

Submission From the Western Australian Curriculum Council Secretariat to House of Representatives Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in Schools

The Curriculum Council is a statutory authority responsible for development of a curriculum framework for schooling, accreditation of post-compulsory courses, comparability of assessment and certification of student achievement in those courses. It is representative of all stakeholders in post-compulsory education (school sector/systems, universities, training, industry, community, parents and teachers).

Under the National Agreement for VET in Schools the Council is responsible for reporting all post-compulsory school student achievement in VET and counting it towards the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). In 2002 the Council has also assumed responsibility, through direction of the Ministers for Training and for Education, for:

- identifying training/competencies appropriate for delivery as part of a school program
- providing advice to schools on resource requirements for delivery of competencies
- quality assurance arrangements for schools that gain Registered Training Provider status (effectively RTO status through the Council's special arrangements)
- reporting of students' VET achievement
- providing annual reports to both Ministers

These new responsibilities reflect the state government's commitment to reform of post-compulsory curriculum. The report of the Curriculum Council's post-compulsory education review, *Our Youth Our Future*, provides the blueprint for development of new courses of study that are accessible to all students and provide learning pathways that lead to work, further education and training. (A copy of this report is available on request or through the Council's website.)

This submission has been prepared by the Curriculum Council Secretariat. It has been drawn from the Council's work in the above areas and is representative of the views expressed in the Curriculum Council's 2001/02 report to Ministers. (A copy of this report is available on request or through the Council's website.) Members of the secretariat would be keen to participate in a public hearing, if required by the Committee.

The issues identified in this submission are common across Australia and indicate that there is an urgent need for action.

Range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools

The Council supports the concept of a general education with vocational focus. This is sometimes at odds with the training sector where the emphasis is on turning out students who are job-ready. VET in schools has contributed significantly to:

- engaging students who may otherwise not have returned to post-compulsory schooling;
- motivating students through national recognition of their achievement;

- enabling student achievement of nationally agreed career education outcomes;
- promoting pathways from school into further VET;
- fostering development of generic competencies and employability skills critical to career and transition planning;
- transforming pedagogy by integrating a practical, workplace orientation in student learning programs; and
- transforming school environments through promotion of linkages with the local community, industry and workplaces.

In Western Australia, VET in Schools encompasses programs that range from students achieving one generic competency, through those completing a VET Certificate, to those participating in a school-based traineeship.

Predominantly School Delivered

Delivery strategies include discrete training programs (stand-alone VET) including workplace learning and integrated general/vocational programs.

Based on 2001 Western Australian post-compulsory student completion data 9 684 students in 157 schools across all school sector/systems achieved at least one module/competency. Of these:

- seventy percent of the students involved had access through school partnerships with RTOs (including 20% in outsourcing partnerships, where the RTO was responsible for all delivery and assessment, and 50% in quality assuring partnerships, where the school was responsible for assessment and delivery and the RTO responsible for quality assurance);
- the remainder of students (30%) were in schools that had gained RTO status through the Training Accreditation Council (TAC).
- overall, 80% of students had access to nationally recognised VET through programs delivered and assessed by schools (i.e. 50% in partnerships and 30% with RTO status).

Schools opt to deliver VET, in preference to outsourced delivery, chiefly because of cost considerations, logistics and timetabling flexibility. This is particularly important in schools outside the Perth metropolitan area.

The Council is concerned that some RTOs (including TAFE Colleges) continue to offer outdated VET to schools. This means that students are completing TAFE subjects or modules when Training Packages covering the same areas have been endorsed for implementation in the state.

Curriculum Coherence

One of the roles of the Curriculum Council is to negotiate competencies that are appropriate for delivery by Registered Training Provider schools as part of a broad general education. This strategy is designed to promote the provision of coherent programs, integrating general and vocational outcomes and leading to complete VET qualifications. These competencies/qualifications are negotiated through a process involving Industry Training Council and TAFE College Network representatives. Competencies providing access to 30 Certificate II and/or Certificate I qualifications from 14 industry areas were negotiated for 23 Training Provider schools in 2002. Similarly, competencies providing access for students in Training Provider schools to 61 Certificate II and/or Certificate I qualifications from 30 industry areas have been negotiated for 2003.

