



# **INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS**

**SUBMISSION**

**Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of  
Catholic Schools, Qld**

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## SUBMISSION

### FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATIONS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN QUEENSLAND

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The Federation thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training for the opportunity to make a submission on this important area of the school curriculum. Parents not only have a vital interest in the area as first educators of their children but also many are involved as small business owners who have greatly assisted in the introduction of vocational education programs into schools. It is essential that parents be involved in the decision making process at all levels, from the framing of the legislation to the introduction of school programs

Parents are very supportive of the vocational initiatives in schools but in many instances are not aware of the content of the courses and how the qualification obtained will benefit the student in the future. Some of this confusion for parents, staff and students originates from the situation where schools come under the legislative requirements of multiple departments at both State and Commonwealth level.

Comment:

#### **A. (1) The place of vocational education in schools.**

Vocational education has extended curriculum offerings to all students so that they have been able to identify and proceed along multiple pathways in the transition from school to work. It has allowed students who may previously have left school after Year 10 to pursue further studies and to combine school subjects with work options. However there are a significant number of students who leave after compulsory schooling and who are not attracted to any type of course which is related to traditional schooling. It is with this group that resources need to be mobilised more effectively.

Also, the acceptance of the value of vocational education in schools with a traditionally structured 'academic' curricula does not appear to have been as effective as in those with greater curriculum offerings. It may be that the majority of students in these schools are tertiary bound. This may have led to the perception that there is a hierarchy of importance of particular subjects and courses, with vocational education not regarded as being equivalent in value to the traditional subjects. However, it is of interest to note that a significant number of tertiary graduates are now undertaking studies in TAFE to develop their 'employability' skills.

Schools still do not appear to have grasped the opportunity to be regarded as community learning centres providing lifelong education to community members. There is still a perception, particularly in the minds of some parents, that at some time there is an end to learning. Schools should have the opportunity to provide relevant vocational courses to learners of any age.

## **(2) Vocational education growth and development.**

In its initial stages, vocational education in schools relied on a few committed staff, usually in the practical subjects e.g. design technology, business and catering liaising within their local communities to form partnerships with other schools, training institutions and businesses. For schools prepared to divert scarce resources, vocational education initiatives meant smaller class sizes and considerably more out of class time with students at school and in the workplace for those administering the programs. Cooperative programs with TAFE colleges were very successful in some cases but success very much depended upon the willingness of the TAFE administration to become involved, the number of places available and the geographical location of the school. The advent of ANTA funding released some resources to schools and allowed more schools to participate in programs.

## **(3) The effectiveness of vocational education in preparing students for post-school options.**

Unfortunately, this country does not have a culture or history of close relationships between schools and employers. There has been a general wariness among employers of the ability of schools to provide effective practical qualifications that would be accepted by business and industry. Similarly, schools are wary that employers really do understand that schools are more about education for life than training. These misperceptions have tended to sow the seed of doubt in the minds of employers of the authenticity of vocational education qualifications obtained in schools.

Vocational courses have allowed students to gain a wider appreciation of the workplace and its requirements, and now with nationally recognised standards, it is hoped that employers will accept more readily the qualifications obtained at school.

A significant number of our students in the senior secondary area have part time positions, many with a high degree of responsibility. Unfortunately, such responsibility is not recognised officially

## **B. (1) The range**

Queensland has led the nation in the provision of vocational education and there has been a significant take up of these opportunities by students. After initial hesitation, parents are now very supportive of the increased curriculum options. However, it is also significant that the retention rate in post compulsory schooling has not increased along with the extended provision. Schools have had to extend their resources to such an extent that some may have reached a point where maintaining their present commitment or further extension will be counter productive for both staff and student.

## **(2) The structure**

Vocational education is delivered in schools and in workplaces. Some traditional subjects have vocational elements embedded in them and count for tertiary entrance whilst others do not count or stand alone. A large number of schools have formed clusters to more effectively deliver training in the workplace and there are many successful examples of inter-school collaboration and cooperation. Workplace learning puts a strain on both school and workplace with the administration requirements of assessment and reporting.

