

Response on behalf of Independent Schools Tasmania to the Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of Vocational Education and Training

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training.

This response on behalf of the independent school sector in Tasmania applies to the following key areas relating to the terms of reference of the inquiry:

1. information available to students about VET qualifications and related career pathways along a student's journey through secondary schools, vocational education, higher education, and work transitions, with a focus on how this combines with other sources of advice, including informal advice, to influence student choices, and how Commonwealth funded information for students about VET may be improved;
2. perceptions and status of the VET sector and how this may be impacting student enrolment choices, employer engagement, and recruitment and retention of the VET educator workforce, and how perceptions and status of the VET sector can be improved. International best practices in relation to VET perception and qualifications status should be examined;
3. successful partnerships between VET providers and employers that have demonstrably created career pathways and secure employment opportunities for students, considering the best practice elements of these successful partnerships, and how more partnering may be encouraged among VET providers and employers; and
4. Commonwealth programs which could influence the above, and intersections with state and territory, industry, and philanthropic efforts, including any structural barriers to improvement.

1. Information available to students about VET qualifications and related career pathways

Tasmanian independent schools have responded positively to recent policy changes supporting more informed school-to-work transition and raising career awareness. Through the Tasmanian Government's *Years 9-12 Project* which was established as a result of the 2016 *Review of Years 9 to 12 Tasmania*, conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) strategic initiatives include:

- Improving the rates of attendance, retention, attainment and completion for Tasmanian students in Years 9 to 12
- A vision for VET that has at its core that "By 2030, all learners in Years 9 to 12 will have access to high quality personalised, customised and localised vocational learning and VET opportunities to support their career and life aspirations."

A strong focus on VET in schools and the more general vocational learning including career education has resulted in:

- A greater focus on VET that aligns with real skills needs in Tasmania.
- Ensuring school-based training meets national training standards with a particular focus on work placement.
- Better informed pathway planning for students through years 9-12.
- A renewed senior secondary curriculum that reflects contemporary workforce knowledge and skills.
- Access to contemporary career information that supports greater knowledge about workforce requirements.
- Focus on education and industry partnerships that support school students attaining VET qualifications which are valid and ensure appropriate performance to meet industry expectations – Certificate I and II VET qualifications for years 11 and 12, Units of Competence (not full qualifications) at years 9 and 10.
- Flexibility to meet changing skills needs in particular industries allowing Certificate III qualifications in approved circumstances.
- Greater promotion of School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships for Certificate III qualifications in high demand skills areas.

To support the policy initiatives under the *Years 9-12 Project* Independent Schools Tasmania (IST) has:

- Appointed a dedicated VET-VL consultant to work with independent schools to promote the advantages inherent in the policy and to increase the take up of VET programs.
- Has representation on a range of cross-sectoral project working parties engaged in implementing policy.
- Provided an extensive range of resources supporting all aspects of VET in Schools and Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASbAs) development and implementation for and by schools – examples use “How To Guides” for VETiS, ASbAs, as well as specific information on working with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).
- Provided ongoing Professional Learning opportunities for VET and Career teachers covering practical aspects associated with establishing and running VET programs.
- Sourced and delivered current information for VETiS and ASbAs from Australian and Tasmanian Government agencies – A VETiS Newsletter produced four-times annually is one mechanism used for this delivery..
- Provided one-on-one support for schools developing VET programs including identifying and working with stakeholders.

Commonwealth and State Government support through resources

Both Commonwealth and State governments provide a comprehensive range of online resources and support agencies. Key amongst these are:

- The National Careers Institute which provides links to major information sources around employment and workforce demands (see [Home | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)), careers information through the Explore Your career portal ([Explore Your Career | Your Career](#)) and through supporting a diverse range of programs which promote all aspects of VET.
- Myfuture which provides an extensive range of online resources to support career exploration and planning – it is currently involved in exploring a project to provide virtual work exposure (formerly work experience) for students in association with Education Services Australia (ESA).
- Training.gov.au ([training.gov.au - Home page](#)) which provides a comprehensive listing of VET qualifications, Australian Training Package information and RTOs across all industries.
- The Commonwealth government's Skills and Training website at [Skills and Training - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](#) which provides extensive information, including for school students, on VET.

