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Junee High School Vocational Education Program

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

RE: Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

The Junee High School Vocational Education Program is based in one school only and works on offering each student four workplacements in Year 11 and two placements in Year 12. Junee is a rural community of 5,891 (ABS estimate June 2000), a half hour drive from Wagga Wagga and a two and half hour drive west of Canberra.

The program is assisted by a Management Committee made up from representatives from the local business and school community. Over the last ten years 150 to 220 workplacements per year are organised for students studying Metals Engineering, Furnishings, Hospitality, Retail, Primary Industries, Information Technology, Business Services, Construction, Tourism and Work Studies.

The students are given the opportunity to gain skills and competencies across a very wide range of industries. Most students gain excellent work place references and are to be highly commended for the effort and commitment they have shown. The support and encouragement offered by the local business community is outstanding and Junee High School would not have the quality program being offered to our students without their assistance. Local business people are involved in providing workplacements, ideas for implementation, applications for funding and general support for providing whatever they can to assist our students.

The program is supported by the involvement of outside providers and agencies that are involved in the employment industry, providing the real world perspective for students and links to follow upon leaving school.

Junee High School students are consistently able to gain employment as a direct result of the time they have spent in the workplace combined with the course work. Under the vocational education program all students in Year 11 are given the opportunity to complete their First Aid Certificate.

Students, teachers, parents, and our local business work together to provide the best possible outcomes for all parties.

From a whole school perspective Vocational Education Courses have been a large part of the senior school curriculum, with an average of 55% TO 65% of senior students choosing to enrol in a VET Subject. One day in the Year 11 timetable is designated for workplacement, and where a course is not offered at the school students can access Wagga District locations to complete the course. This allows us to consistently offer new courses. Teacher training is always going to be an issue re suitability and industry standards being met in a school environment but for many Junee High School students this is the only option they have to experience what a particular industry can offer.

Vocational Education is a part of the whole school curriculum offered and provides viable options to students of both academic and non-academic focus. It is possible for students to reach appropriate AQF Level 11 qualifications but we see the primary focus in being able to offer a wide variety of options to show how industry operates and students suitability to those industries. Students are expected to gain skills that will allow them to become employable. Junee High School offers a program which is innovative, and ground breaking and has over the years been the subject of numerous research groups.

Where ever student's individual differences require attention they are offered individual programs to work through to gain the best possible outcomes. In some instances this requires specialised assistance, i.e. disability services, indigenous VET Programs.

The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP) has been supportive of the Program meeting some of its financial and developmental needs with the remaining funds required to meet the programs needs being met by Junee High School from its own budget each year.

Current funding criteria dictates that we are only eligible to apply if we do so as a cluster not as an individual program. Under this arrangement we have been grouped with Cootamundra High School and Temora High School, and directed to apply for funding as receipt of any money is dependent on the group of three schools forming an incorporated body and taking out public liability insurance. At present we have no economic, cultural or social ties with these communities, as we are basically a satellite town of Wagga Wagga. We are being directed into a structure, which the local business community is not in favour off, and a situation, which erodes the time and effort they have placed into the program.

The current arrangements each school has in place are that the Coordinators are employed as part of the staffing for the school either within or outside the staffing formula. On costs are met from the Schools individual budgets. Each School also has a committee of volunteer business people who are consulted as part of the operation of the Vocational Education Program.

All liability of persons involved is currently covered by the Insurance's carried by the NSW Department of Education. In the case of Junee High School Auditing of Accounts is carried out as a community service by a member of the school board who meets the criteria required for auditing purposes. Under new funding arrangements parts of the money received will need to be allocated towards incorporation, public liability, administration and auditing costs before it can be directed to the individual programs. Less money will be spent on the students it has been requested for, as the costs incurred by these programs can no longer be absorbed by the individual communities.

Notice has been received by the contact person re the amount of funding dollars available for our combined use in 2003. It is less than received by the three schools combined in 2002. With reduced funding dollars available to us to continue with the innovative program as is we have to make the hard decisions about how the program operates in 2003. We will certainly be looking at whatever avenues are possible to fund, maintain and develop what we have. In the long run it will be the students who suffer the most and along with them the growth and development of the local small rural business community. We wish to remain an individual program to provide the maximum benefit possible to our students and our local business community. We are not being permitted to make our own decisions because of changes in funding policy.

Junee High School is providing a much needed and valued service to the students and the local community. We wish to continue to do this but the ways things are looking being innovative and taking that extra effort to provide a quality program may no longer be possible.

We have developed links with local communities and local employers and wish to continue making school more relevant, providing quality pathways from school to work.

In the media release re the Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools mention is made about the committees plans to visit schools. We would like to invite you to visit Junee High School and see Vocational Education working.

Yours in creating better futures for our young people.

Marie E Knight
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Junee High School