



VETnetwork
Vocational Learning - Enterprise - Transitions

Submission on behalf of VETnetwork Australia to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training's *Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions.*

VETnetwork Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry. As the peak body representing all involved in the development and delivery of vocational education and training in schools around Australia it has considerable knowledge of and experience in matters relating to the successful transition of young Australians from school to working life.

VETnetwork Australia was established in 1995 as a result of a nationally drawn gathering of stakeholders interested in the newly emerging vocational education and training in schools agenda, held in Canberra. Those participating were unanimous in their resolve to set up a national organisation to promote the educational value of VET in schools, to share best practice and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers.

Since then it has:

- Grown a membership base across all jurisdictions with over 700 members
- Established state affiliates including VETnetwork QLD, VETnetwork NSW and VETnetwork TAS with plans to continue the new nomenclature into all states
- Run six very successful national conferences beginning in 1998 attracting over 500 delegates from all states and territories
- Published *The Vetnetworker* national newsletter and distributed this on a quarterly basis for distribution to members and schools
- Published *VOCAL: The Australian Journal of Vocational Education and Training in Schools*

- Provided professional development programs relating to vocational education, enterprise and career education around the country
- Been actively involved in a range of state and national policy initiatives including school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, the Australian Vocational Student Prize and Local Community Partnerships, together with involvement in projects managed by the Commonwealth Education Department (DEEWA and its predecessors) and Commonwealth funded bodies including the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (formerly the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation), Curriculum Corporation and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).
- Has contributed to much of the research over the last 10 years undertaken by bodies like NCVET, ACER and university research on vocational education in schools.
- Strengthened its strategic direction which is embodied in its mission statement:
"Our purpose is to provide nationally focused quality leadership and professional support for the engagement of young people in vocational learning, leading to successful transitions."

Core values which are included in this mission statement include that the focus is national – this is to ensure congruence between the expectations of members and other key stakeholders – and successful transitions are defined as including school to work, training and further education. As well, successful transitions recognise individual pathways and achievements.

Underpinning the association's strategic direction and purpose are the following core business objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: To identify, promote and provide quality 'value for money' professional development learning to members.

Strategic Objective 2: To provide national advocacy/influence/lobbying activity on behalf of our members, through maintenance and development of networks, recognition as a peak national association and input into government policy and direction.

Strategic Objective 3: To achieve self funding status including viable administrative function through membership, actively seeking funding support and sponsorship and identifying new financial initiatives.

Strategic Objective 4: To identify and promote 'best practice' within the provision of vocational learning, enterprise and transition programs.

Strategic Objective 5: To overcome barriers imposed by State boundaries through collective collaboration with state based members and associations.

The comment and recommendations in this submission come from a range of sources including:

- Input from National Executive members to whom the terms of reference of the inquiry were circulated
- Comment from network members responsible for related policy matters at both a state and national level
- From the resources of VETnetwork Australia's range of publications and professional development activities
- The extensive research activity that in many cases has involved active input from VETnetwork Australia's members.

This submission has been drafted by Mike Frost, Vice Chair, VETnetwork Australia.

1. Employability and Career Development Skills through Part time Work

VETnetwork Australia sees part-time paid work by students attending school as just one of a range of ways in which young people experience the world of work. Work-based learning models include:

- School-based traineeships and apprenticeships
- Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)
- VET in Schools programs (with or without SWL)
- Work Experience

All of these have features which both enhance employability and nurture career knowledge and awareness. However they differ substantially in quality and in outcomes.

Figure 1 summarises the major and most commonly experienced types of experience of the world of work and rates them in terms of useful education and training outcomes.

The development of employability and career development skills is likely to be best achieved through a program that involves authentic workplace experience, payment for work and gaining accredited training outcomes.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships provide the best model for achieving this. Establishing a formal training agreement is in itself a rigorous process requiring scrutiny of the employer, the workplace, the relationship between employer and school and a clear understanding of training outcomes. The fact that on-the-job training is actually paid allows it to meet some of the positive outcomes from paid work – some financial independence, exposure to the adult responsibilities of the workplace and what normally goes with paid work.