In Tasmania the State government provides a wide range of information and support through:

- Skills Tasmania (at [Home | Skills Tasmania](#)) which provides information for all aspects of VET including ASbAs.
- The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) which provides a wide range of resources supporting the *Years 9-12 Program* (at [Home - The Department for Education, Children and Young People Tasmania \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](#))
- The Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification Office (TASC) which includes information on recognition and assessment of VETiS for students and schools (at [Home - TASC](#)).

Issues

While there is an abundance of support material made available from government agencies it is often fragmented and duplicated particularly state and Australian Government resources. Information on Career Education is a case in point where the National Careers Institute (NCI) potentially has capacity to lead and broker career information and resources nationally, in the process rationalizing the extensive and diverse range of current material available online.

Likewise the duplication of very good interactive digital resources on career exploration and experience is already occurring at a national level through the work of myfutures on virtual work experience/exposure and locally as in the Victorian Department of Education's VIC – VICE virtual industry careers experience. There is also evidence that these initiatives are also occurring locally via individual projects – The North West Tasmanian Industry Training Hub has been producing similar high-quality digital resources on apprenticeships.

2. Perceptions and status of the VET sector

There has been a significant shift toward more positive attitudes on VETiS programs amongst Tasmanian independent schools largely as a result of the *Years 9-12 Project* being a cross-sectoral initiative with strong partnership qualities established and maintained by Government, Catholic and independent school sectors.

Most independent Tasmanian schools with a year 9-12 presence have established VET programs or are planning to incorporate these in the next couple of years.

There has been particular interest among smaller schools now developing supportive strategies for school-to-work and viewing ASbAs as a useful way to engage with VET in a practical way while supporting better post-school outcomes including post-year 10 transitions to future work and training.

There is still a long way to go as even amongst the most committed independent schools where the perceived barriers are persistent. The major ones include perceptions that:

- VETiS programs are relatively complex requiring partnerships with employers and RTOs which for many schools are new experiences.
- Running VETiS programs based on individual student interest is expensive, disruptive to school timetables and operations and is hard on teacher resources like professional time and compliance demands.
- VETiS is most appropriate for students who are not embarking on an ATAR-generating program – only a couple of Tasmanian independent schools demonstrate a major commitment to VET where all students are expected to complete a VET program.
- Recruiting and upskilling suitable VET teachers is expensive – VET teachers do require a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 and \$4000.
- Work placements for VETiS programs can be difficult to secure although many independent schools use their existing parent and business networks to secure such placements.
- Since there is no dedicated RTO for independent schools in Tasmania, schools find it challenging to negotiate details and they are expensive – there is a greater tendency to use on-line RTO services with dedicated VETiS providers like IVET (<https://www.ivetinstitute.com.au/>).

Employer perception of VETiS

As an outcome of post-COVID skills shortages there has been some sizeable shifts in the attitude of employers across all industry sectors to school-based VET demonstrated through:

- More pro-active engagement by industry with schools promoting training pathways into their respective industries – in Tasmania mining and forestry, aquaculture, hospitality

and tourism and construction now actively seek opportunities to engage with students through VET taster programs, industry expos, site visits and joint educational activities.

- Active promotion of and recruitment via ASbAs for industries seeking to rebuild their workforce with a clear preference to work with schools through this process.
- Ongoing collaboration with schools by industry to promote VET programs and to provide work placement opportunities particularly displayed by industry associations – the Master Builders Association in Tasmania has a wide-ranging program working with schools to recruit apprentices in the construction industry.
- New and emerging skills needs in, for example, renewable energy and drone pilot aviation has seen industry leadership in engaging with schools, providing on-site training and future employment and career opportunities.
- Willingness by the Department of Education to directly engage with industry to determine how VETiS and ASbA programs can align with industry skills needs in the process determining the appropriate level of qualifications that can be delivered by schools.
- A more pro-active stance by TasTAFE in supporting better industry training pathways via TAFE in the process working more directly with schools to nurture school-to-TAFE programs. This sends a clear message that school-based training is legitimate and is endorsed by the peak industry training body.

