

Flexible senior secondary education settings and the effectiveness of school-based training pathways

Introduction

- 6.1 Secondary education institutions face an ongoing challenge to provide relevant learning to facilitate pathways into further education and work for the full cohort of students. This challenge has seen the recent development of a broad range of flexible alternative education settings to accommodate the diverse needs of the greatest number of students, including those who do not thrive in the traditional schooling environment. The range of settings varies widely from comprehensive changes to senior secondary certificate frameworks in some jurisdictions, to the introduction of more local, community-based approaches.
- 6.2 In April 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to bring forward the 90 per cent Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate target from 2020 to 2015. COAG agreed that the most appropriate measure of this target is:
- for 2015, the proportion of young people in the 20-24 year old age group who have achieved Year 12 or a Certificate II or above as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Education and Work; and

- for 2020, the proportion of young people in the 20-24 year old age group who have achieved Year 12 or a Certificate III or above as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Education and Work.¹
- 6.3 Achievement of the national attainment rate will be met by differential target rates across jurisdictions and the Commonwealth has agreed to provide competitive performance-based funding of \$100 million to the states to support delivery of this achievement.² It has been acknowledged that achieving the targets set by COAG will depend on the capacity of the school system to deliver programs that meet the needs of the full cohort of senior secondary students.³
- 6.4 The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) noted that while certificate frameworks across the school sector have remained relatively stable, there have been recent innovative developments in some states and territories in an effort to accommodate the needs of students seeking greater flexibility than that provided by more traditional approaches.⁴ South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania have all recently introduced new senior certificates of education with increased flexibility. Tasmania has also undertaken significant reforms which have seen the introduction of three new institutions for post-Year 10 education and training. In Victoria, enrolments in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) – an accredited secondary certificate offered as an alternative to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) for Year 11 and 12 students intending to pursue vocationally oriented pathways – have grown substantially since its introduction in 2003.⁵
- 6.5 Secondary schools across Australia are also increasingly offering Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) programs which allow students to combine vocational studies with the general senior secondary curriculum and gain practical business and industry experience. VETiS programs count towards a Year 12 certificate and an

1 Council of Australian Governments Meeting, Hobart, 30 April 2009, *Communique*, <http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/index.cfm>. Accessed 14 September 2009.

2 Council of Australian Governments Meeting, Hobart, 30 April 2009, *Communique*, <http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/index.cfm>. Accessed 14 September 2009.

3 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 34.

4 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 18.

5 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 18.

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate, and may count towards university entrance.⁶

- 6.6 A range of programs and initiatives also exist at the state and local levels to offer increased flexibility to assist students to combine school and work, some examples of which are examined in this chapter. There were a significant number of examples and case studies presented in evidence about flexible approaches occurring in different communities across all jurisdictions. Not all initiatives presented in evidence are outlined in this section. Readers who are interested in finding out more about various practices occurring in schools, colleges and TAFEs which offer students greater flexibility are encouraged to access submissions from the committee website.⁷

Senior secondary certificate framework initiatives

Tasmania *Tomorrow*

- 6.7 The Tasmanian Government's Tasmania *Tomorrow* initiative established three new institutions for post-Year 10 education and training. Commencing in 2009, the Tasmanian Academy, the Tasmanian Skills Institute and the Tasmanian Polytechnic were formed to provide young people with a broader range of options to manage their pathways to a career.⁸ Ms Jules Carroll, Director, Learning and Teaching, Tasmanian Polytechnic, explained the rationale behind the initiative:

Essentially through the whole of the Tasmania *Tomorrow* project, what we were trying to do was improve the skills shortage situation and the retention completion and qualification level in Tasmania and, through doing both of those things, improve the productivity levels of the state.⁹

- 6.8 The Tasmanian Academy is focused on academic learning for students pursuing a pathway to tertiary education. The Tasmanian Skills Institute is focused on skills development of the workforce and specialises in working with employers and employees, including apprentices, trainees and

6 H. Coates, and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 1.

7 <<http://www.apf.gov.au/edt>>

8 Tasmanian Government, *Submission no. 35*, p. 2.

9 Ms Jules Carroll, Tasmanian Polytechnic, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 March 2009, p. 1.

cadets. The Tasmanian Polytechnic is focused on practical learning and offers vocational education and training pathways for both Year 11 and 12 students and mature-age students in addition to Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) subjects to enable students to attain a senior secondary certificate with a vocational focus.¹⁰

6.9 FYA described the recent development of the Tasmanian Polytechnic as ‘the most adventurous’ among the introduction of specialist schools.¹¹ The Polytechnic provides students with:

- practical learning with pathways from certificate to diploma and links to university;
- pathways that lead to the new TCE; and
- real-life practical learning opportunities that take place both on campus and in the workplace.¹²

6.10 Both the Tasmanian Academy and Tasmanian Polytechnic offer courses that enable students to achieve the requirements of the TCE and many of the qualifications at the Tasmanian Skills Institute can also contribute to a TCE.

6.11 Successful completion of the new TCE requires students to meet requirements for standards in everyday adult literacy, numeracy and use of information and communication technology; requirements for amount and level of participation and achievement in education and training and requirements for pathway planning.

6.12 The TCE recognises a broad range of learning with flexibility as to how, when and where that learning occurs. Through a system of ‘credit points’, students can meet TCE requirements in many ways including through senior secondary TCE subjects, nationally recognised VET, through other qualifications recognised by the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, or through a combination of these.¹³

10 Tasmanian Government, *Submission no. 35*, p. 2.

11 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 18.

12 Tasmanian Polytechnic, *Your Polytechnic – About us*, <http://www.polytechnic.tas.edu.au/polytechnic_about_us.html>, accessed 20 August 2009.

13 Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, *Tasmanian Certificate of Education*, <http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/_WWW_doc/008041/RND01/TCE_course.pdf>, accessed 20 August 2009.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

- 6.13 The introduction of VCAL was described as ‘the most radical innovation within the school sector’.¹⁴ VCAL accommodates integrated VET and other forms of workplace learning through its generally flexible approach to subject timetabling which enables students to design a study program which suits their interests and learning needs.¹⁵
- 6.14 Students select accredited VCE and VET modules and units from compulsory strands in literacy and numeracy skills, work related skills, industry specific skills and personal development skills. There is an option for students who start their VCAL and wish to complete a VCE to transfer between certificates.¹⁶
- 6.15 Since its inception in 2003, VCAL has grown to approximately 15,000 enrolments in 2008, which constitutes about 15 per cent of the upper secondary market. FYA stated that while its impact upon Year 12 retention rates is unclear, it seems likely that it has had a positive impact.¹⁷

New Queensland Certificate of Education

- 6.16 The recent¹⁸ introduction of the new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) establishes a framework for young people to combine education and training to attain a qualification over a period of up to nine years.
- 6.17 The QCE ‘offers flexibility in what is learnt, as well as where and when learning occurs’ and learning options include senior school subjects, VET, workplace and community learning, and university subjects undertaken while at school.¹⁹
- 6.18 Students are supported to plan their senior learning at the end of Year 10 and the development of a Senior Education and Training Plan (SET Plan) – which is agreed between the student, their parents and the school – which maps out how a student will work towards a Senior Certificate or Certificate III vocational qualification, and/or a viable work

14 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 18.

