

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

Centralian College is a multi-sector institution that offers senior secondary, Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education courses. These courses are delivered either on the main campus in Alice Springs, in formal settings in other Northern Territory regional population centres (including Darwin) or in remote communities. VET delivery is particularly flexible including significant on the job delivery and assessment. Higher Education courses are delivered under a contractual agreement with the Northern Territory University.

The organisational and institutional arrangements for the Centralian College are unique in Australia given that the College was established in 1993 through the amalgamation of the Sadadeen Senior Secondary College and the Alice Springs College of TAFE.

This submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training is based upon the combined experience of a truly cross-sectoral organisation. This experience has been accumulated in a decade when the national vocational agenda has undergone both significant change and major growth. The College Community believes that many of our experiences could be used to benefit students around Australia if used with due regard to the local context.

The terms of reference have been noted and the submission from the College is developed under each of the four major TORs.

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The place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development, and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

1. The range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs.

The Centralian College experience is that the presence of readily accessible VET programs has added considerable breadth and choice to the experiences undertaken by students as they progress through secondary education. This is of particular importance in rural and remote settings where choice in traditional high school organisational patterns is often curtailed. For example, nearly 80% of Stage One (Year 11) students enrolled in the College are undertaking at least one VET Unit. This is assisted by the recognition of VET studies as counting towards the student gaining the NT Certificate of Education (NTCE).

This broad range of choice is often cited in student satisfaction surveys as the main reason for enrolling in the College. The largest single source of Senior Secondary students derives from the two private sector schools in the town. Parents and students value the opportunities afforded by the larger range of study options.

Another benefit comes from the TAFE tradition of using a broader range of hours of delivery each day. The College makes more efficient use of facilities by operating an extended timetable and packaging time differently during the day. The current timetable operates from 0800 to 1700 four days each week with a finishing time of 1200 each Friday. In addition, tutorial classes are conducted by lecturing staff three evenings a week in the Learning Resource Centre. Periods of time range from one to four hours and often accommodate on the job training requirements for VET units.

This pattern of delivery leaves Fridays available for staff meetings during normal business hours. It also better meets the realities of students' paid employment commitments. Some 64% of NTCE students are in paid employment for an average of 8 hours per week. In addition, Indigenous students often have cultural and family commitments that make considerable impact upon a more traditional tightly packed school timetable.

The integrated approach used at Centralian College also ensures access to a full range of VET offerings as they exist in their own right to serve the broader needs of industry. There is a tendency for traditional high schools to offer either what is convenient for the facilities available or by what is cheap to deliver. In addition, school timetables limit on the job experience as it tends to cause major disruption to other learning experiences forcing students to make very difficult decisions about how to use their time. This often leads to total withdrawal from traditional subjects or the VET study. We believe Centralian College can cater well for both without placing undue pressure on the student and their family.

The ability to make a different use of time comes about through the College having its own industrial award for lecturers and educational administrators. This award allows the Centralian College to operate 50 weeks a year. Educational Administrator positions (equivalent to principal and assistant principal levels) have five or six weeks recreation leave per year while lecturers maintain the more traditional twelve weeks leave. Hours of work can be anytime between the hours of 0730 and 2200 weekdays without penalty payments up to a maximum of thirty hours per week. This flexibility allows for students to undertake classes at more suitable times to recognise their lifestyle and can also allow lecturers to do more on the job assessment and training as they can be working during hours that are often available to students for paid employment.

Centralian College lecturers can be employed through the minimum entry provisions in the award. This provides for a series of qualification bars beyond acceptable industry experience. All lecturers at Centralian College are required to obtain a Certificate Four in Workplace Assessment to meet the new Australian Quality Training Framework. This ensures there is a consistent understanding across the College of industry standards and flexible modes of delivery and assessment. Lecturers delivering NTCE Courses are required to have a formal teaching qualification.

Considerable flexibility is gained by having access to a wider pool of potential staff, particularly in addressing the issue of teacher shortage that is prevalent in regional and rural areas. It is often possible to identify VET modules that will meet the requirements of the NTCE recognition process and to then use a VET qualified lecturer to ensure the continuity of offerings. This is possible in all but the most specialised of senior secondary subjects such as physics and maths.

