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Purpose and rationale

- 2.1 Major policy changes and initiatives in vocational education in schools have occurred in response to increasing retention, global economic imperatives and industry requirements, social equity considerations and community expectations. These different drivers of change create multiple purposes for vocational education which are not always compatible. The range of purposes has resulted in the need for a broadening of the curriculum in secondary schools. The rationale for increasing vocational education and its links with general education is a major theme of this chapter. A review of vocational activity is provided, including the need in the most recent Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) national strategy document for addressing the status of VET.
- 2.2 The chapter concludes with descriptions of the components of vocational education, including a depiction of a model of vocational education within a general education framework. The model highlights the purposes that vocational education is expected to serve and the range of pathways that can be followed. This diversity in pathways provides some indication of the complexity of providing vocational education in schools.

A major national activity

- 2.3 Since Federation shifts in government policy have resulted in significant changes in the location of responsibility for vocational education and training, and for its coordination. The shifting of delivery in the last decade reflects the move in recent years to broader welfare and economic concerns for youth, in conjunction with a focus on skilling for the future.¹

1 MCEETYA, 1999, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/nationalgoals/index.htm>>. For activity since 1996 on

- 2.4 Essentially, there have been periods of policy shift from the 1960s where vocational learning played a significant role in preparing young people at the end of Year 10 or 11 to consider full-time employment, apprenticeships and other skills training, or university study. This long standing presence of vocational education within the state secondary education systems predates the national post-school system of vocational education developed from the mid 1970s.
- 2.5 School-based vocational education and training received less emphasis in the 1980s. The change from the 1960s and 1970s to the renewed focus on vocational education in the early 1990s was associated with a new social and economic environment that had higher youth unemployment, increasing secondary school retention rates to Year 12 and variable numbers of apprentices in training. Concerns were raised at national and state levels about the quality and organisation of the final years of schooling, the need to improve national skill levels, and welfare and equity issues for young people.²

Response to needs in schools

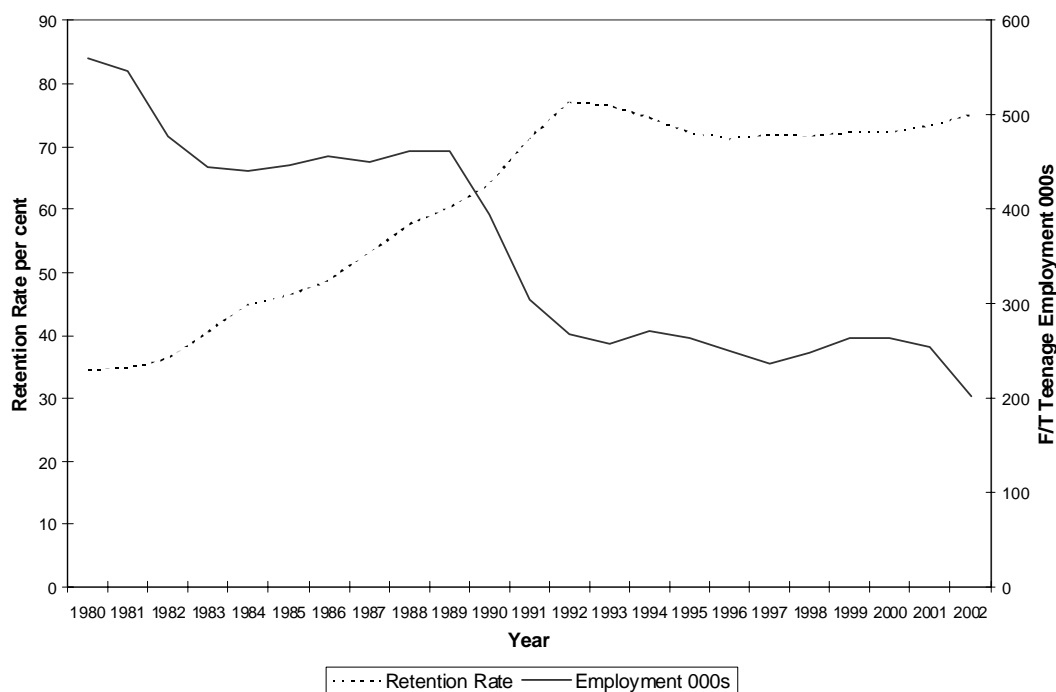
Increasing retention

- 2.6 The most significant development in schooling in Australia in the last thirty years has been the rise in the proportion of young people completing secondary education. The retention rate to Year 12 rose from approximately 30 per cent in 1971 to 77 per cent in 1992, falling to around 72 per cent in 1995 and remaining at this level.³

vocational education in schools at a policy level please refer to MCEETYA, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2000 and 2001: Vocational Education and Training in Schools*. For an earlier summary of activity please refer to Malley, J et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, NCVER.

- 2 Malley, J et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVER, p. 19; Ms Susan Hyde, District Superintendent, Central South West, SA Department of Education and Children's Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2003, Adelaide, p. 1036.
- 3 DETYA and South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2001, *National report on the development of education in Australia*, prepared for the International Conference on Education, <<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE/natrap/Australia.pdf>>.

