



16<sup>th</sup> February 2009

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Training  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Secretary

### **Combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions**

This is a submission to the subject enquiry currently being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Education and Training. Thank you for accepting this late submission.

The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) is a strategic partnership consisting of Gwydir Shire Council and the various educational providers that operate within the Shire. These include the NSW Department of Education and Training, New England University along with two Community College organisations that operate within Gwydir Shire.

The GLR has had some measure of success in the area of Vocational Education.

One of the unique features of the GLR is the direct involvement of the Gwydir Shire Council and that is one of the features of the GLR that act as a model to improve the application of vocational education within rural and remote areas of Australia.

Gwydir Shire Council recently signed up its 100<sup>th</sup> Trainee and/or Apprentice over the previous four year period. Apart from supporting the school based trainee scheme the Council is also very much a learning organisation with 93% of its staff now possessing at least Cert III accredited or above qualifications.

Another worthwhile feature of the GLR is its commitment to genuinely developing individual learning programs for each and every student as a pathway to success in the transition from school to either employment or further study.

In relation to the specific Terms of Reference:

*Our Community Learning and Growing Together*

Managing the demands of study and part-time or casual employment is part of everyday life for the majority of Australian school students. The impact of potentially competing demands is not well known, and there is little provision of information or guidance to schools or employers on the effect this has on the lives of young people generally, and more specifically on their career development and prospects for successful transitions. The committee's review of the impact of combined study and work on the success of youth transitions and Year 12 attainment will focus on:

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

The GLR is a strategic partnership that has the wholehearted support of the Gwydir Shire Council. This is the Council's policy response to the general lack of educational achievement within the Shire and the need to up-skill our population in order to provide, as far as possible, a skilled work force to meet the employment market demands that exist.

Obviously the range of courses is limited by the geographical location of the Shire, the availability of educational providers and the inherent base line educational achievement available upon which to build.

However, it has been the Council's experience that once training is commenced and positive outcomes are achieved the individual learners are keen to build upon the success with higher level courses or other vocationally based studies.

A good example is the identified need for Aged Care employment. The GLR commenced a Cert III course in Aged Care to meet the identified employment need. To date over 100 students have completed the course and many of these students were older women who wanted to re-enter the work force. In some cases parents and school aged children did the course together.

The direct involvement of local government in the creation and fostering of learning regions should be encouraged and financially supported especially in rural and remote communities to address identified skill deficiencies.

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

The current artificial barriers that exist between Vocational Education and 'mainstream' learners should be eliminated. The past amalgamation of the NSW State Government Departments to form the Department of Education and Training should be reflected in the classroom. All current teachers should be encouraged to

become multi-skilled in academic and Vocational Education subject areas.

In NSW the Boards of Vocation Education and Studies should be amalgamated and the focus of the school system should be a *Life and Work Ready Certification*. This may seem fanciful but until something of this magnitude occurs the VocEd qualifications will carry the stigma of being of lesser value than the Higher School Certificate, which is of very little genuine use to the very great majority of students within the school environment.

- 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 focus must be on identifying an individual learning pathway for each student. Obviously this will take time and resources to achieve but it can be done. The GLR does exactly this.

Each year every family with Year 9 students is visited in their home and a comprehensive evaluation is undertaken of the child's interests, expectations in discussion with the parents or carers.

The mentoring and support provided individually to each student is particularly important during Years 11 and 12.

Whilst visiting the home environment the parents are also asked to consider their need for training of some kind. We have had some significant success in using this direct approach with some parents signing up for courses through the school.

As a majority of the students do not immediately progress onto university studies the focus becomes a vocational education pathway.

The attitude of the school plays an important role here as a lack of flexibility in determining the requirements for the issuing of a School Certificate, for example, can be detrimental in a student's attitude towards the school environment.

Once again the legitimacy of vocational education and the results obtained are often perceived to have a lesser status when compared to more academic pursuits.

The time commitment required in the vocational education subjects often takes the student away from the academic subjects thus

causing a level of friction.

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

The GLR has proven over many years to be successful in meeting the legitimate aspirations of individual students.

The overall success rate of the GLR in either producing students who are successful in seeking employment or going onto higher levels of education has been quite outstanding.

Over the last 6 years (2003-2009) the numbers of school based traineeships / apprenticeships are listed below:

### **Rural**

Cert II in Agriculture - 10 SBT  
Cert II in Horticulture - 7 SBT

### **Retail**

Cert II in Retail - 54 SBT

### **Childcare**

Cert III in Children's Services - 4 SBT

### **Metals**

Cert II in Engineering Production - 1 SBT  
Cert III in Engineering - 2 SBA

### **Meat Processing**

Cert II in Meat Processing - 2 SBT

### **Hospitality**

Cert II in Hospitality - 7 SBT  
Cert III in Hospitality - 1 SBA

### **Community Recreation**

Cert II in Community Recreation - 2 SBT

### **Business Services**

Cert II in Business - 13 SBT

### **Auto**

Cert II in Automotive Servicing - 6 SBT  
Cert III in Automotive - 1 SBA  
Cert III in Automotive (Auto Electrical) 1 SBA

**Aged Care**

Cert III in Aged Care - 6 SBT

**Carpentry**

Cert III in Carpentry - 1 SBA

**Hairdressing**

Cert III in Hairdressing - 2 SBA

**IT**

Cert II in Information Technology - 2SBT

**Nursing**

Cert III in Acute Care Nursing - 2SBT

**Grand Total - 123**

- 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 GLR is proof that the effort involved in developing school-based training pathways is a very successful method of ensuring a successful transition for students from school to employment or other higher education.

One issue that continues to frustrate the efforts of the GLR is the arbitrary decisions that confront our efforts to meet each student's individual vocational education request regarding TAFE minimum class sizes. Often we are informed that without 15 students a course cannot run. Obviously in a rural area this cannot always be achieved and it reduces our capacity to aid in the student's transition to a productive career choice in line with his or her vocational calling.

It simply boils down to the fact that you are either fair dinkum about meeting the needs of each individual student or you aren't!

The individual programs developed for each student are very relevant for students with particular needs due to background or physical or mental disadvantage. Matching potential outcomes with the individual's level of ability is very important – we aim to let the student achieve his or her potential within a caring educational environment.

The model developed within the GLR with the close involvement of

local government should be encouraged within rural areas across Australia to ensure that the available resources are firmly focussed on achieving the best possible outcome for each student and the broader community.

Attached to this submission are copies of two evaluations of the Gwydir Learning Region for your Committee's information.

Please do not hesitate to contact the writer if a formal presentation to the Committee's enquiry is warranted or considered of benefit.

Yours faithfully



Max Eastcott  
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Gwydir Shire Council  
Chair  
Gwydir Learning Region