The arrangements for employing lecturing staff allow the students of the College to make use of a considerably broader range of experiences and qualifications than would students in a traditional high school. Given the national teacher shortage this is a very significant advantage. One unintended, but nevertheless important, consequence is that the proportion of male lecturers is quite high compared to the national feminisation of the teaching force.

In addition, the College strongly supports staff to gain a formal teaching qualification through payment of HECS fees for part time study and some full time study awards. There is significant advantage for lecturers to gain formal qualifications as it allows them to move through the salary bars in the award.

Possibly one of the most significant changes the College has been able to make is having a different set of performance indicators recognised in our reporting to the NT Government. Traditional high schools tend to report only on retention to Year 12 and Tertiary Entrance Rank Scores. Centralian College will now report on these two items as well as students who move into other training (eg full apprenticeships) or full time employment. Under previous reporting arrangements, a student in the NTCE study program that received an offer of an apprenticeship and re-enrolled in another section of the College was counted as a failure of the system. This is plainly wrong headed. Centralian College has set itself a target of having 96% of Year 11 students in 2002 either retained into Year 12, in formal training or in full time employment. Motherhood will account for most of the other 4%. Given the national discussion on population, this is likely to be an equally desirable outcome.

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2. The differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs.

It is the strongly held view of Centralian College that individual secondary schools should not be Registered Training Organisations.

The arrangements that apply in Alice Springs have worked very successfully by allowing the schools to do what they do best while ensuring that industry standards, practice and facilities are available for students. This has been accomplished by Centralian College providing an auspicing service for the two other government and three private sector schools in the town.

As the new requirements of the AQTF are brought on stream it will become more and more onerous for individual schools to meet the requirements. Partnership arrangements with RTOs offer significant benefits to schools in terms of record maintenance and reduction of workload while allowing access to a much broader range of VET packages than would be possible for an individual school. This type of relationship allows for considerable economies of scale and more efficient use of expensive infrastructure while maintaining standards.

Many secondary schools address the AQTF standards by having only the VET offerings of their institution assessed against the framework. Obviously, this is an inferior standard compared to an organisation that submits all of its operations to scrutiny. At Centralian College all sectors of the College are audited against the AQTF (and the former Quality Endorsed Training Organisation standards).

The joint nature of College organisation ensures that VET in Schools type activity maintains its industry standard and focus. Secondary schools are very resilient organisations having absorbed many changes into their normal work patterns. One of the major concerns expressed by many industry-based persons is that they fear the normal school experience will dilute the industry standards and will be a victim of this absorption. There is also a perception that many schools are using the VET in

Schools Program to dump less inclined or talented students out of more 'important' classes.

Centralian College agreements ensure that both industry standard facilities and lecturers are available to students from all sectors of the Alice Springs education community. Many Australian schools tend to limit the VET offering due to lack of facilities and resources. There is a well recognised tendency to offer areas of training that are the least expensive to deliver or those that can be offered with a significant component of theory and/or simulation. Schools are also often hampered by the limited range and industry experience of traditionally trained teaching staff.

By having a cross-sectoral organisation with an extended timetable, the College can respond to a number of initiatives and student identified needs. The two most significant of these include the Pathways Program and School Based New Apprenticeships (SBNA).

The Pathways program allows students to gain significant workplace experience, some NTCE studies and VET in schools type subjects in an individually tailored program. This program is nearly always supported by a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Often students will move from Pathways into SBNAs. The literacy component also compliments other College activity through a contractual arrangement with CentreLink. Clients of CentreLink who require improved levels of literacy and numeracy to gain employment or to remain on benefits are tutored through the College in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. These clients are generally mature age and they appreciate the more adult atmosphere of the College. Most of the referrals from CentreLink indicate to our staff that they would not attend a traditional high school to meet the requirements, but they feel comfortable with the College and, in fact, many become interested in other College offerings and make a subsequent enrolment. They often serve as good role models for the Pathways students.