Figure 2.1 Rate of retention to final year of secondary schooling, fulltime teenage employment: 1971 – 2002



Source ABS Schools Australia (4221.0) and ABS Labour Force (6202.0.40.001)

2.7 This trend can be partly explained by the reduction in full time employment opportunities for teenagers. The peak in the retention rate was associated with the 1991-92 recession. The retention rate for females has been higher than that of males for most of the 1980s and 1990s. This is in part due to a significant proportion of males leaving school prior to Year 12 and taking up apprenticeships as one example.⁴

2.8 Associated with reduced labour market opportunities have been changing social factors, the valuing of educational attainment in leading to more opportunities and the need for a more skilled Australian workforce.

2.9 However, despite the increasing awareness of the value of completing secondary education, following 1992 the national retention rate fell. This was attributed in part to a significant proportion of students dropping out of school because the curriculum was not relevant to their needs and interests as well as to the improving general employment prospects. The school curriculum has been described as having too narrow an academic

4 Collins, C, Kenway, J and McLeod, J, 2000, *Factors influencing the educational performance of males and females in school and their destinations after leaving school*, Deakin University and University of South Australia, funded by DETYA, Canberra, p. 7.

focus, suited to the approximately 30 per cent of students who go on to university.

- 2.10 In this context, in 1997 the then Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training called for a review of curriculum:

If schools are to retain these students, they must accommodate a wider range of abilities in the curriculum than is currently the case.⁵

- 2.11 Considerable activity at the national level from the early 1990s moved VET from a post-school option to encouraging vocational education in schools as a key initiative in education, supporting a broadening of the curriculum. This had the intent of converging general education with vocational education, and making the secondary curriculum more socially inclusive by reducing the distinctions between programs of study mainly on the basis of matriculation status.⁶

General education and vocational education

- 2.12 The growth of programs such as VET in Schools⁷ can be attributed firstly to the economic policy imperative to promote VET, and secondly to the benefits expected from the applied learning that VET involves.
- 2.13 In 1994 the Schools Council made the distinction between general and vocational education. General learning is the creation and acquisition of knowledge irrespective of the uses to which it may subsequently be put. Vocational learning is the acquisition of knowledge relevant to employment. Generally, vocational courses stress the acquisition of demonstrable competencies.⁸ The Schools Council advocated incorporating vocational and general studies into one coherent curriculum framework. Recommendations for a convergence between general education and vocational education have been made nationally and also internationally:

5 Dr David Kemp, Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, *Retention rate fall highlights need for government reforms*, media release, 23 January 1997, K1/97.

6 Connell, R and Crump, S, 2003, *Exhibit No. 126*, p. 3.

7 As noted in Paragraph 1.10, there is a range of terms associated with vocational education. In this report the term *VET in Schools* is limited to school students continuing to work towards their secondary school certificate. The VET component of their studies gives them credit towards a nationally recognised VET qualification.

8 Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1994, *The role of schools in the vocational preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students*, pp. 5-7.

the demands of the modern workplace are such that that the distinction between ‘doers’ and ‘thinkers’ is no longer relevant. Hence the distinction between academic and vocational skills is also irrelevant.⁹

2.14 A report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) *From Initial Education to Working Life* identifies common elements of pathway reform of participating OECD countries. These include:

- broadening of vocational programs and qualifications;
- creating linkages between general and vocational education;
- developing combinations of school and work-based learning;
- establishing bridges between secondary vocational education and training and tertiary education; and
- developing more flexible education and training pathways.¹⁰

2.15 Contextualised learning, and integrated on- and off-the-job training, are desirable in vocational education.¹¹ A workplace learning component is thought to enhance general learning by providing a context and rationale for specific learning. Internationally, the United Kingdom’s Minister for Schools, for example, has expressed the view that:

upper secondary education in England historically had suffered from a weak vocational offer and a narrow academic track which resulted in a system “marked by barriers to learning”. The new greater flexibility would mean a range of vocational options ... ‘Academic’ and ‘vocational’ do not do justice to the courses being studied. That is why I prefer to talk of general education and specialist study.¹²

2.16 The Committee agrees that the traditional distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ courses is becoming increasingly blurred, with a significant element of theoretical and conceptual content in many

9 Malley, J et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVER, p. 36.

10 OECD, 2000, *From Initial Education to Working Life: Making Transitions Work*, Chapter 4, Key features of effective transition systems, Paris, p. 83.

11 Harris, R, Willis, P, Simons, M and Underwood, F, 1998, *Learning the job: Juggling the messages in on- and off-the-job training*, NCVER, cited in Malley, J, et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVER, p. 36.

12 David Miliband MP, UK Minister of State for School Standards, *Greater flexibility in education for 14-19 year olds*, media release, 21 January 2003, <<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1047.asp>>.

vocational courses. However, the Committee notes that distinctions between general and vocational education are still present and useful in providing a focus for efforts, but that greater convergence is required to enable the development of enterprise skills and vocationally competent young people in their transition to post-school options.

Major vocational education activity

2.17 A brief chronology of major VET activity since 1985 maps the development of vocational education, highlighting the significant focus on skills formation and a national VET system, followed by the increasing adoption of vocational education into the secondary school curriculum.