15 Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission no. 17*, p. 2; and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 62.

16 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 62.

17 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 18.

18 The new QCE was awarded to Year 12 students for the first time in 2008.

19 Queensland Government, *Submission no. 41*, p. 9.

option. The SET Plan helps a student to structure their learning around their ability and areas of interest.²⁰

- 6.19 To be awarded a QCE, students must have a minimum of 20 credits in the required pattern, and fulfil literacy and numeracy requirements.

New South Australian Certificate of Education

- 6.20 Similar to the QCE, the new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is designed to improve flexibility and address literacy and numeracy issues. The SACE is being progressively introduced from 2009. Ms Tanya Rogers, South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, stated:

In particular we are working hard to raise a level and range of vocational education and training opportunities for young people in schools as part of their senior secondary curriculum so that it has parity of standing for those young people with other areas of the curriculum.²¹

- 6.21 Key components of the new SACE include:
- a compulsory Personal Learning Plan which requires students to plan their final two years of school and beyond with a focus on life, career and personal skills;
 - a points-based system that allocates credits for learning through school subjects, TAFE, community service and work experience;
 - a credit bank that allows students to store credits and return to the SACE if their learning is interrupted; and
 - five essential skills for life and employability that each student is expected to gain: communication, critical thinking, personal and social development, processing information and applying knowledge.²²

20 Queensland Government, *Submission no. 41*, p. 9.

21 Ms Tanya Rogers, S.A. Department of Education and Children's Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, pp. 12-13.

22 Hon Jane Lomax-Smith, Minister for Education and Children's Services, *New school to work 'passport' for SA students*, news release, 22 November 2006. Available online: <<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/curric/pages/NumeracySciences/SACE/>>, accessed 13 August 2009.

TAFE Directors Australia case studies

6.22 Through its membership, TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) provided some examples of state-based institutions which provide innovative and alternative approaches to attaining a secondary certificate and support students to combine work and study. TDA stated that 'these jurisdictions recognise the value of the workplace as a learning resource rather than a drain on students' school time.'²³ In addition to the Tasmanian Polytechnic, TDA's membership presented case studies which included Holmesglen Vocational College, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Vocational College and the TAFE NSW Sydney Institute's St George College.

Holmesglen Vocational College

6.23 Holmesglen Vocational College was established in 2007 with an enrolment of approximately 200 students and is situated on the Moorabbin campus of the Holmesglen Institute of TAFE in Melbourne, which provides students with access to a range of vocational training programs and the facilities of the TAFE Institute. The committee held a student forum at the Holmesglen Vocational College during its inquiry.

6.24 The college curriculum combines secondary school education with professional and personal development programs. Students undertake VCAL and all vocational programs have pathways with credit transfers into pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, certificate and diploma courses. Students also have the option of continuing at the college and completing a VCAL qualification over 12 months. This enables them to complete a pre-apprenticeship and benefit from the broader program of Literacy and Numeracy, Work Related Skills and Personal Development.²⁴

6.25 Mr Andrew Adamson commented on some of the underlying principles upon which the college was established:

...the key driving ideas behind it were that there were a lot of students sitting in school for whom the schools really did not supply what they needed in terms of learning programs. Even if they did not drop out, they mentally dropped out. The other part of it was that it was unrealistic to expect young people at that age to make choices about their future career that locked them into

23 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 18.

24 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 10.

particular career paths. I suppose a third leg to the stool is that we wanted to supply them with personal development programs.²⁵

CIT Vocational College

6.26 The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Vocational College was established as an entry point to VET which enables students to develop 'essential skills' including a Year 10 equivalent or Year 12 level secondary education while at the same time beginning to acquire vocational skills through accredited vocational courses. TDA noted that the college is able to achieve this through:

- working closely with other CIT teaching centres to design programs so students can participate in achievable components of vocational courses
- flexible curriculum design;
- incorporating elements of training packages into its general education courses;
- customising study programs to suit the individual needs of students, while employing flexible strategies such as timetabling, full-time and part-time options, work, self access print and online resources, tutorial support and access to drop-in support and individual tutorials; and
- supporting students' basic skills (language, literacy and numeracy, computing) while they are engaged in vocational programs and/or work.²⁶

6.27 Ms Kaye O'Hara from CIT, representing TDA, stated:

Traditionally, our ultimate goal with those people who came to us to get a year 10 certificate was to get them back into the schools system. Since establishing the vocational college, our goal now is to move them within the vocational college through CIT, mainly because it does not seem to have worked having them go back into the schools system. So what we have come up with is programs and offerings that move them into work, into apprenticeships, into our year 12 and into traineeships. It is offering them pathways with us. That is proving to be a much better option, a more successful option, for them.

25 Mr Andrew Adamson, Holmesglen Vocational College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 March 2009, p. 3.

26 TAFE Directors of Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 12.

...So we are balancing...the tensions in terms of fulfilling policy that is around full-time students and the client group who might need something more flexible, more part time and less attendance based.²⁷

- 6.28 CIT Vocational College provides extensive pastoral care and students have access to the full range of support services available in a tertiary education institution and staff with experience in supporting students combining full or part-time study with work. The college also employs dedicated youth workers and careers counsellors to support students in their learning and work.²⁸

St George College (NSW TAFE Sydney Institute)

- 6.29 St George College is a TAFE college in the southern part of metropolitan Sydney. The college commenced the St George Trade School in 2008. Trade schools are an initiative of the NSW Government, which offer secondary school students a broad range of vocational training opportunities including part-time apprenticeships and traineeships.
- 6.30 St George Trade School offers training in automotive, electrotechnology and nursing. These new programs embed the NSW Higher school Certificate (HSC) with off-the-job vocational training and work experience to give school-based students vocational units of competence and work skills which contribute to their HSC. TDA stated that this presents an opportunity for students, who are able to:
- combine paid part-time work, training and school;
 - receive their HSC;
 - attend off the job training at St George Trade School; and
 - have a minimum of 100 days of paid employment.²⁹
- 6.31 Apprentices can complete the equivalent of the first year of a Certificate III trade course and continue their training once they graduate from school, while trainees can complete their Certificate II and III qualifications while still at school.³⁰