The School Based Apprenticeships are particularly suited to the Centralian College organisational pattern. These allow for students to be formally trained while being in the workplace and still work towards their NTCE. The College sees this as a major area for growth as more employers become comfortable with the arrangements. 34 students participated in SBNAs in 2001 with many of those students moving onto full time employment or full time apprenticeships.

In addition, the structured workplace learning activity funded by the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation provides for major on the job training for students. This year it is anticipated that some 180 individual students will undertake 240 work placements that will have an average duration of 60 hours each. This will allow a significant number of students to not only have real industry experience, but also gain credit towards their NTCE.

Centralian College is confident that there is broad acceptance of its VET offerings for secondary students due to its widespread formal consultative mechanisms. There are nineteen Industry Advisory Groups who meet at regular intervals with educational administrators and lecturers. They discuss standards, industry needs and how the training packages are implemented. In addition, the Centralian College Council has a further eight committees that contain a wide variety of community members in addition to members of Council. These committees also serve as a forum for feedback to the College at both operational and policy level. Some of these committees include VET, Enterprise, 8CCC community radio, Indigenous and Secondary.

The place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development, and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

3. Vocational education in new and emerging industries.

In a general sense Centralian College doubts that the existing methodologies of allocation of the training funding in the NT is geared to be responsive to new and emerging industries. The processes of negotiating national Industry Training Advisory Boards and the NT Training Advisory Councils followed by the necessary bureaucratic Employment and Training Division procedures including complex resource agreements with providers mean that on the ground responsiveness in a timely manner is highly unlikely. Even major infrastructure projects such as the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway had little or no training provided prior to the commencement of the project. Certainly, the RTOs are not resourced to support innovation and emerging needs in a substantial manner.

However, if one is willing to accept a broader definition of “new and emerging” and “VET in Schools” a very different picture emerges. In much of remote Australia there is little or no industry of any sort. Almost by definition, any industry is new and emerging.

Likewise, VET in Schools has traditionally been aimed at 15 years or older students in the senior years of schooling. In many rural and remote communities, this age group has either considerably reduced numbers due to early school leaving or no engagement at all due to the lack of secondary schools or for cultural reasons. It would be useful to redefine VET in Schools by the age grouping of 15-19 year olds.

Using these broader definitions, Centralian College is playing a significant role in supporting new and emerging industries, particularly in remote communities. The College has a VET Module enrolment of about separate 260 Indigenous students under the age of 19 and 126 of these students live in remote areas as determined by postcode. This is a significant number of students who might be considered VET in Schools students in other jurisdictions.

The range of new and emerging industries include the following examples

- Horticulture (Table Grapes and Asparagus) at Ti Tree

- Sandalwood Plantation at Oak Valley
- Hairdressing in four remote communities including one in Western Australia
- Art and Silk Painting in Alcoota and Titjikala
- Bush Tucker in Laramba
- Developing Camel-proof Yard panels in Tjuwumpa and Docker River
- Steel Fabrication in Titjikala and Atitjere

The College is a strong supporter of Desert Knowledge Australia as this development has the potential for significant development of new employment opportunities throughout our main area of delivery.

More traditional offerings on the main Alice Springs Campus of Centralian College include a significant commitment to media and music. The industry standard media suite contains matching equipment to that used by the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association that conducts radio broadcasts throughout remote central Australia and Imparja Television that has a similar footprint.

Two students who completed Certificate Two in Multimedia last year are currently employed in production houses in Sydney. While the issue of multimedia being a national emerging industry might be questioned, it certainly is an emerging industry in the Alice Springs community. The ability to access industry standard facilities and training that is recognised nationally gives students a strong advantage. It is unlikely that many traditional high schools would be able to achieve at this standard due to both financial and staffing constraints.

The place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development, and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

4. The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for Indigenous students.

The difficulties associated with the delivery of VET programs to Indigenous students are well documented. The Centralian College experience shows that these factors are also present. Major negative factors include remoteness, high costs of delivery, low levels of literacy and numeracy, dysfunctional communities or a lack of engagement with the formal education and training system. The complex interaction of these and a myriad of other factors ensures that simplistic solutions to accessibility are almost always doomed to failure from the very outset.

