



National Catholic Education Commission

**Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace
Relations, Small Business and Education Committee**

Inquiry into the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Australia

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1. Introduction

This submission is concerned with the ensuring the future expansion of high quality vocational education and training offerings in Catholic schools. It takes into account the following contextual factors:

- the experiences, achievements and issues of Catholic schools in embracing the principles of vocational education and training and implementing VET programs, especially over the last four years;
- the expiry, during 2000, of existing Commonwealth and ANTA funding support for a variety of VETIS programs;
- the work presently being undertaken by the MCEETYA Task Force on Vocational Education and Training In Schools in identifying the costs of present VETIS delivery models and proposing a framework for 2000-2004 to consolidate and achieve necessary expansion of VETIS programs.

This submission has been developed in support of the principles underpinning the report of the Taskforce, *Partnerships for Growth*.

2. NCEC Principles Underpinning VETIS Programs

In 1998, NCEC identified the following principles as underlying effective and efficient provision of VET programs in schools:

CURRICULUM

- i) Every student is entitled to an education that develops the whole person and acknowledges the interconnectedness of learning needed in an individual's life roles in today's world.
- ii) VETIS programs should have a broad focus on "work-readiness" outcomes that allow students to develop key life and work skills/competencies that enable them to participate actively in paid and unpaid work: VETIS is not simply about getting jobs;
- iii) VETIS programs should be considered an integral part of the school curriculum, not a set of special offerings for particular students. This has implications for funding.
- iv) VETIS programs should complement the vocational learning that occurs within the wider curriculum and co-curricular activities;

STRUCTURES

- v) The development of effective VETIS programs builds upon partnerships between schools, Government, the VET sector industry and the wider community; structures should maximise flexibility in program delivery;
- vi) Programme structures should reflect a balance between central policy directions on the one hand and student needs and local conditions on the other;
- vii) Students are involved with a variety of education and training providers - young people are studying, learning about work, training on the job and undertaking paid work;
- viii) There should be appropriate recognition of vocational learning outcomes towards higher education and training pathways;
- ix) Schools structures, processes and cultures should be flexible to adopt new learning environments, techniques and technologies;

FUNDING

- x) Funding allocations should reflect joint responsibilities and attach to clearly identified roles and responsibilities in terms of services delivered;
- xi) VETIS funding, programme and accountability structures should operate within a common, clearly understood framework, allowing optimum efficiency and manageability;
- xii) The allocation of funds and the design of programs should be aimed to meet the needs of all students, especially those experiencing educational disadvantage.

3. Recent Catholic Sector Experience with VETIS

Whilst Catholic schools have always prided themselves in the compulsory years of schooling upon providing a broad general education for students, there has also been a strong community perception that students who completed 12 (or 13) years of schooling would be university bound. With higher retention rates, changed expectations about the skills young people need prior to entering the workforce, and a major restructuring of entry level training to meet Australia's future industry and employment needs, a single focus within post-compulsory schooling on the university destination is no longer applicable nor appropriate.

Responding to changing economic and social demands, Catholic schools have wholeheartedly embraced a new agenda for post-compulsory schooling. Increasingly Catholic (and other) schools have been working in partnership with a range of stakeholders to change the focus of post-compulsory schooling to provide for the 70% of young people who proceed directly to training and/or to the labour market. The effort has focused upon the provision of entry-level training programs for young people, integrated with their senior secondary certificates.

A number of Commonwealth programs in the 1997-2000 quadrennium have assisted the schooling sector to:

- Expand the coverage of VETIS programs and increase the number of students participating in and completing VET modules and qualification(s)
- Establish the school based apprenticeship pathway and increase the delivery of school based apprenticeships
- Encourage the involvement of industry and VET personnel in the development and delivery of VETIS programs in schools
- Increase student participation in structured workplace learning.

