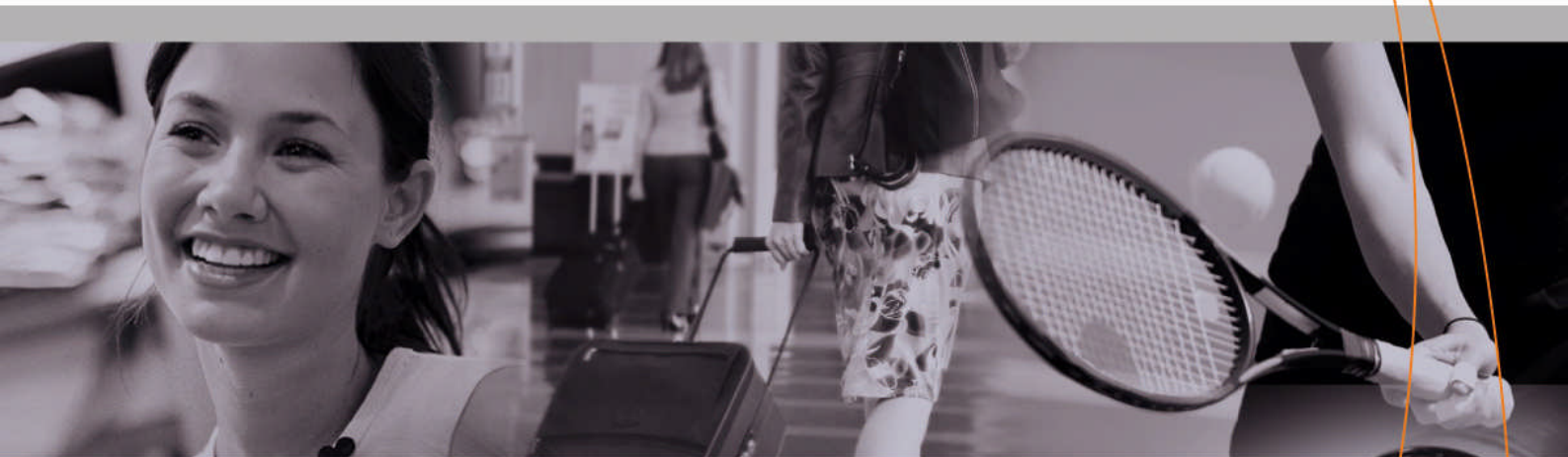


Submission Number: 14

Date Received: 15/01/09

Combining School and Work: Supporting successful youth transitions



January 2009
Service Skills Australia Submission to the House
Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry

About Service Skills Australia

Service Skills Australia is the Industry Skills Council for the service industries. Skills councils are the recognised national bodies providing advice on industry training and skills development needs to government and industry.

Service Skills Australia represents the interests of businesses across sectors including retail and wholesale, sport, fitness, community recreation, outdoor recreation, tourism, meetings and events, hospitality, restaurants and catering, caravans, hairdressing, beauty, floristry, community pharmacy and funeral services.

Service Skills Australia supports skills development for our industries by:

- providing industry intelligence and advice to Skills Australia, government and enterprises on workforce development and skills needs;
- actively supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services, including training packages. SSA currently manages a total of 10 industry training packages;
- providing independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions; and
- working with enterprises, employment service providers, training providers and government to allocate training places.

Introduction

Service Skills Australia (SSA) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into Combining School and Work*. SSA's comments are in relation to the delivery and assessment of Vocational Education and Training (VET). The evidence for this submission comes from our extensive consultation with industry, peak employer bodies, training providers and trade unions carried out as part of the core roles and responsibilities of an Industry Skills Council.

The intention of VET in Schools should be to prepare the student for the workplace—whether at entry level or by becoming technically proficient in a specific skill area. The VET in schools student should be able to use the qualification or partial qualification to assist in gaining employment. In many instances, VET in Schools is delivering full qualifications at Certificate III and IV with no workplace experience. As a consequence, students are led to believe that they will be able to leave school and gain employment as a manager or skilled operator, despite having no experience in the role. For example, the delivery of the Certificate III in Retail Services is aimed at a person with some level of retail experience looking to strengthen their skills and build new skills in supervision. The Certificate II in Retail Services is the industry recognised entry level qualification, but Boards of Studies deem it to be of insufficient academic rigour and frequently push to have the Certificate III program delivered.

