Submission to VET enquiry

My interest is in the provision of VET in Schools to rural and remote schools and students in NSW.

I have been reflecting on the sorts of factors and considerations that might be relevant in looking at the effectiveness and outcomes of VET in schools for rural students and rural communities, and ways in which these might interact.

The relevant literature provides a level of consensus on the major issues. These can be summarised as:
1. **Access, Equity and Participation Issues**
2. **Curriculum Delivery and Assessment Issues**
3. **Training Outcomes Issues**

In the rural context it is relatively easy to see ways in which access and equity issues might surface. Geographic isolation and remoteness from service delivery infrastructure have obvious implications for some students and, in the interest of equity, suggest the need for flexible and innovative responses. Curriculum delivery is a major concern, given the factors of location, time and distance that providers have to contend with, and these same factors compound the difficulties associated with fair and effective assessment of competence for rural and remote students (access to richness of training contexts, shortage of appropriate assessors, etc). Training outcomes issues can be related (for example) to the availability of local options, the degree of match between training and local employment opportunities, the fitness of the education and training to meet local employer requirements.

Within these three major categories of issues is embedded a series of more specific concerns. These concerns include:
- **The Planning Process**. Here the emphasis is on the appropriateness of the process, its capacity to engage relevant stakeholders, and the effectiveness of its implementation.
- **Markets**. In a rural context, the thinness of the market for education and training is a concern, highlighting the need for adequate market research, market development and responsiveness.
- **Costs**. Inevitably, there will be direct cost implications in servicing the education and training needs of rural and remote clients, highlighting the need for efficient structures and processes, and for the unequal provision of resources (when compared with denser, more urban markets).
- **Delivery Systems**. Typically, delivery systems in education and training have been designed to meet the needs of relatively large aggregations of learners, and efficient systems of mass education have been developed. Rural and remote students require a different paradigm, based on different assumptions and having different criteria of efficiency.
- **Attitudes.** All stakeholders bring perceptions, beliefs, opinions and habits to the task of education and training. These need to be examined for their capacity to either facilitate or impede the effectiveness of VET in schools activities.
- **Quality Assurance.** Whilst VET is a national program and subject to national standards, the QA processes used in rural and remote contexts may require some special consideration.

- **Community Sustainability.** A major sub-text in the provision of VET in schools is its role in community capacity-building and in the development of the human and social capital that will be needed to sustain and renew Australian rural communities. Within each of the major categories of issues is potential to impact on the future of communities and the individuals who make them.

At a third level, it is possible to examine all of the above issues and concerns according to their locus. It is possible to tease out ways in which they relate to:
   a) **Individuals**
   b) (Geographic) **Location**
   c) **The 'System'** of education and training provision.

We now have matters of influence affecting VET in schools in three dimensions – the three categories of issues; the seven concerns and the three examples of locus combine to produce a 63-cell model (3x3x7).   Figure One shows those relationships graphically.

This model has heuristic value in shaping and organising an inquiry. Whilst, in the course of the Committee's work, data may not be found to match every cell, the existence of the cells can:
   - help to ensure that relevant questions are asked or observations made; and
   - help organise and make sense of data gathered in the course of the inquiry.

The cells can be 'unpacked' and laid out two-dimensionally to allow their content to be located or interrogated. The matrices would then look as indicated in Tables 1, 2 and 3 following.

Each cell suggests its own sorts of investigations. As an example, one could ask how Access, Equity and Participation issues affect Costs of VET in schools provision. In turn, we can look at how these participation costs are related to an Individual (e.g., does an individual who is part of a slim cohort face additional costs?); to Location (Is the specific cost associated with provision at a particular site harmonious with access and equity objectives?); or to The System (Is there something within the system's structures or processes that impacts on costs of provision?).

I therefore offer the model to the Committee for its consideration and possible adoption.

I should be happy to elaborate or respond to questions related to this submission if the Committee requests.

