# Submission to the
# House of Representatives
# Standing Committee on Education & Training

# INQUIRY INTO
# VOCATIONAL  EDUCATION
# IN SCHOOLS

# from the
# Australian Associations of
# Christian Schools

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*There are* **102 Christian schools offering post-compulsory education in Australia.** *These schools serve dominantly middle and working class families in urban, regional and remote Australia. The student numbers in the schools are* **increasing at approximately 6% per annum.** *Christian schools have, on average, 200 students. 72% of these schools are both primary and secondary. All schools are* **co-educational. Over half the schools are in regional and remote locations.**

*Since the mid 1980's, retention and participation rates at the post-compulsory level of schooling in Australia has increased significantly. School authorities have had to reconsider and redesign their curriculum offerings to meet the changed demands and needs of these students. The most significant development in curriculum has been the introduction of VET at the post-compulsory level.*

*VET is now an important part of schooling in Australia. Teachers need far more pre and inservice training to be effective in this area. Courses need to be designed and accorded the status given to other more academic offerings. Funding arrangements require far greater streamlining and co-ordination, particularly between Commonwealth and State/Territory jurisdictions.*

## (1)   AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (AACS)

AACS is an Association of Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS) as well as independent Christian schools. Consequently,

AACS represents **253** Protestant Christian **schools** across Australia. These schools educate over **74,000 students** and employ some **5,000 teachers**. The schools are to be found in every Australian State and Territory.

Protestant Christian schools in membership with AACS **serve largely middle and working class Australian families and communities**. This is borne out by the SES scores of the schools. 120 schools are located in metropolitan cities. Over 50% of the schools serve regional and remote communities throughout Australia. Increasingly, these schools are reaching out to the disadvantaged and emphasis is being placed on the education of indigenous students and the mainstream education of students with disabilities.

This submission was authorised by the Council of the Australian Associations of Christian Schools (AACS).

## (2)  TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW

The Terms of Reference for the Review are sufficiently broad to encompass most aspects of Vocational Education in schools. This submission, however, will not address the implications for schools of Vocational Education "in new and emerging industries".

In relationship to the last Term of Reference (Indigenous Students), the Christian school system in the Northern Territory is intending to undertake a series of major initiatives in this area, having bedded down the participation and retention of indigenous students in secondary school at Marrara Christian School, Darwin.

In WA, the Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School, Wongutha, is designed for Year 11 and 12 students around a practical VET programme. This school has been successful in this regard for several years. It has strong leadership and provides indigenous students with practical skills that will take them into further education, training and/or employment.

## (3)  COMPOSITION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

With over 74,000 students in members' schools (2001 Commonwealth Census), Christian schools employ some 5,000 teachers. 55% of Christian schools in Australia have 200 or less students. However, student numbers vary between 20 and 1,300.

School size is an important issue when account is taken of the number of Christian schools in regional and remote Australia.
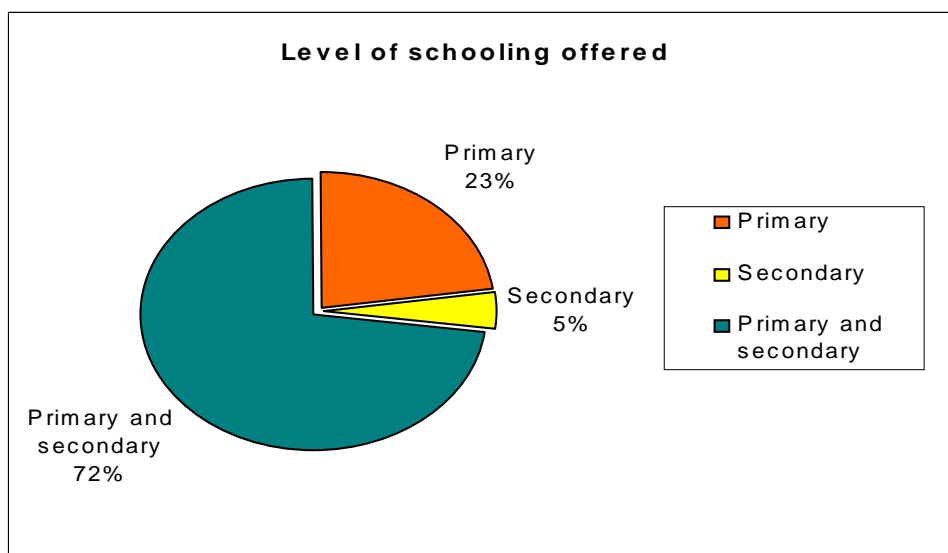
### TABLE (1) – CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS LOCATION

| LOCATION | NUMBER OF SCHOOLS |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| **Metropolitan** | **120** |
| **Regional** | **117** |
| **Remote** | **16** |
| **TOTAL** | **253** |

Nearly three quarters  of Christian schools are combined primary and secondary schools.  Graph (A) below illustrates the levels of education offered by Christian schools across Australia.  **102 Christian schools (40%) go through to Years 11 and 12. Of these schools, two are exclusively Year 11 and 12 colleges**.

**GRAPH (A)**



Level of schooling offered

Primary 23%

Secondary 5%

Primary and secondary 72%

Legend: Primary, Secondary, Primary and secondary

## (4)    GROWTH IN POST-COMPULSORY AGE SCHOOLING

With the significant growth in apparent retention rates in both Government and non-Government schools over the last 25 years, senior secondary curriculum has had to accommodate students not intending to go from school to university.

The table below sets out the percentage retention rate changes over the last 25 years.

