



QUEENSLAND COUNCIL OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS INC.

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ENQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Inc. is a community organisation that represents the interests of State school Parents and Citizens Associations throughout Queensland. It has a history spanning more than 50 years. Approximately 1300 P & C Associations are affiliated with QCPCA. This represents more than 99% of all eligible P & C Associations.

A key aim of this Association is to be involved in all areas of education affecting the parent, school and community. Vocational Education in schools is a key area of interest for our organisation and its affiliates because of its relevance to students and their parents. We will address our concerns under the terms of reference.

The value of education lies in its ability to deliver learning experiences that equip young people for the next phase of their lives. The vast majority of young people progress from school to work (statistics put the figure at approx 70%). Increasingly employers are demanding "work-ready staff". When the choice is made by a student to focus on this pathway, VET becomes a crucial component in the process of assisting young people to be prepared for work, not just in an academic sense but also by practical exposure to work environments.

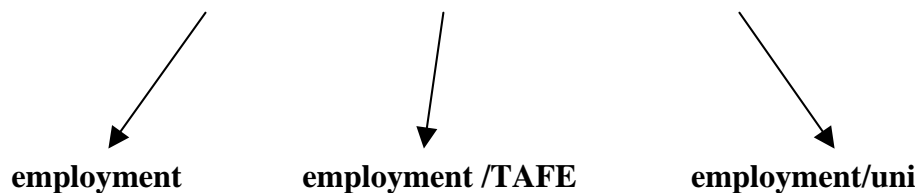
Queensland has been very successful in engaging young people in VET but this has resulted more from dedication of individuals to make it happen, rather than the operation of a system that provides coordinated support. There are areas in Queensland where VET networks are well established and are working successfully, but there are many areas that cannot make the same boast.

Community awareness, particularly parent knowledge and acceptance of the value of VET is a vital aspect of the future of its success. It is critical that at the point in a student's education when they have to make decisions about subject choices and their future, that they and their parents are fully aware of all avenues available to them. Most students turn to their parents for advice and support for their future direction and therefore parents are part of the chain of information on VET and must be kept informed.

As QCPCA sees it, the difference between traditional education pathways and VET can be summarised as:

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION – rigid, inflexible system ⇒ OP & university (one size fits all)

VET – flexible, tailored to individual needs ⇒ opens a range of opportunities after Yr 12



The advantage for participants in a well-organised VET program is the ability of the process to produce outcomes consistent with the participant's aspirations (in all cases), rather than moulding the student in the shape the system demands.

The VET scheme, to be effective, must deliver the following:

- fully meet the educational and vocational needs of a diverse range of participants
- provide alternative pathways of learning
- broaden the teachers perspective, in that they have a traditional and vocational outlook
- provide innovative workplace training for participants
- strengthen the relationship between students and the community
- place a 'value' on vocational learning as a legitimate alternative to mainstream academia.

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

As indicated in our introduction, Queensland has already embraced the VET concept as an important part of senior schooling, with more than 60% of all VET commencements occurring in Queensland. However there are certainly many improvements required to the system for it to achieve its full potential. VET delivery must be flexible to enable it to adapt to the changing needs of individuals and the system itself. This will ensure that outcomes are maximised for participants and industry.

The Queensland Government, this year, released a discussion paper addressing Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF). QCPCA supports, in principle, the thrust of the ETRF discussion paper. We are pleased that they have reacted proactively to the emerging data indicating reforms of the system are needed. One of its key messages is that a proportion of young people, about 20%, are not well served by the current schooling and VET arrangements. These young people are being lost in the sense that they do not find their way into full-time employment or further education after they leave school. Development of a worthwhile learning experience is paramount for securing the future for our young people. The role that vocational education plays in that future is crucial to the overall success of education for young people, particularly for those that are not suited to current schooling and vocational education arrangements.

The sort of flexibility that we envisage for VET is not just in terms of what it can deliver but how the funding is structured. There is an increasing trend for young people not to select a traditional “course” of study but to mix components of a number of different modules from a range of courses. However, in doing so, many young people run the risk that their choices will not be fully recognised by employers or higher education systems. The current certification regime is not capable of recognising successful completion of modules as opposed to the completion of specific ANTA Certificates.

