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3 October 2002

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

<u>Via email</u>

The Secretary,

<u>RE: Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools</u>

The Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (SGR LLEN) held a focus group with Network members on 19 September 2002 to discuss the range of issues tabled by the Standing Committee on Education and Training.

In attendance:
John Hansen – EO, Geelong Area Consultative Committee
Robyn Dolheguy – EO, Geelong Region Vocational Education Council
Steven Boyle – Principal, Corio Bay Senior College
Ralph Shaw – Principal, Oberon High School
Louise Lee – Career Information Centre, Centrelink
Sophie Devlin – Project Officer, LLEN
Ray Couchman – G-Force Recruitment
Russell Willis – School Focussed Youth Services, BatForce
Susan Kelly – Later Years Consultant, DE&T
Anne-Marie Ryan – EO, SGR LLEN

The Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network boundaries include the municipalities of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast, Queenscliff and Golden Plains south of Rokewood. The focus group responses reflect the issues that impact on the young people (15-24 years) in this Region.

Each of the above focus group members is happy to provide any additional comment and I will provide their contact details should this be necessary.

Focus Group Responses:

The range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs

- **Range**

Schools in this Region are looking to increase their VET programs but identify cost as an inhibiting factor. The group raised the question of how much VET could be delivered in a school while still offering a broadly based academic curriculum. It was agreed that schools need to work with their communities to identify their market niche and the range of curriculum that needs to be offered.

- **Resourcing**

The current funding model and arrangements for VET in schools is vague, late in being announced which mitigates against forward planning and poorly communicated to schools. The group recommended that funding for VET needs to be advised by July in the year prior to implementation.

A number of schools in this Region have RTO status. The group recommends that schools that are delivering VET need to be resourced specifically for this work in the same amounts as private providers particularly given the time and effort associated with meeting the compliance requirements of applying for and maintaining RTO registration. It is clear from local research in this Region that schools with RTO status can provide greater access to greater numbers of students and significantly reduce the current costs of course delivery. The group also recommended that funding for VET needs to be for a three - year period to enable appropriate planning and resource allocation to be applied.

- **Teacher Training**

This is a serious issue for schools. It is difficult to recruit teachers with the appropriate range of Industry experience to deliver courses that meet specific Industry requirements. The group identified that there are many teachers who need ongoing training and Industry updating to be credible to deliver VET. The current level of Professional Development and Training budget allocations to schools is minimal in the light of the need in this area. The TRIP program was identified as useful in this regard but many teachers undertaking a TRIP placement do not return to the schools sector. The group strongly endorsed the need for funding for short Industry specific training courses of 4-6 weeks duration that could be undertaken at the end of the school year.

The group strongly recommended that Diploma of Education studies need to be over two years and include a focus on generic employability skills, enterprise learning and some component of Industry work-placement.

The issue of Recruitment of people from Industry or with an Industry background into Education was discussed with the group identifying the length of teacher training and the current salary levels for teachers as major disincentives to people moving from Industry into VET in schools. The group recommended that an Incentives package be developed to attract and retain Industry qualified people into education including a Scholarship scheme, Accelerated courses and entry and exit Incentive payments for undertaking teacher training.

The group acknowledged the value of the international vendor training program CISCO, being delivered as part of VET in the VCE. This program requires trainers to be accredited through a highly specialised, rigorous training program. This ensures that teachers are seen to be delivering industry credible, high quality VET programs. More of these programs, which are responsive to specific labour market needs and incorporate teacher training which is highly targeted and of short duration are useful. Industry seems less interested in issues of Accreditation and more interested in courses that meet their needs. The group discussed the differing needs of small, medium and large Industries and recommended a mix of training models for these differing needs and settings. It was also recommended that customised training packages be developed in consultation with and for small business enterprises.

The group discussed the need for a culture shift that would see Employers valuing a well trained and skilled workforce by taking up opportunities to provide structured workplace training and entry level jobs for young people as a means to building a skilled workforce for the future. The flexibility within the new Business Services Training Package will assist in this process.

The differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of Industry acceptance of school-based programs

- In Victoria most VET courses are based on the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF) and as such do have Industry recognition. A VET in the VCE program offered at a school or other RTO is the same qualification that is available to entry-level employees within industry. Reports from the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) indicate that Victorian Industries highly value VET courses as evidenced by the numbers of VET graduates being offered employment in local businesses. The issue of the rigour of school-based VET courses has been raised and relates in the main to the time that VET students spend in Industry as part of their course. At this stage not all VET courses require a mandatory structured Industry Work placement.

- **Advantages of school-based VET**
The group identified that schools have the capacity to be flexible in matching the individual learning and vocational choices of young people to an appropriate VET delivery model. For young people demonstrating particular aptitude for a vocational pathway schools are able to provide an accelerated learning pathway through their studies. Schools are able to offer stability in staffing in contrast to the often mobile and sessional employment arrangement of teachers working in other sectors.

