

Mr James Rees  
Secretary  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Training  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mr Rees

Please find enclosed my submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Training to assist them in their inquiry into the place of Vocational Education in Schools. I am the Business Manager of Impact Creativity Centre, a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO#20650), and I am currently studying a Bachelor of Adult Learning and Development at Monash University. I am available to clarify any component of the submission should that be required and I thank you for the opportunity to submit.

Yours Sincerely  
Jo Beasley

## Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

### *Executive Summary*

This Policy Submission is prepared to address some of the terms of reference of the parliamentary committee's inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools. In this submission I would like to review the *Impact Creativity Centres'* model of training and discuss this models effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options and career pathways. The structure and delivery of courses will be discussed as will the constant need to train and up-skill staff. Reference will also be made to the difference that has been noted between delivering VETiS in a secondary school environment as compared to a separate commercial environment.

The CEO of Impact, Malcolm Beasley, is the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's State Reviewer for Multimedia. *Impact* delivers the Certificate II in Arts (Interactive Multimedia) and Malcolm consults extensively to teachers across the State about this course, the model of training and post-VETiS pathways.

The model involves students learning in a commercial working environment and at times being employed by *Impact* for different real-life projects. Classes are structured to an 8 hour day so a true vocational experience is ensured. The working environment is 'high tech' with state-of-the-art hardware and software. Production work of high standards is expected of the students and is modeled by the trainers. Through a well established partnership with Eumemmerring College and the South East Vocational Consortium and developing

partnerships in the Gippsland Region, including being a member of the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), *Impact* is creating pathways and assisting young people into either further education and training or employment.

### *Background*

*Impact Creativity Centre* has been established since 1995 and delivers training in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) from Certificate II to Advanced Diploma level. *Impact* is a commercial production house providing ICT solutions and is also an Internet Service Provider (ISP) providing hosting. *Impact* was the first RTO, in Victoria, to deliver Certificate II in Arts (Interactive Multimedia) as a VET in the VCE subject. From the initial intake of 10 students, *Impact Creativity Centres* enrolments have grown to 128 students for VET in Schools Certificate II in Arts (Interactive Multimedia) for 2002.

*Impact* has two Campuses, one based in a school, at Eumemmerring College in Hallam, and the other based at the Bass Coast Adult Education Centre in Wonthaggi. The Hallam Campus has been operating for six years and the Wonthaggi Campus is in its second year, though the first year with VET in Schools (VETiS) students. As mentioned, *Impact* provides training to Advanced Diploma level and this was initiated due to graduates of the VETiS Certificate II in the Arts, being unable to find educational pathways that were both challenging and relevant. This additional training, which is funded

through the Priority Education and Training Program (PETP), still provides many of *Impact's* VETiS graduates with viable options for continuing education in an area of high demand, rapid change and growth.

Being a production house for New Media Solutions enables *Impact* to adhere to the training ethos that most students will eventually have the opportunity to work for, and interact with, clients whilst they are training and be paid accordingly. This model is working well with Year 11 and 12 students who are involved in the conception, creation and production of websites for a variety of clientele. For example, [www.polarexpedition.net](http://www.polarexpedition.net) is a website that was created by year 11 students for the Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria. This site was developed to support fellow year 11 students who were embarking on an expedition to Greenland, earlier this year. This project was managed by a year 11 female student and she, along with her three cohorts, were employed by *Impact*.

This model of training involves a lot of administrative tasks but the rewards are exponential. Not only do the students earn money whilst they are training, they learn invaluable generic and work-related skills and develop relevant resumes for when they enter the job market. One of the hardest areas for young people or recent graduates to address is the industry requirements for relevant work experience. By providing the vocational/training experience that it does, *Impact* is helping to bridge the gap and develop interconnected pathways between learning, work and training.

One student, who achieved 96% in his ENTER, chose to study the Diploma of Multimedia with *Impact* after participating in the VETiS program. The pathway organized for this person enabled him to experience real work throughout his training. After graduating from the Diploma course he is now running his own business with clients and contractors introduced during training. The observation that can be drawn is that through the opportunity to liaise with clients during training, this individual managed to form partnerships and networks essential in any business and his VETiS experience laid the foundation for this to occur. To be meaningful VETiS should be encouraged to provide these types of opportunities.

Support for this type of VETiS experience is found in '**Making VET in Schools work:** a review of policy and practice in the implementation of vocational education and training in schools', where Robyn Ryan sites findings by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The most successful pathways were found to be those which allowed both a high level of general education and an occupational qualification. This model is highly valued by employers, as are combinations of work and study and some but not all forms of workplace experience (OECD 2000 sited in Ryan R. 2002 p.3)

The vocational experience received at *Impact* provides this type of opportunity for participating students.

### *Maintaining Industry Currency*

The term ‘the new VET practitioner’ which “refers to a group of practitioners who engage in a variety of educational and training activities that focus on preparing and developing workplace capability but whose work increasingly extends beyond traditional teaching or training roles” (Chappell p.7) succinctly describes the teachers and trainers workplace practices at *Impact Creativity Centre*.

On-the-job training and professional development are a normal part of all *Impact* staff members’ daily activities. Using state of the art equipment and current software and applications, combined with very fast internet access, provides the trainers with access to the most recent developments in Information Technology.

All staff have been involved in the *Impact* environment either as VETiS students who then went on to complete the Diploma and Advanced Diploma Courses in Information Technology, and the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment, or as Diploma students. Initially staff are employed on a casual and part-time basis as software support specialists and are then trained accordingly.

