



12th Dec 2008

To: The Secretary, House Standing Committee on Education and Training
Re: Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions
Via Email:

From: Ian Palmer

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this enquiry.

Due to the time of year I am unable to consult effectively with my Committee or the network of Local Community Partnerships around Australia, so I have decided to lodge this submission as a private citizen. I would be happy to elaborate on any point should the committee seek it.

- **providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;**

Employers are not positioned to assess Employability Skills

Employability skills are vitally important, but not easy to assess in a consistent and reliable manner that would provide a credible, nationally recognised qualification.

Local Community Partnerships facilitate Structured Workplace Learning for senior school students undertaking Vocational Education and Training. Employability skills are central to these training packages and everything LCPs do to support them. However attempts to have employers consistently and objectively comment on a student's employability skills have met with patchy success to date.

In many cases the employer does not have the time, training and assessment skills, or inclination to do much more than a simple tick and flick check list. Over the past decade I have witnessed many well intentioned attempts to improve this without much success.

Once a young worker has established a working relationship with the employer, the supervisors often struggle to offer a detached, objective view of the student's skills due to the fear of de-motivating the "worker". Perhaps this is just human nature, but either way it makes it very hard to get effective feedback from employers who seem to default to brief glib statements, or politely neutral statements. It's a brave employer indeed who offers constructive feedback that risks hurting a students feelings or creating public relations problem for the business.

These real world factors must be taken into account when designing any system or it will fail.

Accelerate the updating of training packages to do a better job of assessing Employability Skills

The new Hospitality Training package will be very interesting to witness as it attempts a far more prescriptive assessment regime, including mandating the workplace setting, equipment trading environment that the assessment must be carried out in. In this way it is hoped to have a more consistent quality of evidence gathering that supports the overall assessment of skills.

Employers often do not understand the relationship between the AQF levels and Employability Skills. Attempting to make employers assessors of Employability Skills will lead to confusion and disengagement by many employers and may even discredit the established AQF system.

The current AQF works well but some packages still need urgent updating to ensure employability skills are assessed in a more robust and credible fashion.

NSW is wasting valuable teaching time

In NSW the Board of Studies has introduced Board Endorsed Course in Industry-based Learning to give HSC unit credit for the 'on-the-job' component of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. This course is well intentioned and provides an encouragement for students to undertake a School based apprenticeship or traineeship and a reduced academic load in other subjects at school, and in turn provide a greater opportunity for the student to succeed in the apprenticeship. Without this important concession even more students would drop out of training or school.

However the Industry Based Learning is a token course with teachers required to meet regularly with the student and update a journal of their “progress” in the job. There is no teaching of employability skills, but rather a logging of workplace activity to merely achieve compliance with the course requirements. Teachers often talk of this in ridicule. It could be argued that this is a waste of a teachers’ time, and educates students that the system is just a game of manipulation. If NSW school based apprenticeships were to grow to numbers anything like those achieved in Queensland or Victoria the Industry Based Learning system would collapse as teachers could not cope.

Logging employability skills is not as important as teaching them. Whatever system is developed it must not steal Teaching time; promote cynicism in students that they are doing some sort of Mickey Mouse course; or disenfranchise employers from the skills training agenda.

Students can self assess

Students however, may find it useful to self assess their employability skills along a progression – along the lines of the proposed Job Readiness Certificate. In this way students may also see that they are only part way along a continuum of learning. The following example may be useful:

Employability Skill: Problem Solving.

I can recognise	I am able solve the	I am able to delve	I am able to plan
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problems and report them to a supervisor.	common day basic problems in this industry for a young worker	into a problem and use my research and technical skills to find a suitable solution	ahead to anticipate problems and take preventive actions.
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The above example loosely equates to Certificate one through to four.

The real issue with any form of self assessment will be encouraging the students to participate in the exercise.

If there was a greater reward based on time credits off future Traineeship and Apprenticeship terms more students would participate willingly. Eg achieving the Job Readiness Certificate could guarantee students one month off a 12 month traineeship and 3 months off a 4 year apprenticeship.

The inquiry could recommend:

- The acceleration of the training package reviews in order to enhance the robust assessment of employability skills.
- Investigate linking the Job Readiness Certificate to a credit off apprenticeship terms.

- **identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;**

Employment is fickle and hence dangerous to tie in too tightly with education qualifications

Great care needs to be taken in the design of any arrangement so that it remains flexible for fickle employment patterns of young people, particularly in turbulent economic times. One of the problems in NSW with school based apprenticeships is that schools expect students to commence by Term One and remain in employment for the duration of senior years. The reality is that most employers can not synchronise their labour demands to the timetable of schools, and employment continuity can not be guaranteed.