27 Ms Kaye O'Hara, TAFE Directors Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 March 2009, p. 5.

28 TAFE Directors of Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 12.

29 TAFE Directors of Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 17.

30 TAFE Directors of Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 17.

Brisbane-North District

- 6.32 The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) also noted work being done in the Brisbane-North District under the Queensland Government's *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* agenda, where collaboration between schools, industries and employers has helped to address skills shortages, particularly through the *Healthy Futures* program which is focused on the health and aged care industry.³¹
- 6.33 Mr Tom Robertson from the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts explained how the program had evolved from a scan of the local area which identified employment opportunities in the health industry in the region where there were no skilled industry partnerships in existence.
- 6.34 Mr Robertson noted that prior to the initiative, most students did not tend to consider a career path in the aged care industry, and similarly the industry, which was experiencing an ageing workforce, had not previously been active in targeting students.³² Ms Judi Buckley, also from the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, explained that having pathways embedded in the curriculum made them 'more meaningful'. With respect to the Healthy Futures program, she stated:

...the students eventually, after a strong preparation phase, are enrolled in a certificate III. This could be in allied health or as a nurse care assistant or some other certificate course where the organisation has identified it wants students in a particular area. The students... use this experience to build their portfolio and, because of the relationships we are building up with the universities, they can now articulate straight to [university]. We are trying to break the barrier down between VET and academic learning because it is really just different types of learning, and students are getting exposed to those different learning styles and what is possible.³³

31 Australian National Schools Network, *Submission no. 13*, p. 6.

32 Mr Tom Robertson, Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 11.

33 Ms Judi Buckley, Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 51.

Flexible schooling models: 'No one size fits all'

Often students are forced into particular learning paths by timetables, by what competencies or interests or qualifications particular teachers have in that area and what the school has traditionally offered. I think that across the state there are communities that still think that way: the student has to fit in with the school rather than the school fit in with the student.³⁴

- 6.35 There was recognition from inquiry participants that the changing nature of the senior secondary landscape, including the increasing number of students combining school and work, requires that schools offer more flexibility in their timetabling arrangements. It was argued that the current education system still lacks flexibility in accommodating the learning needs of students, despite it being clear that a 'one size fits all' approach is no longer sufficient to meet these needs. Nevertheless, there are successful flexible schooling models in place which facilitate local solutions in order to respond to the particular needs of communities. Case studies suggest that flexible schooling models are most effective where there is an emphasis on individual case management. ANSN stated:

Flexible timetables, opportunities for extended completion of year 12, and second chance options are available. Individual students are engaged in a dialogue about the curriculum, and individual case management often plays a key role. The programs are diverse and even within each program, the diversity of the students is respected. There is no assumption that 'one size fits all'. Yet despite the complexity and diversity of these settings, they are becoming repositories of systematic knowledge about 'what works' for young people whose lives involve messy combinations of study and work.³⁵

- 6.36 The Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland noted that despite encouragement to be more community oriented, school operations are still designed around a 9am-3pm timetable, limiting the options available to students beyond the classroom.³⁶
- 6.37 However, there are also schools which are offering alternative schooling hours to accommodate the changing needs of their students, such as

34 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48, Attachment B*, p. 52.

35 Australian National Schools Network, *Submission no. 13*, p. 7.

36 Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Qld, *Submission no. 32*, p. 3.

extending the school day to 5pm and only requiring students to attend four days a week, thereby giving them an additional day to participate in part-time work.³⁷

- 6.38 The Australian Industry Group, for example, noted some instructive examples of flexibility which include:
- split timetables to assist those participating in part-time work;
 - on-line delivery of some program elements;
 - after traditional school hours mentoring/tutoring support;
 - schools responding to the special needs of students.³⁸
- 6.39 The Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA suggested that better use of school facilities after hours may also be an option to support students to combine work and study.³⁹
- 6.40 Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) advised that it is currently developing online learning programs for some VCE subjects so that they can be delivered to students in rural and remote locations. BSSC suggested that once this initiative has been set up, it could potentially be applied for those students who combine school and work, who could complete course work online and therefore free up time during the school day for part-time work or work placements. In a student survey run by BSSC, 38 per cent of students indicated they were very interested in completing some of their study online, with only 20 per cent indicating they were not interested at all.⁴⁰
- 6.41 As part of its proposal for an Intergenerational Youth Compact, ANSN promoted some pilot sites which offer flexible schooling options. The sites identified by ANSN are located in communities with low socio-economic indicators and seek to improve pathways for disadvantaged students.
- 6.42 At Mount Gambier High School in South Australia, many students take three years to complete Years 11 and 12 and the whole school is structured to support part-time students. In 2006, over one-third of all senior students at Mount Gambier High were part-time. Dr Katherine Hodgetts, Research Fellow, University of South Australia, explained that teachers at the school meet with the students individually before the school year begins to discuss both their schooling commitments and their working arrangements or extra-curricular activities, in an effort to establish how

37 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission no. 27*, p. 8,.

38 Australian Industry Group, *Submission no. 37*, p. 4.

39 Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, *Submission no. 30*, p. 8.

40 Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Submission no. 55*, p. 4.

much time they can apply to study while maintaining their wellbeing.⁴¹ The school invites local employers in so the relevant parties can engage in a discussion about what employers' peak trading periods and what the school's peak assessment times are so that, where possible, school timetables and employers' rosters could be adjusted to avoid conflict.⁴²

- 6.43 The inquiry heard that the part-time flexibility supported by Mount Gambier is essential in supporting completion for those students who cannot attend school full-time due to work commitments or the costs of public transport. Dr Hodgetts added:

One particular hallmark of Mount Gambier and other proactive part-time schools is the emphasis on individual case management – teachers brokering in- and out-of-school learning and acting as advocates for their students in relation to employers. This takes time and resources. A half-time student does not need half the resources of a full-time student; often they need more in the way of counselling and case management because they are negotiating much more complex lives. Also hugely important is the training and time given to mentor teachers and case managers to do the work that keeps part-time students connected to school, which would also mean networking these teachers across schools in order that they keep abreast of best practice.⁴³

- 6.44 Professor Marie Brennan and Dr Hodgetts from the School of Education at the University of South Australia, described the results after the school implemented these changes as 'amazing', and reported that:

...the number of As went from 1.8% total enrolments to 29.6%.
Merit Certificates went from 0 in 1997 to 40 in 2004/2005.
Retention rates went from 31% to 83%. Failures at Stage 1 went from 7 times the state average to 0.8% below.⁴⁴

- 6.45 Another pilot site identified by ANSN is Illawarra Senior College in Port Kembla, where the committee conducted a hearing and student forum. Illawarra Senior College is unique in catering for post-compulsory continuing and re-entry students from a wide range of backgrounds in course levels ranging from Years 10 to 12. The college's student body

41 Dr Katherine Hodgetts, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 14.

42 Prof Margaret Vickers, Australian National Schools Network, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 8.

43 Dr Katherine Hodgetts, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 14.

44 Prof. Marie Brennan and Dr Katherine Hodgetts, *Submission no. 39*, pp. 7-8.

consists of 30 per cent mature-age students, and includes around 180 part-time students. The current age range of students is 15 to 79.⁴⁵ Around 50 to 60 per cent of the college's intake are re-entry students who have left education previously and come back to study after a break. The Principal, Mr Mark Webster, indicated that this can be a very long break, sometimes 20 or 30 years.⁴⁶ The college offers a Year 10 program to both normal and mature-age students and was the first school in the state to deliver an alternative Year 10 Certificate, which follows the one-year TAFE Certificate program rather than the Year 10 Certificate that other schools in NSW follow. The college has a strong careers program and, as with Mount Gambier High School, each student is case-managed. The college is open for extended hours from Monday to Thursday and is closed on Friday, which enhances the part-time employability of students as they are available to work all day on Fridays.