- **Disincentives for Employers**
The group identified the inbuilt disincentive associated with schools delivering VET in the VCE courses beyond Certificate II level. A student exiting school with a Certificate III level qualification is unlikely to be employed as a trainee because the employer will not attract an employer subsidy. An added disadvantage to the student's employment prospects is the higher wage required to pay a trainee undertaking Diploma level training. Some Employers also see

students with a Certificate III as unattractive because they do not have job opportunities at this qualification level.

It is appropriate that Certificate III level programs be delivered as part of the VCE as this ensures that VET programs are equivalent in rigour to all other VCE courses of study. In relation to the IT Industry, Certificate III needs to be available within schools given that many young people are already demonstrably capable in this field.
The group recommends that the structure of Employer Incentives be changed to take account of the above issues.

- **Certificate I-IV sequences**
In Victoria, the majority of VET in the VCE programs provide students with a sequence which contributes to Units 1 to 4 of the VCE. This sometimes requires identified Certificate III level modules to be delivered in addition to the Certificate II program. VET programs which do not offer a 1- 4 sequence, such as Retail and Small Business, are proving unpopular with students. The Retail Industry employs a large number of young people in this Region yet many of our young people will not undertake training in this field without the full study sequence being available. In relation to the IT Industry there needs to be a Certificate III available within schools that is equivalent to a VET in the VCE study given that many young people are already demonstrably capable in this field.

Vocational education in new and emerging Industries
- Time lag
There is a demonstrable time lag between the identification of Regional skill needs and shortages and the establishment of training courses to provide a suitably qualified workforce. Currently there are vastly insufficient numbers of Industry qualified teachers to run VET courses. The group also discussed the difficulty that Industry/Employers experienced trying to forecast employment trends. In addition Industry does not communicate its needs directly to course providers who are then out of the loop in matching courses to Industry growth areas. There remains an ongoing need for forums for Industry and Education and Training providers to work on these issues together.

- **Student and parent awareness of employment opportunities**
Students and parents still have outdated ideas about the current employment market and about the nature of traditional Industries. In this Region the Manufacturing Industry is still viewed as a poorly paid and dirty Industry when the reality is that it now offers well-paid and highly technical work opportunities. This same lack of awareness impacts on student choices across the vast majority of Industry areas and accounts for the difficulties that Industry experiences in attracting a workforce.

- **Role for Local Government**
The group identified a key role for local government to facilitate opportunities for Regional businesses to meet with the Education and Training sectors to identify and respond to employment changes within a Region

- **Role for schools**

Schools are able to respond to the needs of new and emerging Industry if they have access to a VET dedicated three year funding model. Such a model would also provide seed funding to respond to new Industry initiatives. Schools are well placed to build links with local employers and work on skill development in tandem with the Employers over the long term

- **Role of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)**
LLENs are alliances of Education, Training and Industry sectors who work together to provide seamless Pathways for young people from school to training to work or some combination of these. In this LLEN Region there has been a model developed for the introduction of new VET courses that is aligned to new and growth Industries within the Region. This model brings together the Employers, Local Government Economic Development planners, Area Consultative Committee, Industry Training Boards, Vocational Learning Councils, TAFE, and schools to jointly identify Industry needs and customise packages of learning and skill development with opportunities for workplace experience. This new way of working in partnership will over the long term enable a close match between Vocational Education and Regional Economic and Employment Development.

Employability Skills
The group identified that Employers are seeking employees who can demonstrate a range of employability skills, only one of which is technical competence. In the view of the group there is a need for a Policy that mandates that all young people undertake vocational learning programs in the secondary school from year 7 and that the employability skills or generic competencies developed by year 10 be acknowledged in year 10 Reports. It is also recommended that all intending school leavers have job seeking skills including Resume writing and Interview skills and ready for work ethics (attitude and discipline).

Work placements
Currently there are a number of VET courses that do not have mandated Work placements. In the view of the group all young people need mandatory Work placements and additional funds need to be provided for this to occur. This would significantly improve Industry acceptance of VET graduates and increase the credibility of school based VET courses. Local Research is clear that young people who undertake work placements have a stronger take-up rate of employment (not necessarily in the VET discipline).

School-based Traineeships
Traineeships provide a potential opportunity for young people to convert their casual and part-time work into an accredited form of Training that acknowledges the employability skills they are developing from this work experience. The group recommended the need for a Regional Project to fund a dedicated Project Officer to liaise with Employers on ways that casual and part-time work could be accredited through a Traineeship. The one disincentive identified is the possibility that Employers may cease to pay a casual wage in favour of the lower traineeship wage.

Communication Strategy

The group strongly recommended the need for a National Campaign targeting the Community on the changes in the world of work and promoting the value of New Apprenticeships and Vocational Learning for all young people to realise a career and to assist employers to increase the skill base and work ethics.

Prepared by: Anne-Marie Ryan
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