

## Australian Technical College Sunshine



### Submission for Transition from School to Work

In Australia there are three distinct education and training sectors: School, Vocational Education & Training (VET) and University. The recent Bradley Report identified the gap between University and VET sectors and encouraged strategies to reduce this distance. On the challenge of school to work, I suggest that the gap between school and VET is the area of greatest concern.

VET is for many graduates of both school and university, an excellent preparatory step before entering the world of work. This strikes as odd in two ways: first because traditionally TAFE is seen as an articulation pathway towards university; and second because VET is still regarded by many school workers (teachers, career advisors) and parents as a second-rate articulation goal, for school-leavers.

What we need desperately, is for schools to champion trade (and therefore VET) pathways to young people. And to do this, school workers need to understand those pathways.

Current initiatives to increase trade awareness in schools include VET in Schools (VETiS) programs and Trade Training Centres in Schools (TTCs):

VETiS programs have existed for over 10 years and are widely accessed by young people seeking to “taste” trade training at a basic level. The student will usually move between school and Registered Training Organisation (RTO) sites, but school teaching staff will not. The result here is that the student gains an appreciation of both ‘worlds’, but school staff do not. The relationship between RTO and school is usually restricted to a fee-for-service, financial basis.

The current TTC initiative is yet to be evaluated, but early predictions would see this as an excellent opportunity for younger grades (Years 8, 9 and 10) to be introduced to the trade learning environment.

Neither VETiS nor TTCs address a fundamental gap in pathways to work discourse: school support for trade career pathways.

Victoria’s school system used to divide at the senior secondary level, offering young people the opportunity to gain essential foundational skills whilst pursuing either vocational or academic streams. In recent years, the Federally-funded Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) introduced a very modern version of a trade-oriented education and training option for senior-secondary students. Led by industry, ATCs combined VET and school learning.

Australian Technical College Sunshine (ATCS) avoided some of the adverse politics around ATCs by building on true partnerships between stakeholders. Industry, TAFE and government school partners worked tirelessly to not only provide an innovative vocational education pathway for young people in the West of Melbourne, but to bridge the gap between sectors.

Students of ATC Sunshine enroll in a “3-way Learning Model”: at College, TAFE and on the job. Thus, they experience the strength of each sector. This model celebrates trades and trade career pathways, while acknowledging the value of foundational skills and knowledge.

When industry, school and TAFE united to design and build ATC Sunshine they found a significant language barrier to their collaboration. In the mainstream, there is a gap between sectors that continues to hamper the smooth transition of young people from school to work.

ATC Sunshine unites VET, school and industry strengths to provide a celebration of vocational learning at the senior secondary level. Kinaesthetic learners with trade aspirations are offered quality learning experiences and excellent career prospects. The division between learning at work, at school and in VET is diminished, and respective outcomes and expectations are mapped across into other fields. Our education product is appreciated by our students, and our graduate product is appreciated by employers.

As economies constrict and unemployment rates rise there is less incentive for young people to leave school; school is a safe place to remain in preparation for the future. By default, our school retention rates will rise and the young people who stay will demand – and be suited for – education options previously available in industry (eg. Apprenticeships), now needed in school.

Options like ATCs offer an alternative for the students who enroll and study there. They also offer an insight for other education and training partners – mainstream schools, TAFE and industry – into options for engaging young people in meaningful foundational and trade-specific education programming.

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