

The Secretary
House of Representatives
Education & Training Committee
Suite R1-106
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2060

Attention James Rees

(c.c. Olive McVicker)

Dear Secretary

re Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

I am writing to provide comments to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the above topic.

My comments are fairly general, however they could be directed particularly towards No. 1 of the Terms of Reference “The large structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools including leader training and the impact of vocational education on other programs”.

These comments are provided on behalf of the Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee Inc.

The Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee covers a region of 64,000 square kilometres of the western portion of rural Victoria.

It has a population of about 180,000 people who live in the 12 municipalities of Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Moyne, Warrnambool, Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Northern Grampians, Ararat, Horsham, West Wimmera, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack.

The region includes all of the Federal Electorate of Wannon and parts of the Mallee, Corangamite and Ballarat electorates.

The Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee regularly holds meetings in different parts of the region.

At our meetings the majority of people in the region agree that the VET Program is amongst one of the best initiatives taken by the Government in broadening the scope of education in providing an alternative to purely academic courses.

However, I have recently been approached by several people raising the concerns that the Government funding to the program has been dramatically reduced over the past few years.

The shortfall in course costs is approximately \$300 per student in government schools.

This shortfall has to be met by the student's parents.

Rural schools face another disadvantage over their city counterparts as the students often have to attend the TAFE component of the program at night classes or in another town.

This raises the issue of transport which can be difficult to organize and expensive.

The situation in small independent schools is even more acute since they receive less government funding. The cost per student for courses such as automotive, engineering, electronics or hospitality is around \$600 per student.

Another issue brought to our attention is that most country schools enrol their students for VET in Nov/Dec for the next year. They enrol them with V.A.S.S. early February and enter contracts with RTO's, however they do not receive their funding until later in the year and there is usually a shortfall.

Many TAFE providers claim that currently they only charge out 60% of the normal fee to country schools for the "off the job" training. They claim that this is not sustainable.

Demand is dropping dramatically for these prized courses purely because of the costs involved. For example, one independent school in this region last year had 14 students enrolled in VET courses, this year there are five. One other school states that they have stopped offering some VET courses because of the cost.

The Government last year increased funding for school-based apprenticeships which is appreciated, but in small towns the number of suitable employers is not nearly sufficient for the demand and many students are not able to gain an apprenticeship.

As education is compulsory to the age of 15 years, it would be fair to say that students who choose to be involved in the VET program are financially disadvantaged from students who choose the straight academic path.

I am also sending these comments to you electronically. I am available to discuss any of these comments in more detail if required.

Yours sincerely

Pat McAloon
Executive Officer

20th August, 2002