

**VICTORIAN AUTOMOBILE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SUBMISSION FOR THE
ENQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS
(AUGUST 2002)**

1. Introduction

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) is a federally registered employer organisation that represents more than 4,500 retail motor industry employers throughout Victoria and Tasmania.

Most of VACC's members are small businesses with less than ten employees. Our membership is divided into fourteen divisions that cover a diverse range of sectors within the retail motor industry including towing services, automobile repairs and panel beating, car dealerships, service stations, component manufacturing, and farm machinery dealers.

In Victoria, this industry employs around 50,000 people in around 9,800 businesses. In 2001, there were 7,619 ABN registered businesses. The industry's total retail sales amounted to \$7.5 billion and generated \$11 billion in total income in 1999.

The retail motor industry suffers severe skill shortages in the provision of skilled tradespeople into its business operations. The industry relies heavily on trade based or traineeship qualifications as its underpinning skills development platform. The technology within the industry is changing at a fast pace, as are the skills required to service and repair new vehicle models.

VCE students and VET teachers are often unaware of how far the industry has developed, in particular in the last decade. An outdated but typical view held in the schools sector is that the industry involves difficult and dirty work, with little to offer in the way of career development for individuals. In the past, entrants to the industry were at year 9 standard, whereas increasingly entrants must now have at least year 11 or 12 standard to cope with the demands of high technology, customer service driven environment.

Driven by the effects of severe skill shortages in the industry the VACC has supported and encouraged key strategies designed to raise the levels of knowledge on industry career paths both in schools and in the broader community.

Participation in school based work experience programs in the automotive industry is common amongst school students. Through the award system, the availability of school based apprenticeships and traineeships are being delivered in partnership with schools and TAFE Institutes.

A key function of VACC operations is the provision and support of training programs to its membership base in the retail motor industry.

Through its Group apprenticeship Schemes in Victoria and Tasmania and through its short course and business management training programs the VACC aims to facilitate skills and knowledge growth and career path development for individuals in entering the retail motor industry.

2. Current VACC initiatives in the schools sector

Since its inception in 1918, the VACC has continually sought to develop strong links with industry training providers and maintain a clear understanding of the articulation of school based education with vocational training skills and knowledge development.

In more recent times the VACC has taken an active role in providing both information to schools, in respect of newly emerging skills paths in the industry, and the options available through part-time school based traineeship programs.

In 2001 the VACC was successfully selected by the Federal Department of Employment, Science and Training (DEST) to manage a project designed to lift the rate of school based trainees in automotive studies in Victoria. At the time of writing the VACC has engaged 28 school based trainees in the Victorian Schools Sector with a view to their articulation into full time apprenticeships at the completion of their VCE if they wish to pursue a career in the industry.

Whilst the VACC has always been active in the provision of advice to schools on the nature and future of the industry, in 2001, the VACC unveiled a new mobile careers

education unit that has been specifically designed to encourage teachers, careers advisors and VCE students to use the unit as a viable careers and advice centre.

The mobile careers unit has been sign written in a creative manner to attract the attention of young people and the broader community.

This creative approach to educate school students on the changing nature of the industry and the career paths available has been highly successful. In practice small groups of students are seated in the unit and are engaged in career discussion provided by experienced industry personnel at the school site.

3. Schools to Work Transition

The VACC supports the position that a range of learning pathways should be provided in the State secondary school system as a means through which young people can successfully complete their VCE studies.

Clearly through both academic and technology based curriculum VCE students can obtain underpinning skills and competencies that can support the transition from school to the workplace.

VACC acknowledges the benefits that student work placement and structured work based learning are providing to individuals assisting in the linking of school activities in the world of work.

VACC members through their various organisations and workshops have demonstrated their support for work placement activities through their willingness to engage students in the workplace for the purposes of work experience and study requirements.

Indeed many VCE students have articulated their work experience activities into employment in the industry as a key result of being able to access first hand industry experience in a VACC member workshop.

The industry views these activities as important and vital in the overall schools to work transition for youth. In addition, it should also be noted that the industry views

work experience as important not only for those students that choose to pursue a career in the industry, but also for those that, as an outcome of their experiences, decide that the retail motor industry is not where their career aspirations lay.

A direct outcome that this view has on the intake of new apprentices and trainees is that more young people entering the industry that have a realistic view of the work environment and its expectations and thus are less likely to cancel out of their training agreement at an early point in their employment.

The VACC acknowledge and supports the re-emergence of schools that have recognised the benefits the technology programs can bring to school communities and in particular for those students who are better supported through technology and skills based programs.

The VACC membership are deeply critical of the devolution of the technical school system in Victoria and bemoan this action as a key feature in the decreasing numbers of young people entering the automotive trades, which it turn has exacerbated the current skills shortages scenario that remains in Victoria.

The introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is seen as a means through which VCE students may adopt a less academic study stream and in turn may also elect to undertake a school based VET program or traineeship.

Given an environment where an appropriate curriculum and adequate resources and made available to schools the VCAL may enable students to undertake gain approval both amongst their peers and teachers to undertake a program of their choice without pressure to articulate their studies into a university education.

The VACC has, in July 2002 been approached by two Victorian secondary schools to support the development of centres for skill development for their school cluster groups.

This is also viewed by VACC as a direct acknowledgment by schools that many VCE students aspire to become engaged with technology based curriculum and in many cases seek to extend their academic studies into this medium.

The VACC will support these initiatives in schools where they do not duplicate existing local vocational training arrangements, say through a local TAFE Institute, and where they provide a viable integrated curriculum outcome that can meet the diverse needs of their student groups.

The VACC does not support these initiatives (in respect of the retail motor industry) where programs have little or no reference to industry training packages and where schools are unable to properly facilitate the delivery of competent industry level vocational training programs.

Ideally the VACC would prefer a model of delivery for automotive programs that focuses on underpinning knowledge components of the retail motor industry training package, which could in turn be credited towards full competency achievement in Certificate II and III through a traineeship or apprenticeship program.

Currently the State Automotive Industry Training and Advisory Board (ATV) are developing a series of new technology standards specifically for the secondary schools sector.

These standards while focusing largely on the underpinning knowledge of the full industry standards they allow for a return to the delivery of basic science and underpinning principles of automotive technologies to VCE students. This general level of knowledge and understanding of technology has been identified as a key failing in many young people seeking to enter the industry via a trade occupation.

4. RTO Status for Schools

Whilst the VACC supports the inclusion of pre-vocational programs into VCE studies there have been significant concerns in the past over the provision of RTO status to secondary schools for the provision of programs that deliver against industry standards found within the retail motor industry training package.

This concern has been voiced on the basis that few schools have adequate staff, experience and facilities to deliver vocational programs to the level required in the standards.

In addition it is of concern to the industry that inherent occupational health and safety issues and poor levels of skill development and assessment may exist where inadequate resources and facilities are found.

Currently the provision of RTO status to schools is carried largely in isolation from industry and with no reference to the State Industry advisory arrangements.

Given that the RTO provision and audit process has in the past, focused on the administrative side of program delivery, at the expense of curriculum content and delivery outcomes, the retail motor industry currently has little faith in terms of consistency and quality outcomes where delivery of automotive programs in schools, under the training package is provided.

A position raised by the VACC in this regard is the support of a review of the current RTO provision process to schools to include the active participation of the State Industry Training and Advisory Board (ATV) in order that accurate assessments for schools wanting to deliver vocational subjects can be made.

5. School Based Traineeships

Since 2001 the VACC has initiated 28 school based trainees in Victoria through its Group Apprenticeship Scheme. This initiative has been carried out with support funding from DEST through the Targeted Initiatives Program.

Fundamentally the VACC believes that this program offers a viable alternative career and educational pathways for VCE students.

The industry has supported this initiative on the basis that the program provides for students to become familiar with the industry, and the sorts of tasks that would form the basis of a traineeship or apprenticeship program. Another key benefit of the program is that employers can effectively trial a person in their organisations prior to the student leaving school.

A limitation that has been found in this program is the inability of the secondary school system to provide the requisite flexibilities in timetabling to allow students to attend TAFE and the workplace as part of a structured school based traineeship program.

Clearly, the school based traineeship model has many strengths and advantages for students who want to articulate school studies into an apprenticeship post year 12.

Indeed even where a school student does not want to move into an apprenticeship post VCE, school based traineeships still offer significant opportunities for students to become familiar with workplace culture and the various rigours of work life that they will be exposed to at some time in the future.

In addition to this school based traineeship programs are able to expose VCE students to new and emerging technologies in industry and the broader community.

This exploration, based in the construct of the workplace, offers additional advantages to students in that these experiences and learning may be applied to other studies in the students curriculum, thus fostering the application of skills and knowledge on a cross functional basis across a wide range of applications.

A second issue, which has yet to be fully explored, is the degree of competency that can be achieved through a traineeship where attendance in the workplace is generally one day a week (excepting school holidays where full weekly blocks can be achieved).

Analysis is required to fully understand whether learning on this part time basis is incremental or a repetition of 'like' jobs over an extended period.

What needs to be fully understood is to what competency level a school based trainee will exit their VCE studies at.

This analysis that will be undertaken in 2002/3 by the VACC will focus on the sorts of jobs, both depth and breath, that are undertaken by school based trainees week in week out in the workplace.

Acronyms

ATV	Automotive Training Victoria
AITB	Automotive Industry Training and Advisory Board
DEST	Department of Employment Science and Training
VACC	Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training (VET in schools)