

Overview of vocational education in Australian schools

information Brief to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into vocational education in schools

Overview

This Information Brief supplements the detailed material provided in the Department of Education, Science and Training's (DEST) submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, Inquiry into vocational education in schools. It provides a summary of the key roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and States and Territories in relation to the school and Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems and an overview of the national policy context. Also attached are a series of Fact Sheets relating to key issues, specifically:

- » The National Training Framework and Quality Assurance;
- « VET in Schools;
- « School-Based New Apprenticeships;
- « VET Qualifications;
- « The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA);
- « The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP);
- « Funding - Commonwealth recurrent funding for the School and VET sectors; and
- « Definitions of Key VET in Schools Terms,

Commonwealth / State / Territory **Government Roles and Responsibilities**

School and vocational education in Australia is administered under a federated system of government in which the constitutional and financial responsibility for school education lies with State and Territory governments. Notwithstanding this, the Commonwealth has responsibility, as do all levels of government, to ensure that all young people have the knowledge, skills and attributes to be able to contribute and participate effectively in all aspects of Australian society.

The Commonwealth Government has no day-to-day responsibilities for schools but provides significant national funding and coordination for school education.

School Education

The Commonwealth, State and Territory, and non-government school authorities all share a role in the identification of national priorities for schooling, promoting national consistency and coherence in the provision of schooling across Australia, and identifying strategies for achieving these aims.

States and Territories have responsibility for their own systems. As a result there are commonalities, in relation to purpose and goals for young people, as well as diversity in relation to the organisation and delivery of schooling across the country. Each State and Territory education department determines its own policies and practices on matters such as the organising of schooling, curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and awards as well as co-ordinating and administering the resources allocated to schools. At the senior secondary level these responsibilities are usually administered through a separate agency.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

While responsibility for VET also rests with the States and Territories, it is regarded as a national system supported by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and major industry bodies. The Ministerial Council (MINCO) of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for VET, makes decisions on national objectives and priorities, and strategic policy and planning including funding,

The Commonwealth, through DEST has a central role in VET policy and programmes in promoting national consistency and coherence in the provision of VET and in providing advice on national VET issues. It monitors the performance of the VET sector and co-ordinates the Commonwealth Government's relations with MINCO, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP).

State and Territory Governments assist in the formulation of national policy objectives and priorities through MINCO. They have responsibility for the administration and delivery of VET within the jurisdictions, which includes issuing qualifications, and the administration of TAFEs,

The administrative structures in each State and Territory vary. However, each has a training or recognition authority that registers training organisations that provide VET and monitors their operations. The registration of qualifications based on Training Packages and accreditation of training courses where no suitable Training Package exists or where Training Packages have not yet been developed and New Apprenticeships are also the responsibility of the States and Territories.

National Policy Context

In April 1999, all Education Ministers agreed to a historic commitment to improving Australian schooling within a framework of national collaboration. *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for the Twenty-first Century (the National Goals)* identify the areas of common concern that will be addressed and provides broad directions to guide government and non-government education authorities and others involved in the provision of school education in Australia.

The National Goals clearly reflect that school education is delivered in the context of contributing to the development of young people so that they are able to engage effectively with what has become an increasingly complex world, both in Australia and as part of the global community in which Australia participates.

The National Goals articulate the need for a paradigm shift in the way schools develop and deliver school education and signal a broadening of school education in order to provide for the intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development of young Australians. Underpinning this shift is the need for schools to engage with their community.

"The achievement of these common and agreed national goals entails a commitment to collaboration for the purposes of:

- further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community." (MCEETYA, 1999)

The National Goals recognise that for the school sector to deliver on the educational and social commitment to young people, schools will need to provide students with a broader range of skills and qualifications, and opportunities to develop an understanding about the contemporary world of work and the range of pathways available.