The changing pace of technology, reforms in the workplace and emergence of new industries outstrips the capacity of educational systems to develop courses of study to accommodate this trend. The development and approval process for new certificates is so protracted that changes and requirements of rapidly developing or redeveloping industries easily outstrips the capacity of the system to provide appropriate training.

The way that funds flow to VET training does not cope well with this sort of demand. Similarly, the funding model for schools cannot accommodate this level of flexibility either. The flexibility issue is further compounded by the rigidity in how allowances for study/living are allocated to young people.

The end result is that, the tracking and management of money stifles educational innovation. By removing or relaxing barriers more young people will achieve better outcomes and contribute to society rather than being a burden.

Range

The range of VET options in well-established industries meets a wide variety of needs but does not always cover the reality of those industries. Industries like signwriting have undergone significant changes in operations, with many companies employing computer controlled laser-cutting equipment and computer design while others still rely on the skills of painters. This is by no means an isolated example. Many industries are experiencing similar advances in technology that are not well reflected in the available training modules.

The regionalised nature of the Queensland population, with 56% of people living outside the capital city, places greater demands on the delivery of a wider range of vocational education, especially in geographically remote communities. It is not reasonable to expect that young people in rural and remote communities will only be interested in heavy industry or primary production. There is also a tendency to overlook the value of VET in the industries that serve and support a community, such as the service industry. Extra funding should be directed at encouraging a more diverse range of industry to be involved in VET on a community level, by offering, for example, greater incentives to engage in the VET programs.

The inverse aspect of this issue is that where the focus is narrowed on the leading industry of a community, the student demand for industry placements then overwhelms local industry's capacity to provide those placements. Therefore more attention must be given to:

- a) bringing additional VET opportunities to the young people state-wide; or,
- b) taking the young people to VET opportunities – the need for flexibility to enable travel to facilitate learning and for participants to take advantage of as wide a range of opportunities as possible.

Neither the school system nor the VET system provides a mechanism, whereby industry placement can occur beyond a fairly limited geographical distance. Travel subsidy schemes do not deliver solutions to this problem. Other allowance schemes do provide assistance for VET away from the young person's home base but only for participants who are no longer in school.

The whole system of financial assistance to young people requires review to ensure that the various allowances are consistent and do not overlap in their application.

Resourcing

When considering the resourcing of VET in Queensland, recognition must be given to the impact of regionalisation and geographic isolation. Queensland is the most regionalised State in Australia and faces much greater challenges in effectively delivering VET than more compact and accessible States, such as Victoria and New South Wales.

Commonwealth funding is tied to the number of 15-17 year olds on a State-by-State basis. Using this criterion, Queensland is classed as a "medium" sized State and funded accordingly.

In terms of access and participation in VET, Queensland has a much greater proportion of 15-17 year olds involved in VET than other States. For example, 60% of all school-based traineeships nationally, are Queensland based. The current formula for the funding of VET is wide open to distortion in funding allocations. It is a reality that States with large numbers of 15-17 year olds and low participation rates in VET receive a larger allocation than States with lower numbers of 15-17 year olds and very high participation rates. Therefore it is possible for a smaller State to proportionally have far more young people actually accessing VET.

The funding model should be **based on participation rates in VET** and under such a model Queensland would be classed as a “large” State and receive commensurate funding. It is difficult to contemplate how Australia can continue to invest so inequitably in education. The investment of valuable resources must be targeted and distributed fairly to the young people that **actually access these services**.

A specific funding issue of concern is that in some schools, particularly those who offer a wide variety of VET, find it a burden on their already stretched budget to fund the release of teachers from classes so they can maintain and enhance their industry qualifications. This is certainly an area where the funding issue is seen in stark relief. The person delivering the VET subject or module will generally be a teacher but the funding that the school attracts is mainly targeted to the delivery of the subject/module and does not adequately cover the cost of maintaining both teaching and industry qualifications.

Some schools opt out of offering VET as it too costly to deliver the TRS component associated with the delivery requirements. This therefore limits the range of choice that students can access and diminishes their educational opportunities.

