

INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

*ACCI SUBMISSION
TO THE
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND TRAINING*

OCTOBER 2002

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Key Points Raised in this Submission

1. The range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs:

- skills are necessary in the context of the formation of human capital in the economy;
- skill development is needed in the traditional as well as emerging industries;
- ACCI and members endorse the Vocational Education and Training Framework as the model for schools to deliver on the needs of industry;
- ACCI and members urge State/Territory governments to fully implement the Framework;
- ACCI and members support the Commonwealth taking innovative approaches to strategic interventions;
- ACCI and members endorse the concept of student centred funding for VET options delivered by other post compulsory institutions, but not for schools;
- employers endorse the usage of industry developed and endorsed Training Packages for the delivery of VET in Schools and do not support the actions of some State/Territory governments to adapt Training Packages or to “customise” them;
- school timetabling remains one of the most problematic barriers to the delivery of VET in Schools. ACCI and members endorse flexible school hours for senior secondary students where appropriate;
- VET in Schools needs to be targeted to real local job opportunities, skill shortages and future demand;
- there is a dearth of adequate careers information, advice and services available to young Australians. This situation requires urgent attention;
- there is a need for teachers delivering VET in Schools to have appropriate qualifications and recent industry experience. ACCI endorses the teacher release to industry model operated by VECCI;
- there should be a compulsory unit for all teachers in their teacher training on vocational education;

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- employers prefer employees whose skills have been learnt on the job;
- employability skills are an important part of vocational education and education systems need to think how these will be taught, assessed and recorded;
- there needs to be better linkages between industries experiencing skill shortages and schools so that students are aware of this information; and
- the status of VET needs to be raised in the eyes of the community.

2. The differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs:

- School Based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs) will never be a major part of the delivery of vocational education offerings but provide a pathway to employment for some students;
- part-time traineeships place pressure on students and should be brought into the province of schools, possibly through a system of recognised prior learning;
- generally, employers do not have confidence in the qualifications delivered by schools beyond Level II. Schools must meet the same quality requirements as other RTOs if they want employers to value the qualifications they deliver to students; and
- the NTQC will undertake further research in this area ACCI's comments will be tabled at the next ANTA MINCO meeting.

3. Vocational education in new and emerging industries:

- in relation to new and emerging industries, it is important for schools to provide a good general education especially in English, Mathematics, Science and Business Studies; and
- organising appropriate on the job learning experiences in new and emerging industries should be given urgent consideration.

*INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS***4. The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students:**

- the participation of Indigenous students in VET is hampered by poor social and economic factors. In addition, Indigenous students have very low literacy rates. These factors need to be addressed before there can be an increase in participation in VET in Schools options;
- employers may become involved through mentoring and other schemes to assist Indigenous students;
- Programs with a VET focus should start earlier in High School especially at Years 8/9/10;
- Involvement of industry focused mentoring can assist students in these programs. Encouragement of VET for Indigenous students should not only be as an outcome or singular career choice but also as a viable pathway to further education and training and or Indigenous business development. This can be a possible future direction and targeting this concept to students at Years 10/11/12; and
- more effective coordination of key stakeholders is necessary.

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Introduction

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) is the peak council of Australian business associations. ACCI members are employer organisations in all States and Territories and all major sectors of Australian industry. Through our membership, ACCI represents over 350,000 businesses nation-wide. That makes ACCI the largest and most representative business organisation in Australia.

Membership of ACCI comprises State and Territory Chambers of Commerce and national employer and industry associations. Each ACCI member is a representative body for small employers or sole traders, as well as medium and large businesses. This network of businesses enables the concerns of members to be identified. Through this process, business policies are developed and strategies for change are implemented.

ACCI has worked closely with Government to ensure that the needs of business are taken into account in the development of policies and has contributed significantly to reforms within the education and training system.

The process of promoting a relevant education and training system is a shared responsibility. ACCI supports an increased and ongoing partnership between industry, that system and the individual. The clients of this system are taxpayers, employers, parents and students and they all have a vested interest in its effectiveness and efficiency.

The restructuring now occurring in Australian industry clearly highlights the need for advanced knowledge and skills, a commitment to lifelong education and the development of applied research expertise on an internationally competitive basis. An educated and skilled workforce is integral to the future of Australia.

Principles of Education and Training Policy

ACCI advocates a comprehensive education and training system, which enables all Australians to contribute to a cohesive, democratic and prosperous society in which the attributes and skills of individuals are fully developed. This is crucial in meeting the short and long term economic goals of Australia, and provides business with a competitive edge to compete in the global economy.

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Industry requires a system that retains incentives for employers and promotes the flexibility to choose education and training options, which meet specific industry needs.

Policy Objectives

ACCI supports education and training policies which:

- improve education and training as a demand driven system that is specifically aligned to industry needs;
- support the allocation of government funding to education and training outcomes that provide incentives for employers to participate, maximise opportunities for participants and enhance efficiencies within the system;
- expand the role of competitive markets in all sectors by pursuing open competition principles that diversify the supply of education;
- create competitive conditions that enhance the User Choice principle;
- promote student centred funding that allows an individual to purchase a course of study through the school, vocational education and training provider or university of their choice;
- maximise education and training pathways from school to the workplace;
- align packaging of training standards leading to a national qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF);
- focus on nationally consistent outcomes and achieve standards that are comparable to international standards of best practice;
- respond to the growing need for students to undertake workplace learning programs that develop links with industry and create pathways to further training and employment;
- improve, and regularly test, on a nationally agreed and consistent basis, literacy and numeracy standards;

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- strengthen the focus on sound basics, such as literacy and numeracy, at primary school level;
- acknowledge, develop and assess in a contextual manner, employability skills;
- improve and integrate careers education, key competencies and enterprise education principles into the education and training system;
- provide the adoption of an enterprising culture, particularly by young Australians;
- support articulation arrangements across the school, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors;
- promote equality of education opportunities and options for groups with special needs;
- enhance opportunities for education providers to be trained and qualified to standards which are adequately benchmarked; and
- promote training reform, which is enterprise focused, demand driven, and flexible, mindful of all parties involved and devoid of extensive bureaucracy.

The Policy Framework

Australia's education and training system must provide people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to participate fully in Australian society - culturally, socially and in their employment. All Australians must be able to:

- benefit from a sound education platform which provides basic literacy and numeracy skills;
- pursue future education and training opportunities which enhance workplace skills; and
- develop a positive attitude to the concept of lifelong learning.

ACCI plays an active part in the development, monitoring and evaluation of education and training policies and programs that impact on business. This is in recognition that growing support for

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the development of a comprehensive education and training system is pivotal to the achievement of short and long term economic goals of Australia.

Education and training is imperative for:

- an increase in the competitiveness of enterprises and the need to respond to global competitiveness pressures;
- employee satisfaction/motivation through acquisition of higher skills;
- flexibility/adaptation of workers to change in the workplace;
- ability of companies to draw on workers in emerging labour markets and meet new industry needs; and
- enabling enterprises to build upon skills of existing workers, particularly younger workers, to adapt them to a particular workplace.