Other variants show increasingly limited achievement of these sorts of objectives, with traditional work experience the least impressive.

* Rating is based on assessment of the extent to which Learning Models contribute to positive education and training achievement

Fig 1 Comparative Rating of Workplace Learning Models

	Workplace Time	Paid	Industry Area	Program Quality	Qualifications	Rating*
Part-time Paid Work	5 – 30 hours per week	Casual junior and adult rates; award-based; workplace agreements	Service industries – hospitality; retail, catering; fast food	Nationally recognised training not mandated; Authentic workplace skills; Wide variation in quality	No national recognition in senior qualifications; Some Certificate 1 and 2 in fast food and retailing	4
School-based traineeships and apprenticeships	1-3 days per week on the job or blocks during the year	Training wage Contract of training	All industries – including trade training, office and clerical; catering and hospitality; rural industries	Nationally recognised quality assured training;	Recognised in all senior certificates; AQF qualifications	1
Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)	1 day per week to maximum 30 days per year	Unpaid	All industries – restrictions in some states into mining, forestry, aviation and marine	Usually nationally recognised quality assured training;	Recognised in all national senior secondary qualifications	2
VET in Schools programs	Optional – programs not required to use workplace time	Unpaid	All industries – many use traditional work experience for industry placement	Wide variations from nationally recognised, quality assured training to school-developed.	Wide variations from AQF; senior certificate through to local certification and recognition. Some programs can contribute to university entrance (ENTER) although this varies from state to state.	3
Work Experience	1-2 weeks per year; Usually Grade 10	Unpaid	All industries -	No quality assurance; wide reported variations in workplace learning with many poor experiences	Generally does not contribute to qualifications	5

Part time work does, however, provide a range of positive benefits in terms of authentic exposure to the world of work. Figure 2 summarises the positive and negative aspects of part-time work. Quite clearly its biggest advantage is that it provides experience of work in a relatively adult way, including the notion of payment based on expectations about performance, appreciation of behaviour appropriate to the workplace (work ethic), taking direction and assuming responsibility. In this respect it is likely that paid work has the capacity to shape and develop those competencies referred to as employability skills.

Part-time work is not, however, an alternative to real training – it may complement real education and training but it is not an alternative. Student part-time work is dominated by the service industries (food and hospitality, fast food and retail in particular), is poorly paid, exploitative, short-term and generally seen as a short term strategy by young people to meet their needs as young consumers. Rarely do they see long term career benefits from such work.

Efforts to recognise learning outcomes from part-time work have been tried through a range of approaches with limited duration and success. Typically these have involved:

1. Encouraging employers to put part-time workers on school-based traineeships, in the process attracting training incentives as well as students getting a training qualification. Results have not been encouraging – training quality has often been poor; students dislike the lower rate provided by the training wage and the willingness of the employer and school to work together to assess and report competencies has been poor. Fast food and retail industries have dominated this approach.
2. Acknowledging part time work on local certification and school references.
3. Allowing part-time work to count as structured workplace learning – this has tended to be problematic at the employer-school level particularly in relation to on-the-job assessment and reporting to school.
4. Allowing part-time work to count as work experience for school certification purposes.

Fig 2 Summary of Positive and Negative Characteristics of Student Part-Time Work	
Positive Qualities	Negative Qualities
Financial independence and consumer spending power	Often poor use made of talent, intelligence, personality, innovativeness, and energy of part-time employee
Authentic experience of world of work	School organisation (eg timetabling) often means work extends into class time leading to absenteeism
Contributes to employability skills and makes unemployment less likely	Low paid, service sector jobs in hospitality, fast-food, retail are common
Helps more informed future career choices including knowledge of least preferred jobs and support investigation of other career options	Work not recognised generally as contributing to school-based learning outcomes by schools. Teachers and curriculum not conducive to recognising this learning
Positive adult social experience – treated like adults; new friendship network	Performance and achievement decreases as hours of part-time work increase – above 10 hours it becomes a problem
When work takes place (eg over vacation) minimizes	Lower SES students less likely to work; likewise indigenous

