



**INQUIRY INTO
COMBINING SCHOOL AND WORK:
SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL
YOUTH TRANSITIONS**

SUBMISSION BY

*SHOP, DISTRIBUTIVE & ALLIED EMPLOYEES'
ASSOCIATION*

JANUARY 2009

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Vocational education and training at any level has two fundamental roles. Those roles are economic and social. On one hand there needs to be an emphasis upon developing the knowledge and skills base of the nation so as to meet the needs of employers to have a workforce which can maximise productivity. On the other hand, and at least as equally as important, there must also be an emphasis upon developing the knowledge and skills of individuals so that they can pursue rewarding careers.

Our educational and training institutions have a key role to play in synchronising these demands and producing outcomes in line with them. This general principle applies to vocational education and training in schools (VETIS). **The delivery of VETIS must be undertaken in ways which maintain a balance between pedagogical interests and industry requirements.**

Essentially VETIS is about equipping students to have the capacity to seek and obtain employment post school in ways which give recognition and value to their VETIS achievements and qualifications.

Unless employers regard a VETIS qualification as being at least equal in value to a post school achieved qualification, they will give preference in employment to the person who has achieved their qualification post school and while active in the paid workforce.

There is widespread concern in industry (both employers and unions) that VETIS students, whilst having a comparable qualification, do not have comparable skills and abilities to others with the same qualification who have obtained their qualification post school.

Employers are exhibiting a clear preference for people who have obtained their qualifications after leaving school and while being employed.

For VETIS to have broad industry support this fundamental problem must be addressed.

Employers must be brought to a position whereby they regard a VETIS qualification as being at least equal in value to a qualification achieved by some other means such as by combining paid work with study in a post school setting. Unless this is achieved employers, individuals and the community in general will regard VETIS qualifications as "second best".

If VETIS is to be seen as more than an exercise designed to keep young people at school beyond the time they would normally leave, then changes need to be introduced which will establish VETIS in the eyes of all as a pathway of real educational merit.

There is no long term value in maintaining a system which does not indisputably produce a quality outcome which is recognised as such by industry.

To achieve a quality outcome where the standard of a VETIS qualification is regarded as comparable to the same qualification achieved elsewhere, VETIS must be delivered in conformity with the Australian Quality Training Framework and the relevant National Training Package.

This requires those delivering VETIS, and/or assessing students, to hold the trainer and/or assessor skills, as specified in the Training Package. The human and physical resource requirements stipulated in Training Packages must also be met.

Australia has an industry-led training system. Training Packages are developed with the active involvement of industry and reflect industry's views as to what is required in the area of skill development. Training Packages are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain reflective of industry views and needs. The Training Package specifies the outcome required by industry.

It is unrealistic to expect that industry will embrace students whose training is not in line with Training Package requirements.

There is widespread concern at industry level that many of those delivering VETIS do not meet the trainer and/or assessor requirements set out in the Training Package.

There is also widespread concern that teachers often lack understanding of the workplace and the industry concerned.

Consequently, it follows that these concerns are better addressed when the delivery is done by an RTO which has the capacity to deliver to the standard required by industry.

As schools operate independently, there seems to be little control over the decisions they make in the area of VETIS. 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.

The problem is not, however, so much one of structural design, but rather of implementation. There is a wide belief that accountability mechanisms have been removed from the system and that there is an absence of effective checks and balances operating to ensure quality.

Minimum requirements for assessment are specified in most training packages. However, in a number of States there is no effective monitoring or audit process in place in regard to assessment. To the extent that such monitoring does take place, it generally fails to convince industry that it is rigorous or sufficient to ensure quality outcomes.

Training Packages generally do not specify standards for those delivering training, including VETIS. In part, this is due to the fact that some States have used their position within the overall VET system to ensure that training packages do not include prescriptive provisions for the delivery of training. However most packages do have a provision “recommending” that deliverers meet the industry required standards.

Again it appears that there is no serious attempt by educational authorities to monitor those delivering VETIS to ensure that they do meet the provisions of the Training Package. The lack of accountability of educational authorities and schools and their apparent lack of interest in ensuring trainers, teachers and assessors conform with the provisions of the Training Package leaves many in industry short of confidence in the performance of the overall system.

If a quality outcome acceptable to industry is to be achieved, it is critical that the student be able to link the theoretical or academic with the practical. This requires workplace experience. While in part this may involve normal work in industry, VETIS also requires an element of structured workplace learning. In industries such as retail, there is little opportunity for such structured learning if the student is rostered to work during peak trading periods.