Recruitment and retention of VET educator

This is a particularly challenging problem for independent schools because of the size of year 10-12 cohorts compared with, for example, the senior secondary colleges with student enrolments typically over 1200. By contrast independent schools seldom have many more than 200-300 students in that cohort. Because of this independent schools rarely have dedicated, whole VETiS classes taught by an industry-trained and qualified instructor. The alternative model is to provide students with individual, customized programs with training provided by an external, often online RTO under the direction of a school-based VET teacher-coordinator who has a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Independent Tasmanian schools running VET programs have addressed the issue of recruiting and retaining VET-trained staff generally by:

- Identifying one or more teachers with industry backgrounds and experience and supporting them to attain a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
- Such teachers often become the VETiS coordinator supervising students undertaking a variety of VET courses, managing the school support strategies, coordinating work placements and ensuring compliance in line with RTO requirements.
- This can be a challenging role particularly if such VETiS coordinators, as is usually the case, are required to teach in other subject areas.

- In high demand skills areas, particularly in construction, it is difficult to recruit VET teachers since the industry often offers more substantial incentives, and for young teachers in particular the industry often head-hunts them to return to industry.
- Teacher registration demands in Tasmania currently provide an additional level of complexity because all teachers require a formal teacher qualification to teach. The formal qualification to deliver VET – that is current industry experience and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is not sufficient for teacher registration.
- As a result career pathways for VETiS teachers are much more demanding, making working in schools less attractive.

Improving the perception and status of VETiS

This is being already accomplished in some degree through the responses required to post-COVID workforce and skills requirements as well as through some significant policy proposals and landmark VET and labour market reports. Key amongst these are:

- *The Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training (2020)* – the Shergold Report which provided 20 recommendations around, amongst other things, a national strategy on vocational education and training in schools that promotes the quality of VET.
- *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System (2019)* – the Joyce Report which included a section on providing clearer pathways for secondary school students through VET programs.
- *VET for secondary school students: post-school employment and further training destinations (2020)* – Misko, Chew and Korbel – NCVER Report which noted that “Choosing the right VET course and pathway can make a substantial difference to secondary school students looking for a direct transition from school into an apprenticeship or full-time ongoing employment” p2.
- *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review (2021)* – Productivity Commission which noted, amongst other thing, that “More alarmingly, the reliability and usefulness of career information and advice (especially for school students) is questionable. Previous reviews have found that schools and their advisers often have little experience with VET and favour universities.” (p 12).

In much of the research including those cases cited above schools are seen to be primarily geared toward providing pathways to higher education. This is reflected in:

- Lack of adequate provision for VETiS programs based on teacher, parent and broad community lack of knowledge and awareness of VETiS and what students can achieve.
- For independent schools a preference displayed by parents for academic rather than vocational achievement with an ATAR score still the dominant driver for perceived school success.

- Inadequate information about careers in non-traditional and new and emerging industry areas as well as non-university career pathways.
- VET still being perceived as lower status to higher education.
- Lack of adequately trained career counsellors and educators in schools particularly those with specific industry knowledge and experience.

For schools that perceive the high value of running a VETiS program the following characteristics are commonly displayed:

- A general school commitment to ensuring all students have access to a VET program – in some instances (like Circular Head Christian School in Smithton, Tasmania – a previous winner of the Australian Training Awards *School Pathways to VET Award*) all students will participate in, and in many cases complete, a VET qualification.
- School leadership that actively promotes VET programs to students, parents, and the local community.
- A capacity to engage with local business and industry in effective partnerships where students are provided access to work placements and to ASbAs.
- Properly qualified VET personnel on campus particularly those responsible for coordinating and delivering VET programs who can work constructively with RTOs to deliver VET programs.
- Resourcing of VETiS is treated no differently to that allocated to more traditional subject areas and not as an exotic add-on.
- Flexible approaches to innovative VET program delivery – good schools often create school-based enterprises which actually employ employee trainees and apprentices from the student population.