The rigidity of the NSW system means that unless a student can manage their employment to commence within the narrow timeframe of Term One year 11, they are prohibited from commencing at all. The NSW system is too inflexible and thousands of students who could combine school with an early commencement of an apprenticeship are denied the opportunity because they can not start within the timeframe.

Students need the flexibility to move between employment, education and any combination of the two without penalty to themselves or the school.

What is urgently needed is more flexible system that allows students to move between employment, apprenticeships and VET training on a flexible basis. The key to NSW accepting this change will be recognising that every module of VET course is like a mini qualification in itself. Resumes listing completed modules under a statement of attainment are still held in high regard by employers. Denying a student the opportunity to complete even a few modules is denying the student the chance to explore career options, employability skills and evidence for their resume and portfolio.

The rigidity of the NSW system forces thousands of students to a de-motivated existence in traditional schooling, when they could be out earning a wage and gaining key VET and employability skills.

NSW DET has a range of people promoting school based apprenticeships to employers and trying hard to synchronise the commencement within term one of year 11. I liken this approach to a car yard trying to sell cars for the first quarter of the year, and then telling customers that they can only take advance orders for the remaining 3 quarters of the year.

We need a system that allows for a flexible commencement of VET or school based apprenticeships anytime through the senior years.

Students often discover that the occupation is not for them while on work placement, but they are now trapped into completing the course for the next two years. How de-motivating.

The ideal school would provide full flexibility allowing students to withdraw from a poor subject choice, and try an alternative VET course, or apprenticeship, or Pre-apprenticeship course, without penalty to the student or school staffing ratios.

In NSW schools staffing is dependant upon student enrolments to the point that schools find their subtle ways of steering student enrolments away from cluster VET Classes, externally delivered VET or school based apprenticeships. Many school systems are actively working against the bigger agenda due to self interest. Schools need the confidence of funding so they can encourage the best outcome for the students, not the best for school staffing.

Currently schools are judged by Year 12 attainment. The lack of flexibility discourages students from staying at school. Many teachers can see that an apprenticeship opportunity is golden chance for a student, but attempt to talk the student out of it as it will hurt the schools results. In many cases having a student commence an apprenticeship or move on to a TAFE course is a great outcome and should not penalise the school, or the student.

The goal of Yr12 **or Cert III** seems like a long way off unless something big happens to shake up the NSW system.

Career pathways often have a chance factor. As adults we often hear of a job opportunity and have to decide quickly to make the move. Students that suddenly discover an employer willing to commence a part time apprentice, should not be denied the chance. In fact students should be armed with self marketing kits that inform employers of the benefits of the system, as well as the talents of this particular student.

In Queensland at least one Local Community Partnership has an arrangement with its' schools to place students on work placement, and then phone the employer to see how they student performed. If the employer was happy with the student the LCP suggests the employer may like to offer them a school based apprenticeship. This simple marketing strategy continues all year long as students cycle through their industry placements. In NSW this simple – cost effective strategy can not work as students must commence the apprenticeship by term one, which is well before their first workplace under their VET course.

An hour worked should be a guaranteed hour credit off any future apprenticeship period as an incentive to work and gain transferable employability skills.

Vocational skills may be industry specific, but Employability Skills are transferable from job to job. Students that do work placements or have part time jobs should be rewarded with a guaranteed credit of the duration off an apprenticeship. This will act as an added incentive to continue in training at higher AQF levels.

It is important to encourage students to aspire to higher levels of qualifications. Currently too many students stop at a Statement of Attainment, Cert I or Cert II. Improving the relationship between casual work, part time jobs and moving up the AQF ladder would be a welcome advancement.

Currently students who undertake low level certificates as VET in Schools have very low progression figures to higher levels within the same framework. There are many suggestions as to why this is the case, but I'd like to add an important one: There is no guarantee that the course you are studying, or the hours that you work, or do under work placement will count for anything more than another subject listed on your report card.

Recognition of Prior Learning rates are appalling. The system defaults to the assumption that the student does not deserve the RPL credit even though legally the AQF would suggest otherwise, and claiming time off an apprenticeship term, while actually a simple affair, is just not practiced but many students. The system needs to be automatic and easier. A simple piece of paper that guarantees students 3 months, 6 months, or a year of term of a 4 year apprenticeship would work wonders. It will now longer be apply if you like, but we don't encourage it, to rather this is my earned guarantee for all of my past experience.