It should be clearly spelt out, the responsibility of the school to organise proper work placement for students. Schools, teachers and students and employers need to clearly understand and implement the purpose of work placement.

All students should be covered by a signed training agreement which specifies the agreed training plan, provides for proper structured on and off-job training and ensures equivalent educational outcomes and procedures for school students as for others undertaking the same certificate.

There are substantial gaps in the performances of some employers in regard to the provision of workplace training.

Schools often struggle to convince employers to provide structured workplace training opportunities for students.

Often, where such opportunities are provided, adequate supervision, mentoring and appropriate structured on-job training, especially across all the competencies in the Training Package qualification, is not provided. In some cases this is due to inadequate commitment by employers but in others it is due to employers not understanding their obligations, employers not being adequately briefed by schools and not being given appropriate support mechanisms by schools

There is a critical need for State Authorities to put in place processes which require training providers to adequately supervise on the job delivery with penalties applicable for both providers and employers who abrogate their responsibilities to deliver quality outcomes.

Teachers of VETIS programs must meet the industry requirements regarding knowledge and skills. This requires such teachers having reasonably current

workplace experience. In order for teachers to have current workplace experience there is a need for them to have access to regular industrial release. However, in order to assuage the fear of existing workers that industrial release will be used to replace them, it is important that it be implemented in agreement with workers and their unions. Where teachers undergo industrial release, it must be during school term and hours. No teacher should undertake more than 10 school days of industrial release in any year and then only with the agreement of the relevant union.

School based VETIS programs, including school based traineeships and apprenticeships, must be integrated into the industry-led vocational training system and not develop as a separate system.

VETIS programs should expand opportunities for senior secondary students and, as far as practicable, keep open the option of participation in higher education. Careful consideration of subject selection is therefore required by students to ensure a proper matching of students' skills and interests and the training program while enabling them to keep their options open for the future.

The student is sometimes left trying to satisfy both requirements, in addition to carrying the heavy workload of Years 11 and 12. The result is that students either bear the additional pressure, fail, or reduce their secondary school subjects, thereby reducing their choices post Year 12 to only a vocational stream.

In undertaking VETIS, students should not have to carry a heavier workload in terms of time requirements than other students. Classes should be timetabled so that these students do not miss other classes.

There is a need for universities to accept VETIS as being legitimate for university entrance purposes.

Already there is a widespread attitude throughout the community that a university education is preferable to other options. Engagement in VETIS programs should not have the effect of making it more difficult for students to gain entrance to university. Under such scenarios, many students, often with parental and teacher guidance, will choose to avoid VETIS. This has the effect of creating a "streaming" situation where the brightest students avoid VETIS and those unlikely to gain university entrance undertake VETIS.

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 public schools which have low levels of VETIS participation and government schools.

VETIS achievements should be counted fully for the purposes of university entrance scores.

VETIS should not be seen as, or by default become, a mechanism which operates just to keep young people at school longer. It should operate to positively contribute to the development of young people.

Schools have a responsibility not just to impart knowledge but also to ensure that their students have successful transitions. This is particularly important for VETIS students.

A designated person with appropriate expertise and adequate resources, who liaises between student/school/employer and RTO, co-ordinates on and off-the-job delivery and keeps all parties appropriately informed, should be appointed in each school. Where students have been identified as “at risk”, then additional support should be provided.

Objective career advice needs to be made available to all young people. Ideally this advice would be provided in an environment where vocational education and training is not presented as a second class option, principally for those not "smart enough" to go to university. For this to be achieved, universities and careers teachers must be convinced to accept VETIS as a meritorious educational pathway.

The principle of normal work being counted for VETIS purposes should be encouraged. Where this does occur, then the student should be paid the award rate for the job. There is, however, a difference between normal work and structured workplace training and both are essential for the achievement of overall competence by the student. It is essential that school-to-work participants receive genuine training with an appropriate range of tasks and not spend most of their work time performing routine work such as working on a register during peak trading times.

This issue also raises the broader issue of recognition of prior learning. Especially in industries such as retail, young workers learn a wide range of skills on the job, undertaking normal rostered duties. Such workplace acquired skills should be recognized for VETIS purposes.

VETIS has much to offer students if it is delivered as a quality product, acceptable to industry. At the present time the credibility of VETIS is under challenge. The test of the efficacy of VETIS will not be the numbers involved, but whether young people develop the knowledge and skills from VETIS programs sufficient to enable them to acquire and hold rewarding jobs and lead successful lives as part of our community.