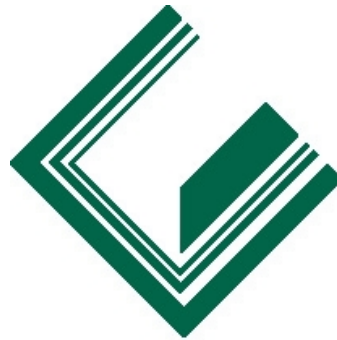


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Submission to:

**The House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Education and Training**

**Inquiry into Combining School and Work: Supporting
Successful Youth Transitions.**

Provided by

Mr Darrel Linke
Chairperson

Ms Lynne Clarke
Executive Officer

**Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council Inc.
PO Box 752
Geelong, VIC, 3220**

Introduction

The Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council Inc. (GRVEC) is an Australian Government funded Local Community Partnership (LCP) organisation, one of more than 200, operating across Australia. GRVEC's mission is to "assist all young people in the Geelong region to access quality information, experiences and support to help them identify and forge a career path leading to personal fulfilment and economic independence." GRVEC facilitates the Australian Government's Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) program, the Adopt a School (ASP) program and the Career and Transition Support (CTS) program across secondary schools in our region which stretches from Lara in the north to Lorne in the southwest. We have built links to many Geelong-based businesses and organisations, both small and large, and partner with the State Government initiated Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network.

As an organisation that is set up to facilitate the SWL, ASP and CTS programs under the Career Advice Australia Banner we are in a good position to comment from a point of view that is not narrowly school or business focused. We have been operating for 11 years and have seen the popularity of initiatives such as VETiS, VCAL and SWL grow over that time. We bring a regional perspective.

As an overarching comment we believe that the current school model or structure is long overdue for review. Existing models do not have the flexibility to allow students to combine part – time work and study -Timetables are rigid and curriculum offerings subject to a number of factors that have little to do with interests or local industry opportunities. Senior secondary schools –Year 10,11and 12 arranged in clusters where students aged 15+ are enrolled in the cluster, can combine part time work and part time study undertaking studies at any one of the campuses in the cluster depending on what fitted with their working hours and subject interest. Such a model would cater to a broader range of students than the current model.

Providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work

- Schools to keep an electronic record of out of school employment both paid and voluntary, for each student who elects to provide the information.

- Develop a nationally accepted method of recording of skills, and attributes based on the employability skills framework. Employers would record training towards and attainment of employability skills in a generic logbook (available to all Australian students) and schools would record this information on their curriculum database.
- Skills and Experience gained on-the job or through voluntary work should count towards the Certificate II in Employability Skills. This qualification should be a no-cost option for all year 11 and 12 students.

Identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which supports students to combine work and study.

- The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is a good model of a senior secondary certificate that has an applied learning focus. (Any new alternative applied learning approach to a senior secondary certificate needs to be positioned appropriately so as not to appear to be a “second rate” course of study).
- Business and volunteer organisations could recruit student-workers at the end of year 10 and year 11 to participate in appropriately supervised and constructed workplace learning ‘internships/cadetships’ over say a 4 week period during the end of year school holiday. The skills and experience gained in this way would count towards the students’ senior secondary certificate.
- School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT) offer a balance of work and schooling that could be expanded to a wider range of vocations.
- Provide monetary incentives for business and volunteer organisations that employ a student-worker to help defray the costs of supervision and training. For example, the student-worker could be issued with a voucher that is surrendered to the employing organisation on completion of the employment period.

Support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support.

Support for the student-worker.

- Fair payment on the basis of duties and experience.
- Non discriminatory work place
- Safe workplace and work practices.
- Non exploitative work practices.
- Timely and accurate information from all parties that is readily understandable.
- Recourse to an independent adjudicator to address complaints against an employer or school.
- Explore the opportunities to set up networks of ACE, TAFE, youth agencies and businesses to provide students who fall outside of the mainstream school sector with a vocational mentor to help develop employability skills and discuss vocational options within the students' study at TAFE or ACE.
- Volunteer mentors for the student-worker drawn from retired workers, or community leadership program participants.

Support at the school/education provider level.

- First class careers and education counselling so that both the student and parent(s) are aware of the demands that a combined work and school workload will impose on the student's physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Support for the student-worker to develop sufficient negotiation skills to advocate on their own behalf or alternately a school/family appointed advocate to ensure that the employer's expectations do not exceed the student's ability to manage their work, school, family and social commitments.
- Support with study and time management skills so that the student-worker can manage their study load.
- Negotiate a 'get-out' clause or process if the work and study model does not work in the student-worker's favour. All parties agree to the process before the work study program is put in place.

- Support for the school's/cluster's administrative staff and subject teachers so that they are aware of the arrangement and can track progress and record it against learning outcomes.
- More flexible hours of school and school models to accommodate student-worker's work commitments, eg late afternoon early evening classes, summer schools.
- Flexible timetables and enrolment processes within and between neighbouring schools. The Student-worker could then be enrolled in a 'school cluster' as opposed to just one school and undertake studies at multiple campuses.