Teacher Training

Under the present system of qualifications, we either turn a teacher into an industry expert /tradesperson or vice-versa. The long-term implication of this is that one skill diminishes over time and requires a ‘top up’. Many communities have suitably qualified industry experts who are keen to support the young people of their community but do not want, or are unable to, undertake teacher training. Conversely, many teachers want to instigate VET in the school but are unwilling or unable to attain the necessary industry qualifications.

Perhaps it is time to investigate instructional teams of teachers and industry qualified experts that offer young people the best of both worlds. The expansion/enhancement of VET should not be hobbled by limiting our thinking that all necessary skills must be rolled into a single package/person. Increasing specialisation in industry will make it even more difficult for any one person to fulfil both roles. The use of paraprofessionals should be considered to enhance the delivery of VET. This would also help to address the shortage of teachers trained in specific industry areas. It is time to contemplate ways to maintain the educational rigor of the system but allow for flexible delivery models, including teaching teams that work in partnership to deliver a well-rounded learning experience.

We would still envisage the teacher as the team leader in a supervising role and the others in a support role, with the teacher maintaining control over curriculum content and course outline. The method of delivery would then be a cooperative effort of the whole team.

Structure

The most significant challenge in effectively delivering VET across the whole of Queensland, stems from the previously identified fact, that Queensland is the most diverse and regionalised State in Australia. Irrespective of the physical location of TAFE colleges the structure of that system is very different from the schools that need to work closely with VET, whether this is embedded in the curriculum or as add on modules.

The broadening of the concept of the school community has progressed far beyond the parent/school/student concept to now engage local industry and commerce, and other education providers such as TAFE and University as well as retired people in the wider community.

One of the difficulties for schools in relation to VET is the sometimes impenetrable layer of bureaucracy that must be negotiated, and the complexity provided by the multitude of players in the field. For teachers and schools, the offering of a VET program should be no more difficult than offering a traditional academic course.

In reaction to the misalignment of the systems, schools have developed innovative solutions that do not conform to the formal system. **In many instances VET in schools is happening in spite of the system not because of the system.**

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

The real value in VET lies with its relevance to and acceptance by industry. Alignment of industry demands with VET delivery will ensure that the investment in VET in schools is maximized. The system plays a role in the identification of needs, including employment demand, to inform educators so they can develop appropriate modules/courses.

The view industry takes on school based vocational education is very much determined on the level of interaction between schools and industry. Where strong links have been formed, similar to a cluster that operates on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, industry views it very positively. On the other hand, there will be industry that views school based training very sceptically, usually as a result of a lack of local drive or initiative. The system provides little support or leadership in this area and becomes very dependant on a local solution rather than a system solution. While local solutions are important, it is also vital that they happen within a consistent framework and it is this framework that appears to be lacking.

Community and industry perception of the value of VET as a legitimate alternative pathway is critical to its future success. Today's perception, in many areas, is that VET is a second rate outcome for students. They are the ones who are not good enough to attain an OP and go to University.

A negative aspect of VET occurs in some areas of employment, whereby a student who has completed one or two modules as part of school based VET is then not eligible to participate in a work based traineeship when they leave school. This means that some students do not have sufficient qualifications to apply for a job and employers in preference select a trainee that has not completed any modules, to obtain the financial incentives attached to traineeships. These types of anomalies should be identified and clearly outlined before a student makes the decision to proceed or preferably this should be addressed in a way that students will not be penalised for undertaking a school based traineeship when it comes to applying for a traineeship after they leave school.

The perception of the value of VET in education must be improved to a point where it is seen as a viable and valuable alternative to what has been traditionally called "academic" study. Qualifications attained during the VET program must be made to be recognised as a substantial achievement post-VET and provide a qualification or recognised credit for achievement should the participant progress to TAFE or University at some future time.

Participation in VET must be legitimised and be seen as a different pathway in its own right – not a second rate pathway. VET is one of a range of qualifications and experiences, which a student carries with them at the completion of their secondary education.

Vocational education in new and emerging industries.

Every industry, irrespective of how “hi-tech” it may be, requires a range of skills and qualifications to turn it into a viable industry. VET has a role in partnership with industry to identify the range of skills required to provide a rounded industry and to develop appropriate responses to support that industry.