Education and training provides business with a competitive edge to compete in the global economy. ACCI plays a key role in ensuring that education and training principles reflect the needs of business. For this purpose, a range of forums and consultative structures are assisting industry and government to work together in reforming the education and training system to better meet the needs of industry.

A full copy of the ACCI Schools Industry Strategy can be found at **Attachment 1**.

1. The Range, Structure, Resourcing and Delivery of Vocational Education Programs in Schools, including Teacher Training and the Impact of Vocational Education on Other Programs

Background

A recent Productivity Commission Staff Research Paper has identified that in the context of the formation of human capital within the economy, the skill of the labour force is important for two reasons.

- Increased human capital is a source of productivity growth.
- The changing nature of work has increased the demand for skills and increased the need for individuals to have appropriate skills in order to access employment opportunities.¹

Much attention has been given in recent times to new industries or references to new industries. From an employer perspective, it is critical for Australia's long-term competitiveness that skills be developed in workers to underpin the growth of traditional industries, not just new industries. How skill development is linked to vocational education is therefore of significant interest to employers.

There are substantial changes being made in the structure of the workforce and the demands of the workforce in the competitive global environment and, clearly, a school system that helps meet the particular needs of industry is integral to achieving competitiveness.

In terms of delivering vocational education in schools, the availability of resources is crucial to the range and depth of offerings. Quality outcomes can only be achieved with an appropriate level of teacher and physical infrastructure resources.

¹ Barnes, P and Kennard, S. 2002, *Skills and Australia's Productivity Surge*, Productivity Commission Staff Research Paper, Canberra, p 1.

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What Industry Needs from the Education Sector

Research undertaken by ACCI through the Survey of Investor Confidence shows access to suitably qualified employees as one of the top ten constraints on investment around Australia for businesses of all sizes². For small business, it ranks in the top three constraints on investment. Therefore a lack of access to appropriately qualified employees holds back investment and holds back employment generally throughout the economy in Australia. Focusing attention in these areas is critically important.

It is often argued that young people struggle in the labour market because education and training are not relevant to actual skill requirements. There are several dimensions to addressing this issue including:

- the need to adjust the balance and understanding between supply and demand for labour;
- ensuring that young people are employable, both at the time they initially enter the labour market and in the first years of employment;
- ensuring qualifications reflect changing work tasks and employment structures; and
- providing young people with experience in real work settings.

In Australia over the last decade there has been a program of ongoing reform to the vocational education and training system. The reform agenda has included the development of national standards, the introduction of a national qualifications framework, the development of a competency based approach to training, an increased role played by industry in the system and the fostering of a more competitive and industry driven environment in which the public TAFE colleges and private providers operate. Moves to increase the flexibility of traineeships and apprenticeships have also been an important element of the reforms.

Associated with these reforms has been a growing role for schools in facilitating access to students to participate in VET and/or their involvement. The Commonwealth, State/Territory education and training departments and the non-government sectors have all been working in partnership with industry to achieve these changes. This has led to a range of partnership arrangements between schools and industry, particularly at the local enterprise level.

ACCI and members are actively involved in strengthening schools-industry activities. This includes participating on a number of key

²October, 2002. *Survey of Investor Confidence*, ACCI, Canberra, p 7.

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advisory bodies and establishing initiatives such as the former Business Education Partnership Advocates (BEPA) project, which involved ACCI member organisations across Australia.

The reforms taking place are generally consistent with ACCI's Education and Training Policy endorsed by ACCI's General Council in March 1998.

The work that has been undertaken by the previous Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) VET in Schools (VETIS) and the current Transition from School (TST) Task Forces and by ANTA in investigating post compulsory entitlements and how to better link to the needs of industry with the work that is being undertaken in the schools, has been an important part of the ACCI focus.

In more recent years, being responsive to the needs of industry has been one of the clear and demonstrable changes that is being made to the school and VET systems. It is of vital importance that industry is put in the driving seat where VET or other schools-industry initiatives are involved and that there is a move away from the driving interests being those of the provider. In the past providers have dictated what was going to be delivered whether it met industry needs or not.

However, it is important to ensure that one of the central goals of the school system is to provide general education to all students. Without adequate literacy and numeracy skills, young people will face huge barriers to effective participation in the workforce and maximising their potential. The retention of young people at school to achieve this goal while allowing challenging vocational opportunities, continues to require new and innovative ways of learning.

Range, Structure, Resourcing and Delivery of Vocational Education Programs in Schools

All States and Territories agreed to the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework in early 2001. ACCI General Council also endorsed the Framework in October 2000. ACCI and members believe that the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework should be the model that continues to be used for the range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools.

Part of the Framework agreement includes the development of a funding framework, which sets conditions and promotes the integration into schools and systems budgets and operations and the

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transfer of resources to VET from other activities. ACCI and members encourage State/Territory governments to fully implement this aspect of the Framework and believe that quality offerings in the VET area best meet the needs of the majority of industry. Most Australian businesses fall into the small business category and these businesses mostly prefer employees who are graduates of the VET system³.

As well, Ministers have noted the following:

- endorsement of 'Principles and Guidelines' that includes a focus on the need to establish long term sustainable funding arrangements;
- an investigation of the costings of VET in Schools programs to develop a validated costing model which identifies cost variables and explores specific cost drives and other elements.
- Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) has endorsed national work to be undertaken that examines organisational best practice for the dealing of VET in School programs to inform strategic policy development.
- Allocation of funding for 2003-2004:
 - Existing formula for funding VET in Schools to be maintained for 2003; and
 - Issue of performance based funding to be reconsidered for 2004 when more reliable data is available in 2003.
- A national seminar for key stakeholders to support State/Territory planning will be convened later in 2002.

ACCI and members support a role for the Commonwealth that focuses on maximising pathways for young Australians through strategic interventions. Funds to investigate how this might be achieved in an innovative manner is desirable and while the current funding arrangement is supported until the end of 2004, it may require revision at that time. The current monies were originally intended to provide leverage to provide a focus on VET in Schools. The focus now should shift to innovative and strategic interventions.

Student Centred Funding

In the ACCI submission to the Higher Education Review, ACCI supported the concept of student centred funding. For components of VET courses that are delivered by RTOs where the school is not an RTO, ACCI believes students should have a choice of provider.

³ ANTA, *National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning*, p 44

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That is, students should be able to purchase a course from any public or private provider (User Choice). Funding should be linked to student outcomes/achievements with prices determined by market forces.

However, for the general recurrent expenditure on the delivery of VET courses to students, ACCI and members believe that State/Territory governments should provide appropriate levels of support to ensure quality delivery. There needs to be further investigation about student centred funding as an approach to resourcing the delivery of VET in Schools.

This should occur in the overall context of employment trends that reflect market realities at both the regional and national levels.

Delivery of VET

Another significant advance in recent years has been a move to the development of industry Training Packages which lead to nationally recognised qualifications. The identified industry competencies deliver what industry wants and what students expect in terms of looking forward to future careers.

It is of vital importance to cater for the seventy percent of students who do not go on to higher education but who go on to full time employment or other forms of vocational education and training when leaving schools. There is a need to ensure the school system provides options for that seventy percent and make sure that there is a full suite of pathways available to young people that means that both their needs and the needs of Australian industry can be met.