International best practices in relation to VET perception

While Australia's school-based VET systems stands up well on any international comparison, particularly in terms of program delivery, quality of training, readiness for the world of work and the like, it has never, at least until recently, enjoyed the open support of industry generally.

Some examples of national and international efforts where industry drives school-based VET programs include:

- The German and Swiss strong industry ownership of apprenticeship systems which link often via professional associations directly with schools – in Switzerland nearly 65% of senior secondary students are enrolled in an apprenticeship program (see <https://www.aicgs.org/publication/the-swiss-apprenticeship-system/>)
- Komatsu Australia's Apprentice Development System engages directly with schools through a series of programs like its STEMpunks ([STEM Punks](#)) which both alert students to career opportunities with Komatsu as well as providing an apprenticeship recruitment avenue.

- UVAIR's drone pilot program Certificate III in Aviation (Remote Pilot) being delivered to several independent and government schools in a number of Australian states including Tasmania. The aviation company actively engages with schools because senior secondary students are regarded as top-line recruits into this part of the aviation industry.
- Many of the national Trade Training Centres established from 2007 work closely with both industry and schools to deliver high-demand skills through their VET programs particularly in construction, automotive, hospitality and horticulture and aquaculture.

3. Successful partnerships between VET providers and employers

While stereotyped perceptions of VETiS programs held by certain industry stakeholders are still common the recent recognition reflected in major reports (cited on p5) suggests these are now being challenged. Most frequently these are framed as:

- School-delivered VET does not build the repertoire of knowledge and skills demanded by employers, particularly in industries like catering and hospitality and more particularly where the qualification is delivered as an alternative to a conventional apprenticeship.
- School programs lack sufficient workplace exposure and experience with sometimes no work placement occurring or less than 5 days over the course of a 12-month program.
- School RTOs do not perform as industry-driven RTOs with training personnel often lacking industry currency and exposure.
- Schools do not understand competency-based training and are not adept at undertaking skills assessment.

However, there is considerable emerging evidence to show that, after more than 30 years, school-based VET has evolved to now be considered by the VET regulator ASQA as equivalent to industry-delivered VET and indeed have often much better records in terms of meeting compliance demands and responding to compliance faults (See [VETDSSS Scoping Study V3.9.pdf \(asqa.gov.au\)](#)).

Tasmanian independent schools have a well-established history of successful school-industry partnerships that have stood the test of time, and which display many of the advantages gained from working with business. Examples include:

- Many instances where parents provide work placements for students in local businesses operated by them in particular in building and construction, hospitality, retail and fitness. This kind of arrangement works well in smaller schools where student interest and career aspirations are addressed through individually customised programs.

- Equine Management Certificate III delivered via a well-established partnership with the local equine industry, Leighland Christian School and Wangaratta TAFE in Victoria.
- Remote Pilot Certificate III delivered via an industry-led partnership between UVAIR, Scotch Oakburn College and the Hutchins School in association with a number of government schools.
- Aquaculture delivered via a partnership between Launceston independent schools, the St Patricks College Trade Training Centre and local aquaculture businesses where viable class-size numbers are built up with independent school students joining the program.
- A number of independent schools with professional standard gymnasiums working with the fitness industry to deliver Certificate III in Fitness.
- School-established enterprises in IT and tour guide industries where students are trained via an ASbA program, are employed by the school and deliver commercial services to the wider public.
- Smaller independent schools opting for individual ASbA arrangements often with family businesses acting as host-employer creating strong relations within the school community and local employers.