### **(3) Resourcing and delivery of programs**

The movement of initial vocational training programs from TAFEs to schools and the requirement for all schools to become Registered Training Organisations has placed an enormous strain on both teaching and administration resources. So much so that many schools may be forced to abandon much or all of their commitment to vocational education in the near future. Many teachers have difficulty in meeting the human resource requirements and schools face extensive financial commitments in maintaining teacher currency in their specialisation, or employing outside training organisations to provide for the required student competencies. In addition to their normal teaching commitments, staff are required to supervise learning in the workplace and to complete time consuming administration.

### **(4) Teacher training**

Pre service institutions have moved very slowly with the change in curriculum in schools and very few new teachers are effectively trained to teach in the vocational area. With significant increases in enrolments in vocational education, this places further pressure on the dedicated few who have carried the burden for so long. There is a need for more innovation in pre service training courses to attract mature age technically qualified students into teaching and to fast track them through the system. This is particularly relevant in country towns where the local population can assist and where it is difficult to attract and maintain teachers recruited from the city.

### **(5) The impact of vocational education on other programs**

The impact of vocational education may create a division between staff in schools which may affect morale. Many teachers of 'traditional' subjects appear only to tolerate vocation education and are not motivated to become involved in the area. Some may fear that such an action will affect their future in their own 'specialisation'. Teachers involved in the vocational education area, traditionally those associated with 'practical' subjects, in most instances have been very generous with their time and expertise in assisting students in both an educational and pastoral sense.

### **C. (1) Differences between school based and other educational programs**

This country does not have strong training culture as do many equivalent countries overseas. There has been a traditional gap between the expectations of employers and the provision of skills delivered by school programs. What employers continually seek are students who are confident, literate and numerate, can communicate effectively, have initiative and are self-motivated. Significantly, they are skills which are considered essential in many of the part time positions held by students, yet very little or no credit is given to them in the school assessment regime.

## **(2) The pattern of industry based acceptance**

The principle of subsidiarity is important in the relationship of the school based programs and industry acceptance. Initiatives will come from relationships developed at the local level. There is no 'one size fits all' solution which is evident when regulations are imposed from above, usually from training institutions and big business enterprises and when those making these decisions are far removed from the local context. This is particularly applicable in country areas where vocational education opportunities are usually extremely limited.

### **D. Vocational education in new and emerging industries**

It is difficult for schools to anticipate new industries unless there is close liaison with the local business community i.e. parents and with private training providers. It will be through this interaction that students will become aware of opportunities and be encouraged to take initiatives in career choices. In general, teaching staff are not familiar with emerging industries as these are not the focus areas of their training and operation. Particularly in ICT, advanced students are generally well ahead of their teachers in competence and need to be encouraged to pursue creative solutions to problems.

### **E. Accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students**

Prospects of unemployment seriously affect the success of programs. For indigenous students in large centres, their opportunities will be similar to those of the white population. However, for many in rural and remote areas, there are limited opportunities for workplace learning and few employment opportunities at the end of a vocational course. Naturally, it is difficult to enthuse young people (and parents) who do not see any hope for future employment. It will be through the initiatives of the local community working together that opportunities will open up. Parents particularly need to be convinced that these opportunities are worthwhile. Students need to be encouraged to remain in their communities and this can only be achieved if there are viable employment opportunities at the end of these courses.

The Federation supports the initiatives that have been taken in vocational education in schools to provide alternative pathways to students. They have brought the local community into closer relationship with education and this has had positive consequences. However, many schools have reached the extent of their resource allocation to vocational education and unless additional resources are provided, administration and staff may be forced to curtail or withdraw their programs.

The Federation would be prepared to prepared to expand on its position if requested by the inquiry.

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