Training Packages are a critically important element of those provisions and there has been an increasing willingness on the part of the school system to utilise and integrate Training Packages into vocational education and training. Industry knowledge and competencies that characterise Training Packages ensure a synergy between industry requirements and the education and training received by students. ACCI and members do not support State/Territory modifications to Training Packages to adapt them to curricula. Where VET options are offered to students, industry developed Training Packages should be used with only minor modification.

It is imperative that Boards of Studies do not alter units of competence or qualification requirements as outlined in the approved Training Packages. This will lead to dissatisfaction by students and employers on outcomes.

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Problems with Traditional Organisation of Schools

Schools organisation, timetabling and flexibility issues remain the greatest practical barriers and sources of frustration to the implementation of VET in Schools programs.

There is a tension between the operations of schools and the needs of employers in relation to how much time students will spend in the workplace and the relationship to on and off the job training and timing of activity. Peak times for both schools and industry occur at the same time. Some schools will only allow students to undertake work placements during school holidays, a time some employers may find unsuitable. The choice of school holiday time also means there is a lack of continuity in learning and utilising skills that have been acquired. This issue is of greater concern to industry than it is to schools.

At times teachers responsible for other subject areas are not as supportive of workplace commitments and are not keen to commit to the measures necessary to support VET programs. This has further exacerbated the situation. Reluctance by some schools to forgo aspects of an individual school's cultural programs (e.g. retreats, swimming carnivals etc) that conflict with the delivery of VET, also presents problems.

Timetabling is a major problem for many schools in accommodating VET programs especially if numbers are low for a particular subject choice. This may limit opportunities. It may be useful if schools specialise across a range of areas in a region to ensure adequate choices are available to students and cooperate in dealing with industry rather than by individual schools and RTOs.

Another option is for schools to consider operating during extended hours to accommodate not only other subject interests but also the requirements of VET subjects for block time in the workplace. ACCI and members support the concept of flexible school hours to accommodate student and employer needs.

Employers and On the Job Learning

On the job learning is a key component of preparing students for the world of work both through the acquisition of specific skills and more broadly, through a general exposure to the expectations of employers.

It is therefore of critical importance that the on-the-job learning component of VET studies be structured to deliver a quality

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experience for students. This has now become the expectation of students, parents and employers.

Further, employers highly value on-the-job learning because of the learning styles available, the direct relevance of the skills acquired and the assurance of standards of the skills imparted. From an employer perspective, the quality delivery of VET in Schools is not possible without an on-the-job learning component. There has been a trend towards simulated learning in recent years, however, it is ACCI and member's view that while simulated learning provides a good grounding in pre-employment preparation, it should not be considered as a quality substitute for on-the job learning. There are limitations on what can be achieved through simulation compared with on-the-job learning.

An ACCI survey of employers on the involvement in schools-industry programs conducted in November 1998 revealed that only half of the business population appears to be aware of VET in Schools programs or how they might benefit their own organisations.

In the survey, ACCI found that there is expected to be growing pressure on employers to provide quality work placements that are nationally recognised as competencies endorsed within the National Training Framework (NTF) and provide credit towards a credential within the AQF.

While this may place additional demands on the resources of the education and training system and industry, properly managed, the productivity benefits of school-to-work programs can work in industry's favour.

If the benefits from VET in Schools programs in Australia are to be maximised, employers should work with educators to ensure that:

- school vocational programs are targeted to reflect real local job opportunities in the local labour market;
- State/Territory business and development units within jurisdictions should also provide input into the process;
- educators are appropriately equipped to provide pre-vocational training relevant to the reality of local workplaces;
- schools with large 'at risk' populations work in consultation with employers, TAFE and other training institutions to provide a wide range of learning environments tailored to the needs of their students; and

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- vocational programs spend more time on developing general work readiness skills, including interpersonal and communication skills.

Many employers believe that VET in Schools is not sufficiently targeted to reflect real local job opportunities, skill shortages and future demand and that schools still focus largely on preparing young people for tertiary education. In particular, there is concern that there are not sufficient on the job learning opportunities in relation to skill shortages nor is there adequate access to relevant, up to date information available when making subject choices.

Many organisations believe that on-the-job learning programs are generally a good idea and deliver community and staff-based benefits, but only half think the programs are appropriate or relevant for their own business or that they contribute in concrete terms to increased productivity.

Many implementation issues also arise. For example there are significant differences in the ways in which clusters assist with on-the-job placements. In some jurisdictions, satisfaction with the operations of clusters is high. This appears to be particularly the case in some rural and semi-rural areas.

In areas where there is a high demand on employers by competing clusters and no overarching organisational structure, the cluster arrangement works against increasing employer participation in VET in Schools programs. The role of the cluster coordinator is pivotal to successful operations in that the personal relationships they build with employers impact on the availability of placements. Work needs to be done to support coordinators in their role and to develop a consistent approach across clusters. For example, appropriate professional development would be one way of providing such support.

The establishment of employer reference groups for specific industries has also helped to ameliorate some of the problems being experienced in the implementation of VET in Schools programs. Building professional relationships within these networks has been an effective mechanism to identify and work on implementation issues as they arise.

There is also a key role to be played by RTOs in supporting employers to participate in VET in Schools. This role has been downplayed to a certain extent in favour of assessment but support for employers to provide quality on-the-job learning opportunities for students is a neglected area that needs higher priority.

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The Role of Institutional VET

Under section 2 of this report, details about the provision of VET in Schools and their status as RTOs are discussed. In terms of the delivery of VET, ACCI and members do not support processes that allow for the automatic and blanket registration of schools as RTOs.

At a more general level, there have been questions posed about the quality of VET qualifications being delivered via VET in Schools. Employers have questioned the quality of skills acquired through this process compared with employees whose skills have been acquired fully on the job with their off the job learning component being delivered by VET providers.

The concern arises through the issuing of qualifications, not the exposure to VET or the broad range of options that include vocational learning and VET in Schools. Employers largely use qualifications as an initial tool for screening future employees. Once a person is employed, employers in general are more concerned with whether or not an employee is competent to perform certain tasks than if they have qualifications to perform that task.

By issuing qualifications that do not match the quality of those provided by other VET providers, schools are in danger of losing the confidence of employers. Where schools auspice with VET providers to deliver the off the job component of VET in Schools the best results are achieved.

This is not to say that VET in Schools should be abandoned or that there is not a place for vocational education in schools. Rather, it is to say that it is the role of schools to deliver a broad suite of vocational offerings to students to familiarise them with and prepare them for the world of work. Basically, participation is about a quality workforce experience. People may be seeking a taste of industry rather than a qualification from participating in VET.

When it comes to issuing qualifications in which have employer confidence, however, this is the role of VET providers such as RTOs. It is not just a matter of transforming Training Package curricula to be delivered in schools.

Careers Advice, Services and Support Materials

The delays in the provision of career advice in Australia within the secondary school system and the delay in State and Territory

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governments in addressing this, has been a major concern for industry.

