schools

- 1.1 The growth of vocational education in schools has been cited as one of the most significant educational changes in secondary education in the last ten to twenty years.⁴ This growth has been demonstrated across all industry sectors and in the number of students and hours of participation. It has been attributed to a range of factors, including a response to student disengagement from school, the need to better prepare students for the world of work and to aid young people in the transition from school to more independent living, and a demand from industry for young people needed to meet identified skill shortages.
- 1.2 One rationale for vocational education in schools has been meeting the needs of students in an educational context where only 30 per cent of students go on to university. It has been argued that the curriculum has been inadequately catering for those students who may not aspire to go to university or who may be unsuccessful in attaining that goal. The best ways that schools and communities can cater for all students has been a key point of discussion.
- 1.3 The number of students completing Year 12 in the last twenty years has risen markedly. Since 1980 the percentage of students participating in Year 12 rose from 35 per cent to just over 73 per cent in 2001 (with a peak of 77 per cent in 1992).⁵ Following the Finn review⁶ of post-compulsory education and training in 1991 young people have increasingly been encouraged to complete Year 12 or its vocational equivalent.
- 1.4 Jurisdictions across Australia are seeking to address the disengagement that some young people are displaying in high schools. This lack of engagement can result in students leaving school before completing Year 12 or its vocational equivalent, the outcomes which all educational jurisdictions see as desirable for students themselves and for the community. Indigenous students and other students 'at risk' or with special needs have been identified as requiring additional support.
- 1.5 Combined with the growth in vocational education have been challenges for all education sectors to meet the demand and improve outcomes for

4 Klee, C, 2002, 'A practitioner's view of vocational education and training in schools', *Exhibit No. 40*, pp. 48–54, and see Mr Bert Evans, Chairman, NSW Board of VET, *Transcript of Evidence*, 25 February 2003, Sydney, p. 57.

5 Fullarton, S, Walker, M, Ainley, J and Hillman, K, 2003, *Patterns of participation in Year 12*, LSAY Research Report No. 33, ACER, Adelaide, p. vii.

6 Finn, B, 1991, *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee, AGPS, Canberra.

students and the wider community in skilling the nation. The challenges brought to the attention of the Committee have included issues of funding and resourcing at all levels, teacher support and effectiveness, career advice, student outcomes and definitions of success, and the differing expectations of industry and education providers regarding the purpose of vocational education in schools.

- 1.6 In 1998 this Committee's predecessor, examining broader issues involving TAFE and higher education, found concerns over the delivery and recognition arrangements of vocational education and training (VET) in schools. The report noted that growth had been significant but that substantial work was required to address the identified concerns:

VET in Schools is still in a fledgling and experimental state. It is not as widely available to students as it should be and programs are of varying quality and relevance to industry.⁷

- 1.7 Considerable research and work has been completed in every jurisdiction and at national levels through the Ministerial Council on Employment Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)⁸ and the Australian National Training Authority Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) to advance cooperative strategies to address these challenges, which go beyond the educational domain alone. However, in speaking to students, teachers, work placement coordinators and employers in a range of communities, it was apparent to the Committee that despite considerable progress since its 1998 report, significant work remains to be done.
- 1.8 There has been considerable industry criticism of the quality of vocational education in schools,⁹ which must be addressed to ensure that school-based programs and qualifications have high industry acceptance. The priority area for school programs, in part funded by ANTA, has been in nationally recognised qualifications as part of the National Training Framework (NTF). Ensuring that employers have confidence in industry specific qualifications is essential to ensure positive outcomes for young people.
- 1.9 However, in evidence to the Committee industry representatives suggested that the focus should be on providing a sound general

7 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Today's training. Tomorrow's skills*, 1998, p. 44.

8 MCEETYA, 2001, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2001*, Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne, <<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/anr>>.

9 Ghost, S, 2002, 'VET in Schools: the needs of industry', *Exhibit No. 40*, pp. 61-64.

education, including generic workplace and employability skills,¹⁰ with the provision of a workplace to provide the context for work related learning. This then raises the question of how much emphasis should be placed on vocational education for new and emerging industries,¹¹ and on addressing current skill shortages in established industries.

- 1.10 The terms vocational education in schools, vocational learning, career education and enterprise education are frequently used and all have significant and separate meanings in the process of youth transitions. Much of the focus to date has been on accredited vocational education and training in schools. To ensure its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options it has been suggested to the Committee that greater resources need to be allocated to support vocational learning and career awareness.
- 1.11 These and many other issues have been brought to the Committee's attention during the course of this inquiry.

Terms of reference

- 1.12 On 18 July 2002 the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, asked the Committee 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; and
 - the accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.

10 Mr Steve Balzary, Director, Employment and Training, and Ms Mary Nicholson, National Manager, Business and Industry School to Work Alliance, ACCI, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2003, pp. 212 and 214.

11 Mr Stephen Ghost, General Manager, Education and Training, Australian Industry Group, *Transcript of Evidence*, 25 February, 2003, Sydney, p. 83.

The structure of the report

1.13 The report is structured into three sections:

- Chapters 1 – 3 provide background to the context of the inquiry. Chapter 2 reviews the purposes and rationale of vocational education in schools. Chapter 3 outlines the systems in place to support vocational education, including state and territory arrangements, funding, and quality arrangements.
- Chapters 4 – 8 report on the current situation. Chapter 4 highlights the growth of vocational education, especially VET in Schools. Chapter 5 discusses the impact that vocational education has had on schools: on timetabling, teachers and resourcing, including the implications of the Australian Quality Training Framework. Chapter 6 identifies various structural factors that influence outcomes, including cross-sector arrangements, funding models, teacher availability and regional factors. Chapter 7 considers the effect of the multiple purposes of vocational education, and how competing needs create dilemmas for educators. Chapter 8 addresses the issues of career education, advice and staffing. Resourcing for careers advice has generally been further diminished by the emphasis on accredited vocational education and training.
- Chapters 9 and 10 focus on future actions. Chapter 9 reviews approaches to catering for individual needs, pathways and the importance of external services to schools that support individuals. The effectiveness of vocational education is reviewed, highlighting the need for greater information on outcomes. Chapter 10 reinforces the need for consolidation and ensuring the sustainability of vocational education. Facilitating partnerships and better articulation arrangements are also keys to effective outcomes and the chapter concludes by advocating support for a diversity of pathways and the need for greater national consistency.

The aims of the report

1.14 The aim of the report is to provide an overview of vocational education in schools throughout Australian jurisdictions in late 2002 and 2003, through the Committee's review of submissions, its public hearings and its visits to a range of schools in all states and territories. Reviews such as *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary*

schools published by the NCVET¹² provide a more exhaustive description of growth and practice up until 2000. The Australian College of Educators in *Learning in a Knowledge Society: the Vocational Dimension*¹³ provides a series of essays on vocational learning from a range of stakeholder perspectives.

- 1.15 It is not the intention of this report to replicate the substantial volume of research that has been undertaken. Rather, the focus of the report is on the issues and dilemmas facing education authorities and schools, teachers, parents, industry and students, and to present key findings and make recommendations to increase the effectiveness of vocational education, in its various forms, in preparing students for post-school options.

12 Malley, J, Keating, J, Robinson, C and Hawke, G, 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVET.

13 *Learning in a Knowledge Society: The Vocational Dimension*, Unicorn: Journal of the Australian College of Educators, 2002, Vol 28, No. 3, Exhibit No. 40.