- 1985 - *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs* (Kirby Report), calling for on-the-job training and improved competency standards.
- 1988 - *Skills formation in Australia*, the Commonwealth Government's policies relating to education and training development in terms of international competitiveness.
- 1989 - *Improving Australia's Training System* and the establishment of the National Training Board.
- 1990 - formation of the Australian Committee on Training and Curriculum.
- 1991 - *Young Peoples' Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training* (Finn Report). Recommendations included the convergence of vocational and general education, the recognition of employment related key competencies, curriculum development to cater for student choices and different learning styles, multiple pathways.
- 1991 - the Mayer Key Competencies to develop employment related key competencies.
- 1992 - *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* (Carmichael Report), with schools participating in pilots in 1993 and 1994.
- 1994 - the development of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) to provide a nationally consistent, recognised system of qualifications and the implementation of improved pathways between the post-compulsory education sectors.

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- 1995 – *Enterprising Nation* (Karpin Report), recognising the importance of enterprise skills within the curriculum at all levels.
 - 1997 – the acceptance of Advanced Standing between schools and TAFE, recognising students’ completed accredited courses on entry into further study.
 - 1998 – MCEETYA endorsed the Principles and Framework for the Consistent Application of the National Framework within Secondary Schools.¹³
- 2.18 Most relevant to the Committee’s inquiry, activity in the last five years has included identifying the key role of vocational education in the National Goals for Schooling, the development of a New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools, the provision of ANTA funds to support VET in Schools and the development of *Stepping Forward – improving pathways for all young people* in 2002, with progress to be reported in 2004.
- 2.19 The fundamental role of vocational education in schools was recognised in the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, endorsed at the 1999 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) meeting. The goals relating to vocational education and training in schools include:
- Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular, when students leave school they should have:
 - ⇒ employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, VET, further education, employment and lifelong learning.
 - In terms of curriculum, students should have:
 - ⇒ participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to VET programs as part of their senior secondary studies; and
 - ⇒ participated in programs and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future.
 - Schooling should be socially just, so that:
 - ⇒ all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational
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13 Klee, C, 2002, ‘A practitioner’s view of vocational education and training in schools’, *Exhibit No. 40*, pp. 48–54.

equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

2.20 The preamble to these proposed goals indicates that:

- The achievement of these common and agreed national goals entails a commitment to collaboration for the purposes of:
 - ⇒ further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community.¹⁴

2.21 In response to these goals, in 2000 a New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools was proposed, with an implementation strategy to commence in 2001. The new framework, outlined in Figure 2.2, consists of six inter-related elements of:

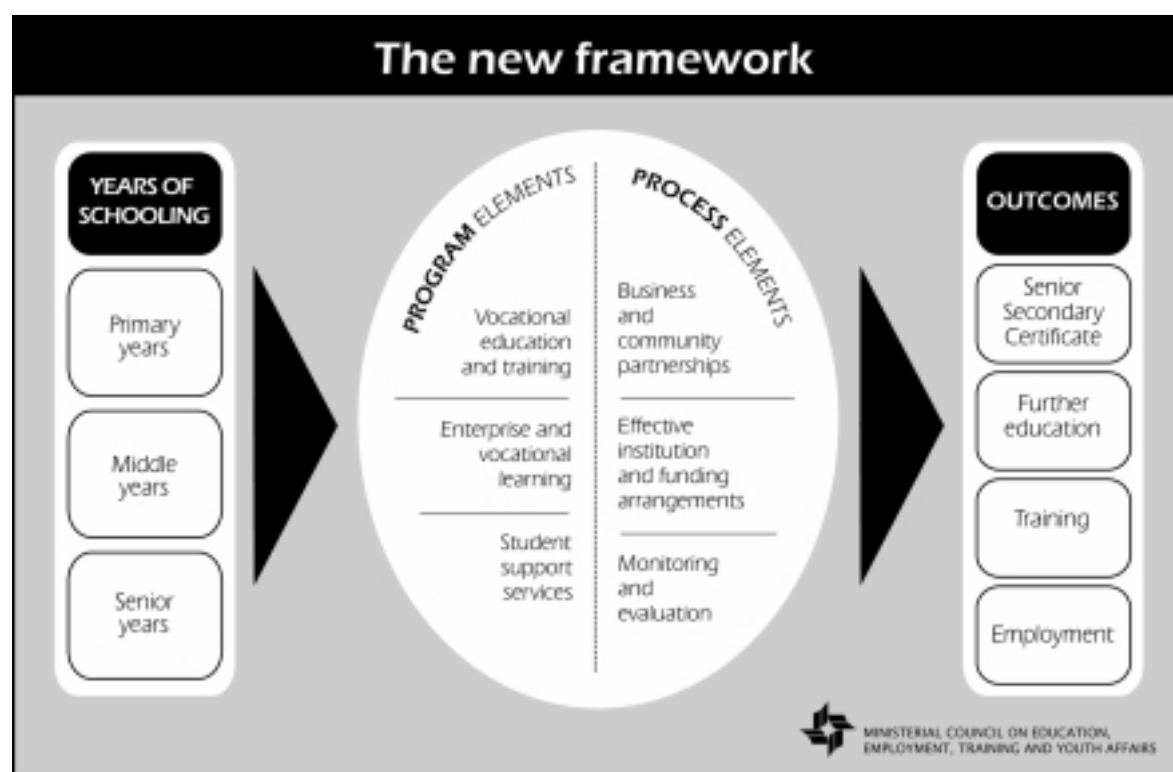
- vocational education and training:
 - ⇒ appropriately accredited industry-specific training based on AQF qualifications and competencies endorsed within the National Training Framework.
- enterprise and vocational learning:
 - ⇒ enterprise and vocational perspectives incorporated into general learning that is appropriate for all years of schooling.
- student support services:
 - ⇒ services that guide and support young people in their transition from compulsory schooling to post-compulsory schooling options and post-school destinations, especially the inclusion of explicit career education programs in school curriculum. Services will allow for local discretion over delivery and relate to participation and attainment in education, training and work.
- community and business partnerships:
 - ⇒ the new framework provides for a long-term commitment from stakeholders to working together to develop mechanisms that foster close cooperation between all levels of government, business, community organisations, education and labour market authorities.
- effective institutional and funding arrangements:
 - ⇒ policy coherence and effective program implementation through institutional arrangements for the organised and continuous