ACCI and member organisations consider that Australia should develop a consistent and comprehensive system of ensuring the delivery of quality careers information and advice to secondary school students across all school sectors (i.e. government, catholic and independent). Whilst it is acknowledged that this responsibility primarily rests with State/Territory governments, there is a role that the Commonwealth should play in facilitating the development of such a system through provision of products, development of quality standards and provision of resources for best practice and employer engagement.

The first step in a successful school-to-work transition is adequate career advice to students in the early stages of their schooling life. The role of parents in providing advice and mentoring their children in the career choices they make is a primary factor in this process. Students and parents are unable to make accurate decisions about subject choice, on-the-job learning opportunities or School-Based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs) without good quality career advice.

There is no consistent or comprehensive system of ensuring the delivery of career advice to secondary school students. Further, there is no systematic integration of career advice into the school to work programs. There are many products and resources in the marketplace today. However, these resources are produced by many organisations, with no coordination, little industry involvement and little or no delivery mechanisms. There is no consistent or standard tool or resource used by careers advisors or students although the development of the myfuture website has provided a starting point. Coordination with other services and structures is still largely lacking.

Further, there is a gap in some schools between the information and advice offered by careers advisors and that being offered by teachers who deliver VET. There is a strong need to establish links between these two groups that will ensure that information delivered to students is consistent.

The growing variety of programs, courses, entry and exit points from education and training increases the importance of effective information, counselling and guidance for educational and occupational choices.

One key solution to providing good quality careers advice is to improve the delivery mechanism. A single point of contact is

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needed within the schools that could be made available to students, parents and teachers.

This point of contact would need to adopt the 'one-stop-shop' approach in addressing the vocational education and training needs and options for the students, in addition to understanding the university sectors and public recruitment practices.

The contact needs to have, at minimum, product knowledge of Training Packages comparable to that of New Apprenticeships Centres.

Teacher Training

ACCI and members strongly support the introduction of a compulsory unit of study into teacher training in relation to vocational education, especially secondary teachers who deliver the majority of formal learning about vocational education.

In order to meet the requirements of the AQTF, ACCI and members believe that VET teachers should have recent, relevant industry experience. Relevant qualifications to deliver VET are also seen as essential by industry. Industry does not favour systems where teachers who do not have industry-specific expertise in a subject area are expected to deliver VET as an “add on” to their “real” teaching load.

ACCI and members endorse schemes where there is limited teacher release to industry programs and where those programs put an emphasis on participating teachers returning to the classroom. ACCI and members favour schemes where there is an intensive and regular teacher professional development program operating within industry settings and where stronger links between industry and education are developed.

One such program is operated through the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI). It aims to:

- give teachers and principals direct experience of industry through full-time, extended placements in positions determined by industry;
- increase the capacity of schools to improve the learning outcomes of students in the key areas of curriculum, to meet school charter goals and priorities, and improve management practices;
- provide participating teachers and principals, and their school colleagues, with a greater understanding of a broad range of industry issues, including industry priorities, management

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- practices, organisation of work and the impact of technological developments;
- support the development of school programs, which impart to students a broad range of work related skills and understanding, and which will also reflect industry's expectations of students as future employees;
 - support Vocational Education and Training in schools;
 - provide industry with a greater understanding of educational issues, priorities and practices;
 - indicate to industry, and to the education community, the various ways in which industry can offer information, expertise and support to the educational programs and management of schools;
 - develop and maintain a diversity of ongoing links between schools and industry; and
 - enhance the status of the teaching profession.

Schools receive a number of benefits, depending on where their teacher is placed and what role they undertake. Projects undertaken by teachers are developed in conjunction with the host employer and the school to meet specific needs and goals. Teachers return to school with a range of new skills and perspectives, as well as a better understanding of what is required of students entering the workforce. Schools also gain a network of contacts from industry as a result of the placement.

Teachers participate in an intensive professional development experience, which provides insights into the operation of industry, valuable skills applicable to school programs and operations, a wide range of contacts and knowledge about industry resources, and confidence in the transferable skills they possess. An industry placement offers many teachers an opportunity for regeneration and an affirmation of their commitment to their role as educators. Teachers also gain a formal qualification resulting from their choice between university or industry-based accreditation of skills and knowledge demonstrated during their placements.

The purpose of teacher release to industry programs should be to ensure that teachers have the competencies that they are teaching to their students and for which they assess them.

Schemes such as this one should be adopted across all jurisdictions.

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Employer Engagement in the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework

Industry has consistently argued that skills formation without adequate access to an on-the-job component of training will result in lower quality outcomes for both students and industry. There are a variety of ways in which employers are involved in the delivery of vocational education and training in schools and without which, schools would not be able to make quality offerings to students. For example, employers provide work experience, part-time work opportunities, talks to schools, on-the-job opportunities for vocational education and training in school students, mentoring support, opportunities for School-Based New Apprenticeships, as well as participation in school advisory and management groups, and in other management activities such as cluster groups.

Part-time work is an option chosen by a considerable number of students and provides a valid stream pathway for them. However, there are opportunities for a greater connection between the pathways chosen by these students and linkages with part or whole of a formal qualification. Currently students undertake this option without any contextual information about the workforce or the expectations of employers. This is a function that could be undertaken, for example, by the school or an RTO so as to understand the theoretical framework within which they operate. This would afford them a broader understanding of issues around the workplace, the importance of qualifications and how to build on learning and participation in the formal sector. The benefits of this would be twofold in that students would not only have access to the building blocks of lifelong learning, but in a more immediate sense, they would be able to access Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) that may contribute to a formal qualification. Employers favour a formal qualification system.

Another message to emerge from broad educational research is that teaching and learning processes and methods that combine abstract and applied learning are as important as the content of education and training.

This has been a driving force in introducing work-based learning within schools. It has allowed young people to establish contacts with employers, which may lead to subsequent employment in the training enterprise, or lead to them being employed by other employers operating in a similar field. It also builds genuine bridges from education into employment.

The findings of an ACCI survey of employers on their involvement in schools-industry programs reinforce the need for an integrated

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schools-industry strategy. AMR Quantum Harris, on behalf of ACCI and the former Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF), conducted the survey involving 2014 employers, in November 1998. The survey covered small, medium and large businesses across all industry sectors.

The objective was to assess the level of employer awareness of, and participation in, structured workplace learning programs. The findings confirm that if the support of employers is to be realised they must be better informed about the roles that they can play. Industry relationships with the schools system should be of considerable influence and support; however, a more structured and coherent approach is needed if stronger links are to be forged.

The survey findings also showed that business is generally supportive of structured workplace learning programs. Two thirds of organisations participating were and continue to be small businesses. Employers indicated that programs do not translate into concrete benefits through increased productivity for the business; however, over half of employers believe that programs deliver some benefit.

Many benefits such as reinforcing existing workers' own skills and feelings of responsibility for students, positive feelings employers have through raising their profile within their community, students introducing new ideas into the workplace, and the opportunity for employers to "try before you buy", are already being experienced by enterprises involved. However, in order to increase participation levels it is necessary to deliver a consistent, credible and simple message on schools-industry initiatives.

