



# CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION NEW SOUTH WALES

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Ms Sharon Bird  
Chair  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT



22 December 2008

Dear Ms Bird

## **Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions**

I write on behalf of the NSW Catholic School sector in response to the Standing Committee's review of the impact of combined study and work on the success of youth transitions and Year 12 attainment. The NSW Catholic school sector welcomes further research into this important topic. Unlike a number of other states, the NSW government has not funded a process to track the post-school destinations and transitions to work of its year 12 students. CEC, NSW would strongly support the introduction of an annual cross-sectoral student destination survey for NSW, which should include questions which relate to the effect of student work on post-school outcomes. In the absence of original data, we will point the inquiry to useful published material from other sources as well as observations from Catholic dioceses and schools, against the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the inquiry.

### **TOR 1: Providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;**

As a general rule, NSW Catholic schools do not recognise, acknowledge and build on the fact that, from the middle years of schooling, many students are in part-time employment. Students beginning work in Year 9 may be in their fourth year of employment by Year 12, holding senior supervisory positions in industry, even if these are part-time. They may have skills in front-line management; they may need school support in managing competing pressures for their time and energy.

Helping students to identify and develop employability skills across the curriculum will assist students to see the relationship between their school studies and part-time work. Students often do not recognise the skills they have acquired through their work and the explicit teaching of employability skills can assist in their development. Will this inquiry link to the National Curriculum Board in relation to the 'key capacities' being investigated?

Integration within existing courses and school programs should be taken further. National Training Packages are currently addressing the need for recognition and accreditation of generic employability skills through the issuance of certificates related to each qualification achieved. A similar model might be extended to other non-VET subjects across the curriculum. Relevant certificates could be issued for part-time work.

NSW BOS Industry Curriculum Frameworks (based on VET training packages) include a mapping of embedded employability skills, which are not explicitly assessed or reported. However, some students who undertake VET courses (e.g. in Parramatta diocesan schools) are explicitly assessed against the employability skills; these reports are valuable tools, particularly for employment applications. The proposed Job Ready Certificate could build on these experiences.

The NSW Board of Studies course Industry Based Learning provides a vehicle for students engaged in school-based apprenticeships/ traineeships to count their work time (as well as their vocational

education) towards their HSC – a time-based credential. There is a view that this course should be made available to students working in part-time jobs or undertaking substantial work placements.

NSW DET has gained funding through COAG to develop resources for use in all school sectors to facilitate assessment based on recognition of student's experiences in retail and hospitality workplaces - whether in voluntary work placement or in paid work.

**TOR 2: Identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;**

In NSW, the 'breadth of study' requirements of the HSC are a major factor in limiting student options and compelling students to undertake full-time school programs of study. The HSC makes a continuous and intense demand for school-based assessment across a two year period. Students juggling demands to travel for work, to undertake stock takes, to respond to customer demand for project delivery, must also keep up with a gruelling HSC assessment schedule. This makes it difficult for any but the most committed and organised student – and the most flexible employer – to engage with a school-based apprenticeship, for example. How many of our top achieving students hold down a part-time job?

It is true that the BOS 'new HSC' introduced the concept of 'HSC pathways' where students could undertake HSC subjects over a period up to five years. Currently 6% of HSC candidates undertake their HSC studies across three years of schooling rather than the traditional two years. While these HSC pathways enable part-time school attendance for student workers, in fact they have not been widely used for Year 13/14 school engagement. Rather, this pathway is often used by high achieving students who accumulate their HSC courses by sitting for one or more HSC examinations in Year 10 or 11. A study of the use of the HSC Pathway option in NSW would be valuable, including the barriers to use of this curriculum option to promote flexible work and study options.

The provision of 'more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate' depends to a large degree on the ability of schools to be more flexible in their structures e.g. in timetabling. Four-day school weeks for senior students, for example, can provide the flexibility needed for students to more successfully combine work and study.

Australian Technical Colleges (for example, Port Macquarie ATC, a Catholic systemic school) and the proposed Trade Training Centres provide examples of flexible timetabling and flexible course delivery incorporating the use of information and communication technologies. Further development of vehicles for recognition in senior certificates of time spent and skills acquired in part-time work is needed. The BOS Industry Based Learning course is a curriculum-based vehicle for recognition. The Trade Training Centre Program provides an opportunity to better support students who transfer out of their Senior Certificate to complete their VET program within the school as a work-study package. It might also provide support to students to re-enter and re-engage with school and work after a period of disengagement. The DSF Foundation for Young Australians 2008 publications *How Young People are Faring '08* and *It's Crunch Time: Raising youth engagement and attainment* are useful references in relation to the challenges of student engagement.

The recent journal *Vocal Volume 7 2008-2009* includes relevant articles on overseas practice, including *The Vocational Charter School Model: A New Initiative in School Reform* (pgs 32-35).

**TOR 3: support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;**

The role of the professional Career Guidance Officers in assisting students in life-long learning may not be fully understood or appreciated by school staff. Past staffing practices for careers positions has led to some cynicism about the efficacy of the role. A national support system for life-long engagement in careers support services is needed; a system that extends beyond school transition and is fully realised once engagement with the workplace is underway. Career support must include individual

career planning. An electronic tool has been developed for the MyFuture website but not released; it must be revived, released and implemented in school and community settings.

The benefit of individual career transition planning for all students should be investigated. Existing examples, such as that shared by the Canterbury Bankstown Careers Connection Local Community Partnership, could be examined to investigate how they might be implemented more broadly.

