



10 September 2002

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Selth

Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools.

As the national ITAB for the seafood industry, the Australian Seafood Industry Council (ASIC) is most interested in promoting vocational education and training (VET) programs in schools. Through its training and education arm Seafood Training Australia, ASIC has devoted considerable resources to raising the awareness of senior secondary students to career opportunities in the seafood industry. As well, by offering programs at the Certificate I, II and III level, the Seafood Training Package has been instrumental in introducing VET in schools learners to work requirements in the aquaculture, wild catch fishing and seafood processing sectors of the industry.

ASIC's view is that participants in VET in schools initiatives are not gaining full value from the programs. The following points are relevant:

.../2

AUSTRALIAN SEAFOOD INDUSTRY COUNCIL

ABN No 35 008 664 999

PO Box 533, Curtin ACT 2605

email: asic@asic.org.au

Telephone (02) 6281 0383 Facsimile (02) 6281 0438

- Schools are often ill-prepared to conduct vocational education programs due to teachers not generally having been involved in the commercial/industrial world. Teachers asked or required to conduct VET programs have a history of "narrow" subject teaching which fails to put general education into a vocational context. Attempts have been made in most States to address this through projects focussing on work-skills but once again, the framework for the vocational contexts is often poorly designed by people not involved in industry.
- The perception many teachers have of vocational education is that it "interferes" with the general education timetable. There is a lack of appreciation that general education provides a context for vocational education and ultimately commitment to vocational subjects is difficult to achieve save for the minority of teachers who have worked outside the teaching profession.
- An issue of fundamental importance to achieving real vocational linkages and outcomes is that there is an absence of applied learning in Schools. Studies conducted with indigenous secondary students in South Australia by the seafood industry found that a high percentage of students preferred practical learning models, preferably involving some vocational activities. The absence of any such provisions resulted in a very high percentage of these students exiting at Year 10 or earlier and perpetuating a cycle of unemployment through, amongst other things not holding any work-related skills.
- There is an increasing danger of having two standards of VET qualifications:
 - an industry standard being met by delivery and assessment in industry or with RTO's and
 - a school standard principally driven by knowledge rather than demonstration of skill and knowledge.

The advent of Training Packages has seen renewed interest in schools assuming responsibility for delivering and assessing vocational training. Concern over a second and less work-related qualification arises from a lack of vocational expertise generally within the teaching profession and a distinct lack of engagement with industry bodies such as ITAB's that are directly involved in moderation activities for all RTO's. As an illustration, woodworking in a craft classroom is radically different from fabricating wall frames or door jams. Similarly, learning about the biology of fish and basic husbandry techniques in a classroom is no substitute for feeding and monitoring the health of yabbies on a commercial farm.

On the positive side, industries such as seafood have run successful school-based pathways programs for many years. They are conducted on the basis that they are integrated in their delivery between the school and the RTO with direct industry involvement. The pathways programs do not seek to create a fully 'qualified' (gain a VET qualification) students but rather sort out those who are unlikely to succeed in a Traineeship. The issue of a statement of attainment to participants assessed as competent in one or more units from an industry Training Package is an inducement to the students to achieve industry standards in their performance. These programs are seen as most beneficial in introducing students to industry sectors thus broadening their work options.

Further to the impact of Training Packages, their introduction has produced some interesting results with school students. It has afforded some the opportunity to participate in school based apprenticeships and provided some real options with subjects that were not available two or three years ago. The downside has been that many students are expected to "make up" general subjects that have been missed due to participation in vocational activities.

In summary, the ASIC supports the aims of vocational education programs in schools. The temptation for schools to offer VET programs based on Training Packages without having the physical and human resources to deliver and assess the units of competency or qualifications as described in the Training Package is a real concern. A second tier of (inferior) vocational qualifications delivered in schools is not supported by the seafood industry.

The most successful VET in schools programs are those which are conducted as a partnership arrangement between the school, industry and often an RTO external to the school.

Yours sincerely



Russ Neal
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Seafood Industry Council