Strong school-industry partnerships frequently display:

- An industry initiated and led approach to schools to engage students in VET programs – the construction industry in Tasmania is engaging in this practice as a method for recruiting future apprentices based on their VETiS exposure.
- A willingness by business to recognise the constraints that operate within schools – school-timetabling, extra-curricular activity, school holidays, assessment and examination timetabled programs can affect the flexibility for students to attend work placements on a regular basis.
- Business recognition of the importance for students to complete senior secondary education and not to recruit students partway through a program thereby jeopardizing the viability of a program.
- Industry actively promoting the value of VETiS programs to the respective industry to parents, teachers and school-communities.
- Industry being willing to work with RTOs and schools to facilitate on-the-job training and assessment, reporting of student achievement and progress and jointly celebrating student success.
- Providing non-exploitative work placement where students can acquire the skills recognised in the qualification without providing effectively free or cheap labour by undertaking mundane or monotonous tasks – the fast food industry has at times been accused of such practices (although it has to be acknowledged that MacDonalds in particular provide trainees with a wide range of food-handling and customer service skills which are applicable across many industry settings).

- A willingness by schools to engage with industry in supporting VETiS programs by encouraging teachers to visit students on-the-job, participating in joint assessment activities and jointly advocating for and promoting programs to stakeholders and school communities.

4. Commonwealth and State Government Support

VETiS programs carry direct and hidden costs for all schools across all three sectors over and above what it costs to deliver the Australian Curriculum and more traditional programs.

For Tasmanian Independent schools these costs are reflected in:

- The cost of RTO services which range widely from around \$1000 per student for a number of on-line delivered RTO services to on-site delivery as is the case with a number of TasTAFE programs which can cost the school between \$35 - \$45,000.
- Recruiting and upskilling of VET teachers and co-ordinators in particular obtaining the required Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 for an online course to \$4000 for a conventional face-to-face program.
- Ensuring VET teachers retain industry currency with the opportunity to return to industry or engage in refresher programs and to engage in moderation and validation exercises – this will involve time out of school so could incur relief teacher charges.
- The provision of specialist VET resources – industry standard workshops, child care and hospitality facilities. This can extend to providing safety equipment, uniforms and the like, as well as supporting transport for students.

Hidden costs for schools include:

- Impact on teacher time particularly in relation to planning work placements, negotiating with RTOs, supervising students undertaking online training, and meeting RTO compliance requirements.
- Impact on school planning including structuring the school timetable to allow for work placement and on-the-job for ASbAs, resourcing, student selection procedures, advertising.
- Increased administrative work load through more complex assessment and reporting processes via RTO and to TASC.

The low-cost solution particularly for smaller schools is to offer an ASbA program which quite a number in Tasmania are already planning. These are attractive because:

- ASbAs operate on the basis of a conventional training contract between the employer and the student where the RTO services are met both through training incentives and the employer.

- The school involvement is limited to ensuring the student can undertake part-time release for one or two days per week and can complete prescribed school work under a personalised arrangement.
- There are no direct costs to the school.
- There are some requirements in terms of monitoring student progress, ensuring assessment data is reported on time and that appropriate authorities are notified in the event of a student electing to change status to, for example, a full-time apprenticeship or to drop the apprenticeship completely.

Barriers

Independent schools in Tasmania face major barriers to VETiS programs around costs associated with accessing RTO services and with upskilling teachers to meet VET training requirements particularly the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

The solutions include:

- The Commonwealth providing an individually customised financial support package for students undertaking VETiS particularly in relation to in-demand skills areas – a student guarantee approach – to meet RTO and school costs in delivering training.
- Access to the State-government sponsored Department for Education, Children and Young People RTO for RTO services – this is a new school VET focussed RTO that has virtually all qualifications sought by school students on its scope.
- Direct support for VET teachers wanting to deliver training in schools to attain or upgrade the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.
- Support for independent schools wanting VET teachers released for professional learning and assessment and validation exercises by way of teacher relief/release.

Thank you for your consideration of this response.

I would be very happy to talk directly with you at any time about the issues relating to school-delivered VET as experienced in Tasmanian independent schools.

You might also like to consider speaking directly with IST's VETiS consultant, Mike Frost (M: [REDACTED] E: [REDACTED].)

Yours sincerely

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