In an effort to ensure students are not disadvantaged in further career options, Service Skills Australia has developed a set of four industry endorsed principles to guide the delivery of VET in Schools programs.

SSA supports any measure which encourages students on a pathway towards real employment outcomes in our industries. Apart from being a major source of economic activity, the service industries provide the first job for many people, be it part-time or full time¹.

School-based VET studies should always be partnered with genuine on-the-job training and SSA would encourage the establishment of a system whereby students can incorporate experience from casual or part-time work towards gaining a vocational qualification.

However, currently industry has concern with the lack of consistent outcomes of vocational education and training in schools. This is largely because there are no common standards around the approval, regulation, resourcing, administration, monitoring and delivery of VET in Schools programs across jurisdictions.

VET in schools

Training packages are the national skills frameworks for industry, designed specifically to provide an effective basis for industry skills development. Training packages include qualifications at a range of levels, to reflect career and training pathways within industry.

To maintain the integrity of training package qualifications, it is critical that their implementation throughout the VET system is consistent with industry intent and quality standards. This ensures that industry is able to accept qualifications and statements of attainment gained through any pathway or registered training organisation as a statement of an employee's workplace competence to a consistent, national industry standard.

VET in Schools programs aligned to training packages must meet this requirement that assess workplace competence. This can represent a specific challenge for schools, for the following reasons:

- Competency-based vocational training represents a relatively new concept for many teachers and administrators working within the school system. Competency-based programs also require cooperative arrangements with employers and other partners, which are not issues that most schools have been required to consider for traditional 'academic' subjects.
- Schools are not primarily vocational training providers, and so typically lack the specialised staff, facilities, industry partnerships and resources that other registered training organisations must access as part of operating their core business.
- Schools may also face unique challenges and tensions in resourcing, scheduling and integrating VET programs with other school subjects and activities.

Service Skills Australia acknowledges that VET in Schools programs vary widely in quality, resourcing and effectiveness, and that specific VET in Schools programs are highly regarded and acknowledged as developing competent graduates. It is the variability and lack of consistency between the VET in Schools programs offered in individual jurisdictions, and by specific schools, that is at the core of industry concern.

¹ ABS Job Search Experience Survey, July 2007, 32% of first jobs were in the occupation of Sales Assistants and Salespersons

Of particular concern is that there are no common standards around the approval, regulation, resourcing, administration, monitoring and delivery of VET in Schools programs across jurisdictions.

Key principles for VET in Schools programs

1. Programs offered are consistent with industry direction around the suitability of specific qualifications for VET in Schools delivery, as defined in the endorsed training package

Training package policy permits each training package to specifically identify those qualifications that industry supports for delivery under VET in Schools (VETIS) programs.

The list of qualifications provided in each training package should be used as the foundation for identifying or verifying the suitability of particular VET in Schools programs.

In relation to the service industries, industry does not support the delivery of some training package qualifications through VETIS programs; these include trade and higher-level qualifications, and in some cases, more technically-intensive entry level qualifications.

This is determined on the basis that all training package qualifications are developed to reflect industry structures and related skill needs, and therefore reflect differing levels of technical skill, knowledge and employability skills. Many training package qualifications require a foundation of skills and knowledge – particularly employability skills – that are typically built over years of employment and life experience and through prior learning. In the absence of formal mechanisms to ensure that VETIS students hold the necessary underpinning skills before enrolment, industry does not support the use of all training package qualifications for VETIS programs.

Where a jurisdiction seeks to allow schools to implement qualifications that are not identified within the relevant training package as appropriate for VETIS delivery, these proposals should be put to the national Industry Skills Council for a national industry response.

2. VET in Schools programs must support attainment of workplace competence

Qualifications and Statements of Attainment issued under industry training packages are statements of workplace competence, not just of learning and knowledge. All VET programs based on training packages – including VET in Schools programs – must ensure that real workplace competence is developed and validly assessed.

VET in Schools programs utilising training package qualifications and units must be designed and delivered to support the attainment, and valid assessment, of workplace competence.

This means ensuring that all VETIS programs incorporate the following features, in accordance with advice provided in the training package and supporting user guide:

- Ongoing access to industry-standard equipment and resources, to allow for practice and development of skills
- Qualified and experienced trainers and assessors, with current industry skills and experience, relevant to the qualification/s they are delivering and assessing.