Part-time senior secondary study: 'a largely unexplored policy challenge'

- 6.46 Senior secondary certificate frameworks across state and territory jurisdictions have freed up 'previously rigid time limits' for completion of accreditation requirements and facilitated the phenomenon of the part-time senior secondary student. Professor Eleanor Ramsay has argued that 'there is an urgency to better understand the causes and educational implications of this significant shift from previously dominant patterns of senior schooling'.⁴⁷
- 6.47 Professor Ramsay has suggested that dominant assumptions about full-time study being the norm for senior secondary students may be a factor in the policy and research neglect of part-time study:

Despite the policy and practice emphasis on increased flexibility and broadening pathways, including different combinations of learning and earning, current approaches to defining part-time secondary study and measuring part-time students (in all their permutations) tend to normalise full-time study and assume a lock-step engagement with schooling. These approaches no longer

45 Mr Mark Webster, Principal, Illawarra Senior College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 23.

46 Mr Mark Webster, Principal, Illawarra Senior College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 23.

47 E. Ramsay, *The "Absent Presence" of Part-Time Senior Secondary Study: A Research and Policy Challenge*, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, Volume 35, Number 2, August 2008, p. 39. Available online at: <<http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/0802c.pdf>>, accessed 7 September 2009.

reflect the more fluid realities of senior secondary engagement and are ill-fitted to identify the extent and nature of secondary engagement no longer conforming to the assumed norm. Nor can they communicate the multiplicity of ways in which Australian students are actually engaging with their senior secondary education.⁴⁸

- 6.48 Analysis of changing patterns of senior secondary engagement is also affected by definitional and statistical complexities. For example, it was suggested that the counting of part-time students is complicated by different definitions of what constitutes 'part-time' for different purposes and agencies. It was also suggested that analysis can be affected by some schools' reluctance or inability to define students as part-time at census time because of resource implications.⁴⁹
- 6.49 Professor Brennan and Dr Hodgetts' submission presented findings from an Australian Research Council Linkage Project which investigated why a relatively high proportion of South Australian students undertake their senior-secondary studies part-time. *Pathways or cul de sacs? The causes, impact and implications of part-time senior secondary study, 2005-2007* (the Pathways Project) involved interviews and surveys with staff and students from 14 South Australian schools.
- 6.50 The Pathways Project found that schools were using the option of part-time study as part of either a *reactive* or *proactive* strategy. Schools offering part-time study as a reactive strategy offered part-time schooling as a last resort option for failing students or those at risk of non-completion. Schools which supported proactive part-time school engagement encouraged a reduction in study load as an option for balancing school commitments with out-of-school commitments (particularly in relation to part-time work or caring responsibilities).⁵⁰
- 6.51 Professor Brennan and Dr Hodgetts reported that the Pathway Project's findings suggest that proactive part-time engagement supports achievement and completion in school contexts which are characterised by:

48 E. Ramsay, *The "Absent Presence" of Part-Time Senior Secondary Study: A Research and Policy Challenge*, The Australian Educational Researcher, Volume 35, Number 2, August 2008, p. 39. Available online at: <<http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/0802c.pdf>>, accessed 7 September 2009.

49 Prof. Marie Brennan and Dr Katherine Hodgetts, *Submission no. 39*, p. 3.

50 Prof. Marie Brennan and Dr Katherine Hodgetts, *Submission no. 39*, pp. 3-4.

- flexible timetables (eg. offering condensed classes with longer lessons on a single day, offering classes after hours);
- innovative communication strategies (eg. SMS dissemination of notices and digital information displays on school grounds);
- communication between students and school staff;
- communication between schools and employers;
- flexibility around attendance; and
- flexible assessment options (eg. enabling students to submit assessments via email or online portals, although it was noted that this may create accessibility issues, particularly in isolated regions or areas of low socio-economic status).⁵¹

6.52 Perhaps the most important finding of the Pathways study for the purposes of this inquiry is the statistic that 28 per cent of part-time student respondents believed they would not be able to remain engaged with school if the option of part-time enrolment was not available to them. Professor Brennan and Dr Hodgetts stated:

Given the documented health, social and economic benefits associated with school completion it therefore seems imperative to support and resource part-time provision as a means of supporting school retention.⁵²

Committee comment

- 6.53 In investigating options for increasing the flexibility schools offer to students, it is important not to overlook that the fundamental purpose of schools is to provide an education for students.
- 6.54 While this chapter has demonstrated existing examples of highly flexible senior schooling programs based around individual case management, many schools, particularly smaller schools, would find it impossible to implement this degree of flexibility.
- 6.55 Nevertheless, it is clear that achieving COAG targets for Year 12 retention and thus improving the post-school outcomes for young Australians is not going to be achieved through traditional schooling models alone.
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51 Prof. Marie Brennan and Dr Katherine Hodgetts, *Submission no. 39*, pp. 4-5.

52 Prof. Marie Brennan and Dr Katherine Hodgetts, *Submission no. 39*, p. 7.

Education systems across the country will be required to cater more effectively for the full cohort of students, including those who are not academically oriented.

- 6.56 Some of the case studies presented in this chapter have achieved outstanding results in terms of outcomes for students. The effectiveness of some of the new senior secondary certificates which have been introduced in various jurisdictions is still too early to assess. The Foundation for Young Australians highlighted the opportunities available from the range of innovations in provision of across the country and suggested that 'these innovations should be thoroughly evaluated so that critical success factors and conditions can be identified and transferred to other initiatives.'⁵³

Recommendation 8

- 6.57 **That the Australian Government evaluate recent initiatives in senior secondary provision across the states and territories, including secondary schools, specialist colleges, vocational colleges and polytechnics, in order to identify key areas of success and best practice models, and possible limitations.**
- 6.58 While definitional inconsistencies make it difficult to assess the number of students undertaking senior secondary study part time, evidence suggests that the proportion of part-time students has increased significantly. The number of part-time students is only likely to increase further with changes to senior secondary certificate frameworks which allow students to attain a qualification over much longer periods of time than the traditional two years. Given the increasing phenomenon of part-time senior secondary study, the Government needs to assess the quality of outcome for students pursuing this option.

Recommendation 9

- 6.59 **That the Australian Government, in consultation with the states and territories, establish a consistent national definition for what constitutes engagement in part-time senior secondary study and part-time work for statistical and reporting purposes.**

53 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p.43.