One example is the role being given to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) or work for the dole. In many communities CDEP is now seen as a desirable work related outcome in the place of 'real' employment. This impacts on the participant's view of the types and amounts of training that might be undertaken. The general outcome is to lower the levels of expectation or even negate the perception of a need for training.

Centralian College has two major groups of Indigenous VET in Schools students. There are those who participate in a mainstream NTCE program or a traditional training program delivered on campus or in a major population centre. Those 26% of NTCE students who are Indigenous participate in VET in Schools programs in similar numbers to the entire cohort. They are supported through Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers, the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness Committee and supportive individual members of staff. All members of the College staff are required to undertake a cross-cultural awareness course. The achievement of satisfactory outcomes in VET in Schools programs for this group of students is roughly on par with the entire cohort of NTCE students.

The second group have been previously described by using the broader definition of a VET in Schools student and live in remote communities. The issue of accessibility is addressed by the College in multiple ways. This includes having lecturers permanently stationed in remote communities, fly in and fly out, drive in and out delivery over a period of days, using established Training Centres, bringing students onto the main

campus or the use of MALUs. The Mobile Adult Learning Units consist of a pantechnicon that is relocated about every ten weeks to a different remote community and the lecturers live on site. These MALUs are keenly sought after by communities and are booked several years in advance subject to the passibility of the roads. The first MALU consists of a traditional workshop for metal and wood fabrication. The second unit is equipped with computers and is used for retail, information technology and remote local area government courses.

The experience of the College is that there is no one right answer even in the same community. The type of delivery depends upon the type of training being delivered, the preparedness of the community and the relationship with the College. Certainly, multiple methodologies are required.

The issue of effectiveness is a bit more difficult to quantify. While there is certainly significant potential for growth of VET in Schools in remote communities great care needs to be taken on two fronts. The first is that the training must have some link to future possible employment. The second is a concern that the rather simplistic notion that replacing the traditional secondary curriculum with a VET program will solve all of the educational and social problems for Indigenous communities.

The funding for training in remote communities, unlike funding for mainstream VET in Schools activity, is seldom on a long term basis. In fact, much of the funding is for very short duration stand alone projects. These projects tend to involve an inordinate amount of administrative effort in application writing, resource agreements, enrolment procedures and multiple reporting to receive relatively small amounts of funding. There is seldom the capacity to put in place a long term training program over a number of years that either precedes and tracks parallel to a substantial economic development activity or fits into a long term strategic project. This severely disadvantages remote students compared to those students who are able to attend the main campus where programs are offered over long periods of time in a natural progression through the Certificate levels. It also restricts the ability of the College to plan for the most appropriate type(s) of delivery and build relationships.

An outstanding feature for both groups of VET in Schools Indigenous students, however, is the necessity for both the College as an organisation and for individual lecturers to build a relationship with the community and the individual families. This relationship is a major factor in the achievement of high level outcomes for Indigenous students. Staff

stability, therefore, is a crucial ingredient of successful VET delivery. One interesting sidelight is that the start of many fruitful relationships for some Indigenous young men has started when the students have been undertaking VET programs during a term in gaol. This relationship has then continued when the students have returned to their communities and often the studies have been maintained. This has been a particular success story in the area of horticulture.

Centralian College has its own Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) agreement with the Commonwealth Government. This four year agreement has set significant 'stretch' targets for the College to achieve in terms of Indigenous participation and achievement in VET. There are a large number of very detailed targets agreed upon to be monitored and reported upon annually. During 2001 the College was very close to meeting virtually all of the 'stretch' targets. These figures are not easily disaggregated into separate VET in Schools programs. However, totals include VET in Schools aged students. Highlights include:

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Actual Outcome
Indigenous New Apprenticeships	42	60	83
Indigenous Cert 1 and 2	78.4%	78.3%	85%
Indigenous Cert 3 and 4	12%	12.1%	9%
Indigenous Diploma	1.9%	1.9%	1%
% of Indigenous of Total Students	33%	34%	32%
Number of Course Completions in New Apprenticeships by Indigenous Students	14	20	25