The National Goals clearly identify that vocational education is an important element of education for all young people in order to assist their transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways. *The National Goals* contain a number of references to the need for vocational offerings to be available during the compulsory years of schooling and in the senior secondary years, emphasising that when students leave school they should have:

- "1.5 Employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning.
- 2.3 Participated in programmes of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programmes as part of their senior secondary certificate.
- 2.4 Participated in programmes and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future." (MCEETYA, 1999)

The report of the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways-Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints to the Future* (2001) supported the directions outlined in *the National Goals* in terms of providing broad vocational experiences for young people as an integral part of their education experience.

The report notes that during consultations, the Taskforce was told that schools were not catering for the broad aspirations of their students, with not enough being done for those students who would not be going from school to higher education. The Taskforce reports that during the consultations, young people

"consistently called for more relevant, accessible and flexible schooling. They highlighted the need for schooling to relate to the broad range of futures of all students, not just the minority who proceed immediately from school to higher education. They argued that education should be relevant, preparing them for life - for living independently, for managing relationships and for prospective employment". (Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 2001, p. 14)

Recommendation 3 of the report includes that "all young people have access to a range of vocational learning and enterprise education experiences while at school." (pp 31 and 96).

In order to take forward reforms to school education to provide for a broad range of vocational education offerings as conceived in *the National Goals*, a policy and implementation plan for vocational education in schools, commonly described as the Framework for vocational education in schools, was developed by the former MCEETYA VET in Schools Taskforce.

This Framework for vocational education in schools embraces the need for improved transition pathways for all young people from school to work and further education and training and signals a broadening of the agenda for vocational education. The Framework for vocational education in schools was developed in 2000, with both the Framework and implementation strategy broadly endorsed by all MCEETYA Ministers (in January 2001) for implementation from the 2001 school year.

In developing the Framework for vocational education in schools, the features identified in the OECD work were refined into six interrelated elements, described in the document *New framework for vocational education in schools: Policy Directions* (p 22) as:

Vocational education and training

Appropriately accredited industry-specific training based on AQF qualifications and competencies endorsed within the National Training Framework.

Enterprise and vocational learning

Enterprise and vocational learning perspectives incorporated into general learning that is appropriate for all years of schooling.

Student support services

Services that guide and support young people in their transition from compulsory schooling to post-compulsory schooling options and post-school destinations, especially the inclusion of explicit career education programmes in school curriculum. Services will allow for local discretion over delivery and relate to participation and attainment in education, training and work.

Community and business partnerships

Mechanisms that foster close cooperation between all levels of government, business and community organisations, education and labour market authorities.

Effective institutional and funding arrangements

Policy coherence and effective programme implementation through institutional arrangements for the organised and continuous involvement of all relevant players at the national, State/Territory and local levels.

Monitoring and evaluation

Data collection processes to provide information that will enable the effectiveness of current and future arrangements to be measured.

An important aspect of the Framework for vocational education in schools is that it directs the efforts of the school sector to develop and incorporate vocational education offerings across all years of schooling and to expand the offerings from what had largely been programmes directed to the provision of industry recognised skills. Vocational education in the Australian context now covers a broad range of activities including:

- VET in schools;
- « part-time School-based New Apprenticeships;
- general vocational learning including activities, such as work experience and SWL;
- » enterprise education; and
- the provision of career education, information and guidance.

These expanded offerings are critical if school education is to cater for all students, including those at risk of not completing school. Many students will leave school before senior secondary years. Early exposure to enterprise, vocational and career education is therefore important in supporting the transition from school to employment, further education or training for early school leavers. A broadening of the school curriculum to include exposure to the world of work and the opportunity to learn in environments outside of the school setting is important in making the school experience more relevant and engaging for a wider group of students.

It is also important to provide young people with appropriate career information. This will assist young people to make informed choices about their future and avoid the possibility of 'churning' through unsatisfactory employment or periods of unemployment on leaving school.

While each State or Territory or non-government school authority may place a different emphasis in terms of policy and implementation on each of the areas of the Framework for vocational education in schools, overall there is a broad level of acknowledgement and support for all elements in recognition of the interrelationship between the elements.