



**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
FARMERS FEDERATION**

Submission to

**The House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Training**

Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

October 2002

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/ves/index.htm>

Terms of Reference

The House Committee on Education and Training is to inquire into the place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

- 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 differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs;
- vocational education in new and emerging industries; and
- the accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.



PREFACE

The **South Australian Farmers' Federation** is the State's principal farmer organisation with a proud history of representation and support for farmers dating back more than 100 years.

We represent industries which have helped to build South Australia, and will continue to play a key role in its future.

Agriculture and Horticulture contribute more than \$4.0 billion annually to Gross State Production and account for around 55% of the State's export revenue. The Centre for International Economics has forecast that over the next decade these industries have the potential to contribute an additional \$1.0 billion to the State economy.

To ensure the sustainability of these industries the Federation sees the need to support the education and training of young people in agriculture. The fact that the average age of SA farmers is close to 60 indicates the need to provide encouragement and support to young people keen to enter these areas.

The South Australian Farmers' Federation supports vocational education in all areas of agriculture and is currently taking an active role with the support of a project officer, funded by ECEF, promoting structured work placements in Viticulture and Horticulture.

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Key points of our submission

The SA Farmers' Federation recognises

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- ☺ that Vocational Education offers students a valuable insight into the workplace and training opportunities to assist in the transition from school to industry
- ☺ the **value to rural industries** of a young workforce with developing skills and workplace experience. Industry is often sceptical of school based training without industry work placements.
- ☺ the importance of giving students options to remain or be attracted back into their **local community** thereby helping to keep rural towns buoyant.
- ☺ the need to attract metropolitan students into rural careers and out into rural areas.
- ☺ the most **significant barrier** to uptake of structured work placements, training and traineeships in the rural industries is the **transport** to the workplace or Training Organisation.
- ☺ there is a lack of appropriately trained teachers or lack of up to date technology.
- ☺ career teachers and parents often have **poor perceptions** associated with working in the **rural industry** (status, money earning capacity, dirty work etc) and are unable to provide accurate information about a particular industry. **Parents are often poorly informed** of the opportunities for Vet and School based traineeships and the benefits to students of **all** abilities.
- ☺ the **cost** of training is often **prohibitive**. Many keen students are missing out on accessing courses because of the expense. (ie Viticulture certificate 1 is available on line at a cost of \$ 2.40 per nominal hour x 260 hours (viti 1) = \$ 676 + 4 visits for QA @ \$ 300 per visit = \$ 1,200. This is without assessment) however by accessing the course on line students can overcome some of the transport difficulties and it is also beneficial to the school for timetabling.
- ☺ training organisations such as TAFE offer little flexibility, making school timetabling difficult
- ☺ there seems to be inadequate time for school based Vet Coordinators to run programs or support a variety of programs. These staff members often have teaching loads as well.
- ☺ the **importance of the regional cluster coordinators** to oversee, promote and assist schools in developing successful Vet programs. They are also vital in promoting sharing of resources and information between schools and regions.

The South Australian Farmers' Federation supports Vocational Education in schools and is keen to ensure it meets the skill needs of rural industries in the 21st Century. The rural industries offer many excellent vocational pathways for students in a vast range

of skills-from farming practises to business, engineering, food processing, hospitality, tourism and many more. Technological advances mean that the industries require more skilled workers.

The Rural industry will depend on the younger generation of skilled workers to maintain high productivity and profitability with emphasis on natural resource management and environmental sustainability. The current drought situation only emphasises the need for large numbers of skilled people to aid the recovery and rebuilding of the areas most affected.

Feedback from a number of regions of SA with reference to the growth, development and effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options has stressed the value of vocational education in the rural industries. The future of rural industry and many rural communities lies in the recruitment of young people into rural careers. These students need to have the opportunity to obtain skills and qualifications locally rather than have to move out of the area to gain training. The Eyre Peninsula region has been particularly successful in achieving some change in this sphere.

There is a good range of programs available although access is not always easy and cost can be prohibitive. Rural industries, in particular the viticulture and horticulture industries have recognised skill shortages. Vocational education is helping to address this problem and workplace employers are beginning to recognise the benefits in giving students opportunities through structured work placements or school based traineeships.

Many of the rural industries offer seasonal work and it can be beneficial for the student to attend for a block work placement. This can be particularly beneficial to the student and school if this is completed over the holiday periods. This can reduce the amount of other work missed out on by the student and reduce the impact on other programs. This also enables students to travel to rural areas to obtain work in their area of interest. Accommodation incentives could be available to the employer. Work placements over the summer break should be made possible for students in the rural industries

Students in the outer metropolitan suburbs of Adelaide are within 30 minutes drive of some of the most productive horticulture and Viticulture areas in the state. A large number of these schools offer some horticulture and viticulture within the school but few students gain experience through work placements because of the transport issue. Many of these schools are in lower socio-economic areas and parents are not able to help. The students are not old enough to drive themselves if a car was available. Opportunities to experience being in a workplace, recognising the diversity of prospects in these industries and to test out a career choice are lost, as well as the accreditation they could receive. Funding needs to be available to subsidise transport

Working with schools to adopt the changes necessary to incorporate Vet and Structured Work Placements has indicated that a number of schools are wary of change. Some schools fear losing their students. This appears to reflect the confusion of the programs. Some schools pride themselves in their enterprise programs but fail to expand these programs to realise the benefits of vocational accreditation for students. Many schools do not educate their parents about vocational education and the opportunities of school based traineeships and therefore students do not receive encouragement from home.

There must be a **clear transition** from the vocational pathways into tertiary studies for able students who may not have achieved a Tertiary entrance score in their final year of school but go on to complete the higher certificate levels. These vocationally trained students have applied industry knowledge and have a greater employability than a student who has followed the academic pathway.

Conclusion

The SA Farmers' Federation supports Vocational Education in schools. The benefits in providing students with a broad range of choices and resultant skills should become evident within the industry. Opportunities exist for young people to explore the career possibilities in Agriculture and Production Horticulture providing training is accessible.

It is essential that the government support schools to implement these programs and encourage industry to continue to expand the opportunities for young Australians. The rural industries must be supported and students introduced and encouraged to consider a career in Agriculture.

The vocational pathway must continue to be developed as an alternative route towards tertiary studies developing young qualified and applied workers

The barriers to uptake, such as transport, training costs, accommodation and the lack of parent understanding of vocational training opportunities, must be addressed.

Vocational Education in Schools should be an effective method of providing students interested in a career in an agricultural field, some insight and experience in the industry. It is essential that school based training is up to date and relevant.