

Hellyer College
response to
House of Representatives Standing Committee
(Education and Training) Inquiry
into
VET in Schools

Background

Located in Burnie in north west Tasmania, Hellyer College provides secondary education to students in years 11 and 12, including some mature age students. Students come to this college from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and geographic locations. The majority of students enter directly from years 10 or 11. Some enroll as full fee paying students from overseas and as local mature age students who have not as yet had the opportunity to study at a senior secondary level.

Formal Organisation as a Training Provider

Hellyer College has been a Registered Training Provider (RTO) since 1996. Hellyer College has successfully achieved Quality Endorsed Registered Training Organisation (QERTO) status and is presently accredited as an RTO under the new Australian Qualifications Training Framework standards. Hellyer College delivers national training packages across a range of industry programs: automotive, engineering, hospitality, retail, tourism, information technology, music, community services and furnishings and furniture making. A tailored course of general vocation taught in an open learning/team teaching environment for those students who have no defined industry career pathway is available through the Certificate of Workplace Skills. Hellyer College delivers certificate level training not embedded units within schools board subjects.

Hellyer College recognizes the limitations of VET in Schools and has broadened its curricula to embrace CISCO (network management) and Microsoft vendor training.

VET Evolution in Burnie

Hellyer College is the primary provider of VET in Schools in Burnie and has been since the early 1990's. Hellyer College works in partnership with industry, the community, TAFE and Marist Regional College (a catholic system private education provider) to facilitate a loose local partnership known as Burnie VET. The structure of Burnie VET has evolved over the decade from a regional focused group that established VET in Schools, to working industry committees/management groups/advisory committees. Some of these industry specific committees have merged/separated/remerged/disbanded/settled for newsletter and verbal communications rather than formal meetings or dissolved because of a recognition that Hellyer College appears to be competent in facilitating VET in Schools.

Workplacement Structure

VET students at Hellyer College have the opportunity to participate in up to 240 hours or 30 days of workplace training. The nature of the workplacement program is determined in consultation with the needs of each specific industry eg Retail and Hospitality are one day a week in the workplace; Engineering prefers block of time; other programs run a combination of block and one day a week workplacements. The Hellyer College timetable is tailored to enable students to be in a workplace with minimal disruption to other studies.

Statistics:

Hellyer College has a student full time equivalent population of 785 (2002: 877).
Eleven VET Coordinators are responsible for VET delivery and assessment.
Our VET Planning Team and QA Management Review Committee administer Vet in Schools.
The breakdown of year 11 and year 12 students in VET is 107:114

A mid 1990's goal of 70% of students completing VET qualifications has not been achieved. A level of VET involvement has emerged on average at 24% of our total student enrolment. A further 30% of student enrolments have a tertiary entrance focus, while a further 30% are still unclear as to their career pathways post year 12.

The role of VET in Schools

- A key success factor is an intangible: strong personal, ongoing relationships established by Hellyer College VET Coordinators with their students and with employers and workplace supervisors.
- VET in Schools enables students with alternate learning styles who have become disinterested with traditional classroom learning to see value in learning.
- Provides tertiary bound students with an opportunity to acquire practical workplacement skills of value in gaining part time work.
- Encourages students to continue with a general education to year 12 level while introducing them to work skills in a business environment. Encourages students to take the opportunity to look at career paths, network and make an informed decision while still studying as to their aptitude and long term interest in particular employment areas.
- Teaches students the generic life skills and soft skills of work ie attitude, time, punctuality, communications, non verbal language skills, dealing with anger, harassment, just in time thinking, customer service, separating self from an abusive customer, the value of relationships, use of a telephone, use of technology (computers, faxes, printers).
- Enables capable employees and employers to participate in a mentoring and training role with young people, hence encouraging and enhancing lifelong learning.
- Markets education and the capabilities of students and staff to many community people who are out of touch with what happens in schools/colleges. Hellyer College staff move outside their comfort zones and into the community to seek workplacements and workplace contacts. Presentation evenings for academic as well as VET programs have introduced a wider parent group to current education and how it functions.
- Showcases the communication and organization skills of teaching staff to the community, especially the business community. The world is very real whether it be a manufacturing site, a retail store or a classroom. We all have clients with needs and budgets to meet. Our profits are simply less easy to recognize at the "bottom line".
- Promotes accountability and a stronger quality framework for educational institutions to operate.
- VET in Schools in Tasmania, through our workplacement program, has been instrumental in creating a culture of training and a knowledge and understanding of national training packages in small to medium businesses. It is unfortunate that such training has been left to senior secondary colleges and VET in Schools Coordinators already struggling with an overloaded curricula. Formal qualifications have been attained by over 80 business employers and employees in Burnie in the second half of the 1990's, as a deliberate strategy by Hellyer College to enhance and continuously improve our VET in Schools delivery. Unfortunately it has been based on ad hoc supplementary funding with no long term strategy possible.

