

# ***AIST***

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*The Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania*

## **Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools**

### **Introduction**

Vocational Education did not exist as such in any of the Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania (AIST) schools, except two Catholic Independent Schools, prior to 1997. From that year onwards funds have been made available to the Association to assist all non-government, non-Catholic schools to introduce Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs. This submission deals with the work developed by AIST with all appropriate schools in the independent sector, not just member schools, as a result of that funding. It does not deal with Catholic Member Schools for whom funding is provided through the Catholic Education Office.

### **The nature of VET in Schools**

It is unfortunate that it has become general usage to talk about VET in Schools, or VIS, as though it is a single, uniform type of program. This is far from being the case and the differences between the programs in different jurisdictions often lead to totally inaccurate generalisations and perceptions at a national level.

Some jurisdictions have embedded individual VET modules, or units of competence, into general senior certificate programs. Satisfactory completion of these parts of a course give a large number of students a nationally recognised VET statement of achievement. This has the advantage of providing limited preparation for employment for a considerable number of students, but unless this applies across a wide range of subjects, including practical ones, it does not provide a full VET certificate. Such ‘VET programs’ may or may not include substantial elements of Structured Workplace Learning (SWL).

At the other extreme some jurisdictions offer their students actual VET certificate programs, based, as available, on National Training Packages, with varying amounts of workplace experience.

In Tasmania, under an agreement between the three school sectors, all VET programs made available to school students are of this latter type. All programs:

- can lead to a full VET certificate either at Certificate 1 or 2 level;
- are delivered by, or under the auspices of, a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), by staff with the qualifications required under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF);
- include a substantial amount of SWL, through extended vocational placements, whether this is mandated in the Training Package or not, this is generally between 120 and 240 hours per year long course; and
- are conducted with the approval of the local industries.

The differences in the types of programs are significant when considering such aspects as:

- rates of development of programs;
- resource requirements; and
- industry perceptions.

In various national discussions these differences are often ignored and rarely understood.

### **Growth and Development of VET in AIST Schools**

Towards the end of 1996 AIST set up a *School to Work Committee* and appointed a School to Work Project Officer to assist schools in their reaction to the encouragement to provide access to VET programs. In 1997 schools with Year 11 and 12 enrolments were encouraged to consider how such access might best be provided in each individual case. Two schools decided to apply for RTO status to provide programs for students and in 1998 students from four schools enrolled in their programs.

As VET programs developed they continued to follow this pattern and two other AIST schools became RTOs while others outsourced their programs to RTOs. All programs continued to involve a considerable workplace component, called 'vocational placement' to try to distinguish it from 'work experience' that for a long time had been provided to mainly Year 10 students. Despite this and specific programs aimed at making this distinction clear to employers some confusion still exists.

By 2002 all AIST schools have agreed that they will provide access to VET programs where the school, the student and the parents believe such a program is in the best interest of the individual student. Some schools have gone further than that and have developed a policy that encourages all students to consider taking a VET program. By 2001 the number of students involved in VET programs through AIST schools had exceeded 130.

The range of programs has increased from one, hospitality, in 1998 to 12 in 2002 comprising:

