



Submission to the House Standing Committee on Education & Training Inquiry into combining school and work: Supporting successful youth transitions

"Most of the growth in the skilled workforce in Australia is occurring in occupations requiring university training rather than in VET-level training, as is widely but incorrectly assumed."

(Dr Bob Birrell Campus Review November 2008)

Background:

Great Southern TAFE is located in the Great Southern region of Western Australia, and delivers 850,000 SCH across a region of 40,000 sq km.

The College has developed strong relationships with government and non-government schools in the region, and in 2008 delivered 142,000 SCH to schools of which 47% was delivered under auspice.

Point 5 in the terms of reference of the Inquiry - *the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people)* - is of particular relevance to Great Southern TAFE, a regional RTO concerned with ensuring young people make effective transitions into the regional workforce.

There is a body of evidence that confirms that students in regional Australia have lower progression rates to university, and that qualification levels for the regional workforce continue to lag that for the metropolitan regions.

Through consultations with industry and education stakeholders Great Southern TAFE has identified that for the Great Southern, in common with much of regional Western Australia:

- Skills shortages are forecast in the para professions;
- Progression of regional students to university has been falling; and
- The drift of young people from the regions is creating a social imbalance.

The College further found that there was a strong perception in school and industry that VET delivery to school students should be held at the Certificate I/II level; and consequently the student cohort referred to VET in schools programs were either students intending to take up apprenticeships, or students who were struggling with traditional classroom based delivery.

This submission to the Inquiry by Great Southern TAFE outlines a specific strategy developed to improve the workforce competitiveness of regional school leavers and to improve their educational attainment.

Strategy:

Great Southern TAFE has invested in a delivery methodology to ensure students can remain at school in Years 11 and 12, and complete higher level VET qualifications. This program has been badged as **TAFELink** and is a strategy to:

- increase participation in VET higher level qualifications by students at regional high schools;
- Speed up entry to industry for young people who enter year 11 having already settled on a vocational pathway;
- Provide an alternative university entry pathway aligned to the economic & personal circumstances of many young people in regional WA;
- Deliver financial benefits to students by ensuring credit transfer arrangements between Great Southern TAFE and universities are clearly documented; and
- Complement the W.A. State Government policy to ensure that young people remain in education or training

The student cohort undertaking this program is one that previously would have not been considered for school based VET programs – these are students who have embarked on a matriculation pathway, but at the end of semester one in Year 11 have come to the conclusion that this pathway is unlikely to provide them with the results needed to secure a university place.

Under this program Great Southern TAFE and senior high schools negotiate the development of a student release pattern to accommodate students attending TAFE to study for a certificate III/IV whilst continuing their enrolment at school. In Western Australia up to 50% of the Western Australian Certificate of Secondary Graduation can comprise VET subjects. The outcome for the student is senior secondary graduation with a VET certificate IV.

Advantages of combining senior secondary graduation with a VET higher level qualification include:

- Direct articulation into VET Diploma from school as pre-requisite competencies have been completed;
- A VET certificate IV with secondary graduation meets the Minimum Entry Requirement for many universities;
- Possession of both a higher level VET qualification and senior secondary graduation improves both labour force competitiveness and productivity in the workplace; and
- Students continue to benefit from the social and pastoral aspects of attendance at school.

Outcomes:

Although only in its second year of delivery, this has been an extremely well received program. Both Murdoch and Notre Dame Universities have confirmed that they will accept enrolments from students graduating through this pathway. Edith Cowan University will accept this pathway as meeting entrance into the University Preparation Course; and Curtin University is considering endorsing this pathway as an equity strategy to increase enrolments of regional students in undergraduate qualifications.

Four high schools in the Great Southern region are now engaged in the TAFELink program. Students are enrolled in higher level qualifications in Information Technology, Financial Services, and Multimedia. In 2009 it is planned to broaden the scope of qualifications to include certificate III/IV qualifications in Conservation & Land Management, allied health, and children's services.

There has also been a significant level of interest in adopting this program in other non-metropolitan regions of Western Australia, and over the past 12 months Great Southern TAFE has been invited to conduct workshops on this model of delivery to staff of RTOs and schools in six regions.

Relevance to the Inquiry:

1. Many higher Level VET qualifications require work placements, and integration of work and study improves employment transitions
2. Western Australian legislation accommodates 'dual' enrolment of students at school and TAFE and the parameters of the Certificate of Secondary Graduation as dictated by the Western Australian Curriculum Council permit students to apply VET units of competency to 50% of the certificate. It is important that any development of a national curriculum does not erode this fledgling opportunity for students in senior secondary schooling to include higher level VET qualifications in their secondary graduation certificate.
3. Of concern is that the funding model for VET delivery to schools has not recognised the potential for this pathway to improve transition into the para-professions. This failure of recognition occurs in both State and Commonwealth funding models. The most recent Commonwealth school-VET initiative, the School Trade Training Centres, explicitly excludes provision of higher level training. This situation occurs as School Trade Training Centres can only deliver qualifications in the traditional trades and, with the exception of hospitality, it is impossible to complete a certificate III in a trade qualification while at school.
4. Recent COAG agreements also exclude higher level VET qualifications obtained at school from targets agreed with State Governments – this restricts the capacity to deliver higher level qualifications as the State Training Agency has no incentive to increase ceilings for VET in Schools despite this strategy clearly targeting a student cohort who would previously have not considered a TAFE-university pathway.