Barriers to the Growth of VET in Schools

- Delivery at full Certificate II level of a national training package at senior secondary can be a disincentive for employment. If a full time traineeship at Certificate II level is available with a Commonwealth government incentive to the employer, then a student who already has achieved the full certificate II will not attract the government incentive. Given a choice between an applicant who would attract the incentive and one who would not attract the subsidy, the former will most likely gain the traineeship.
- Parent, teacher and community perceptions that VET is for non university bound students.
- Parent, teacher and community perceptions that VET is a second runner up to a university education.
- Lack of recognition of the value of alternative learning styles and generic work and life skills by the university – this is changing, but has not changed significantly in Tasmania and is reflected in the makeup of VET enrolments. Tasmania has no recognition of successful VET studies in Tertiary Entrance Rank Scores.

- Existing teacher training: teachers are the most important element in the learning environment, but teachers are trained in a traditional university teaching environment and tend to perpetuate what they know. Need to supplement the range of teaching qualifications to allow for adult learning styles of teaching, OH&S training, understanding of AQTF and training packages and teacher into industry programs.
- The neglect of a teacher into industry program as a national initiative for all VET teachers appears at odds with the intent of introducing national training packages.
- Pedagogy and teaching styles in colleges in Tasmania vary widely from the pedagogy and delivery of training in TAFE. However, the two institutions endeavour to work together to provide VET in Schools, often with wide variations in philosophy, funding, commercial accountability and objectives. This has and continues to create unnecessary tensions.
- VET in Schools is not recognized as an equal partner with VET in TAFE. This is a significant issue, ongoing and a cause of tension. Instead of recognition that schools/colleges can deliver the entry level training package certificates while providing the same student with a general education, we have tension and some competition for the same market. Aside: Although TAFE is the most significant player in the VET public provider field, over 40% of VET nationally is now delivered by private providers, at the same cost per student contact hour (see Skilling Australia Conference, www.skillingaustralia.com.au presentation by John Somerset, Hall Chadwick on "Paying for VET").
- The lack of a trained VET workforce for the next decade is documented along with the growth in employment in the small to medium rather than large businesses: see www.skillingaustralia.com.au. There is great value to be gained by encouraging managers and owners of small to medium businesses to be involved in training staff.

Hellyer College Customer Feedback Research 2002

In 2002, workplaces and students were surveyed. Every few years we survey teaching staff, including non VET teachers and parents. Office administration have the opportunity to formally feedback regularly and in a timely manner, issues through an agenda item of the Hellyer College VET Planning Team.

Workplace Surveys

Each year we provide certification to workplaces and workplace supervisors in recognition of their contribution to our VET in Schools workplacement programs. These certificates carry the endorsement of the Tasmanian Dept of Education, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Hellyer College. As part of our survey, we ask employers which staff they wish to be recognized, and encourage the business to award the certificate, rather than Hellyer College. This has been a very significant and successful strategy.

In 2002, 166 workplace recognition certificates were issued. However, only 10% of employers completed the survey. Given that 80% of our employers are not in their first year of working with our workplacement program, this is not surprising. One third of the returned surveys were from employers who have worked with our programs from 3 to 10 years.

The employer surveys covered issues such as: contact with the school; preparation of the student for the vocational placement; the attitude of the student; future employment of the student; benefits to the student and employer from the program and suggestions for improvement.

The positives about VET in Schools noted from the survey: providing opportunities for local youth, desire to support Hellyer College and the community and VET in Schools assists their staff to develop supervisory skills.

The negatives about VET in Schools noted from the survey: businesses find the supporting documentation they are asked to complete onerous, finding work for a VET in Schools student can sometimes be difficult, a few students totally unsuitable and need to develop more skills before workplacement.

Student Survey 2002

Out of a total of 218 students, 55 female and 45 males responded. The survey is always presented as optional and the right of a student not to participate is respected.

21% of students had vocational placements in businesses employing less than 5 employees

48% of students had vocational placements in businesses employing 6-20 employees

31% of students had vocational placements in businesses employing above 21 employees.
37% of the workplacements were more than 10 km from Hellyer Colleg/Burnie

Students choose to do a VET program in order of response: to gain some practical job experience and training; to assist in a career choice; to get a job; to get an apprenticeship/traineeship.
Students felt that their teachers provided them with an excellent understanding of occupational health and safety , discrimination and career pathways information. Students did not feel comfortable or fully understand much of the terminology that is attached to VET eg RPL, Grievances, codes of conduct.
Students overwhelmingly valued their on-the-job experiences but felt that there needed to be more communication with the workplace to encourage workplace supervisors to feed back to students, their progress.
Students overwhelmingly praised their teachers for the support and process of their VET delivery.