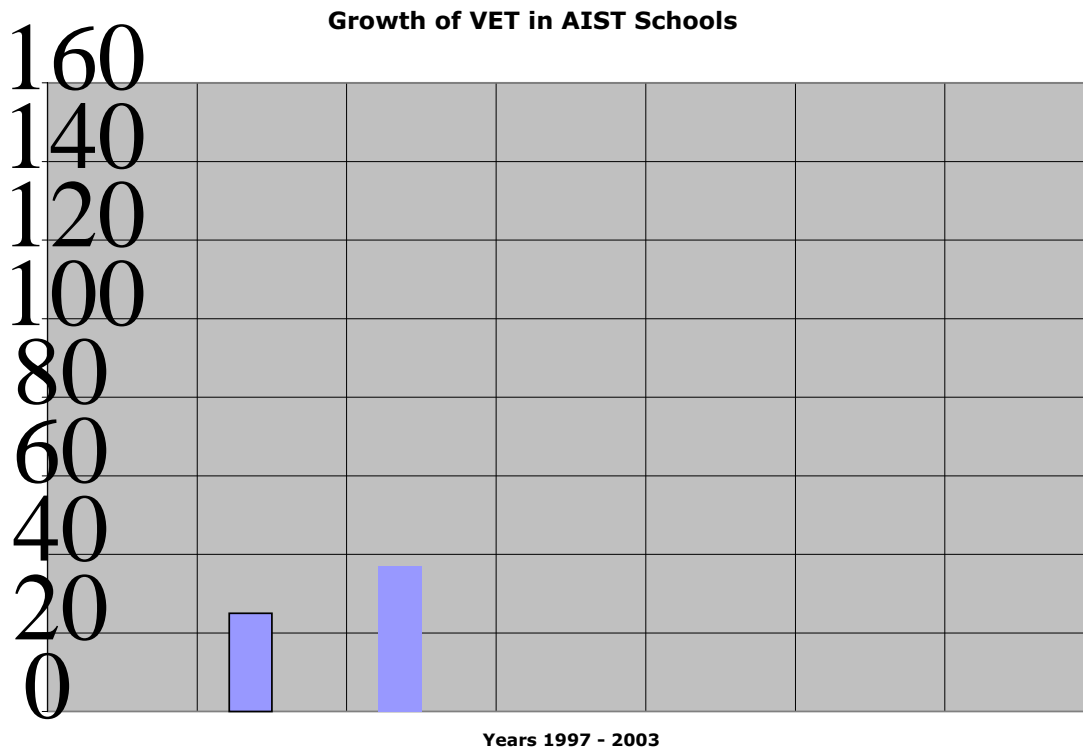
Aeronautics

Automotive

Child Care  
Hospitality  
Information Technology  
Light Furniture  
Maritime Skills  
Metals and Light Engineering  
Multi Media  
Outdoor Recreation  
Teachers Aide  
Veterinary Nursing

To make access to low enrolment programs possible schools have entered into a number of partnership agreements. In the Hobart area from 1999 the seven (7) non-government schools had agreed in principle that students in any of their schools could attend VET courses in any other. By 2002 all seven schools have been involved in such arrangements. In addition schools have developed arrangements with state Senior Secondary Colleges for students to undertake VET courses offered by them. Schools have also provided opportunities for their students to be involved in courses offered in part or in full by TAFE or a private RTO. In 2003 the five (5) Hobart AIST schools will be involved with two (2) Catholic Colleges and the four (4) Senior Secondary Colleges in regional programs developed through the Hobart Education Business Training Partnership (HEBTP) which is considering programs in Electrotechnology, Financial Services, Agriculture, Laboratory Technician, and Automotive Certificate 2.

Some schools have found that enrolments in VET programs do not justify running all of them each year. Schools deciding to opt for programs operating in alternate years account for a fall in the number of participating students in 2002, a drop which it is anticipated will be reversed in 2003.



### **Effectiveness of VET in AIST Schools**

Feedback from the various stakeholders has been very positive and schools that have run VET programs are clear about their value for some students. Students for whom the programs have been particularly appropriate have benefitted in many ways:

- they have achieved a level of success previously not achieved in school work;
- this has brought increased self esteem;
- in turn this has led to improved results in other areas of school life; and
- those students being happier have contributed to a generally improved school climate.

Parents of many students involved in VET programs have recognised these, and other improvements in their children. Schools with a long tradition of excellence in academic work have found this parental attitude spreading among their community and thus making extension of their VET involvement more possible.

Employers involved in the programs have been very supportive. Despite often rather negative perceptions being gained from industry contacts in other States, employer reactions within Tasmania have generally been very positive. The high level of vocational placement for VET students in Tasmania appears to be responsible for this. Some high level employers who spend more time in national gatherings have been critical of 'VET in Schools' probably a view derived because of the 70,000 VET in School students in other jurisdictions which do not have any workplace learning, however, their own staff supervising vocational placements have been generally very pleased with the programs. A considerable number of students have gained full or part time employment with employers with whom they had placements.

Customer Feedback Surveys carried out in Tasmania show a very high proportion of employers involved being very highly or highly satisfied with the programs with only a few rating them as satisfactory. Any lower ratings than this have been very individual cases where a particular relationship with student, teacher or school has affected the view of the employer.

## **Infrastructure Development**

The AIST has been involved in the last six years in the development of the necessary infrastructure for VET programs to be offered through schools. This has included involvement in:

- national activities both with the National Council of Independent Schools and other state and territory Associations and through the Commonwealth Department, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP);
- various cross-sectoral activities at State level, such as the State Vocational Education and Learning Policy Committee (SVELPC) and the state National Training Framework Reference Group, as well as statewide support for VET coordinators in non-government schools;
- regional education community partnerships where AIST schools are involved; and
- assisting schools with their own infrastructure development in such areas as professional development and promotion of VET within schools and the wider community.