14 DEST, *Submission No. 75.1*, pp. 1-2, MCEETYA, 1999, *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/nationalgoals/index.htm>>.

involvement of all relevant players at the national, state and territory, and local levels.

- monitoring and evaluation:
 - ⇒ data collection processes to provide information that will enable the effectiveness of current and future arrangements to be measured.¹⁵

Figure 2.2 New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools



Source MCEETYA, 2001 from *New framework for vocational education in schools. A comprehensive guide about pathways for young Australian in transition: Policy Directions*, p. 26.

2.22 In the Committee's meetings with stakeholders the first element of vocational education and training, often described as VET in Schools, was widely commented on as having significant prevalence in schools. A major driver seems to have been the allocation of ANTA funds to support accredited vocational education and training in schools. The other elements of the program were less widely acknowledged as being successfully embraced and resourced.

2.23 The implementation strategy for the new framework, with indicative timelines running from 2000 to 2004, outlines a range of actions and

15 MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools, 2000, *New framework for vocational education in schools: Policy Directions*, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/policy.pdf>>.

outcomes that are in train. Many of the actions go beyond the school and education sectors, requiring the involvement of business and the community for successful implementation.

- 2.24 From the whole of government perspective, vocational education in schools is recognised as just one component assisting in the transition of young people from school to work or further study. In July 2002 a sub-committee of MCEETYA on Young Peoples Transitions developed *Stepping forward – improving pathways for all young people*, and a Taskforce on Transition from School developed an action plan to guide jurisdictions in their implementation.¹⁶
- 2.25 It is apparent from the refocussing of the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools to the description Transition from School that a broadening of the agenda beyond accredited training in secondary school was required to better reflect the partnerships in the community and elements of successful outcomes.
- 2.26 The five key areas for action in *Stepping Forward* which have direct relevance to this inquiry are:
- education and training as the foundation for effective transition for all young people;
 - access to career and transition support;
 - responding to the diverse needs of young people;
 - promulgating effective ways to support young people; and
 - focussed local partnerships and strategic alliances.
- 2.27 Appendix E outlines the *Stepping forward – action plan*. A progress report is expected to be provided in 2004.
- 2.28 The Committee acknowledges that jurisdiction activities addressing *Stepping Forward* may be in place or in progress. However, this holistic view of vocational education in schools as one component of the transition of young people was not a common element of evidence to the Committee. A number of outcomes and areas of specific activity in the *Stepping Forward - Action Plan* were cited by witnesses as recommendations for actions. Further progress is needed and this will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.
- 2.29 In 2000 Ministers noted the:

16 MCEETYA Taskforce on Transition from Schools, 2002, *Stepping forward – improving pathways for all young people*, <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/stepping_forward.htm>.

need to improve mechanisms for coordinating policy, program and resource management across the broad area of vocational education in schools

and asked the taskforce:

to progress more coordinated and integrated approaches in this area, with particular attention to streamlining diverse funding initiatives and focusing on outcomes driven arrangements.¹⁷

2.30 In 2003 the same call was echoed by witnesses to the inquiry.¹⁸ Clearly, considerable effort has been made at the planning levels to recommend these courses for action but the reality faced by schools is still a challenge.

2.31 The experience of the Committee in speaking with schools is that a whole-of-school approach that is effectively managing the spectrum of vocational learning within a general education framework is for many an ideal that is still to be realised.

Industry and vocational education and training

2.32 Accompanying the focus on the schools sector the broader VET environment was also refocussing. In June 2003 the ANTA Ministerial Council (MINCO) which consists of Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for VET endorsed in principle *Shaping our Future, the national strategy for vocational education and training 2004–2010*. As stated in this document the purpose of VET is to provide skills and knowledge for work, enhance employability and assist learning throughout life. The four objectives are:

- industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy;
- employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training;
- communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment; and
- Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.¹⁹

17 MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools, 2000, *New framework for vocational education in schools: Policy Directions*, p. 7, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/policy.pdf>>.

18 South Australian Government, *Submission No. 97*, pp. 2-3, 5-6; Alice Springs Workplace Learning Community, *Transcript of Evidence*, 1 May 2003, Alice Springs, p. 622.

