

13 September 2002

Secretary  
Parliamentary Inquiry into VET in Schools  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Sir

In 1997 the then Dean of Education at Curtin University recognised the importance of the changes which were occurring in secondary schools in this State. He supported a bid for funds to research the situation in the schools and the possibility of setting up post-graduate teacher training in the area.

Our research took almost a year. It was very difficult to pin down what was really happening in the schools when it was happening so rapidly. However, we took the opportunity not only to observe relevant VET activity in the schools, and what was happening at State level (Education Department of WA, the Department of Training and the Curriculum Council), but to discover what sort of teacher training programs had been set up in other universities and in other States.

The pattern had become clear near by the middle of 1998 and at this stage we were able to take our findings to a national conference in Queensland where we compared notes with researchers working in similar areas across Australia.

By the beginning of 1999 we had written our Graduate Certificate in VET in Schools. It was designed for four year trained teachers working in the schools, who wished to obtain a qualification for the work they were already doing, and for those who chose to change to VET in Schools as a new teaching direction.

The Graduate Certificate normally is a one-semester full time equivalent course. This new Graduate Certificate was designed as an in-service course, and it was expected that candidates would spread their study over one year or two, according to their circumstances. It consisted of four units, as follows

**304363 Ed519 VET Context and Policy.** This unit deals with the context and policy of VET in Schools, and includes a wide range of government documents, guidelines and regulations.

**304367 Ed548 Diploma in Training and Assessment Systems.** This is a National Training Authority accredited course, and will assist the candidate make the transfer from schools based education knowledge and experience to the concepts, language and expectations of industry training.

[This unit was recommended to us by the Department of Training, as they advised it would give teachers more credibility with industry.]

**304370 Ed559 VET Internship.** The Internship will guide the candidate through a range of practical projects at school and district level. The candidate will be expected to seek advice and guidance from Voced Coordinators or VET personnel in the school. There will be a choice of approximately 5 out of 10 set project topics.

**304358 Ed 599 Industry Project.** This unit will allow the candidate to undertake research into a specific industry or in the broader context of the VET in Schools activity. Candidates will propose a research topic and, with regular feedback from the Curtin supervisor, complete the research and a report.

The course was offered online. Generous Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provisions were available for those who had considerable experience in working with VET in Schools, in particular the VET Coordinators.

We advertised widely and spoke to various groups about the new course. There was a lot of initial interest. However, only a handful of candidates enrolled and only two completed the award. That was in 2001. We had no new enrolments in 2001 or 2002.

In August this year, the Dean of Education and the Coordinator of the VET in Schools program met with the Director General of Education and his VET in Schools senior staff to discuss the problem. They agreed that the course was a good idea and that its content appeared sound. They expressed surprise that it wasn't better supported. The Faculty of Education team pointed out that the problem didn't seem to stem from the validity or quality of the program, but from the cost. We believed that teachers were not prepared to pay the cost of university post-graduate fees. We proposed that the Director General award a number of scholarships, or part scholarships, to fill the places in the new program.

The Education Department team recommended that we change the unit *Industry Project* to *Industry Placement*, which we agree we could do. The other change we proposed is that we will replace *Diploma in Training and Assessment Systems*, which is proving to be a dubious choice for graduate teachers, and write a new unit based on the teacher resource being developed by the national Curriculum Corporation.

We have not had confirmation of a scholarship scheme from the Director General as yet, but we have moved on with our rewriting and upgrading in preparation for enrolments of a significant size in the first semester next year.

The implication of our experience with the Graduate Certificate in VET in Schools is that quality teacher preparation for this very important innovation in our schools is being neglected and ignored because teachers will not pay the fees out of their own pocket. If the scholarships are not forthcoming, a valuable training resource will have been wasted.

Yours sincerely

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Dean  
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