Assessors without appropriate industry knowledge are unable to make valid judgments around industry requirements, practices and standards, invalidating their assessments. Teachers and schools may work in partnership with current industry operators to ensure that the appropriate level of industry skill and knowledge is available to students.

- Assessment undertaken in an industry/workplace environment, requiring the candidate to consider commercial imperatives, respond to client traffic and range of requirements, and deal with time restrictions, competing priorities and contingencies. This allows for the valid assessment of all dimensions of workplace competence.
- Formal arrangements and appropriate support for structured workplace learning, of sufficient duration to allow the development and consolidation of skills, and formal assessment of workplace competence.

Where individual schools are not adequately equipped to meet these requirements, delivery and assessment should be made available through establishing partnerships with other Registered Training Organisations, including schools as appropriate, with sufficient funding and resources made available to support this option.

3. Structured workplace learning must be integrated into all VETIS programs, and must be managed to ensure effective learning and assessment

One of the key issues cited by industry has been the lack of appropriate structured workplace learning and workplace application of skills in some VET in Schools programs. Industry is of the view that successful completion of training package qualifications require integrated on and off-the-job learning.

While these requirements may be partially met through the use of school-based enterprises and well-equipped training facilities, industry believes that formal work placements for all students are also necessary to ensure workplace competence.

In addition to the requirement for sufficient workplace learning, there are key requirements in terms of the *nature* of workplace learning that need to be met to ensure that students gain real learning opportunities in the workplace.

The key issue is that structured workplace learning is not simply normal work, nor is it traditional 'work experience'. It must involve genuine training across the full range of workplace operations required by the training package qualification. This typically requires exposure to a broad range of skills and processes.

Service Skills Australia considers that all VET in Schools students must be covered by a signed training agreement which specifies the agreed training plan and provides for proper structured on and off job training.

This agreement must also be resourced and monitored effectively. In practice, each student should have access to a designated person with appropriate expertise and adequate resources, who liaises between student/school/employer/RTO, co-ordinates on and off-the-job delivery and keeps all parties appropriately informed.

A number of states allow school students' part-time or casual work to be counted towards work placement requirements. While Service Skills Australia supports this principle, it is necessary to ensure that these students are able to access structured workplace learning across all required skills within their work. Some students' casual employment may already reflect the use of this range of skills, but others' regular duties may be confined

to a narrow range of routine tasks that do not build competence across the range of skills required by the qualification. In this case, a formal program of rotation of duties may need to be negotiated with the employer, or additional work placements may be required.

4. VETIS should increase, rather than limit, pathways available to students

VETIS should increase, rather than limit, pathways for those leaving school at the end of year 12. VETIS programs should provide multiple pathways into employment and/or further training and education. Service Skills Australia recommends that VET in Schools programs should, as far as practicable, keep open the option of participation in higher education.

Participation in VET in Schools programs should therefore not disadvantage students for the purposes of university entry. This means that senior students undertaking VETIS should do so as part of a broad general education program that combines a Senior Secondary Certificate of education with nationally-recognised training package units of competency and/or qualifications.

Service Skills Australia does not support the establishment of separate 'vocational' and 'academic' streams, based upon which subjects contribute toward tertiary entrance. Students are effectively pushed into one stream or the other, with VET in Schools positioned as the option for those who are unlikely to achieve a university entrance. This diminishes the status of both VET in Schools and VET in general, and negates its potential for making a positive contribution to the development of all young people.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is imperative that training package implementation is consistent with industry intent and quality standards throughout the VET system. There are wide variations in the quality, resourcing and effectiveness of VET in Schools programs. Some VET in Schools programs are highly regarded and acknowledged as developing competent graduates. However, across jurisdictions and in specific schools, there is inconsistency and variability between the VET in Schools programs. This is at the core of industry concern.

Any vocational education and training in schools program should be based on the following principles:

1. The programs offered are consistent with industry direction around the suitability of specific qualifications for VET in Schools delivery, as defined in the endorsed training package.
2. VET in Schools programs support the attainment of workplace competence.
3. Structured workplace learning is integrated into all VET in Schools programs, and must be managed to ensure effective learning and assessment.
4. VET in Schools should increase, rather than limit, pathways available to students.