[http://www.careerconnections.net.au/index.php?content=careertrans&subcontent=ct\\_plans](http://www.careerconnections.net.au/index.php?content=careertrans&subcontent=ct_plans)

*Vocol* Volume 7 also includes an article by Carmel Ross. NSW Catholic schools admired Ross's pastoral care approach in a paper, *Education for Life? Education for Work? Education for Wholeness...* presented at the VETnetwork Conference2006; Cairns. Ross says: "Given the busy-ness of life today and the complexity of the society and world we live in, young people will be most secure and well-mentored when there are a few if not several adults who pay attention to them individually and guide them through the not always easy task of growing up into happy and responsible adults" Page12–PowerPoint notes are at [http://www.vetnetwork.org.au/dbase\\_upl/conference2006\\_ross.pdf](http://www.vetnetwork.org.au/dbase_upl/conference2006_ross.pdf).

Recent research by Margaret Vickers, University of Western Sydney, on “Student’s management of workplace relations” (discussed at the AVETRA OctoberVET forum) indicates that young people in part-time work can experience a range of physical and emotional difficulties at work that are not understood by staff in schools. Difficulties such as arguments with inexperienced work supervisors, tiredness from work or long hours and the demands of school work itself can impact on a student’s participation at school. Strategies to support students in this area should include investigation of:

- Formal and informal counselling programs at school
- Strategies to assist employers in providing safe and supportive work environments for young people

Research by Kitty te Riele, University of Technology Sydney, *Re-Engaging marginalised young people* (AVETRA OctoberVET forum) indicates a need to reform school structures to engage students, increase retention rates and the relevance of schooling. Dr te Riele recommends further investigation of the following:

- Provision of engaging, interesting, challenging and relevant curriculum
- Provision of variety and individualised learning – the “standard script” of the classroom routine does not suit all students.
- Provision of school structures that enable students to return to education after a time in the workplace. For many students, school completion is not linear.

#### **TOR 4: the potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity)**

The move from school to work is becoming a period of transition rather than a point in time. Margaret Vickers research describes this ‘third settlement’ which asks students to juggle school, work and life. This new paradigm requires seamless transition structures that support students post-school.

Vickers’ paper, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work (LSAY Research Report No 30)* February 2003 found that work experience, combined with education, helps young people get jobs; however, work tends to have a negative effect on achievement and participation.

Under the emerging economic climate, some young people may find it more difficult to gain part-time employment, especially in lower SES areas. The recent DSF paper *Keeping Skills during Hard Times* needs to be further developed to consider the effect of the financial downturn on school students and school leavers. The inquiry might consider:

- The potential impact of increased financial hardship on school retention
- The potential decrease of job availability for School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships as well as other part-time work
- Equity issues in relation to access to work and training for school students, likely to be more marked when times are tough. There are fewer job and transport opportunities in low SES

areas, but greater need for students to contribute to the family finances, to provide unpaid support in the home or family businesses.

- Other relevant research includes
  - Transition Pathways from School to Work or Further Study Report to COAG form MCEETYA November 2006
  - VET Pathways taken by School Leavers (LSAY Research Report No 52) September 2008 David D Curtis, and a number of other LSAY Research Reports.

**TOR 5: the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).**

The number of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in NSW Catholic schools remains low, with substantial engagement in trade-based courses limited mainly to schools which have received additional funding and resources e.g. as Australian Technical Colleges, and lately Trade Training Centres, and which have developed flexible structures and strong industry relationships. With the NSW HSC breadth of study requirements demanding that industry fit with schools, school-based training arrangements remain a choice only for the few in NSW. Many of the students who might most benefit from school-based part-time apprenticeships are unable to access them.

John Polesel of the Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning (CPELL), University of Melbourne challenged educators with the article: *Democratising the curriculum or training the children of the poor: school-based vocational training in Australia*, published in the Journal of Education Policy, Volume 23, Issue 6 November 2008. 'In reviewing the current Australian evidence, it argues that if the central debate is one between the competing demands of achieving equity (which is associated with comprehensive provision) and that of achieving quality VET (which is associated with tracked provision) then, sadly, Australia fails to deliver effectively on either of these aims.' Polesel is critical of the intensity and structure of VET in schools, not in the quality of what occurs there.

VET courses provide national recognition and clear articulation into post-school training. Polesel's research is based on Victorian data. Further research in NSW is needed to ascertain the post-school destinations of students to provide information on the effectiveness of their transition.

Professor Richard Teese (also of CPELL), speaking to a 2008 workshop held by the NSW Catholic Secondary School Association, titled his presentation 'VET works'. He noted that VET responds to a legitimate student perspective on learning, via collaborative, applied, practical, problem-based learning. However, Teese makes the point that VET requires some key factors for success: It must be mainstreamed in schools, with

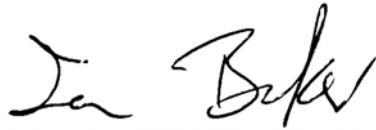
- Broad industry focus for student programs
- Good range of VET courses
- Early access (Years 9/10)
- Inclusiveness (open to all students)
- On-campus provision
- Internal (staff) resources
- Close links with other RTOs
- Training of staff
- Cluster participation
- Good industry links
- Structured work placements
- Zero costs to students
- Minimal additional costs to school.

Cost and related funding issues are critical as families and schools are affected by the financial downturn. Appropriate resourcing for schools is needed to support implementation of any new VET

structures or programs. Consequently, the financial implications for both families and schools of choices related to learning and earning must be considered by the inquiry.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to contribute to the work of the inquiry via this submission. We would be happy to contribute further to the work of the inquiry through attendance at a roundtable hearing. Please contact me if you would like to discuss these issues further by phoning me on 02 92871 575 or by email to [ian.baker@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au](mailto:ian.baker@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au).

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ian Baker  
*Acting Executive Director*