**TABLE (2)**

| Year | Government | Non-Government | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1976 | 37.2 | 59.3 | 42.6 |
| 1986 | 45.8 | 68.5 | 51.9 |

*AACS Submission to the Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools*

| 1996 | 68.6 | 83.8 | 73.6 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2001 | 70.6 | 84.5 | 75.4 |

*Source: ABS Schools, Australia, 2001, p18.*

The significant increase in retention rates from Year 10 through to Year 12 in both Government and non-Government schools between 1986 and 1996 was triggered by the Commonwealth Government's *Participation and Equity Programme*. This programme was often mirrored by similar initiatives undertaken by State/Territory education authorities.

The result of increasing numbers of students completing Year 12 required education/school authorities to reconsider the role of the senior secondary curriculum. For example, in 2001, there were 411,535 students in Years 11 and 12 in Australia's schools. In the same year, Australia's schools were educating 3.27m students. Our senior secondary student population is now nearly 12.5% of the total school population.

Resourcing senior secondary education poses a challenge to school authorities. Pupil/teacher ratios, class sizes, curriculum options and physical amenities and resources make senior secondary education signicantly more expensive than junior secondary or primary. Resource allocations by Government and non-Government education authorities to secondary schools do not always differentiate between junior and senior secondary students. This requires significant cost imposts on schools and sometimes parents.

Most of the curriculum offerings available to senior secondary students before the mid 1980's reflected matriculation requirements of Australia's universities. In fact, university entrance and TER scores often drove the curriculum at the senior secondary level. Increased retention and participation by students in Years 11 and 12 called for a re-think of the role of schools at this level.

Thirty years ago, students leaving school at Year 10 often went directly to work or to TAFE. In fact, many education authorities had secondary school provision (technical colleges) designed to stream students from school to work/TAFE. Increased participation and the advent of Vocational Education in schools led to a major adjustment to post-compulsory education at the school level.

## (5)   VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Rather than canvass the history of VET in schools over the last 25 years, suffice it to say that most schools offering post-compulsory education have had to include VET in their curricula.

Careers Education was mainly designed to provide students with guidance about their future/further education, training and work options. VET, on the other hand, was designed to provide students with a participative experience in the work environment

while, at the same time, enhancing their Key Competencies so that they might be flexible in their choices.

A range of reviews and initiatives (Finn and Meyer) foreshadowed the structural adjustments being made to the Australian economy, particularly in the commercial and industrial sectors. Targets were set, competencies identified and benchmarked, courses designed and funds made available to enable student participation.

## (6)    TEACHER TRAINING

Most, if not all, teachers engaged at the senior secondary level 25 years ago were ill-equipped to undertake VET courses with their students. Despite the apparent goodwill of hundreds of teachers, many were forced to jump in at the deep end and do the best they could for their students who were not initially heading for university.

Universities and, particularly, their teacher education faculties did little to equip the new cohort of teachers for the demands of a changing post-compulsory school curriculum. Universities valued academia, TER scores and HECS funded student numbers. There was no culture that provided new teachers with a sense of esteem for VET.

At the same time, opportunities for practising teachers to undertake inservice and professional development activities in VET was limited, haphazard and often poorly funded. Some incentives were offered to industry to address the issue and engage with the teachers. This has had varied success.

If VET in schools is ever to have the teaching competence associated with VET in TAFE, then a lot more will need to be done to adequately equip both new and existing school teachers.

## (7)    STATUS OF VET COURSES IN SCHOOLS

Career education and work experience were viewed by those both in schools and outside them as necessary for students not likely to proceed to university or needing to make contact with a firm or industry that might be able to support them, with paid part-time work, during their tertiary studies.

Boards of studies in most jurisdictions across Australia have struggled for years in providing students undertaking VET courses with the same recognition as students undertaking courses leading to university entrance. This problem continues to beleaguer many VET initiatives across Australia. In March 2000, a New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools was launched by education ministers.

The hard work of Commonwealth and State Departments of Education as well as ANTA, ECEF (formerly ASTF) and TAFE has done much to enhance the status of VET in schools. However, students proceeding to post-compulsory education in schools need to be convinced that the status of their VET course has parity within their chosen field with the status of other courses, eg. Ancient History, undertaken for tertiary entrance purposes.

## (8)    DELIVERY OF VET COURSES IN SCHOOLS

Apart from the need to enhance the capacity of school teachers to deliver VET, considerable work still needs to be done to couple the initiatives of schools with TAFE and the business sector.

In many jurisdictions, the relationship of schools with TAFE depends more on their Government/non-Government status than the needs of the students.  Business and industry need far more encouragement to enter into meaningful partnerships with school authorities to deliver VET.

The advent of ICT and its application to VET will certainly enhance the opportunities for post-compulsory students (and their teachers) in rural and remote locations. Similarly, indigenous students and students with disabilities require delivery modes designed to meet their needs, rather than the requirements of the sector.

## (9)    FUNDING FOR VET IN SCHOOLS

This submission will only take account of Commonwealth funding for VET in schools. Over the years, the Commonwealth has taken a range of initiatives and implemented an array of programmes to enhance the opportunities available to young people at the post-compulsory school age.

Until recently, the Commonwealth provided three main arteries of funding for VET in schools:  ANTA, ECEF and the School to Work Programme.  School authorities and VET co-ordinators were often between a rock and a hard place understanding where to go for funding for a particular VET initiative.  Sometimes, they had to go to DEST; at other times they had to go through a State association (Association of Independent Schools).  In some instances, they were directed straight to the funding authority, eg. ECEF.  On occasions, these authorities and funding sources funded the same programmes or elements within the same programmes.  Arrangements were often unclear, application procedures uncertain, funds available unpredictable and timing difficult to attract students into programmes.

For the Commonwealth's significant investment in VET to bear the fruit it deserves, a more streamlined and integrated approach must be taken so that all school authorities know the priorities, know the funds available, know the submission process and understand the outcomes they are expected to achieve.

11 October 2002