- 2.33 In December 2003 an action plan to progress twelve specific strategies for achieving the objectives was under development. These are to include a range of strategies that are relevant for the schools sector and acknowledge the need to make learning pathways seamless and to improve the value and image of vocational education and training. The action plan will be presented to ministers in June 2004.

Purposes of vocational education

- 2.34 In evidence to the Committee it was stated that there is still considerable debate about the purpose of vocational education in schools,²⁰ reflecting varying stakeholder views. During the early 1990s the underlying purpose appeared to be to enable non-university bound students to learn applied skills and competencies in demand in the workplace. Now the policy expectations are much broader, aiming to meet the needs of all students and with that comes greater complexity.²¹ Catholic Education South Australia, for example, questioned the purpose of vocational education. If its purpose is to enhance existing learning and it can be embedded in existing subjects the resource impact is considerably lessened. If it is to be offered in schools as industry-specific 'stand alone' subjects then those subjects will be capital intensive and directly compete with other areas of the curriculum for the limited resources available.²²
- 2.35 Again in South Australia, Ms Susan Hyde, District Superintendent in the Department of Education and Children's Services, reiterated the view of national government bodies that vocational education is for all students, not just for some students who want to enter a certain industry pathway. The broad view of vocational education is that it prepares all young people for their working lives rather than just preparing them for a particular trade, industry or avenue of employment.²³
- 2.36 Identifying the stakeholders and their views requires considerable coordination to involve students, schools, education authorities for schools

19 ANTA, 2003, *Shaping Our Future, the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010*, < <http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp>>.

20 *See for example:* Australian Federation of Special Education Administrators, *Submission No. 108*, p. 5.

21 Malley, J et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVER, p. 23.

22 Catholic Education South Australia, *Submission No. 53*, p. 2.

23 Ms Susan Hyde, District Superintendent, Central South West, SA Department of Education and Children's Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2003, Adelaide, p. 1029.

and VET, universities, employers and industry bodies, and the community. The role of vocational education needs to be considered within the wider social and educational responsibilities of schools. Specific local contexts also need to guide those priorities. A concern of the Committee is that while this prioritisation of purposes is required in order to set reasonable expectations on what schools and the community can achieve, it should not dampen innovation or prevent the meeting of local needs.

- 2.37 In the broader VET environment the multiple purposes of VET are somewhat clearer, with ANTA making clear statements in *Shaping our Future 2004–2010* about the client and employer driven focus of VET.²⁴ Students attend TAFE and other providers for very different purposes, so there is no single purpose for vocational education and training. Some are interested in entry level training, others wish to upgrade skills or change their career focus and are pursuing new areas. Some people are doing courses simply for personal interest.²⁵
- 2.38 Within the schools sector there are additional purposes identified by government and education authorities, such as trying to retain students at school. However, the reason for participating in VET in Schools is probably not so clearly formulated in many school students' minds as it is usually more exploratory than for those in the broader VET system such as TAFE. Organisations with an investment in the future outcomes of vocational education indicated that they thought that VET in Schools is a 'taster' of possible work futures.²⁶ The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) stated that:

the role of vocational education and training is a taster for students to examine some of their alternative career paths. It is not an end in itself and it should be seen as such. The first point I would like to make is that vocational education and training needs to be seen in the context of other activities within the school environment. It is not a stand-alone. It is quite different in terms of

24 ANTA, 2003, *Shaping Our Future, the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010*, < <http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp>>.

25 Dr Tom Karmel, Managing Director, NCVER, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2003, Adelaide, pp. 1066-1067.

26 Mr Steve Balzary, Director, Employment and Training, ACCI, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2003, Canberra, p. 207. (NB: ACCI considered that School-based New Apprenticeships are career oriented); *ECEF Submission No. 84*, p. 22.

an offering from School-based New Apprenticeships and the distinctions need to be much more clearly outlined.²⁷

- 2.39 Others in industry stated that VET in Schools was not successful for their organisation due to the lack of clear focus on their industry as a future career.²⁸
- 2.40 The Committee believes that there is a need for greater identification of purpose, as currently practitioners are attempting to meet all needs under the heading of flexible and diverse pathways, and the system of funding is insufficient to do so. The translation of purpose into strategies affects the models and programs that are then developed. This discussion needs to occur at all levels in the community. For example, in Victoria, following examination of students' needs, VET programs were developed for students whose needs were not being met by the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) system. Two programs are in place to support students, VET in the VCE, and the recently developed Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).²⁹
- 2.41 Part of the as yet limited evaluation of outcomes of VET in Schools indicates a greater participation of academically lower achieving students and improved outcomes for that group.³⁰ However, the benefits of applied learning appeal to a broad range of students. In Tasmania, the different learning methodology of VET was integral to its appeal, and not necessarily only for lower achieving students:

In many aspects the VET program is probably harder than a pre-tertiary but I would probably disagree with it being counted towards university because, if we went down that path, theory might become an even bigger aspect of the VET course. I would hate for VET to lose its integrity because hands-on experience is vital to the subject. If you lose that, it is just another course.³¹

27 Mr Steve Balzary, Director, Employment and Training, ACCI, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2003, Canberra, p. 207.

28 Mr Grant Howorth, Human Resources Manager, Austal Ships, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 August 2003, Henderson, WA, p. 899.