Student Destination Data for 2002, 2001, 2000

This information is collated and available on the ECEF website at www.ecef.com.au

Student Research for 2003 – Burnie VET.

- A total of 234 students out of 785 full time equivalent year 11, 12 and 13 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs during 2003.
- 2 students from non English speaking backgrounds identified.
- 13 students identified as having a disability.
- Of the total 234 respondents, 102 are female and 119 are male.
- Although there is only a 7% difference in enrolment numbers by gender, there are clear differences in enrolment choices for females and males. No females chose Automotive or Engineering, no males chose Community Services studies.
- 238 business participants offering 557 vocational placements in 2003. Of this number, there are only 22 new employers in 2003. The overwhelming majority of businesses are long term participants in VET in Schools in our local community.

Resourcing

- Public Education appears to permanently lack sufficient funding to provide a quality education. No doubt, the private local providers of education would agree.
- VET in Schools is, as is any effective teaching strategy, human resource intensive. It relies on partnerships, strong communications and one on one mentoring – mentoring students enrolled in VET as well as workplace supervisors and employers.
- In the past, the commonwealth government strategy of providing funding through ASTF, then ECEF, has been an annual adhoc, hurdle based affair, that has required excessive hours of administration to receive fairly minimal supplementary funding. The accountability process and intent of the funding bodies was appropriate, but the methods used to attain the ends was inappropriate and in recent years became very divorced from the grass roots teaching of VET in Schools. The emergence of DEST as a replacement to ECEF and its success in improving this situation will be closely monitored!
- ANTA funding to the state has been well used given that the OPCET strategy has usually been to get the funds to the schools and colleges rather than retain it centrally.
- Resourcing for ongoing professional development of VET Coordinators is an issue and all colleges in Tasmania rely on ANTA funds to meet this additional demand on Professional Development budgets. Professional Development of new VET staff in schools/colleges must be addressed at a teacher training level.
- State and Federal funding tensions are ongoing.

School Based Traineeships (often referred to as SBNAs/SBTs)

- There has been limited success in their introduction to Tasmania. Success of existing vocational placement programs has often been given as the reason for the slow take up of SBT's.
- Structural impediments and a lack of clear policy and process has been a major impediment. Change is now under way.

Impact of VET on other programs

- VET in Schools has provided a valuable alternative teaching and learning program style for students who are keen to gain employment, but who are encouraged/have no choice but to stay at school/college until year 12.
- As long as a college has made provision for the VET teaching program as it does for schools board subjects, then VET in Schools is sustainable. (However, the professional development needs of VET staff is not sustainable through the normal resource package.)
- Class sizes tend to be smaller than in the basic teaching subjects and hence there is a perception that VET in Schools is resource-favoured.
- Teaching staff in non VET subjects do feel that VET students do not always fulfill their obligations to non VET subjects if they are on block release to industry ie they may not “catch up” on work missed.
- It would appear unlikely in the near future for VET in Schools to have any impact on numbers entering pre tertiary subjects.
- Overall, VET in Schools has been a proactive addition to the curriculum in satisfying the teaching and learning needs of a wider cohort of year 11 and 12 subjects.

New and Emerging Industries

- In the last twelve months, there has been a definite and positive change in the economic outlook in the Burnie region. Prior to this, the Mersey-Lyell region had seen a gradual decline in business opportunities and negative population growth.
- Recovery in the Engineering industry has meant rapid employment opportunities for boys in the apprenticeship area. Newspaper ads still mention year 10 qualifications as an exit point to school.
- Recovery in the business community has seen the rise in part time casual work in retail and hospitality. Approximately half of the Hellyer College student population identified themselves as having/having had casual work.
- The construction industry has also experienced growth.
- Opportunities in new and emerging industries exist in the future in the areas of wind generation, electrotechnology and across natural resources. Hellyer College VET in Schools has identified possible future program growth in electrotechnology, food processing and health services.

Access and Equity

- VET in Schools is available for all students in the Burnie area.
- Hellyer College has well developed support systems for all students, and in particular, indigenous groups and students with disabilities. Hellyer College has available on campus or will arrange access to, staff attached to Jobs Pathways Programs, Youth Health Services, a nurse, Centrelink, Project Officer for Indigenous students, social workers and district support personnel.
- Traditional career pathways are still popular with parents and the community and will continue to be significant in the career choices that our students make.