These programs and their outlays for the period 1997 to 2000 include:

ANTA	\$80m
ASTF	\$76m
School To Work	\$23m
Full Service Schools	\$23m
Jobs Pathway Program	\$13.5m
TOTAL	\$215.5M

However, the major cultural and organisational change in senior secondary education required to consolidate this achievement is only just beginning; the growth achieved so far is now beginning to place substantial resource pressures on schools and systems.

4. Need for Funding Maintenance

The MCEETYA VETIS Taskforce report *Partnerships for Growth* makes clear that there has been massive growth in participation in VET over the past three years. This growth is as significant in Catholic schools as it is in other sectors and has clearly been assisted by Commonwealth funds. It is nationally agreed that participation in VET in schools, as well as in school-based part-time apprenticeships, should grow even further. Furthermore, increases in quality, not just participation, should be a key goal.

The mass adoption of VET in schools is causing a major cultural and structural change in senior secondary schooling, a change that is beneficial locally, regionally and nationally. It needs to be recognised, however, that the change is only just beginning, and VET still faces practical and attitudinal obstacles. We are at a relatively early and precarious stage in the necessarily lengthy process of broadening the scope and purposes of senior secondary schooling.

Catholic schools rely entirely upon the Commonwealth programmes and private sources to implement VET in schools. It is not uncommon for families to pay additional fees or levies to enable their children to participate in VET programs. With these major Commonwealth programmes due to end in 2000, there is a pressing need to alleviate the current uncertainty regarding funding beyond 2000.

This is especially important because the evidence of the greater costs of provision of VET in schools is overwhelming. This has been recognised in the Taskforce report. Major cost items include:

- Work placement coordination
- Workplace assessment
- Purchase of training from RTOs
- RTO establishment costs
- Program coordination and administration
- Ongoing pastoral care and student monitoring

On this last point, it has been demonstrated that school-based new apprenticeships have higher completion rates than non-school-based ones. NCEC believes that this is due to the additional support infrastructure and pastoral care that schools provide their students. This pastoral care comes at a cost.

Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that some of these costs, such as purchase of training from TAFE Colleges, will rise in 2000.

It is often asserted that most of these costs should be offset by the gradual integration of VET into the curriculum. While there is some room for rationalisation of course offerings, both at Board of Studies (or equivalent) and school level, the scope for integration is limited. Schools need to offer reasonable curriculum breadth to cater for a more diverse range of students' needs, interests, pathways and learning styles, and, indeed, to fulfil a wider array of purposes.

The incorporation of VET should complement, not replace, existing academic offerings, which provide options for all students, including those undertaking VET programs.

It is worth noting that in the 1960s, when the Commonwealth decided to expand the delivery of science within the curriculum, it was accepted by all stakeholders that this would involve increasing the range of curriculum offerings, rather than substituting science for other subjects. It was further accepted that this major cultural and curriculum change, in the best long-term interests of the nation, would involve substantial additional costs. These additional costs would not just be once-off, though the initial capital work was expensive, but would be on-going. The cost of educational provision would have to rise to accommodate this major change to the curriculum.

The same approach should be taken when considering the expansion of the curriculum through the addition of VET programmes. It needs to be recognised that this will involve higher costs although economies of scale will emerge over time.

VET has undergone significant rationalisation as it attempts to move towards best practice. The development of high quality strategic programmes, and not just simple expansion of numbers, is another reason for increasing cost burdens on schools. An example of this is where schools seek and achieve Registered Training Organisation (RTO) status, and thereby increase flexibilities and integration within the school. This is accompanied by additional costs in the registration and validation process as well as staff training.