Recommendation 10

- 6.60 **That the Australian Government undertake research to quantify the number of students engaged in senior secondary schooling as part-time students, and to assess their experiences and outcomes from part-time study. Research should focus on arrangements in schools which support positive outcomes and successful completion for part-time students and identify any limitations.**

Vocational education and training in schools

- 6.61 In 2004, a predecessor of this committee presented a comprehensive report on vocational education in schools which included 41 recommendations mainly aimed at longer term strategies relating to VETiS.⁵⁴ While there have been some significant developments with regards to VETiS since that report, many of the issues raised continue to pose a challenge for all Australian governments.
- 6.62 This inquiry focused on the large cohort of secondary students combining school with paid part-time work and therefore issues around VETiS were explored only in passing during hearings. However, a significant body of written evidence was received on the effectiveness of school-based training pathways.
- 6.63 The development of policies and programs for VETiS is currently a joint responsibility of the Australian and state/territory governments, while the nature and delivery of VETiS is the responsibility of the states and territories.⁵⁵
- 6.64 VETiS must be provided by a registered training organisation (RTO), which may be a TAFE institution, private provider, community-based provider or a school. Generally, a period of structured workplace learning is involved.⁵⁶ LSAY data shows that over the past 10 years, the broad profile of VETiS participants has remained constant in that they tend to

54 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2004), *Learning to work: Report on the inquiry into vocational education in schools*, House of Representatives, Canberra.

55 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 42.

56 H. Coates and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 1.

have lower levels of achievement and to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵⁷

- 6.65 Submitters were generally supportive of VETiS, acknowledging that if delivered as a quality product, it can be effective in providing alternative pathways to further education, training and employment for young people. It was also suggested that participation in VETiS can enhance student well-being by building self-confidence and improving social engagement.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that there remains significant scope for improvement, and VETiS continues to face challenges with respect to its credibility within industry due to concerns over quality assurance.

Australian Government VETiS initiatives

- 6.66 DEEWR provided details on a range of national programs and initiatives to assist VETiS students to make successful transitions through school and from school to further education, training and employment. Many of these are being implemented under the banner of *Career Advice Australia* – the Australian Government’s national career and transition support network for 13-19 year-olds. Programs and initiatives offering assistance to VETiS students include:

- Local Community Partnerships (LCPs) which assist young people in their transition through school by providing connections with schools, professional career practitioners, parents, other youth service providers and business to improve access to quality career information, career development and experiential learning opportunities. LCPs are supported by a network of regional industry career advisers who provide locally based career information and advice, and national industry career specialists who provide industry sector-specific information. In 2007 LCPs supported approximately 79,000 young people through structured workplace learning placements, with a similar number expected for 2008 and 2009.
- Provision for VETiS students to gain vocational experience through an increase in the availability and quality of structured on-the-job training opportunities through the Government’s *On-the-Job Training Initiative*. The initiative is being implemented through state and territory education authorities. From 1 January 2010, it will form a component of

57 H. Coates and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 1.

58 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission no. 21*, p. 12.

the proposed National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

- Establishing Trade Training Centres to help increase the proportion of students achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification and to help address skill shortages in traditional trades and emerging industries. Under the *Trade Training Centres in Schools* program, schools will have an opportunity to apply for funding to build new, or upgrade, trade or vocational education and training facilities and purchase trade-related equipment, giving students access to trade training facilities that meet industry needs.
- Facilitating opportunities for recently retired professionals and tradespeople to pass on their knowledge and skills to VETiS students through the *Mentors for our Students* pilot program. The pilot aims to improve retention rates and the transition of young people from school, by sparking their interest in those occupations experiencing skills shortages in their local communities. 25 LCPs have been selected to pilot the program, which is expected to support up to 750 mentors across Australia mentoring some 2250 secondary school students in years 9 to 12. LCPs will work with their local secondary schools and TAFEs to coordinate mentoring; select mentors and provide them with relevant training; and match mentors with students.
- The *Australian Vocational Student Prize* recognises and rewards senior secondary students who demonstrate exceptional skills, commitment and achievement while undertaking a vocational education and training program or an Australian School-based Apprenticeship. Each year, the prize recognises up to 500 Year 12 students, with the winner receiving \$2,000 and a certificate.⁵⁹

6.67 Under COAG's *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions*, full responsibility for VETiS placements will be transferred to the states and territories and each jurisdiction will be provided with facilitation funding to support a range of reforms related to the youth and transitions agenda with flexibility to address individual state needs.⁶⁰

59 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 42. Further details about some of these initiatives are included in Appendix B of DEEWR's submission.

60 Council of Australian Governments, *Fact Sheet: National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development*, <http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-11-29/docs/20081129_skills_workforce_development_fact_sheet.pdf>, accessed 3 August 2009.

- 6.68 DEEWR's website advises that the department will be developing implementation plans with the states and territories, through which the jurisdictions will outline how they will allocate their share of funding.

VETiS arrangements

- 6.69 In 2005, 95 per cent of secondary schools offered VETiS programs, an increase in 25 per cent in 1997.⁶¹ The number of students enrolling in VET subjects also continued to rise (see Figure 6.1).
- 6.70 In 2006, one-third of all school students enrolled in a senior secondary certificate were participating in VET.⁶² In most cases, this involved one subject and predominantly at Year 11 level. For example, in Victoria, only 15.9 per cent of Year 12 students were participating in VETiS.⁶³
- 6.71 There are two main options under the VETiS arrangement. Students can undertake school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) or VET subjects and courses (often referred to as 'other VET in Schools programs').⁶⁴
- 6.72 In 2006, 12,900 or 7.5 per cent of all VETiS students were undertaking a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship, with 158,700 (92.5 per cent) students enrolled in other VETiS programs.⁶⁵
- 6.73 SBATs provide students, typically Years 10-12 students, with the opportunity to attain a nationally recognised VET qualification as well as their senior certificate or equivalent, and gain valuable work skills and experience through paid employment.