Students should be guaranteed that an hours work was an hours credit of the Traineeship or Apprenticeship time. Therefore students could keep a log book of their working time, and be guaranteed the time back. Students on Work Experience or Work Placements should also benefit. Time served equals time saved. If this is matched by a record of AQF modules the students may achieve enough evidence to significantly shorten their apprenticeships in future years. This may also reduce drop out rates as well as reward those students who commence early. NCVER data shows quite clearly that success rates in CERT III courses attainable within one or two years are often double those that take 3 or 4 years to achieve.

Employers know that young people with work history make better recruits. The employer may not know the theory of employability skills instead they just think the worker has maturity and common sense.

Some industries will argue that time in a retail shop has no credit off a construction trade, but I would argue that three months in retail gaining employability skills, is equal to 3 months in any trade gaining employability skills and should be recognised.

Apprenticeships in the traditional trades have very poor completion rates and this is no doubt linked to the fact that they are also the trades with the longest terms to be served. Low pay, long terms in often economically turbulent industries and a Generation Y student Population are not a good mix for success. Everything we do to turn the talk of competency based training into reality will be a welcome step in the right direction.

Linking a system of guaranteed credits off apprenticeship terms will create another incentive for students to follow through with higher levels of training post school.

This inquiry could recommend that :

- A greater alignment of the Career Advice Australia initiative with Skills Australia, with particular focus on promoting school based apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships
- Barriers to flexible VET pathways be identified and removed
- Students part time jobs and work experience earn guaranteed time credits off apprenticeship periods on an hour for hour basis

▪ **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 potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity); and**

Schools need to move towards Certificate III as the new minimum workforce entry point in today's marketplace.

Business practices evolve and competition raises the bar. These days Certificate III is the minimum standard to be a productive worker. Trouble is schools are not set up to train at Cert III and the traditional apprenticeship at Cert III level is often tied into complex industrial relations and trade training regimes.

More needs to be done to promote a move towards Cert III in schools if we are to get serious about workforce productivity. However this often requires students to be working in the trade under an apprenticeship. The school based apprenticeship model in NSW stretches a 4 year apprenticeship out to a five year term. Two years part time at senior school and 3 years full time post school. Trouble is we are making it even harder for employers to commit as they are now trying to look 5 years into the future.

If students are exposed to 5 years of economic and life risks, we will increase the failure rates and unfairly label the student as a drop out.

Adding to the complication is the tension between the needs of the job, the needs of schooling, and the requirements to achieve a HSC.

If the student loses their employment their HSC is at risk. At which point the employer faces pressure from the parents and the school to recover the situation. If the employer stands firm, the parents pressure the school to find another employer. This is pressure the schools don't need. Schools have enough on their plate delivering Education and Training, without having to become employment counsellors on top.

Pre-apprenticeships in schools could provide work experience, employability skills, career pathways, and education without the risk of finding paid employment up front for thousands of students.

A better model would be if schools could offer something closer to a Pre-apprenticeship model. The students could be trained at School/ TAFE or an RTO and achieve credits for industry hours while at their part time jobs, on work experience or participating under the Rudd Government's election commitment for the On the Job Training Program.

Currently the VET In Schools model does a very poor job of achieving Cert III or part there of. The current model does not help students achieve credits off the training time in trades. The legal framework is in place to achieve all of this, but it is not functioning and delivering results.

The Rudd Government is investing \$2.5 Billion into Trade Training Centres in high schools. The quantity of students in NSW undertaking Cert III school based apprenticeships is so low that the TTCs risk being white elephants that in years to come will be judged as ineffective in reducing the skills shortage – unless new incentives are found to help schools stretch to Cert III training.

Moving VET in Schools to include a pre-apprenticeship model:

1. Will not burden employers who are facing uncertain times.
2. Will guarantee a credit off the apprenticeship time post school.
3. Can preserve the HSC qualification, and the AQF qualification, as well as reward students with a credit off the time served. A triple benefit.
4. Removes the need to schools to be dependant upon employers continuing employment for the duration of the senior years and the risk of parent pressures if employment fails during the school years.
5. Reduces the hard sell to employers as the model is intuitive and easily accepted
6. Improves the fit between the Trade Training Centres and the school system
7. Dovetails neatly with the proposed On the Job Training Program which could provide up to 20 days per year of Work Placements per student.
8. Promotes a pathway culture to higher levels of training.