The findings of this survey remain relevant today. To engage employers in schools-industry initiatives, relevant, targeted marketing to employers needs to be undertaken. That is, it would suggest a lack of knowledge about schools-industry initiatives rather than a lack of willingness to participate that inhibits higher levels of employer participation. There is a strong need to undertake marketing activities to increase the current levels of employer engagement.

Employability Skills

Employers have also identified other skills as being of importance to the operations of their business. Recently, ACCI and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) have undertaken the project "Employability Skills for the Future" so as to provide DEST and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), with a detailed understanding of the employability skill needs of industry. The

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report provides a consolidation of research with both small and medium sized enterprises and large enterprises during 2001. The research has clearly identified an Employability Skills Framework that has strong industry support.⁴

The project identified those key, generic employability skills that enterprises argue individuals should have along with the job-specific or relevant technical skills. It identified an Employability Skills Framework that could inform the thinking and curriculum development of the Australian education and training systems.

There are a number of critical aspects underpinning this Framework. These are:

- the framework identified by employers builds on the Mayer Key Competencies;
- employer recognition and integration of the Mayer Key Competencies in their discussion of the nature of jobs and skills is strong;
- employers have identified the importance of what have been termed “personal values that contribute to employability” and indicate that these are required as part of the set of employability skills;
- small and medium sized enterprises and large enterprises have identified the same critical mix of skills as being relevant to the employability and ongoing employment of individuals;
- the skills identified as critical to employability are broadly consistent across industry sectors;
- the priority of these employability skills (and their respective elements) vary from enterprise to enterprise subject to the context of the job and the enterprise;
- the employability skills identified are as relevant as job specific or technical skills;
- the employability skills identified are relevant to entry level and established employees. What is recognised by employers is that the elements and level of complexity of the skill will vary with both the job type and classification;
- the employability skills identified are relevant to all industry sectors with little variation occurring across the sectors;
- there is a strong recognition of the role of life long learning in skill development and responding to change;
- employer views with regard to leadership have emerged in a different way to other research. Employers have tended to

⁴ 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, pp 8-9.

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suggest that the skills identified in the Framework are contributors to an employee's capacity to lead;

- the recognition that customer service of itself is not an isolated skill but rather the outcome of the integration of a range of different skills of an individual eg communication and problem solving; and
- throughout the project those interviewed also argued that the employability skills identified had a much broader application. The skills were as important to effective participation in the community.

Employers participating in the research placed a strong emphasis on the need for both entry level and ongoing employees to exhibit a broad range of personal attributes. Employers suggested that entry level and ongoing employees needed to reflect attributes that were acceptable to the rest of their working peer group, the customer and were in line with the company's approach. The employers participating in the research stressed the need to ensure future employees developed these personal attributes as they are an integral feature of an employable person and a key component of the Employability Skills Framework. The results of the work were true across all industries and for all sizes of enterprises.

Therefore, how young people acquire employability skills and how employability skills are measured and reported, are questions raised by this work that will provide future challenges for the industry and education sectors for the vocational education for all students. In particular, how students can be given opportunities during their school years to develop personal attributes will require further discussion and debate. Employability skills are seen as a priority in relation to vocational education from an employer perspective.

This does not mean that employers are advocating any particular way in which employability skills should be taught, assessed and recorded. Nor are employers advocating for a stand alone formal certificate in employability skills.

The work currently being undertaken on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) to: validate, within the schools sector, the employability skills proposed in recent research undertaken within Australia; identify approaches to the assessment and reporting of achievement of these skills by secondary school students; and scope implementation issues and develop strategies to support the future implementation of employment related skills in the schools sector, should provide guidance on which direction should be taken to further work in this area.

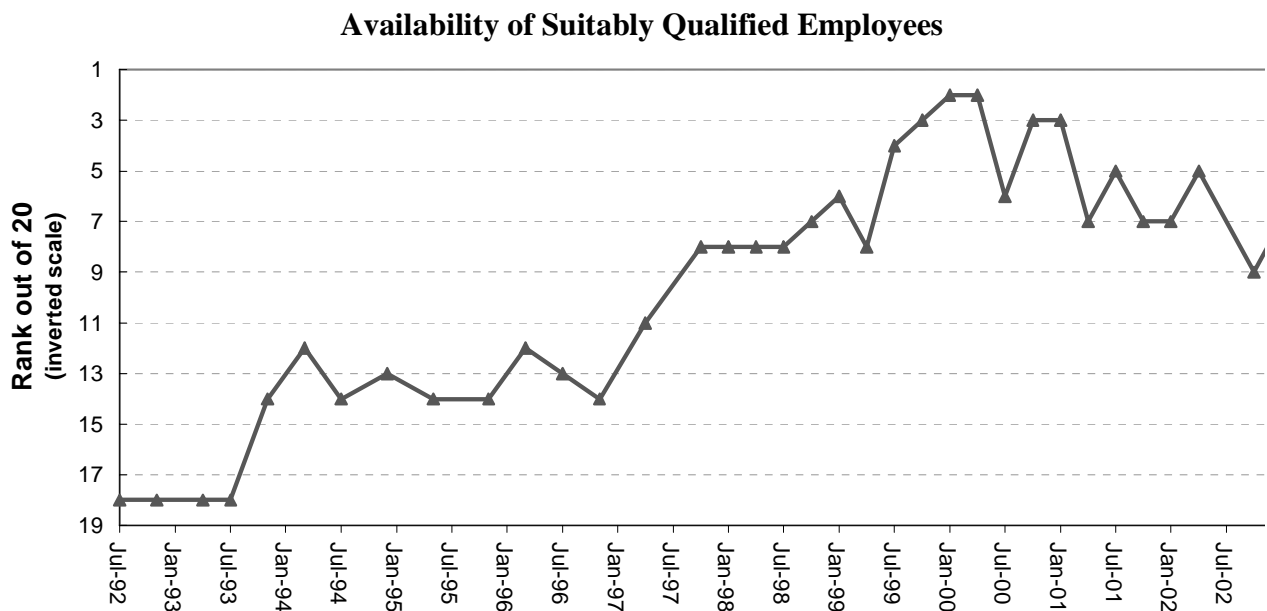
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The work being undertaken by ANTA to investigate the potential integration of the Employability Skills Framework across the sectors where vocational education and training is delivered, will also be important in answering the questions raised.

Skill Shortages

Skill shortages have been a significant focus for ACCI employment and training policy reforms in recent years. Through ACCI members, ACCI has participated in a diverse series of activities spanning a range of industries – not only traditional trade occupations – resulting in significant progress towards addressing current and future skill needs. ACCI is of the view that a broad industry response, which includes but is not confined to traditional trades, is required in order to address skill shortages across the Australian labour market.

The graph below illustrates the rise in importance of the constraint in the survey through the late 1990's, the slight decline in ranking in recent years and the recent rise in prominence again.



A major response to this issue was the introduction of the National Industry Skills Initiative (NISI which operates jointly between industry and government.

The industries and organisations participating in NISI are:

- Automotive Retail and Repair;

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- Electrotechnology;
- Engineering;
- Commercial Cookery;
- Building and Construction;
- Rural;
- Retail;
- Emerging Technologies; and
- Road Freight.

In July 2002, Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson endorsed a forward work programme for NISI. The programme extended NISI to include projects in the boating and aerospace sectors of the engineering industry and consideration of the entertainment, printing and energy supply industries for possible future projects.