61 H. Coates and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 1.

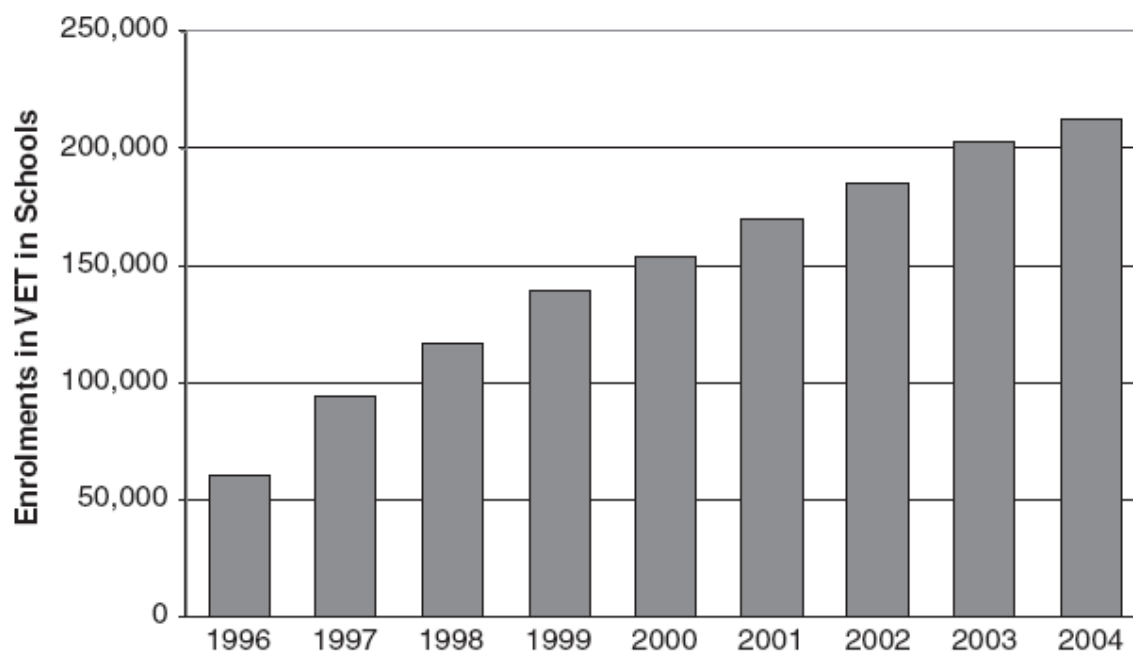
62 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2009), *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET in Schools 2006*, p. 5.

63 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 31.

64 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Annual national report of the Australian vocational education and training system 2007*, p. 34.

65 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2009), *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET in Schools 2006*, p. 5.

Figure 6.1 Year 11 and 12 student enrolments in VET in Schools, 1996 to 2004



Source: H. Coates, and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 1.

6.74 While the proportion of apprentices and trainees undertaking SBATs is relatively small, student enrolments are increasing at a rapid rate (see Table 6.1). SBATs are concentrated in the retail and hospitality sectors and are more likely to be at certificates I and II level than at certificate III and above level.

Table 6.1 School-based apprentice and trainee commencements by state and territory, 2002-07

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
New South Wales	255	759	869	911	773	1 404
Victoria	4 063	3 562	2 696	5 109	5 206	6 497
Queensland	4 722	5 293	6 044	6 419	6 956	7 973
South Australia	763	1 029	1 537	1 602	1 926	1 336
Western Australia	300	961	1 121	1 156	1 397	1 166
Tasmania	2	13	81	102	96	242
Northern Territory	15	147	141	114	179	155
Australian Capital Territory	292	465	363	369	326	335
Australia	10 411	12 230	12 853	15 782	16 861	19 110

Notes: Data are the sum of the first revisions of each quarterly estimate of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.
School based information introduced 1 January 2002.

Source: NCVET, National Apprentice and Trainee Collection, various collections (using the first revision), in T. Karmel and P. Mlotkowski, *School-based apprenticeships and traineeships*, Occasional Paper, 2008, p. 9.

Impact of VETiS on completion and retention

- 6.75 A 2006 LSAY report which examined the impact of various models of VET provision on school completion rates and post-school outcomes found that a higher proportion of VETiS participants than non-participants changed their mind about completing Year 12 between Years 9 and 12.⁶⁶
- 6.76 A study by NCVER found that participation in VETiS positively effected retention from Year 10 to Year 11, but had a negative effect on retention from Year 11 to Year 12.⁶⁷ With respect to transitions to further work or study, the report found that for those students who leave school after Year 11, the transition is smoother for VETiS students than for those who do not participate in VETiS programs. For students who complete Year 12, the report found no benefit in transition from participation in VETiS programs.⁶⁸
- 6.77 While these findings were based on research conducted during a relatively early phase of VETiS programs, DEEWR suggested that more recent research appears to show positive effects for students with poor academic achievement. However DEEWR suggested that ongoing research is required as VETiS programs are developed further.⁶⁹
- 6.78 NCVER research shows that completion rates for SBAT participants are a little higher than for comparative non-school VET participants at the certificates I and II level, but lower for certificate III level. The lowest certificate III completion rates for SBATs are in the trades.⁷⁰
- 6.79 TDA stated that combinations of school and work are being particularly tested in the context of SBATs. Where students see their workplace as offering greater benefits than their schooling may lead to increased rates of non-completion. Yet TDA noted that research shows the employment gained through SBATs is 'usually insecure and poorly paid, unless it is within the context of a contract of training.'⁷¹

66 H. Coates, and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 4.

67 A. Anlezark, T. Karmel and K. Ong, *Have school vocational and education programs been successful?*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2006, p. 6.

68 A. Anlezark, T. Karmel and K. Ong, *Have school vocational and education programs been successful?*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2006, pp. 6-8.

69 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 45.

70 National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Submission no. 4*, p. 3.

71 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 20.

6.80 TDA suggested that the most successful SBAT models are those which are flexible and based on strong relationships between the employers, schools and an RTO.⁷²

6.81 SBATs were endorsed in submissions for their effectiveness in engaging students at risk of leaving school. For example, Ms Kerrie Parkinson who works for a Local Community Partnership in NSW, stated:

We have had many success stories with students who were going to leave school, but instead undertook a SBAT and have had amazing success.⁷³

Industry concerns over the credibility of VETiS

6.82 The growth in VETiS has created some challenges for schools, one of which is sourcing suitable work placements for students.

6.83 The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) suggested that employers are favouring students who have completed their VET qualification post-school over those who achieve a comparative qualification through VETiS program; 'for VETiS to have broad industry support this fundamental problem must be addressed.'⁷⁴

6.84 Industry concerns over the credibility of VETiS can largely be attributed to the variability and inconsistency between programs offered across jurisdictions. According to Service Skills Australia:

...there are no common standards around the approval, regulation, resourcing, administration, monitoring and delivery of VET in Schools programs across jurisdictions.⁷⁵

6.85 Despite the view from industry that successful completion of training package qualifications requires integrated on and off-the-job learning, evidence suggested that there remains a lack of appropriate structured workplace learning in some programs.⁷⁶

6.86 Structured workplace learning provides students with structured work placements in real or simulated work environments, where they are given the opportunity to develop their technical and employability skills and direct experience of the working world. Structured workplace learning is

72 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 20.

73 Ms Kerrie Parkinson, *Submission no. 1*, pp. 1-2.

74 Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Submission no. 8*, p. 1.

75 Service Skills Australia, *Submission no. 14*, p. 4.

76 Service Skills Australia, *Submission no. 14*, p. 5.

implemented in a variety of forms across state and territory jurisdictions, with different models of coordination in place.⁷⁷ A representative from DEEWR stated:

From a VET perspective, the policy push is absolutely for more people to do the on-the-job training component. Often training packages will prescribe whether or not you have to do an on-the-job training component. In some packages you can do the VET component in the classroom and you do not have to go out into a work environment. However, from a policy perspective, we know – and certainly employers and industry prefer and believe – that there is a rounding out of the quality of the VET course if you go and do the on-the-job component.