The notion of new and emerging industries, and VET participants’ access to them must be viewed in a broader sense. Not only are there new and emerging industries, but there are also traditional industries, which are being revolutionised by the introduction of new technology and practices. VET participants must have the chance to be accepted in this area.

Participation in new and emerging industries is a two-edged sword. A new industry needs to prove its viability as an ongoing enterprise before VET resources can be dedicated to it. Accordingly, during this ‘proving’ period, opportunities can be lost. However to ‘go too soon’ may see the industry fold and the learnings and vocational path are lost.

Traditional industries, which are being modernised, must be included in the VET program and teachers must be up skilled, in consultation with industry, to ensure learning is current and relevant. The resourcing of VET should include a component of research to allow forward planning. Our students need to have available a range of choices that encompass the employment trends of the future.

In short what this equates to is, VET in schools, regardless of the type of industry, needs to be current, relevant and of high quality, so that outcomes for participants are first class. We must be realistic about the expectations of industry and produce outcomes for VET, which meet these expectations.

VET must be directed at providing participants with the best possible set of choices in study and practical experience at school level so that their future vocational outcomes are enhanced in each individual situation.

The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.

Queensland, like other States with significant indigenous populations, faces major challenges in the provision of education and training. This is particularly true in the case of those indigenous Australians that live within dedicated communities. In many instances these are typified by high unemployment and lack of local enterprises. These communities are, in many respects, not dissimilar from other regional and remote communities but have their own unique challenges.

The nature of these communities results in geographic isolation, which brings with it difficulties in physical access to travelling and VET support personnel. It also brings economic isolation because they are located according to traditional ties, rather economic viability. The industries that do develop within the communities do not align well with the current options provided by VET. Where VET has been introduced some communities have seen a very high uptake of the option to the detriment of traditional schooling. Striking a balance between “vocational” and “academic” studies is vital for the communities to remain viable.

In many rural and isolated areas of Queensland, students travel and are accommodated at either hostels or boarding facilities/schools. In most cases the community struggles to find placements in industry for workplace training for local students without an influx from outlying areas.

A further issue facing these students is that part of the VET program is to work during school holidays. Accommodation for these students, when their normal boarding facility is closed for school holidays, is yet another obstacle to overcome. It would be beneficial to these students to structure a schedule that allows the travellers to do their work-place training in school terms and the local students to do theirs in the school holidays. The delivery, by being more flexible and resourceful in terms of balancing the “where and when” of the theory and practical components of VET in these communities, will be beneficial to all those involved. There are already some excellent programs in place to assist students from these areas, such as “Reach in and Reach out”. Another is the “Cape York Youth Net” known as “CYYN”. Their goals include:-

- Build individual skills
- Provide awareness of opportunities
- Share information and
- Contribute to the development of your community.

A visit to their web page www.cyyn.net, gives examples of the good work they are doing with some of these students at home and in the towns. Some examples include:-

- Local art
- Tourism

- Leadership.

These types of programs have infrastructure in place. With some creative thinking it may be possible to extend these into VET initiatives. This should be the subject of interdepartmental cooperation and collaboration to best utilise resources and funding for the benefit of all indigenous people.

There are a number of projects in place such as the 2001 National Report on Indigenous Education and Training that could be beneficial to access. Within the scope of this report, Vocational Education and Training is addressed, however, this would be an excellent opportunity to broaden that scope to include VET in schools. This is an ongoing reporting process, with reports being presented for each year it is funded. These reports will provide more information about what is being achieved by education providers around the nation. The provision of a record of the state of Indigenous Education and Training will enable Governments to be able to track progress being made and highlight areas where the gaps remain significant. It will also play a major role in terms of the Commonwealth's accountability for expenditure in the area of Indigenous Education and Training.

Another is the newly established Indigenous Education, Employment Training and Youth Taskforce, formed at the recent MCEETYA meeting held in Auckland. The original taskforce was split to address this specific area. The Taskforce will be chaired by the Northern Territory, with representatives from all jurisdictions and will be responsible for advising MCEETYA on the national effort to improve Indigenous education, training, higher education and employment outcomes, and on the well being of Indigenous youth.

While it is commendable for this inquiry to address the issues for indigenous students it ignores other important equity groups, including students with disabilities.

This review must consider provision of VET in the light of relevance and access by all young people.

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