NCEC notes that the Minister has expressed the view that “the Commonwealth cannot be expected to support mainstream activity with targeted funding over the long term. There is no question that VET in schools is by now mainstream.” (Letter to the Hon. Dean Wells MLA, November 1999). NCEC submits that the only reason VET in schools is gradually approaching mainstream status – and it has not yet done that – is the targeted financial support provided by the Commonwealth over the last four years. If the Commonwealth wishes to end targeted funding for VET in schools and at the same time ensure growth in VET participation, it will need to roll into the General Recurrent Grants the funding it has provided as targeted funding to date. However, this is not advisable at this point in time, as it remains the case that VET in schools has not yet been sufficiently established within schools as mainstream activity. Continuation of targeted funding is required in the medium term, namely for the next quadrennium.

For all the above reasons, the NCEC submits that at the very least, current Commonwealth funding for Vocational Education and Training programmes in schools must be maintained in real terms. Due to rising costs, maintaining current participation levels and quality will probably require increased levels of funding. Planning for growth and improved quality will require still greater increases.

5. Redesigning Commonwealth Financial Assistance for VETIS

However, despite the growth promoted by Commonwealth funded programs, substantial improvement can be achieved. Catholic schools and education authorities have found great difficulty in trying to address at the local level the multiple accountability requirements of this variety of funding agents (DETYA, ASTF, ANTA) and the specificity of targets and funding protocols required to utilise the funds. Separate pools of funds with discrete

eligibility criteria mean that schools are constrained by having to tailor their provision to fit program requirements from providing a programme that best meets student needs. There is a need to reduce the inefficiencies of coordinating outcomes and reports across a variety of programmes; programme rigidities need dismantling. Much of the time of teachers is not being used as productively as it could be. Currently, resources and effort are being diverted away from implementation into administration.

A Catholic school response which meets the needs of students and employers locally, and the National Training agenda nationally, is more easily provided within a holistic framework, where an integration of VETIS programs within general delivery can be more easily addressed.

NCEC therefore suggests the initiation of an integrated Commonwealth program for 2001-2004, entitled *Partnerships for Student Learning and Post School Pathways*. This approach is much more consistent with current practice in public administration focussing on broadbanding and global budgeting. A single program will streamline and considerably simplify the funding, programming, coordination and accountability processes associated with VET in schools, and hence facilitate better outcomes for all students.

At this time, there is a range of VET in Schools course models which contribute to New Apprenticeship arrangements. These models are structured to deliver competencies endorsed within the National Training Framework and provide credit towards a credential within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). These include :

- students undertaking VET programs as part of their senior secondary studies;
- students undertaking a traineeship or apprenticeship program which involves a contract of training and paid employment while continuing to study at school. Under these arrangements the student is both a secondary student and an employee;
- students undertaking a senior secondary education and also undertaking part time employment out of school hours which as a formal, structured training component. Some of the formal training component may be able to be given credit within either the senior secondary certificate or within an accredited VET program within the school.

Schools implementing or developing any of the above cited VETIS course models should be able to access Commonwealth funding support, provided each school authority commits itself to developing a plan for the growth of VET provision.

Consistent with earlier arguments for a single program, it is suggested that it should be funded and administered by a single body. NCEC believes that the most appropriate body is DETYA, in collaboration with State/Territory and/or local management bodies. Furthermore, decision-making at State/Territory or local levels should be based on partnerships between major stakeholders.

Whatever the management structure, each grantee would be required to provide DETYA with annual growth targets for :

- Overall student participation in VETIS (including, but not limited to, New Apprentices);
- Capital and resource investment necessary for the implementation of designated industry training packages;
- Teacher training and retraining targets necessary to implement designated industry training packages, consistent with RTO requirements.

6. Conclusion

The experience of the past few years tells us that school communities will be the major driving force behind the future progress of vocational education and training in schools. Schools can be best assisted in their task by a streamlined, carefully targeted program which simplifies allocation and accountability arrangements and enables schools to build productive partnerships with industry and training providers. In this way, schools can concentrate their energies and resources on obtaining the most effective and worthwhile outcomes for each student. However, in order to consolidate the substantial recent growth in VETIS programmes, current funding levels must be, at the very least, maintained in real terms over the next quadrennium 2001-2004.