In states like New South Wales, they have made the on-the-job work placement, the structured workplace learning, a compulsory part of doing all VET in schools. Other states and territories tend to let the mandating in the training package make those decisions, but there has definitely been a push over time to move towards more of the on-the-job placements as part of the vocational opportunities rather than fewer.⁷⁸

- 6.87 Figure 6.2, based on LSAY data from 2000 and 2001, shows the variable levels of participation in workplace learning across secondary schools, with 10 per cent of schools offering VETiS not including a workplace learning component and just 12 per cent of schools incorporating a workplace learning component in all of their VETiS programs. The authors responsible for compiling this data noted that these patterns may have changed in intervening years as VETiS has become more fully incorporated into school programs.⁷⁹
- 6.88 LSAY data suggests that where schools offer a strong VET program with high levels of workplace learning, students are more likely to enter further VET study and are less likely to be unemployed.⁸⁰

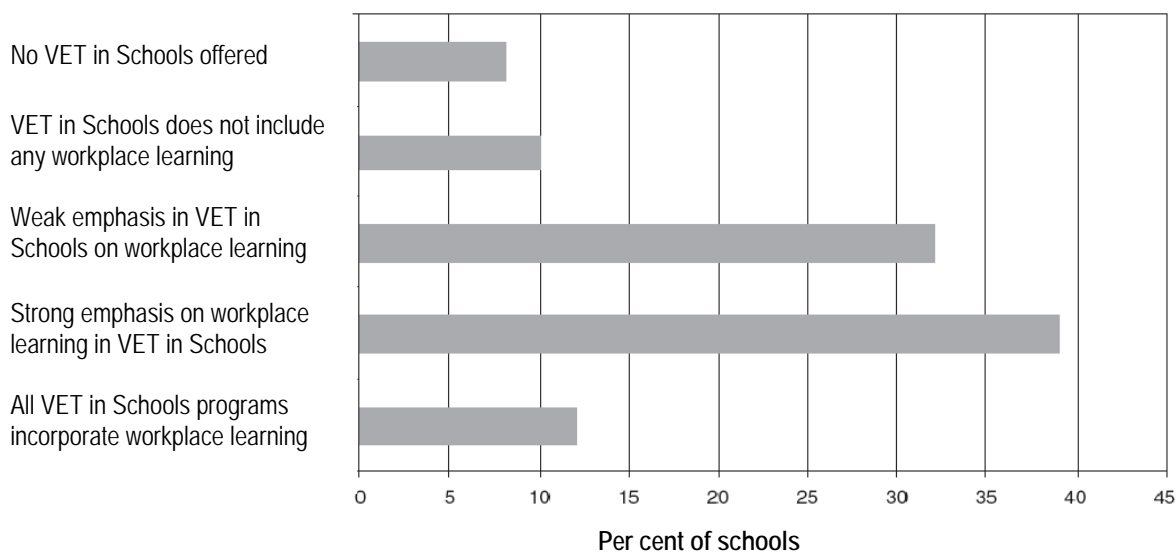
77 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 43.

78 Ms Renae Houston, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 May 2009, p. 3.

79 H. Coates and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 3.

80 H. Coates and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 4.

Figure 6.2 Emphasis on workplace learning



Source: H. Coates, and S. Rothman, *Participation in VET in Schools*, LSAY Briefing Number 15, October 2008, p. 3.

6.89 SDA noted that schools can often struggle to convince employers to provide structured workplace opportunities, and even where they do there can often be a lack of adequate supervision, mentoring and appropriate on-the-job training. While sometimes this is due to a lack of commitment from employers, it is also often the case that employers lack awareness of their obligations because they have not been properly briefed by schools, or provided with appropriate support mechanisms.⁸¹

6.90 The ACTU noted that:

...placements can vary in quality, ranging from “work experience” programs – where little structured learning or assessment takes place and having in some cases little direct connection to the VET course being undertaken – to structured experiences of work including specific on-the-job training and assessment which is fully integrated into the VET course.⁸²

6.91 The South-East Local Learning and Employment Network was similarly critical of VETiS programs which lack a structured workplace learning component:

It is our strongly held view that [structured workplace learning] ought to be a required component of all VETiS programs. It seems ludicrous that a program with the avowed aim of work skills

81 Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Submission no. 8*, p. 4.

82 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission no. 21*, p. 15.

development does not, in most cases, require any work place attendance. A young person might secure a – say – Certificate II in Automotive Technology without ever having stepped into a workshop to have some direct workplace experience in plying that trade.⁸³

- 6.92 TAFE institutes warned against attempting to engage students too early in their schooling in VET programs that have no credibility with employers.⁸⁴ Both the ACTU and SDA suggested that because schools operate independently, there is little control over the decisions they make regarding VETiS even where these decisions appear not to be in the best interests of students, or the needs of the labour market. It was argued that programs are offered on the basis of existing facilities or the availability of teachers who can deliver the curriculum. SDA stated:

Currently there is little willingness by the Departments of Education to intervene in arrangements which schools make in VETiS programs, even when sometimes they are obviously not in the best interests of the students and are contrary to industry desires.⁸⁵

Negative perceptions of vocational education pathways

- 6.93 Despite the growth of school-based training pathways through VETiS, there remains a common view that VET is an appropriate option only for students who struggle to achieve academically. Consequently, it was argued that the traditional, academic approach to prepare senior secondary students for university has dictated school structures, staffing and timetabling, while alternative approaches are ‘accorded lesser status at the periphery.’⁸⁶ This approach has also seen academically oriented subjects given greater status in certification than vocationally oriented areas.⁸⁷
- 6.94 While VETiS programs have been integrated into senior secondary certificates in various ways, FYA stated that ‘they remain essentially minor elements’ of secondary provision. FYA acknowledged that the separation between the schools and VET sector is:

83 South East Local Learning and Employment Network Inc., *Submission no. 23*, p. 8.

84 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission no. 29*, p. 33.

85 Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Submission no. 8*, p. 3.

86 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission no. 12*, pp. 4-5.

87 Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland, *Submission no. 32*, p. 3.

related to the respective traditions of the strong links between the secondary curriculum and university studies and the industrial training culture in Australia.⁸⁸

- 6.95 Group Training Australia CEO, Mr James Barron, stated that ‘we still have a long way to go to effectively promote the alternative pathways in a lot of school systems.’⁸⁹ SDA added:

Under the current arrangements, we are on the way to creating a two tier education system. Under such a scenario, this is and will continue to increase the division between [private] schools which have low levels of VETIS participation and government schools.⁹⁰

- 6.96 The Australian College of Educators (ACE) suggested that there is a lack of recognition amongst staff in secondary schools about the importance of the work and skills agenda and the range of new pathways available to students, meaning that students may not be receiving appropriate advice. ACE stated that secondary school staff:

...continue to believe that if the skills agenda suits any students at all, then it suits students who are uncooperative or whose academic achievements of themselves mean they are likely to drop out. There is still a perception that troublesome students are those best suited to VET courses, but failing that, should leave school and get a job – they have no real idea of what that really means for the life chances of those students.