Don Squires
VET for Schools Consultant
Rural and Distance Education
P O Box 717
Bathurst, NSW 2795

Fig 1: Conceptual framework for the analysis of vocational education provision in rural areas of Australia
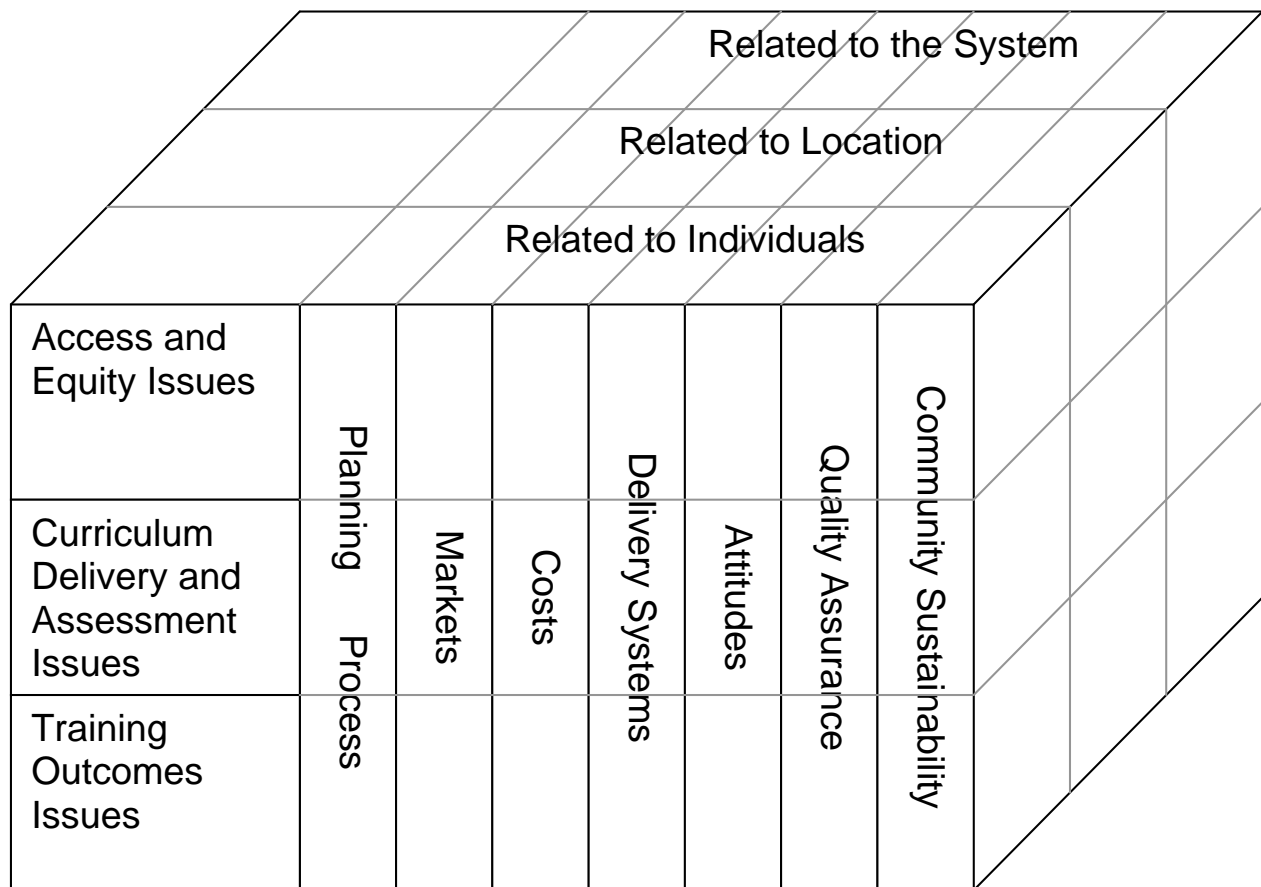
Table 1: Access, Equity and Participation Issues

In the broad areas of:	Issues arise IN RURAL AND REMOTE areas that are associated with:						
	PLANNING PROCESSES	MARKETS	COSTS	DELIVERY SYSTEMS	ATTITUDES	QUALITY ASSURANCE	COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
ACCESS, EQUITY & PARTICIPATION	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS
	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION
	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM

Table 2: Curriculum Delivery and Assessment Issues

In the broad areas of:	Issues arise IN RURAL AND REMOTE areas that are associated with:						
	PLANNING PROCESSES	MARKETS	COSTS	DELIVERY SYSTEMS	ATTITUDES	QUALITY ASSURANCE	COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
CURRICULUM DELIVERY & ASSESSMENT	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS
	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION
	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM

Table 3: Training Outcomes Issues

In the broad areas of:	Issues arise IN RURAL AND REMOTE areas that are associated with:						
	PLANNING PROCESSES	MARKETS	COSTS	DELIVERY SYSTEMS	ATTITUDES	QUALITY ASSURANCE	COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
TRAINING OUTCOMES	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS	Related to INDIVIDUALS
	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION	Related to LOCATION
	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM	Related to THE SYSTEM