29 Victorian Government, *Submission No. 86*, p. 18.

30 Polesol, J & Teese, R, 2002, *Transitions from the VET in Schools Program the 2000 Year 12 cohort*, July 2002, Department of Education and Training, the Educational Outcomes Research Unit, University of Melbourne, pp. 18, 21.

31 Mr Grant Cooper, Student, Don College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 September 2003, Devonport, p. 1306. Pre-tertiary subjects are those which contribute to a tertiary entrance score. A student must satisfactorily complete a minimum of four pre-tertiary subjects to be eligible for tertiary entrance, with at least three being done in Year 12.

- 2.42 Concern was expressed to the Committee that the VET system should not be designed solely to meet the needs of a small group of students and direct them into employment rather than considering other educational options, and that the system should have enough flexibility in it to be able to meet the needs of all students.³² It was suggested that the model of a successful system would:
- engage some people who are not particularly engaged at schools;
 - develop students' skills for employment in particular industries;
 - enable students who want to go to university to broaden their education; and
 - enable the development of generic workplace or employability skills for all students.
- 2.43 ANTA commented that the need for flexibility and for multiple ways to address these different student and industry requirements is currently being considered.³³ However, even though there is planning and policy comment about pathways, the Committee notes that the current system is not yet effectively delivering or supporting those multiple pathways.
- 2.44 Much of the focus has been placed on VET in Schools, and yet given the increasingly broad range of expectations of schooling there needs to be greater consideration of other areas to foster student development, such as broader vocational learning, career education and enterprise education. It was suggested that the specific focus on VET in Schools has been an outcome of the original performance measures, and the Committee suspects that this has been to the possible detriment of these other areas.³⁴
- 2.45 Even within National Training Framework (NTF) programs the role of VET in Schools is itself contested, subject to 'multiple ... objectives and expectations imposed ... by separated central agencies'.³⁵ The Committee believes that the complexity of the multiple goals needs to be clarified, and that there needs to be greater debate about the purposes and goals of vocational education in schools to enable effective development of appropriate pathways.

32 Ms Meredith Peace, Deputy Vice President, Secondary Sector - Victorian Branch, AEU, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 September 2003, Melbourne, p. 1207.

33 Mr Adrian Stephens, Director, Client Relationships, ANTA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 April 2003, Brisbane, p. 359.

34 Mr Bernie Fitzsimons, Senior Education Adviser, Catholic Education Office, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2003, Adelaide, p. 1055.

35 AEU, *Submission No. 72*, p. 20.

- 2.46 The Committee believes that there is a need to debate these issues more rigorously with the range of stakeholders - students, parents, industry and the community: What is the purpose of the increased emphasis on vocational education? What are the purposes of VET? What is the role of the school in the community in providing vocational education, and the differences between vocational education and 'vocational education and training'? These issues are explored further in Chapter 7.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA, its associated education authorities and key community groups engage in further debate on the purposes of vocational education in schools, including VET in Schools programs, in order to clarify and articulate specific objectives, expected outcomes, target groups and priorities, with a view to better ensuring that policies and programs meet those purposes.

Status of vocational education and training

- 2.47 Much policy work has been instigated at the national and state and territory level to support and encourage vocational education. Vocational education has been described as providing access to multiple pathways for all young people in their transition from school to work or further study. Across the whole of the VET sector an issue that was voiced to the Committee is the poor status of vocational education and training:

Many parents have commented on the positive effect VET programs have had on their children. However there are some parents who need to be persuaded of the value of vocational education. In many schools, parents' perception is that the achievement of academic success is the expected goal for their children, no matter what interests the student may have. The challenge is to have vocational learning valued by parents, employers, the wider community and at all levels of education.³⁶

- 2.48 This view is reinforced at a national level, with the National Goals for Schooling stating that schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. When students leave school they should have

36 Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission No. 25*, p. 6.

employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, VET, further education, employment and lifelong learning. A goal of this kind suggests that the benefits of participating in vocational education and VET programs are applicable for all students.³⁷

- 2.49 There is evidence that some academically high achieving students are undertaking VET programs.³⁸ However, the general image of VET is that it provides a pathway for academically less able students. Consequently, VET has had a status problem, and efforts to achieve parity of esteem are focussing on recognising VET achievements within the senior secondary certificate, and enabling VET programs to be incorporated into the tertiary entrance score. This is not without significant challenge. One of the National Strategies recently announced included improving the value, brand, language and image of VET and public recognition of its employment outcomes.³⁹
- 2.50 The Committee heard concerns that altering curriculum by embedding the industry developed competencies into existing units, or requiring an additional exam to meet perceived more rigorous requirements for university entrance, may then alienate the students for whom the industry focussed programs have been initially designed. It has also been suggested that doing so would fundamentally change the nature of VET courses. Resolution of these issues relate to the purpose of vocational education. Alternative assessment strategies are being examined and evaluation of one methodology is due to report early in 2004.⁴⁰
- 2.51 The Committee believes that while there is value in exploring these possibilities it is important that VET not be absorbed into the general curriculum in such a way that its content and assessment becomes subject to the tertiary entrance requirements of what is currently the dominant element of the curriculum, and thereby lose the significantly different

37 MCEETYA, 1999, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/nationalgoals/index.htm>>.

38 Malley, J et al., 2001, *The quest for a working blueprint: vocational education and training in Australian secondary schools*, Part 1, NCVER, p. 45.