With insufficient accurate information about the school to work and training agenda, teachers are simply unable to positively influence students or their parents about beneficial and more relevant pathways that may lead to further study through ongoing skills development through a range of reputable and recognised training bodies.⁹¹

- 6.97 The provision of inappropriate advice from careers advisers in secondary schools about vocational pathways was highlighted by Mr Ian Blandthorn from SDA:

I think back to one of my children a few years ago when he was struggling a little bit at the time at school. I suggested he look at an option in the TAFE system. The career advice that he got at that

88 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 36.

89 Mr. James Barron, Group Training Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 47.

90 Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Submission no. 8*, p. 6.

91 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 49*, p. 2.

particular school effectively led him to conclude, 'If I go to TAFE, Dad, everyone will think that I'm dumb.'⁹²

- 6.98 The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) argued that boards of vocational education and boards of studies should be amalgamated so that the secondary school system's focus is on a 'Life and Work Ready Certification'. GLR stated:

This may seem fanciful but until something of this magnitude occurs the VocEd qualifications will carry the stigma of being of lesser value than the Higher School Certificate, which is of very little genuine use to the very great majority of students within the school environment.⁹³

- 6.99 Through COAG, the Australian Government and state and territory governments have agreed (as at 2 July 2009) to undertake a communications strategy which supports reforms outlined in the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions. States and territories will have responsibility for communications specific to their jurisdiction regarding the importance of increasing attainment and engagement of young people aged 15-24 in education, training and employment. The communications strategy will have multiple targets which include:

- young people aged 15-24;
- parents and guardians of young people aged 15-24;
- education and training providers; and
- employers and potential employers of young people aged 15-24.⁹⁴

Committee comment

- 6.100 The first section of this chapter highlighted instances of the increasing flexibility being applied to senior secondary education certificates to assist students to navigate between a variety of pathways where both academic and vocational courses can contribute credit towards a qualification.

92 Mr Ian Blandthorn, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 17.

93 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48*, p. 3.

94 Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions*, <http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NP_youth_attainment_transitions.pdf>, accessed 21 September 2009.

- 6.101 VETiS plays an important role in supporting successful youth transitions and building Australia's productivity through its capacity to enhance student engagement. Given the extent to which issues around VETiS have been researched and reported on in recent years (including inquiries by a predecessor of this committee and the committee's Senate counterpart) the current inquiry focused primarily on school and part-time work balance.
- 6.102 Notwithstanding, there was a clear message through submissions that suggested many of the concerns with VETiS identified in previous reviews and reports persist. A concerted effort to enhance the quantity and quality of VETiS is required if COAG targets are to be realised. Continuing to broaden the options available to senior secondary students will be essential for improving Year 12 completion rates.
- 6.103 The greatest cause for concern over VETiS are inconsistencies in the product being delivered through institutional based VET compared to VET delivered in the workplace. Specifically, the absence of a required structured workplace learning component through VETiS programs continues to be identified as a major concern for industry.
- 6.104 Following COAG's National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions, specific arrangements with respect to VETiS will be decisions for the relevant state or territory governments, including decisions on whether to invest Australian Government funding to support structured workplace learning.⁹⁵
- 6.105 The Australian Government should continue to support an expansion of structured workplace learning opportunities to improve the quality of student outcomes for VETiS participants.

Recommendation 11

- 6.106 **That the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to develop a plan to ensure that structured workplace opportunities are available to all students participating in school-based vocational education and training.**

95 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Youth Attainment and Transitions – Frequently Asked Questions*, <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/FAQ.pdf>>, accessed 24 September 2009.

- 6.107 The changing nature of senior secondary certificates of education has opened doors for an increasing cohort of students to pursue vocational pathways which provide credit towards a Year 12 qualification. There is still much work to be done in promoting vocational pathways so that they are seen as an equal first choice option and more accurately reflect the significant proportion of Australian secondary students who do not go on to study at university. The new senior secondary certificate frameworks provide a platform to further build the profile of VET as a viable pathway for secondary students.

Figure 6.3 Case study: Heavy vehicle driving

Heavy Vehicle Driving: An unexploited pathway

Representatives from the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Ron Finemore Transport Pty Ltd and the Transport Industry Skills Centre presented evidence on the challenge the road transport industry faces due to pending shortages of heavy-vehicle drivers and a tight labour market.

The TWU stated that there is an expectation that in the next 10 years, the industry will double in size, creating an opportunity to absorb large numbers of entrants if an effective transition program were to be put in place.

However, there are barriers to attracting new entrants which are making it difficult to capitalise on the tight labour market for drivers, even in a time of growing unemployment.⁹⁶ The barriers identified by the TWU include:

- strong client control of trucking industry market pricing;
- current traineeship initiatives which are ‘largely ineffective in attracting new entrants’; and
- the length of time it takes to move through the graduated licensing system can mean school age entrants are lost to other occupations immediately after leaving school. Trucking can then become the second-choice occupation once other careers don’t work.

Existing traineeships, which can be school-based (although this option is not provided by all states), through *Certificates I and II in Transport and Logistics (Road Transport)* are restrictive due to age and time-based restrictions on heavy vehicle licensing.

96 Transport Workers Union, *Submission no. 59*, p. 2.

Licensing requirements which determine progression through the various truck licensing categories means that an employer may have to fund a school age recruit for two years before they can drive an articulated vehicle and often three years for a multi-combination vehicle. TWU argued that this made school-age recruitment to the truck driving profession 'extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible.'⁹⁷

Evidence suggested that the trucking industry is well-positioned to offer a viable school-to-work transition for a significant number of young Australians, provided governments and industry stakeholders are prepared to work collaboratively to take advantage of this opportunity.

Witnesses promoting the need for a more direct career pathway for young people expressed the importance of a strong emphasis on a workplace culture which promotes safety and provides appropriate mentoring and training in any effort to attract young people as new entrants to the industry. TWU Federal Secretary, Mr Tony Sheldon, stated that 'only companies with a good safety record and a protective culture should be allowed to access young people.'⁹⁸

The committee encourages the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to work with state and territory transport ministers, in consultation with key stakeholders in the transport industry, to investigate the development of a national truck driving apprenticeship scheme that facilitates a more direct career pathway from secondary school to truck driving as an occupation than currently prevails.

97 Mr Tony Sheldon, Transport Workers Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 June 2009, p. 3.

98 Mr Tony Sheldon, Transport Workers Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 June 2009, p. 3.