This strategy provides the basis for the development of new post-compulsory courses of study that provide access for all students to the underpinning knowledge and skills identified in

Training Packages. In addition, if schools meet AQTF requirements, these courses may also provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate competency to industry standards. In this way students may continue to keep open their options for future learning pathways and continue enrolment in the structured and supported learning environment facilitated by the school. (The WA Department of Education reports that this promotes the completion of schooling and VET programs, contributes to upskilling of students and part-time/full-time employment opportunities.) This strategy is also inclusive of those students opting to leave the school environment to continue learning in training organisations.

This approach is not supported by the current short shelf-life of Training Packages. The importance of being responsive to the dynamic needs of industry is acknowledged. However, after an initial settling in period it must be possible to achieve an adaptive approach that is responsive to changing conditions and at the same time provides a degree of continuity. Frequent changes to Training Packages must surely impact on the credibility and portability of qualifications.

Importance of Independent Quality Assurance

The Curriculum Council is responsible for quality assuring assessment of student achievement that is counted towards the WACE. It is concerned that it does not currently quality assure assessment of student achievement in partnerships.

There are issues related to the degree of quality assurance of student outcomes that is provided through partnerships. Significant variation in the nature of quality assurance provided by RTO s, is reported by schools (even within one school that has partnerships with several different RTOs).

The Western Australian experience has highlighted the importance of the independence of bodies responsible for quality assurance. This facilitates the perception and reality of neutrality in accreditation and recognition functions.

Teacher Training

In its quality assurance role Council has negotiated human resource requirements based on information provided in Training Packages. Training Provider schools are required to demonstrate how teachers meet the standards. Over the last few years many Western Australian teachers have achieved workplace assessor qualifications. Notwithstanding this significant achievement it is recognized that the Teacher in Industry Placements Program is an important strategy for teachers to demonstrate current competency and understanding of industry requirements.

Notional Hours

There needs to be national consistency in the negotiation of notional hours for the achievement of competency. The Curriculum Council is aware that there are wide variations between states. As it is likely that the notional hours will play a role in national reporting for VET in Schools national consistency is essential.

Currently the Curriculum Council bases its certification on the notional hours advised by the Department of Training. Some of the notional hours designated to competencies must be questioned. For example, teachers working on the integration of competencies from the *Film, TV, Radio and Multimedia Industry Training Package* with a new Media course of study have questioned the allocation of notional hours. The allocation of 50 hours for the competency *Set up and operate a basic video camera* (CUFCAM01A), for example, is seen as totally unrealistic as students typically demonstrate this skill in a much shorter period of time.

Resourcing Issues

The Curriculum Council is aware that schools report a higher per student cost for VET compared with general education programs.

Concerns have been expressed by Department of Training representatives that allowing schools to deliver VET duplicates publicly funded infrastructure. This seems contradictory as the concern does not apply to schools delivering VET in partnership with RTOs. Schools, on the other hand, argue that delivering VET, particularly at lower levels of certificate, enables more effective utilization of their publicly funded infrastructure.

In relation to Council's areas of statutory responsibility the resource implications of quality assurance have not been given appropriate consideration through Commonwealth funding in the past. There is little value for students in striving to achieve if it is perceived that there is no quality in that achievement. Sufficient resources need to be provided to schools and the Council in order to promote quality assurance. To date the Curriculum Council has received no Commonwealth funding for its quality assurance functions related to VET in Schools. This is of major concern.

The Curriculum Council, like all other Boards of Studies has undertaken to include VET achievement in the general education certificate. This has involved significant increase of workload in data gathering and quality control. The implications for data base development and timeline pressures in the production of certificates to meet community expectations have been much greater than anyone ever envisaged. There are significant resource implications in all of this, for Boards as well as schools. The Curriculum Council has not received any resources to assist in taking on this new responsibility and that is a major shortcoming. This is unsustainable given the growth of VET in schools and the increasing demand to certify achievement of students in years 9 and 10.

