



Catholic Education Centre

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

Dear Sir

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training

I write on behalf of Catholic Education South Australia in relation to the Committee's Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in schools.

Catholic Education SA supports initiatives to improve accessibility to and uptake of vocational education in schools. We believe that all young people should have access to vocational learning and the opportunity to pursue industry specific study as a worthwhile and valued education pathway. We are concerned at the cost to schools and the difficulties associated with sustainability when ANTA funding is no longer available. We believe that much more needs to be done prior to the removal of this funding and recommend to the Committee that this funding continue until 2008.

In 2001 every Catholic secondary school with senior school enrolments offered vocational courses of some type with more than 4,900 students involved. This represents a genuine commitment to vocational education and in making this submission we would like to comment on each of the terms of reference.

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

The Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals of Schooling states that students should have *participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior school studies*. Schools, therefore, are faced with parallel issues of spread, i.e. vocational education for all students, and depth i.e. specialised certificate completion as part of senior school studies. The latter has significant implications for resourcing as well as structure and delivery. There is a further issue of the relationship to and equivalence of vocational certificates with senior school certificates in each state.

The Information Technology industry accepts that students in senior school could achieve Certificate 3 level, while there are a number of other industries which will not entertain any level beyond Certificate 1.

The Work Place learning component required by many VET Certificates continues to be an inhibitor in the take-up of School-based Apprenticeships and other VET studies to certificate completion level. At present only about 25% of students undertaking VET studies at senior school level are engaging in Work Place Learning. There are several factors contributing to this:

- Access to some industry types is extremely difficult. Some industries will not allow school based young people onto their sites
- Conventional school structures and timetables may inhibit opportunities for work-place learning without the need to ‘make up’ for time missed in other classes.

A number of options presently exist for the delivery of VET in schools. VET modules may be embedded in existing subjects, schools may offer ‘stand-alone’ VET studies, having developed a relationship with a training provider to deliver the course on behalf of the school, or VET may be incorporated into particular subjects developed by Boards of Studies for accreditation as part of senior school certificates. Schools will make decisions about these options based largely on available resources. Apart from funding received from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and some access to smaller targeted grants from the Enterprise and Vocational Education foundation (ECEP), Catholic schools receive very limited support for VET programs. The present costs associated with offering VET courses are such that schools are faced with difficult curriculum resource decisions. There is little doubt that, were ANTA funds discontinued in the near future, there would be a considerable scaling back of VET programs available to students in Catholic schools in South Australia.

The most common form of delivery of programs within Catholic Education SA has been through auspicing agreements with other providers, particularly TAFE Institutes. Both government and non-government school sectors were involved in the development of a self-assessment instrument in conjunction with TAFE SA which has informed the protocols surrounding the auspicing agreements. These auspicing arrangements are, we believe, unique to South Australia and have resulted in schools having to accept a high level of quality assurance from the outset, which, in turn, has resulted in acceptance by industry. Teacher training has been an integral part of this quality assurance.

Industry specific training has placed a great impost on schools, e.g. Hospitality is currently \$750 per person, and schools then have to fund replacement teachers during the training period. There are associated issues of access for teachers in country schools so the uptake is much smaller. A further key issue facing professional development and training in the VET area is the reality that industry developed training packages are constantly changing with new and different competencies requiring assessment and variation in core and elective components of courses. The nature of many industries today is such that this will continue to be the case.

Catholic Education SA is committed to both the above options. In addition we recognise the importance of vocational learning throughout the compulsory years of schooling. The South Australian Curriculum and Accountability Framework (SACSA) has identified vocational learning as an important cross-curricula component in all years of schooling.

The impact on school resources will continue to be a major issue. A key question is the purpose of vocational education. If its purpose is to enhance existing learning and can be embedded in existing subjects the resource impact is considerably lessened. If it is to be offered in schools as industry specific, 'stand alone' subjects then those subjects will be capital intensive and directly compete with other areas of the curriculum for the limited resources available. Sustainability post ANTA funding then becomes a very real problem.

2. *The difference between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs.*

Where schools have delivered VET under auspicing agreements with other providers there has been a high level of quality assurance and resultant qualifications have been, generally, well accepted by industry. In these arrangements there has been agreement on what is delivered at the school, by the RTO and on the job. In these situations there have been attempts by schools to address the timetabling difficulties referred to above.

While industry acceptance of school-based programs has been, on the whole, encouraging, there are still enormous variations. Students in South Australia undertaking VET studies in the Building and Construction industry are limited to Certificate 1 largely due to the inability of schools to gain work-place training in this area. There is the anomaly that a sixteen year old apprentice can gain access to a building site, but a sixteen year old VET in school student cannot. Students are required to demonstrate competencies in an adult working environment, yet cannot gain access to this environment.

There are also issues regarding national consistency in industry requirements for certificate completion. It would be an inequity to use certificate completion as criteria for funding when, within the same industry, a similar course may vary from state to state in the number of hours required for completion. This is a state industry based decision, quite beyond the influence of schools. There needs to be national consistency in completion requirements and we recommend that the committee seeks to identify where this responsibility for determining national consistency should lie.

3. *Vocational education in new and emerging industries*

The total number of students in individual schools accessing vocational courses is still comparatively small compared with traditional subject areas. It is difficult for schools to provide access to new and specialised industries where only one or two students might be interested. Some attempts have been made to combine groups of students from more than one school to make courses economically viable, but this has scheduling implications which may be difficult to coordinate.

Information Technology is popular and more easily provided by schools. However, other more specialised areas such as aquaculture and aviation, for example, present difficulties for work-place opportunities as well as high cost. Geographical location is another issue with such industries.

A further concern is the future of Industry Training Advisory Boards. Some have ceased to exist and there are concerns that, without the ITABs there will be no structure in place which can provide an informed and representative link with industry to ensure that VET in school programs remain reliable and credible.

4. *The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students*

There are a number of issues surrounding vocational education for indigenous students:

- a. Identification of aboriginality and associated difficulties of setting a case-management approach in place
- b. Retention from middle to senior years in secondary schools. There is a need to engage these young people in vocational learning in years 9 and 10
- c. Small numbers throughout the Catholic sector mean students are scattered across many schools in different areas
- d. Costs of case-management and individual planning is an issue
- e. Many students need a bridging or GAP program before undertaking specific VET courses. There is a problem here with acceptance within the ANTA funding guidelines that are targeting industry specific vocational education.

There is also some confusion regarding various sources of funding which might be available to support indigenous students.

Conclusion

Catholic Education SA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry and is happy to elaborate on any aspect of the above submission

Senior Education Advisors responsible for vocational education and training within Catholic Education SA are available to meet with the Committee to provide further information to the committee if required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allan Dooley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail.

ALLAN DOOLEY
DIRECTOR
3 October 2002