9. Encourages skills development during an economic downturn, rather than waiting for the lag time for employers to recruit and train apprentices when the economic cycle returns.
10. Is scalable and cost effective for larger volumes of students.

An ideal scenario would be for schools to deliver pre-apprenticeship training over years 10 to 12, so that when the student graduated they were at 2nd year level of an apprenticeship.

This would break the NSW school based apprenticeship 5 year model into a 2 plus 3 model. Two years of Pre-apprenticeship, not dependant upon paid employment, as it would use Work Placements and part time employment to earn hours of credit, followed by the remainder of the apprenticeship training and time post school. Thousands of students could be served under such a model.

Individual employers would have the choice if they want to hire an untrained, inexperienced apprentice and start from scratch, or a student that has been through the pre-apprenticeship model at school, completed a wide range of modules and earned a credit off their term. Anyone who has worked in the recruitment services knows employers snap up partially skilled workers long before unskilled workers.

The inquiry could recommend that:

- Impediments to the delivery of Cert III courses in schools be addressed
- Schools enhance VET in schools to achieve Pre-apprenticeship course status
- Local Community partnerships under the Career Advice Australia Initiative promote the proposed On The Job Training package to help students achieve industry hours for Pre-apprenticeship courses at school.

- **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).**

We must do more

VET in Schools has been a tremendous success so far, but Australia needs more to be globally competitive and see our young people gain rewarding employment as skilled workers.

With the investment in Trade Training Centres and the proposed On the Job Training package schools will have two more tools to help with successful transitions.

Additional help could be sourced through DEEWs network of Local Community Partnerships who have a national footprint and currently facilitate Career Transition and Structured Workplace Learning. LCPs work closely with tens of thousands of employers

around Australia. Students are placed into industry based Work Placements and joint industry School projects that engage students in their learning.

LCPs recruit, induct and retain employer involvement in youth skills development. LCPs work with employers to ensure that students with special needs are given the opportunity they need.

Employers often recruit students after experiencing the student's potential during one of our programs.

LCPs have the network and relationship with employers and are ready to do more. This resource is ready to help schools, either by formally recruiting employers for school based apprenticeships, helping to map employability skills and career potential with students, or facilitate the proposed On the Job Training Program with employers and schools in a coordinated and cost effective manner.

Other issues that need investigation are:

1. Trade schools not able to take enrolments from outside their normal student catchment. Trade schools need to be a centre for excellence and take the best students in the same way selective schools do. VET needs stature and credibility form allowing the best VET students into the school.
2. Trade schools not able to use trade tools due to school OHS policies. Industry will laugh at this! We need to make it real and address OHS issues in schools just as TAFE and Industry must do.
3. Teachers not trained to Certificate III or better. Money for professional development must be allocated if teachers are to deliver the right level of training for today's marketplace. Cert III also raises the bar on employability skills.
4. VET in schools does not have to be the soft option. Many teachers see VET for the students who can't cut an academic pathway. Cert III pathways are far more rigorous and will stimulate students, while greatly enhancing employability skills and career pathways – especially if delivered in a pre-apprenticeship model.
5. Changes implementation takes years to negotiate on an industry by industry basis, especially to training packages and Industrial relations around the apprentice employment rules that restrict training to Cert III without employment in some key skill shortage industries. Better to prompt a global change, and only negotiate with industries who wish to opt out. In NSW every change takes years and years, we must fix this system to become more responsive to a fast changing world.
6. School systems do not generally understand the needs of employers very well. Schools often feel employers "should" employ on equity issues, rather than the best recruit for the job. Hence employers have trouble interfacing with schools. Local Community Partnerships broker these issues on behalf of all schools and employers in a region to achieve the structured Workplace Learning component of VET in Schools.
7. Schools can't do it alone. Schools need the help from Local Community Partnerships to centrally coordinate and resource a regional approach to employer engagement.

Conclusion

- The Job Readiness Certificate could use students own assessment and evidence to earn a credit off apprenticeship terms.
- Pre-apprenticeships achieve employability skills and vocational skills without requiring upfront employment.
- VET in Schools could use the Trade Training Centre and proposed on the Job Training package and the LCP network to achieve thousands of Pre-apprenticeships.
- Local Community Partnerships are well placed to help deliver and improved career transition for school students.
- School based apprenticeships are good, but have limitations in the marketplace that will always see them as a niche product.
- Schools could improve skills development, career transitions and employability skills through a combination of Rudd Government policies, delivered through a Pre-apprenticeship model. Pre-apprenticeships can be delivered despite a toughening youth employment market and LCPs are well placed to help out.

Ends