39 ANTA, 2003, *Shaping Our Future, the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010*, <<http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp>>.

40 Griffin, P, Gillis, S and Jelinek, M, 2003, *A pilot investigation of a Standards Referenced Assessment Model for VET in Schools courses*, Assessment Research Centre, University of Melbourne; see also *Exhibit No. 125, Expanding Opportunities for Youth. Greater Industry and University Recognition of achievement in VET in Schools*, 2001, ANTA.

approaches which make it so valuable in its own right. These issues are explored further in Chapter 7.

- 2.52 Other methods of addressing the community perception of VET have centred on the provision of greater information and the marketing of opportunities through VET programs. Industry has criticised career advisers for focussing their efforts on subject choice for university entrance rather than employment and vocational outcomes.⁴¹ Given that the careers role within schools has reportedly been significantly under resourced in government and non-government schools,⁴² there is clearly much work to be done in this area. Additionally, it has been suggested that there is also a greater role for industry in marketing career opportunities.
- 2.53 Examples were provided to the Committee of industry, community and school partnerships in the production of information resources.⁴³ The need for follow-up in the schools of such resources and for allowing sufficient time for students to review possible employment options were identified as issues that would assist in promoting vocational education and training pathways.⁴⁴ Chapter 8 explores these issues further.
- 2.54 Furthermore, continuing the discussion of vocational education at the Ministerial level and elevating the discussion to the Council of Australian Governments would assist in bringing the importance of vocational education in schools to national focus.

41 National Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry, *Submission No. 61*, p. 6, Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, *Submission No. 45*, p. 10; Mrs Wendy de Souza, Owner-Operator, Cutting Remark, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2003, Alice Spring, p. 591.

42 Mr Paul Billows, Principal, Willunga High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 6 August 2003, Willunga, p. 1014; Ms Cathy Hickey, Education Officer, IEU, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 September, 2003, Melbourne, p. 1198; and Mr Geoff Bloom, Executive Director, Rural Skills, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2003, Canberra, pp. 1140 and 1141.

43 National Farmers Federation, *Submission No. 91*, p. 5; and ACCI, *Submission No. 95*, p. 22.

44 Mrs Leyla Yilmaz, Industrial Relations Manager, VACC, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 September 2003, Melbourne, p. 1232.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that Commonwealth, state and territory governments and industry jointly fund a promotion campaign to:

- **raise the awareness of parents, students, educationalists and the community of the benefits of vocational education including:**
 - ⇒ **VET as broadly available to all members of the community; and**
 - ⇒ **VET in Schools and School-based New Apprenticeships;**
- **raise the status of VET and other non-tertiary pathways by:**
 - ⇒ **increasing awareness of the range of rewarding career options available; and**
 - ⇒ **promoting careers in areas of skill shortage, such as in established trades.**

Descriptors

2.55 Associated with the community perceptions of vocational education is some confusion about the meanings of terms used in the educational and industry literature on developing skills and pathways. The following descriptors of core components in vocational education are used in the report to provide some clarity in usage. The glossary in Appendix F lists other terms used in vocational education and training.

2.56 In March 2000 MCEETYA endorsed a vision of vocational education in which:

vocational education in schools assists all young people to secure their own futures by enhancing their transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways. It engages students in work related learning built in strategic partnerships between schools, business, industry and the wider community.⁴⁵

2.57 This view of vocational education incorporates the wide range of programs that connect young people with the world of work. Vocational

45 MCEETYA, Taskforce on VET in Schools 2000, *New framework for vocational education in schools: Policy Directions*, p. 11, <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/policy.pdf>>.

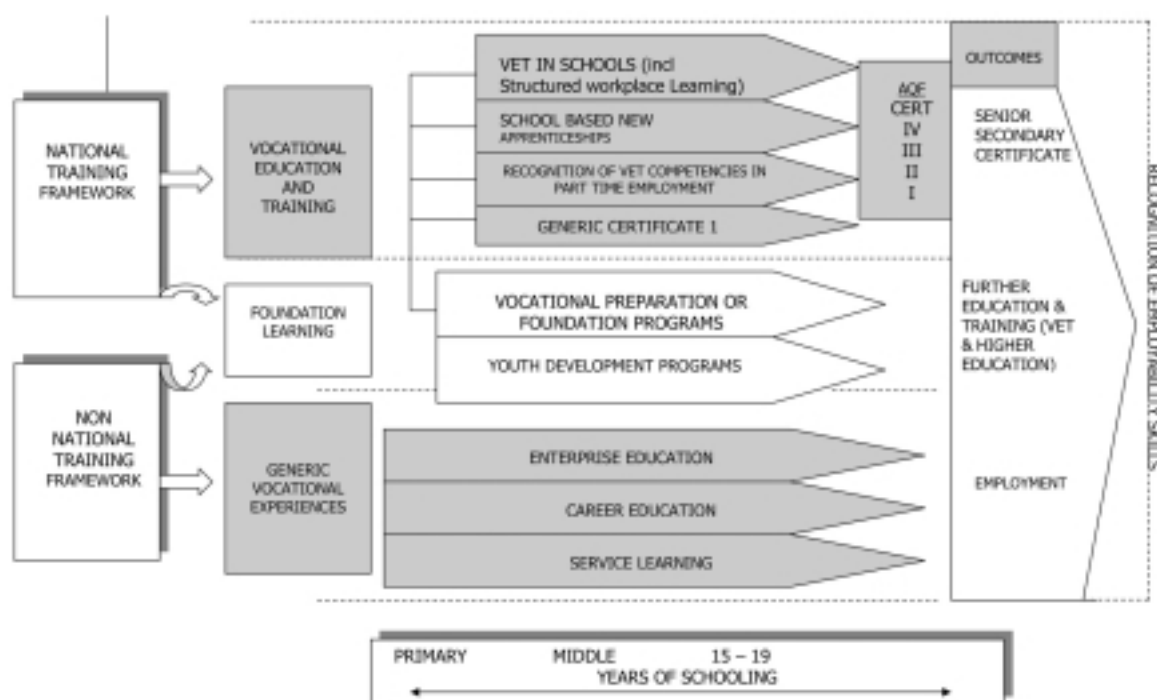
learning, enterprise education and vocational education and training (VET) are all components of vocational education.⁴⁶