### **Impact on School Culture**

The introduction of VET programs for students in Years 11 and 12 has been part of a considerable cultural shift for many independent schools. Most of these schools have long had a very well developed career education structure but this has been predominantly directed towards tertiary education. The Adelaide Declaration provided an opportunity for a general review of the vocational emphasis in schools and AIST has encouraged its schools to face this challenge.

With rather less than 10% of Year 11/12 students overall being involved in VET programs in AIST schools the introduction of VET has not led to any reduction in the number of 'academic' programs offered by schools. This has meant that in terms of both

overall finance and human resources VET is still a very difficult development to resource. Even when VET for individual students is out-sourced there are still considerable administrative duties involved especially with the development of vocational placements where these are not provided through the RTO.

Student Destination surveys have been carried out for VET students but generally through regional groupings or on an informal basis. It is clear, however, that some VET students do their vocational studies as part of a general program which leads to university entrance. A larger number continue their training, most usually in the same industry as their VET studies. A third group gain employment direct from school, very often through contacts developed in vocational placements.

### **Resourcing of VET Programs in Schools**

While the funding provided to schools through their systems from the ANTA VET in Schools funding, and previously through the, then, DETYA School to Work program has been of enormous assistance in developing VET access for school students, schools are still under considerable strain to resource these programs. In Tasmania with its emphasis on vocational placements VET programs generally occupy the equivalent of two timetable lines, one for the off the job aspects of the program and the other for the vocational placement aspect. Often the vocational placement line has to be used for part of the week or year to enable students to catch up on their other study commitments interrupted by placements whether these be one day a week placements or blocks of two weeks at a time three times during the year.

With staff salaries accounting for some 75% of school costs such double line programs are considerably more expensive than normal senior certificate ones. The high equipment and other capital costs are an added VET consideration. Travel costs to vocational placements or for programs shared with other institutions also have to be taken



into account. Until VET programs are undertaken by such a high percentage of students that the number of other programs can be reduced these extra costs will be a burden on schools. Such a reduction in offerings, however, could seriously impact on the overall provision of education to meet the needs of the whole cohort of students.

While the sharing of programs between schools does save money it is clear from our experience that there are also additional costs. The amount of administrative support required to coordinate these programs and to market them to the school communities involved cannot be ignored.

Where schools offer their own VET programs either as RTOs or under auspicing arrangements the required dual qualifications are a strain on professional development needs. VET teachers have to have the teacher qualifications to enable them to be registered teachers, but also need the vocational requirements of Certificate 4 and the up-to-date industry specific competencies. Assisting teachers to maintain their industry experience has been an area in which AIST has tried to support schools.

It is generally experienced that the workload on VET teachers and coordinators in schools is greater than in other subject areas. The advantages of regional education/community partnerships are very real but they also come at a cost of time for the teachers and schools involved. Burnout is a common result of these workloads and this in turn leads to the need for replacement teachers and the attendant additional professional development.

As an Association providing the support that schools and teachers require has only been possible through the availability of targeted funding. Any reduction of that in the short term is likely to result in far less satisfactory programs.

## **National Imperatives**

Independent schools in Tasmania have been generally supportive of the changing emphasis in national policy statements and reports, but many of the desired changes are so far reaching that time is needed for their realisation. Some of the Desired Goals are not well understood or supported by many teachers and parents in our schools and without their support the realisation of those goals is very difficult. AIST is supporting its schools in addressing the issues raised by changing times and developing needs, but recognises that schools require a lot of support in their endeavours to do this.

## **Recommendations**

**It is recommended that:**

1. adequate recognition is given to the substantial differences that exist between VET programs delivered to school students in different jurisdictions, which are the result of the jurisdictions responsibility for school education;
2. future funding models take into account the different cost of VET programs to schools in different jurisdictions because of these differences;
3. current efforts being made to enhance the esteem of VET programs for students be continued and further developed, especially among employers, parents and the wider community;

4. the rhetoric about community partnerships needing to be developed to meet national goals through local solutions be paralleled in funding models etc. so that funding guidelines do not in effect pre-determine a particular model of partnerships.