The Curriculum Council accepts that it is in the best position to gather the VET in Schools data required for national reporting against the key performance measures. It is happy to take on this responsibility but only if sufficient resources are provided to:

- liaise with school sector/system and training sector representatives to negotiate protocols;
- develop the data base so that it is AVETMISS compliant;
- develop data formats for school reporting;
- enter the data;
- ensure that the data is accurate;
- generate the national reports; and
- solve the problems generated during the process.

Differences between school-based and other VET programs, resulting qualifications and the pattern of industry acceptance

The major difference between school-based and other vocational education programs is that the former are delivered in the context of a broad, general education. The advantage of this approach is to give a more practical orientation to the learning program and at the same time develop understandings of the world of work and the role of VET. Development of young peoples' awareness of industry and work opportunities must happen if we are to address skill shortages that already exist or are predicted in specific industry areas.

VET in Schools programs also have the advantage of being able to address shortcomings in generic skills that are identified by researchers as the platform for lifelong learning. *“By working together with schools, perhaps we could better contextualise general literacy and numeracy skills whilst, at the same time, creating more positive images of hospitality as a whole.”* (Iain McDougall, General Manager, Hospitality Group Training, WA)

Negative Perceptions

The Curriculum Council is very aware that sections of industry hold a generalised negative perception of the quality of VET competencies achieved by students through school delivery of Certificate II programs. This is based on the view that although students may be ‘work ready’ this does not mean that they are ‘work competent’. It is unclear whether this includes schools in partnerships delivering and assessing competencies that are quality assured by RTOs (50%) or only refers to schools that have gained RTO status (30%). A report on this issue prepared for the National Training Quality Council (2002, pp 5-7) concluded:

“The project did not find any substantial evidence to support these concerns, at this stage.”

Notwithstanding this, strategies are required to address this industry perception.

Negative perceptions about the quality of VET in Schools are also expressed by TAFE lecturers and private providers. There is anecdotal evidence reported by schools that their students claim that national competencies achieved in the school environment are not being recognised in some TAFE Colleges. This has serious implications for the integrity of the National Training Framework, particularly related to the mutual recognition principle that underpins the framework.

A number of national and state reviews have identified concerns about training that is wholly institutional and training that is wholly in the workplace. Achieving an appropriate balance between off-the-job and on-the-job training may be the most effective way of addressing industry concerns. Many RTO schools combined Structured Workplace Learning and off-the-job competency-based training during 2001. However, this link needs to be formalised and the Council plans to explore the feasibility of doing so.

Views expressed by school sector/system representatives indicate that they have a high level of confidence in the new quality assurance processes established in 2002 through the Curriculum Council. They have also indicated that feedback provided by industry representatives involved with school VET programs indicates growing confidence in the quality of delivery and assessment. The traditional schools focus on achieving comparability of outcomes, in addition to quality of inputs and processes, is also seen by many as adding value to VET quality assurance processes.

The *2000/01 Integrated Monitoring Report* published by the WA Department of Training and the Training Accreditation Council highlights problems with inappropriate assessment strategies observed in some schools that had embedded these competencies in general education subjects. It is important to note that the ‘embedding’ strategy was developed in the mid-1990s, in collaboration with the Department of Training and industry representatives, for the delivery of National Training Modules in appropriate Curriculum Council general education subjects.

Issues associated with moving from a curriculum-based to a competency-based approach and the difficulties being experienced by all training providers, were also identified in the Western Australian Review of the training sector (McRae Report). It is imperative that future integration of competencies with general education must ensure that competencies are developed and

demonstrated in their own right. The Curriculum Council is working with schools to address this issue.

It is important to note that the Department of Training has confirmed that the compliance issues identified through the above monitoring report have now been addressed and that all schools have demonstrated compliance with the national standards. This means that all schools with training provider status have demonstrated through separate validation and monitoring audits that they meet national standards.