Flexibility in staffing roles is encouraged and all staff are multiskilled in various IT areas as well as peer-to-peer and client and student liaison. Staff are chosen through an intense selection process based on observation and personal application. Not everyone has the patience and skill required to be a trainer and we have found this process to be extremely beneficial to the students receiving the training and to the training organisation as a whole.

Through choice, all staff are participating in courses delivered either in-house or externally and are encouraged and supported in these studies. These skills are then shared amongst fellow staff during in-house Professional Development days and with students as required. Sharing ideas, brainstorming, work-shopping and spontaneous tutorials all add to the stimulating hub of collaborative learning. This sort of interactivity is vital to the maintenance of an interesting and challenging workplace and training centre.

#### *Training Methodology and Post VET pathways*

As *Impact* has a production arm to its business, the work ethic of a 'full day' is modeled in the training timetable. Students are required to attend from 9am to 5pm on their specific timetabled days, and participate in a working/training environment. *Impact* students who are employed by the Centre to work on 'real jobs for real clients' experience vocational relevance and authenticity first hand.

'Production Day', which is every Thursday, sees post-VET students who do not have timetabled classes, coming in and working on commercial jobs. They are still in their 'comfort zone' being in an environment that is familiar and working with computers and software that they are gaining skills with, but on this day they are 'at work'. Most students are considering a career as freelance multimedia producers and more often than not, this is likely to be a home-based business. Working for yourself and working at home creates many challenges such as the need for self-discipline and various

entrepreneurial skills and issues such as this are discussed in formal and informal ways.

*Does the Impact Model work for VET in Schools?*

It can only be through research and direct feedback that change or continuity can be implemented. Retention rates, class participation, commitment and disciplinary needs are good indicators of student satisfaction and training relevance. It is noted with interest that this training model is working well with all student cohorts with the only discipline problems arising in relation to students who are participating in the VET course at their 'home' school. As stated before, *Impact* has a campus at Eumemmerring College in Hallam, and students from that school, as well as 10 other feeder schools, attend one full day per fortnight. Over the past six years the only problematic issues have been with Eumemmerring students attending their home school. Even students who have a past history of being 'trouble makers', and whose schools have contacted us to see how they are progressing, have been found to behave in an exemplary manner when in the VET environment. It seems that post-compulsory aged students perform more effectively when attending a work/training environment that they do not associate with their daily curricular activities. Taking VET in Schools out of structured school timetables and emphasising the work nature of the program of study may therefore be the catalyst for some young people to become more actively involved in, and committed to, with their post-compulsory schooling and career pathway mapping.



The VET students attending the Wonthaggi campus, who range from 15 to 17 years old, do not present any discipline problems. They enjoy coming into a working/training environment with other adults and attendance and active participation rates are high. I mention active participation at this stage as it is not uncommon in post-compulsory schooling to have students who are there because they ‘have to be’ to get their youth allowance, and not because they want to be. The more these young people participate in and self-direct their learning, the more eager and consistent they become.

Receiving payment for work has been a great incentive for students who can associate a tangible outcome, money, for effort applied. This has led to a more innovative, creative and higher caliber of work being produced. ‘Earning’ money feels very different to having it given to you and the enthusiasm from students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is palpable as the realization dawns that future pathways and vocations are a real possibility for them.

#### *Delivery of VET in Schools*

Currently the Certificate II in Arts is delivered every Wednesday at Hallam and every Friday at Wonthaggi. The students come from 16 different feeder schools and attend a full day, 9am until 5pm, every fortnight. The majority of students manage their VCE workload even though they miss one day a fortnight. The importance of meeting their commitments, managing their time and not stressing out too much is openly discussed in the training/ work environment. Being able to meet deadlines and deliver on contracts is a reality in the workplace

and the students participate in and are witness to *Impact's* production facility.

In some cases, students are able to negotiate their days of attendance. For instance, two girls were missing a double Japanese class once a fortnight and were finding it difficult to keep up. They now attend their VET class on Thursdays, instead of Fridays, and their cohorts are adult learners in various courses.

### *Conclusion*

The question of how best to incorporate VET into the school system with maximum benefit and least disruption, will continue to be a challenge to the education system as it is structured today. Having true vocational or work experience requires an authentic experience of work. *Impact* offers this opportunity to students by providing training in a work environment and also often the experience of client interaction and paid employment. The client may be a parent or friend of the student who needs a website for their small business. In the first two years, whilst the commercial arm was being developed, Malcolm acted as a mentor and advocate for his VETiS students. The fact that the people who were working on web-sites were students made some people feel that they would receive an inferior product. 'Their just kids, what would they know!' was one comment. The offer of try before you buy was introduced and the hands on experience of working on pilot programs for the Education Department, assisted in the students of *Impact* gaining recognition for their abilities.

Advocacy of the students work and their levels of professionalism still continues.

Rather than a two-hour block that is incorporated into the curriculum, working an 'eight hour day' is expected of the participants. Graduates of *Impact* have had the opportunity to develop a resume whilst they are studying which has been invaluable in their pursuit of individual pathways including further studies, employment and self-employment. The well-established relationship with Eumemmerring College has allowed this school-industry connection to work extremely well and benefit the students. Retention rates are in the 95% region and the training remains current and 'cutting edge'. The experience of VETiS at *Impact Creativity Centre* is meaningful, industry relevant and integrated into the students' VCE work load.

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