- 2.58 There has been some overlap in terminology to describe these components. The description of vocational learning that the MCEETYA VET in Schools Taskforce adopted in 2002 is that vocational learning is:
- General learning that addresses the broad understandings of the world of work and develops in young people a range of knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes relevant to a wide range of work environments.⁴⁷
- 2.59 Vocational learning includes elements such as general employment skills, career education and community and work-based learning, which is appropriate for all years of schooling.
- 2.60 Many submissions to this inquiry focussed on accredited VET in Schools, programs that as part of the senior secondary certificate provide credit towards a nationally recognised VET qualification as part of the National Training Framework within the AQF.
- 2.61 However, the Committee considers it important to focus on the broader definition of vocational education, including its place in Years 7-10, with accredited VET as only one component of assisting students in determining post-school options. Accredited VET also refers to School-based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs), where secondary students enter a formal training agreement with an employer, attend school for part of their time, and attend a place of training for the off-the-job component of the New Apprenticeship.
- 2.62 One conception of the interplay between various vocational activities is provided in Figure 2.3, Vocational Activities and Experiences within a General Education Framework. This clearly outlines the range of strategies that should assist students, distinguishing between programs that are part of the NTF, and the range of other vocational learning experiences.

46 Spring, G and Syrmas, J, 2002, 'What's in a name? The meaning of 'vocational' in changing times', *Exhibit No. 40*, pp. 5-17.

47 MCEETYA, 2002, *National Report on Schooling Australia 2001*, Chapter 7, Vocational Education, p. 2, <http://online.curriculum.edu.au/anr2001/ch7_concepts.htm>.

Figure 2.3 Vocational activities and experiences within a general education framework



Source *Learning in a Knowledge Society: the Vocational Dimension*⁴⁸

2.63 Within this figure there is reference to:

- enterprise education – learning directed towards developing young people to be innovative and identify, create and manage personal, community, and business opportunities; and
- career education – development of knowledge, skills and attributes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their life, study and/or work options.

2.64 Other components in this depiction include community based learning as part of service learning, vocational preparation programs to develop work readiness and youth development programs. All these combine to provide a broader perspective of learning as part of the community than was traditionally provided within a general education framework.

2.65 Within this view vocational activities should occur throughout all years of schooling and not be focussed solely on senior secondary years. Witnesses to the inquiry, including students, indicated that earlier support and more

48 Spring, G and Syrmas, J, 2002, 'What's in a name? The meaning of 'vocational' in changing times', *Exhibit No. 40*, p. 15; see also ANTA, *Submission No. 90*, p. 10 for a similar figure.

extensive careers advice would be worthwhile. Findings on careers will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

- 2.66 Clearly, vocational education in schools requires a range of strategies to be implemented effectively. The challenges of incorporating vocational education within a school will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5. The following chapter examines how vocational education is managed from a systems perspective.

Summary

- 2.67 Seeking to accommodate the needs of a wider range of students has provided an impetus for the resurgence of vocational education in the secondary school curriculum. This has been combined with a need for the Australian community to be skilling for the future. The incorporation of vocational education has been recognised as a fundamental process in schools, yet the management of the change is clearly problematic.
- 2.68 New frameworks for vocational education in schools have been developed, accompanied by action plans to assist with the transition from school to post-school options. However, the Committee notes that the purposes of vocational education and VET for the diverse needs of students are not sufficiently clear, and confusion arises when the terms vocational education and VET are used almost interchangeably.
- 2.69 In responding to competing needs of stakeholders, the Committee believes that there is a need for greater identification of the purpose of vocational education, as practitioners in schools are currently attempting to meet diverse needs while targeted funding is mainly directed to VET in Schools programs. The Committee supports the view that vocational education should be available for all students in a generic way to Year 10, and believes that there then needs to be greater consideration of the purposes of vocational education and training in the senior years.
- 2.70 To enable clearer discussion of the components of vocational education the depiction of the system in Figure 2.3 provides clarity to develop common meanings. However, this complexity needs to be reduced to aid parents and the community in their understanding. The model highlights the purposes that vocational education is expected to serve and the range of pathways that can be followed. This diversity in pathways provides some indication of the complexity of providing vocational education in schools.