Support at home.

- Regular meetings, including email and internet conferencing, between school or other education provider's representative, workplace representative, parent(s) and student-worker to:
 - Set up the school-work arrangement
 - Monitor how the arrangement is working across the school, work and home environments.
 - Resolve any misunderstandings or unmet expectations.

Support at work.

- Phased introduction of the student-worker to the workplace whereby she/he is supervised and has the opportunity to participate in a range of valid workplace activities to progressively guide her/him from novice worker to competent performer.
- Access to staff/mentor who can explain to the student-worker how the workplace culture operates.
- Access to staff/mentor that can assess the student-worker's workplace performance and offer timely feedback to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Workplace supervisor requires regular access to a contact within the student-worker's school or other education provider, through a designated school staff member who has the co-ordination role.

The potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity)

This question can be considered from a number of points of view:

First, what is the student-workers' reason for engaging in work (paid or voluntary) in addition to their school work?

- Suits the student who struggles with the 5 days a week classroom environment – can increase their retention in post compulsory schooling.
- Allows the student who has disengaged, or is at risk of disengaging with post compulsory school to understand the relevance of school qualification in accessing meaningful and economically viable work.
- Use work whilst still at school to gain an apprenticeship or traineeship. In this case the student may well be enrolled in the corresponding VETiS course and be engaged in SWL or relevant SBAT.
- Source of income to supplement immediate requirements or to save for a long term goal (university, travel, set up a business). In this case the student-worker may have little or no interest in pursuing this line of work on a long term basis.
- Gain the skills necessary to support oneself with part time work while studying at TAFE or university (hospitality work seems popular in this regard).
- Use work as a means to gain independence from school or family.

In the above scenarios, the student-workers' reason for engaging in work whilst still at school may or may not align with their longer term career or further education goals. If their reasons do not align then they may well have no impact on the student-worker's prospects for post compulsory qualifications apart from helping them to achieve a financial independence or to qualify for youth allowance. Although it would make them work ready earlier. On the other hand if a student-worker is gaining experience through work to embark on an apprenticeship or other vocational qualification then their work can be seen as relevant to their long term educational attainment in the vocational education sector.

Second, the student-worker, through their work experiences, may discover that they are not suited to the particular career that they had set out to attain. In this case, the

student-worker may well cease their work and change the focus of their studies. The student-worker will need competent careers advice at this stage to help them reassess their options and realign their study choices. In this case the experience of work has had an impact on the student-worker's educational and vocational attainment.

Third, apart from the largely positive impacts outlined above, mismanagement of the school –work balance has the potential to negatively impact on other domains of the student-workers life including educational attainment. There are a number of possibilities that could result in these negative impacts, for instance;

- High work demands or excessive work hours will lessen the time available to the student to study, effect sleep patterns and reduce their effectiveness to learn whilst at school.
- Workplace accidents may mean significant periods of lost school time. Likewise some workplace accidents could lead to disability that effects long term prospects for employment and academic achievement.
- If the student is engaged in opportunistic short term and casual work they may devote themselves to a workplace, to the detriment of their studies, only to find that the employer will lay them off, in favour of younger, cheaper workers, once their salary has reached an adult rate.

There would need to be checks and balances in place to address these potentially negative impacts.

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)

Current school based vocational and training pathways mechanisms such as VCAL, VETiS, SWL and SBAT provide a good basis for a balanced and targeted school-work system. From GRVEC's point of view the essential ingredients that are now required to make the existing processes more effective are:

- A nation-wide approach to dealing with the school-work phenomenon: this includes recognising the role that workplaces have to play in developing employability skills, capturing the attainment of skills and knowledge that the student-worker develops through work and giving credit for it against the school curriculum in a consistent fashion.
- Managing the expectations of student-worker, parent(s), employer and school.
- Effective communication links between schools/clusters and employer.
- Excellent communication processes would need to be established so that each school is aware of the type of work; the employer contact details and the hours of work for each their students.
- Don't ignore the social dimension. Young people at 15, 16, and 17 may be experiencing their first job, and are more likely to be naive with reduced power to bargain and therefore be at increased risk of exploitation, when compared to older students and young adult workers.

Under existing arrangements, School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT) can be used inappropriately where the student is required to settle for training and work in vocational areas that are available through an SBAT opportunity rather than the work that they would really like to try. This failing of the current arrangements could be addressed by increasing the range of vocational opportunities offered through the SBAT program. Vocational Education and Training in School (VETiS) certification is no guarantee of successful transition to the work that the student has a preference for as the student may have to compromise their choice of vocational study to what is offered in the region rather than what is their first choice. The cost of VETiS training can be prohibitive for families (particularly those families that may be disadvantaged for a variety of reasons).