Each area of work has produced a report by an industry led Task Force with an attached Action Plan. This work will continue throughout 2003.

NISI is a major success story of government working with industry to produce tangible results.

There are four main areas where NISI has made a significant contribution to addressing the current and future skill needs of the participating industries in NISI. They are:

1. the extensive research conducted through NISI validating the nature and extent of skill shortages;
2. the resources which have been developed promoting careers in these industries to potential new entrants;
3. the improvement in the level of awareness of employers about the value of vocational education and training in their respective industries; and
4. the improved relationship between government and industry in addressing current and future skill needs.

Careers Resources and Materials

The careers resources and materials developed through NISI include: websites, CD ROMs, printed materials, resource kits for careers advisors, kits for employers to give professional presentations to students, New Apprenticeships Awards which recognises excellence in occupations in traditional trades areas, a mobile careers van which travels throughout regional areas promoting careers in the automotive industry and a “Hotline” providing information on careers and course information.

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These resources have been distributed throughout schools, training organisations and industry associations with positive results.

Employer Engagement in Training

Each industry identified the promotion of training to employers as a major strategy in their Action Plans. Research which reveals the triggers prompting employers to train employees and employ New Apprentices has been conducted in several of the industries participating in NISI. This research has been used to develop targeted marketing campaigns aimed at increasing the level of awareness of employers, in particular small to medium sized businesses, about training available in their industry.

The extent of skill shortages will continue to be a major problem for the Australian economy. The continuing pressure of skill shortages is due to a complex range of labour market, education and training, employment practice and employee expectation issues. NISI must have the required funding in order to assist government and industry to address the matter. Linkages between schools and industry, industry-based training, targeted career information and flexible pathways for young people, should be an important factor taken into consideration when resource decisions are taken in relation to vocational education and training.

Impact of Vocational Education on Other Programs – the Status of VET

The majority of students will not undertake tertiary studies because of a combination of factors such as parental expectations, perceived status of tertiary studies and the perceived limitations to future pathways. In the ACCI Submission to the Department of Education Science and Education (DEST) Higher Education Review, ACCI made the observation that there appears to be a degree of academic elitism by higher education to VET provision.

This has led to some universities not recognising VET in Schools activity for their tertiary entrance score. This situation is improving through work being undertaken involving ACCI, but is relying on a university process to test or rank VET activity. The inherent tension between competency based learning and exam-based curriculum remains a major issue.

Employers want to see measures taken to improve the status of VET options in schools.

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MCEETYA Transition from Schools Taskforce and Consultative Arrangements

ACCI currently has observer status on the Transition from Schools Taskforce (TST Taskforce) and held membership of the previous VET in Schools Taskforce. It is critical that industry representation on the Taskforce on Transition from School be continued and that industry views be considered when debating and deciding on matters relating to the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework.

Not only are business education partnerships an element of the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework but also other elements have business participation as a significant component. For example, the delivery of VET in Schools, with approximately 170,000 students participating in 2001, require workplacements for the delivery to be possible.

As well, employers are involved in activities across Australia that promote flexible career and transition pathways. However, it is not just because of employer assistance in delivering various elements of the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Framework that the voice of industry should be listened to, but it is also because of the role of industry overall.

Employers are a major consumer of educational services for the formation of workplace skills. ACCI therefore advocates a demand driven rather than a supply driven model for vocational education in Australia. This more closely aligns vocational education to the needs of business, students and governments and shifts the focus to a business culture where students have realistic options available to them based on what employers want.

The importance of this is to ensure that there are fully accessible and flexible means available to make high-level representations of employer views to relevant Ministers for Education and Training. Full representation on the TST would assist in this process.

The Role of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation

ACCI has long advocated for a government entity that could integrate the various schools-industry initiatives and facilitate the involvement of employers and industry in the education and training agenda. The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) is the body that now undertakes this function.

The importance of ECEF comes about because of the need for:

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- a nationally consistent framework of targeted activity which is easily marketable to employers;
- a key nationally recognised platform in the effort to reduce youth unemployment;
- a recognition of the importance of the Commonwealth role in resourcing schools-industry initiatives;
- linking Commonwealth resourcing to the schools system rather than the vocational education training system through the four-year Commonwealth schools agreement with State/Territory Governments. This places pressure on the State/Territory schools systems to provide key elements of the strategy from existing schools funding which they have not done (e.g. Careers Advisory Services);
- a recognition of the need for additional resources to be provided on a competitive basis to industry, the community and schools;
- getting better value for money including minimisation of Government expenditure duplication and introduction of outcomes based models;
- securing agreement that schools-industry initiatives are a combination of activity impacting on employers rather than a concentration on a specific initiative; and
- establishing a special purpose organisation with an employer led board with critical links to established Government and industry advisory structures. It would also bring together staff resources from a number of Commonwealth agencies with responsibilities in this area to consolidate expertise.

Specifically in relation to vocational education, it is important that ECEF have the capacity to act as a bridging agent so that directions agreed by MCEETYA can be implemented. This can be achieved through specific targeted initiatives and continued work on structured workplace learning.

In addition, ACCI has recently formed an alliance with ECEF to work to:

- address specific areas of activity defined under the MCEETYA Framework;
- build business and industry engagement to support the implementation of the MCEETYA Framework;
- identify and support policy change relevant to the appropriate industry sector through involvement in appropriate forums;
- broker alliances with other relevant stakeholders (including, young Australians, parents, Parents and Friends Associations, and school Principals);
- raise young Australians' awareness of and practical exposure to the income producing potential and relevant career choices;

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- increase industry and/or regional economies' recognition of the potential to enhance productivity and profitability through active involvement in learning beyond the classroom activities for young Australians.

This strategic arrangement between industry and ECEF should provide better support for employer engagement in the student transitions from schools. It will allow for the expansion and growth of employer involvement at the local level, which will be a major focus of activity for the next two years. Continued financial support to strengthen local arrangements for employers is necessary to provide advancement in this area.

2. The Differences Between School-Based and Other Vocational Education Programs and the Resulting Qualifications, and the Pattern of Industry Acceptance of School-Based Programs

There has not been, nor is there ever expected to be, a large uptake of School- Based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs). They currently make up between 2-3% of all VET in School enrolments with the highest number being recorded in Queensland.

It is ACCI and members' view that there has been some confusion about the purpose of SBNAs. Students currently undertake a combination of school-based and non-school based activities during their final years at school. Some students regard VET in Schools options as providing a 'taster' of industry or as a bridging arrangement to other jobs or for higher education choices. Where a student's pursuit of VET in Schools courses results in a tertiary outcome, ACCI regards this as positive for students and for industry. A VET in Schools course of study does not need to articulate directly into employment within certain industries or SBNAs.

Other students may pursue part-time employment as a mark of independence or purely to provide sufficient financial resources to fund their lifestyle choices. They may have little or no interest in using the part-time work they do to pursue future career options. In the main, hospitality and retail are the vestibule industries for the majority of young Australians.