Implications for a Standards-based Approach

Council is aware of the global trend to using standards frameworks as the basis of quality assurance. This approach has the potential to promote:

- national recognition;
- skill development to industry standards;
- the move from normative to criterion based assessment;
- greater flexibility for a range of organisations to deliver VET;
- increased range of delivery strategies that may be used to meet the same standard;
- greater organizational focus on continuous improvement and risk management strategies;
- sharper focus on outcomes and consequent move away from a time-served notion of VET; and
- increased capacity to adapt to rapid change in industry.

Implicit in the Australian Qualifications Framework is a new concept of qualifications based on learning pathways and recognition of achievement against the standard. This represents a significant shift from the concept of qualifications as 'gatekeepers' based on selection. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear people referring to time-based and delivery-based criteria for judging VET in Schools. (The very title implies that this is not real VET.) There is currently no mechanism in the VET for comparing assessor judgements about competencies.

To stereotype delivery as 'lacking in quality' in one type of organisation, across the nation, strikes at the heart of the National Training Framework and the standards-based approach that underpins it. Having said that it makes sense that a young person aspiring to achieve Certificate III through an apprenticeship, particularly in the traditional trades areas, will have had greater exposure to industry requirements than one in a program based on school and workplace delivery. Does this imply that the competency standards need to be rewritten in order to more effectively articulate these industry requirements?

It is also reasonable to expect that young adults may develop greater breadth and depth of performance as they mature and gain more diverse workplace experience. How does a competency-based approach take account of such developmental considerations?

Vocational education and training in new and emerging industries

In some respects there may be less institutional barriers to the implementation of VET in Schools programs in new and emerging industries, particularly those in which young people have considerable exposure. However, policies and mindsets that are grounded in the traditional industries still impact in these new industries. For example, policies impacting employer

incentives for school-based traineeships in industries such as Information Technology require urgent review.

The Joint Ministerial Policy in WA has identified IT and Multi-media as two new industries that some schools may find it feasible to deliver at Certificate III level. It is unfortunate that significant barriers have been encountered in testing feasibility. IT Industry advice is that employment opportunities in the industry are so dynamic that the best approach is to emphasise generic IT skills for which Certificate III through school delivery is ideally placed. It has also been acknowledged that IT credentials have broad application beyond the IT industry.

Some schools are already involved in delivering Certificate III through quality assured partnership arrangements.

The view of the Curriculum Council Secretariat is that if schools can demonstrate they meet Training Package and AQTF requirements they should be able to seek to maximize the attainments of students and the systemic recognition of that attainment.

Accessibility and effectiveness of VET for indigenous students

Feedback from schools is that VET is particularly beneficial for indigenous students because of the more practical orientation of the pedagogy. There are significant issues however, for schools in the more remote parts of Western Australia.

It is not possible for these schools to outsource delivery to an RTO. Quality assured partnerships with RTOs are also problematic. The Department of Education has indicated that it wishes to pursue a strategy of increasing access of remote schools through District Offices that have gained RTO status (as occurs in New South Wales). Access to workplace training is also highly problematic in remote communities.

Research on the training needs of indigenous communities completed for the WA Aboriginal Education and Training Council has highlighted the need for more cross-industry qualifications in remote communities. There also might need to be a diversification of approach so that it is not based solely on Training Packages. For example, the development of community-based programs with appropriate credit transfer, may best meet the needs and realities of students in remote communities whilst articulating with arrangements for national recognition.

Conclusion

The Curriculum Council strongly supports VET in Schools. It is keen to play an important role within the parameters of the National Training Framework and state VET legislation to negotiate curriculum, assessment, quality assurance, certification and reporting issues. However, there must be resourcing to enable these roles to be carried out effectively. If this happens the Curriculum Council believes that it has the potential to negotiate a post-compulsory education system that engages the whole cohort of students and in so doing, contributes to the social and economic development of individuals and communities.