Some students may pursue a VET in Schools option or a SBNA because of pressure from either parents or teachers to gain advantage through the extra qualifications they are able to obtain. Still further, some students may choose VET in Schools or SBNA options because they because they prefer the learning styles offered by on-the-job constructs.

Other students pursue part-time traineeships where the school is not involved in the training or organisation of any educational aspects of the experience. The student obtains part-time employment and must complete certain off the job components in their own time. This places a heavy burden on those students in terms of time commitments for study obligations not factored into their school workload.

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The purpose of SBNAs is to provide direct links to employment at the end of an individual's schooling. An employment contract is entered into and a wage is earned.

It is ACCI and members' view that SBNAs should not be promoted as a mainstream alternative to all students but should be used as a direct pipeline to employment and provide part of the suite of options that provide Australian youth with flexibility in their transition from school. It is also ACCI and members' view the part-time traineeship model needs review as this option places the greatest pressure on Australian school students.

Many students enter a part-time traineeship without any contextual understanding of what they are doing or industry knowledge of the jobs they are undertaking. If schools were to offer courses in the area of the part-time traineeship, it could alleviate the time pressures being placed on students who undertake this option and provide them with dual qualifications upon exit.

Where there is a framework for employers to engage in SBNAs and part-time traineeships the structure allows for better articulation with specific skill need areas such as automotive or electrotechnology for example.

In relation to employer acceptance of qualifications obtained via school options as opposed to those obtained from other sources, the following concerns have been raised with the National Training Quality Council in the report, *The AQTF and VET in Schools: A Report to the National Training Quality Council*:

- students issued with a qualification gained through VET in Schools arrangements may not be able to demonstrate the skills in the workplace;
- the delivery of VET in an institutional setting does not allow for sufficient on-the-job experience; and
- VET delivered by schools is of a lower standard than that delivered by other Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).⁵

In addition employers are in general, comfortable with school students accessing Certificate I qualifications through VET in Schools programs. There are some concerns about Certificate II qualifications (because of traineeship implications) particularly in trade areas where on-the-job training is vital. Serious reservations have been expressed about schools offering students Certificate III qualifications in industry areas including the trades and Information Technology.

⁵ *The AQTF and VET in Schools: A Report to the National Training Quality Council.*

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It is accepted that students may be capable of acquiring the technical knowledge required for a Certificate III qualification, but employers generally consider it unlikely that a student could be assessed as gaining a Certificate III qualification because of issues such as achieving a consistent standard of work within deadlines, providing customer satisfaction (Information Technology, and Laboratory Skills) and lack of interpersonal skills necessary for dealing with adults (Community Services, and Sport & Recreation). In other words, Certificate III skills are considered to be those demonstrated by a competent adult operator in the industry. Relatively small numbers of students are accessing Certificate III level qualifications.

Generally, schools that are RTOs deliver VET at Certificate I and II qualification levels (especially in NSW, Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT). Some schools, in some States and Territories (notably Victoria and South Australia) also offer part or all of Certificates III and IV in a few industry areas, particularly Information Technology, Business and Hospitality. These higher-level qualifications often require the participation of non-school RTOs delivering in partnership arrangements.

Even though the report to ANTA found no concrete evidence to support industry concerns that students undertaking institutionally based VET do not exit with the same skills as those whose training has occurred largely in the workplace, it did find there are perceptions that schools offering VET are not meeting the same standards as other RTOs. Nonetheless, to the extent that any such perception is widespread, there is potential risk for the recognition of students' VET qualifications.

Arrangements under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) to ensure consistency of standards for RTOs is therefore of great concern to industry. While there has been significant progress made towards an increasing acceptance of qualifications achieved via the VET in Schools route, there is still a misunderstanding on the part of some employers about the quality of the outcomes achieved. Quality systems engender employer confidence in the system and a great deal will rest on schools' ability to meet with the same standards as other RTOs. It is being proposed to ANTA that the NTQC undertakes further research in this area. It is also evident that employers highly value the on-the-job learning that students undertake. Effective marketing to employers would also help strengthen the current fragile position.

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Regardless, employer confidence in the system to achieve quality must be a priority if qualifications achieved in schools are to have parity with other VET delivery in the eyes of employers.

3. Vocational Education in New and Emerging Industries

New and emerging industries are providing potential economic growth opportunities for Australia and a serious investigation in relation to providing for the skill needs of businesses engaged in these areas is of fundamental importance.

To meet skill needs of new and emerging industries, it will be necessary to identify whether or not schools systems have the capacity to provide quality vocational education offerings that will meet specific needs. It can be argued that it is the application of technology to existing industries that provides an equal if not greater challenge to the education system. Emerging industries are based on combinations of previously separated disciplines.

For example, biotechnology combines the principles of biology with information technology. Other industries, including traditional industries, have also utilised information technology principles in the provision of goods and services in the economy. Goodwin and Johnston, cited in the Productivity Commission report, *Skill and Australia's Productivity Surge*, suggest that a firm's capacity to absorb new technology from external influences relies on factors within the organisation, such as the level of educated labour⁶.

Training Packages largely cover the specific skills needed for some emerging technologies (for example renewable energy and Photonics) and are also incorporating the recently developed innovation skills. There are additional specific skills required for particular new technologies, but in many cases what is needed are new combinations of skills, with some specific contextualisation for the new industry area. In addition, the types of skills needed are also changing with greater conceptual rather than physical content of output requiring increased demand for conceptual skills in the workforce.⁷

It can be argued that literacy in information technology is an important element in the formation of appropriate skills for new and emerging technologies. The importance of information technology

⁶ Goodwin and Johnston, 1999., cited in Barnes, P and Kennard, S. 2002, *Skills and Australia's Productivity Surge*, Productivity Commission Staff Research Paper, Canberra, p 34

⁷ Greenspan, cited in Barnes, P and Kennard, S. 2002, *Skills and Australia's Productivity Surge*, Productivity Commission Staff Research Paper, Canberra, p 4.

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as part of the Employability Skills Framework is an additional point to support this proposition. However, the point being made above about the general level of education to adapt to new technology must also be considered. The report also suggests that a high general level of education is consistent with a relatively strong diffusion of information and communications technology⁸.

Therefore, in relation to new and emerging technologies, it is important that schools provide a good general education, especially in areas such as English, Mathematics and Science, and provide specific information technology skills. As new and emerging industries comprise firms with traditional and non-traditional business structures, education in Business Studies will also be of importance.

Providing specific industry information in the delivery of English, Mathematics and Science would also be of importance to all students as part of their general vocational education. Current and relevant careers information, products and services would also support the outcomes that could be achieved through endeavours. Linkages with the tertiary sector to develop these skills into innovation are also highly desirable.

As well as the general education provided by schools and the specific vocational education and appropriate careers support, there is a further role for schools to play. This role would be to provide specific courses that relate to new and emerging industries and that are responsive to emerging demands for specific skills.

This requires flexibility and responsiveness in a number of areas such as:

- the capacity of the business areas of State/Territory governments to identify new and emerging industries and to identify the skill needs of those industries;
- the flexibility of State/Territory Boards of Senior Secondary Studies or equivalents in amending existing and introducing new curriculum offerings;
- the capacity of ANTA and the relevant national industry training advisory bodies to develop, validate and implement relevant Training Packages; and
- the opportunities for students to undertake relevant on-the-job learning experiences in new and emerging enterprises.

⁸ Barnes, P and Kennard, S. 2002, *Skills and Australia's Productivity Surge*, Productivity Commission Staff Research Paper, Canberra, p 40.

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The latter has already proved difficult based on anecdotal feedback from ACCI member organisations. By their very nature, firms in new and emerging areas are small, young and undergoing periods of rapid growth. They are also few in number. Trying to coordinate students into on-the-job learning opportunities is therefore a practical problem that will need to be addressed.

Rather than schools attempting to focus their limited resources in this area, more is to be gained for new and emerging industries by schools concentrating on delivering quality general education offerings, career support and targeted vocational learning opportunities.

In addition, the initial work in the development of Training Packages has been to cover as much of industry as possible. Now that this has been largely achieved, it will be necessary to move on and support firms that are innovating, introducing new technologies and practices, or are in new industry sectors. This will require greater flexibility in Training Package construction so that they can reflect new configurations of workforce skills.

Training Packages also need to provide greater recognition for generic skills such as those contained in the Employability Skills Framework.

4. The Accessibility and Effectiveness of Vocational Education for Indigenous Students

General Comments

A significant number of Indigenous Australians participate in Vocational, Education and Training (VET) across the country, with an increase in numbers in regional areas. The participation of Indigenous students in this activity has increased significantly in the past few years although engaging Indigenous students remains a difficult area especially in relation to supply. Recent data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research LTD (NCVER) report on *Indigenous students in vocational education and training in 2000 At a Glance* indicates:

- 51,000 Indigenous students undertook vocational education and training;
- the majority of Indigenous students lived in remote or rural areas; and
- the number of Indigenous apprentices and trainees was 5,160.

ACCI recognises the importance of cooperation between employer organisations, business, the government and the range of education and training providers to ensure that initiatives meet business needs whilst operating in the policy framework of the government of the day. Employers play an important role in setting training policy, establishing links with education and training institutions, and providing training for employees. ACCI contributes to this framework on several levels including representation on a range of committees and forums.

The ongoing need for a range of skills in Indigenous communities requires vocational education to be designed in partnership with Indigenous communities. Directly linked to this is the need to address the language, literacy and numeracy needs of Indigenous communities. Vocational education can be used as a pathway for Indigenous people into employment or higher education. The overall aim is to increase skills that lead to employment and sustainable communities.

At the State/Territory level, a model has been developed in the Northern Territory which involves the establishment of a group of senior representatives of relevant organisations to address the supply issues and coordinate activity with employers. Once established, this group would comprise the Chief Executive of

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NTCCI, the Secretary of the Northern Territory DEET, the NT ATSIC Commissioner, and the State Managers of DEWR and DEST. It is not envisaged this group will meet frequently but will establish an action plan and agree on targeted industries, coordination of program monies, consistency of message to the Indigenous community and better linking of job placement and training provider outcomes and services. This model is favoured by ACCI and members.

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Issues

There are a number of issues which impact on the accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for Indigenous students.

Accessibility

The availability of structured vocational education programs for Indigenous students is limited in some areas. There is an opportunity to further explore more innovative methods of delivery of vocational education, as well as linking the applicability of vocational education to localised circumstances, including community and labour market.

Literacy and numeracy

There exists significant low levels of numeracy and literacy of Indigenous students across the board, this impact directly on students achieving any education outcome. There is an urgent to address this issue to create opportunities for more effective participation.

Recycling through the system

While there are relatively high numbers of Indigenous students enrolled or attending VET courses, there needs to be further investigation into the number of completions and attainment of qualifications, as well as an examination of relevancy of courses.

Support Systems

The establishment of structured support systems both formally and informally would contribute to more effective outcomes for Indigenous students in the vocational education area. These systems could range from mentoring, links to local industry or business through to peer group support.

Cultural Awareness

Indigenous students are often disadvantaged in VET programs through a lack of cultural awareness. This is a long-term problem that requires continual work to reverse this matter.

ACCI Involvement in Indigenous Education and Employment Projects

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) is committed to making a contribution in this area. ACCI is also committed to sustainable outcomes, which will assist in building the economic and social capacity in Indigenous communities and in the broader community.

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The ACCI through its Indigenous Education and Employment Project (IEEP) is contracted to facilitate Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) placements for Indigenous students nationwide. The IEEP also has a strategic focus on providing additional outcomes such as the development, production and distribution of marketing materials and the conduct of various business and community forums and seminars. Through these activities, a greater awareness of labour market issues, skill shortages, and career pathways to enhance Indigenous employment opportunities is provided. The benefit to Industry will be in developing partnerships and exploring and identifying labour force options, for Indigenous people.

Possible Support Interventions and Partnerships from Business

There exists an opportunity for business to explore the possible contributions it can make collectively, in not only assisting and supporting Indigenous students to succeed in the post compulsory education field but to participate collectively to work towards making Australia a more equitable place where all members of society can participate in building a strong economic base. The initial partnerships can be built on to work towards sustainability in terms of employment, better health, and increased participation in the education system. There are a number of stakeholders who have responsibility in this area, and business could focus on where it can participate in partnerships to achieve equitable education outcomes for Indigenous people.

Mentoring

An accepted way of supporting and encouraging individuals to pursue and succeed in education, employment or betterment of life in general is through mentoring. Business can play a significant role and participate in structured mentoring activities. Linkages between Indigenous VET students and Indigenous employers are particularly effective.

Scholarships and Cadetships

There already exists a range of scholarship and cadetship programs available to Indigenous students. Business could target particular Indigenous students from a particular region and obtain support through the existing programs. This approach would maintain and increase skills and local employment in regional areas.

Sponsorship and Partnership

An opportunity presents itself through the development of partnerships between business and local communities on a regional basis to sponsor Indigenous students to maintain their attendance at

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school and further their education with the prospects of employment with their business sponsor upon attainment of certain level of education. This could be at Year 10, Year 12 or beyond. This approach could be one of many pathways for Indigenous students to further their education and link to employment. Support outside schooling through mentoring with local communities is another form these partnerships might take.

Employability skills

Employers play a key role in identifying the skills required by employees, the recently released “*Employability Skills For The Future*” report provides information of business requirements in this area.

Early Intervention

The key problem is how to maintain Indigenous students in VET in Schools options. For example, programs with a VET focus should start earlier in High School especially at Years 8/9/10.

Involvement of Industry focused mentoring can assist students in these programs. Encouragement of VET for Indigenous students should not only be as an outcome or singular career choice but also as a viable pathway to further education and training and or Indigenous business development. This can be a possible future direction and targeting this concept to students at Years 10/11/12

More effective coordination of key stakeholders and across agencies is needed so that the relationships between individual outcomes to support broader whole of government outcomes is achieved rather than having ad hoc results.

Conclusion

Business can make a contribution in this area. Through the development and engagement of strategic partnerships both locally and nationally, with commitment, resources and frameworks, a difference can be made. In partnership with Government, Indigenous communities and the Education sector, Business can implement our shared responsibility in effecting an equal and economically sustainable society.