impact on school performance	students; rural and regional. When they do have jobs they are more likely to work longer hours and hence are less likely to complete senior schooling
Contributes to the range of experiences including career education, school qualifications, work experience that lead to informed career choice	Students with special needs and from different ethnic backgrounds – Eg students from North African, Middle Eastern and Asian backgrounds are less likely to have part-time work
Some schools do recognise and encourage part time work as an incentive to stay at school	Work experiences vary widely in terms of skills development, safety; quality of employer; quality of workplace; quality of supervision
Develop employability skills – good employers value the opportunity that part-time work offers to build workplace skills	Parents less likely to understand the value of work to wider learning including to career preparation and employability
Potentially reduces the need for structured work placements though this requires training to be provided	
May support investigation of other career options	
May provide ongoing support for post-school education and training	

2. Senior Secondary Certification Supporting Part Time Work

There are a number of new senior secondary certificates that have been recently introduced, like the Queensland Certificate of Education, or are in the process of being introduced, like the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, which are distinguished by much greater flexibility in recognising work-based learning. This learning now commonly includes structured work-based learning usually contributing or leading to a VET qualification.

None of the certificates recognise part-time employment other than where an accredited training outcome occurs. This is quite reasonable – senior secondary qualifications certify successful achievement in accredited or recognised courses or programs. The integrity and worth of such qualifications is dependent on consistency in achievement usually based around agreed standards.

Because part time employment experiences vary widely in terms of skills development, occupational health and safety factors, the quality of employer-employee relations and the quality of supervision and the quality of workplace itself, there will be wide variations in being able to assess workplace performance in any meaningful way.

For example, larger employers like Coles-Myer, Woolworths and McDonalds provide generally high standards in terms of workplace operations with sound induction programs, well organized rosters, clear occupational health and safety guidelines and good in-house training. Often the training is accredited and can lead to nationally recognised qualifications mostly in retailing or catering.

Many smaller employers, however, do not apply the same standards. In Tasmania, anecdotal reports cite poor workplace practices are common in, for example, the smaller bakery business – young people being sacked for spurious reasons, sworn at, penalised for perceived errors and poorly managed rostering and equally poor supervisory practices.

Obviously the experiences of anyone working under such circumstances are unlikely to contribute very much to their preparation for the world of work other than in a negative sense at least in terms of contributing in a useful way to certification.

Nevertheless there are some ways in which part-time work could contribute toward certification which could have more widespread application. These include:

1. Pathway planning where young people are supported through high school in developing personalised and customised future career plans. Tasmania's new TCE has a specific requirement that student's lodge a pathway plan at the end of year 10 (underpinned by legislation in the *Guaranteeing Futures Act 2004*) and show evidence that they have made use of it. Part time work can be used to inform that pathway planning and its realisation by providing real and authentic workplace experience. Queensland has a similar arrangement with its learning account system where young people again register their career intentions. Part time work can contribute to their career development in a recognisable way.
2. Part-time work being used in a structured and agreed way to contribute toward a senior secondary certificate. For example, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) specifically identifies part-time work as an activity that can contribute to achieving the certificate.
3. Part-time work contributing to career building through, for example, the development of skills sets. For example, a young person might build up basic skills in customer service through a job with McDonalds, extend those to clerical and office skills through working in an office environment, develop more specific skills in retail and go onto hospitality management. In this case a range of skills are developed over time and built upon in a range of settings. Where this skills development can be recognised through training outcomes (gaining recognised units of competence) then it could feasibly contribute to senior certification.
4. Recognition of informal learning for certification purposes – the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority is currently investigating ways in which learning that occurs incidentally in the home, at work, through community service and the like can be recognised and potentially contribute to certification. Similarly in NSW there are programs of voluntary community service, generally undertaken in Years 9 and 10, with students being awarded a certificate on completion of the recognised voluntary work. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a process for formally recognising knowledge and skills can assist this sort of recognition.

3. Support to Assist Young People Combining Work and Study

Educational programs involving school-based coordinated student work placement are expensive because they involve learning outside school and the classroom. As well as

providing for teacher time for workplace visits and assessment, students and schools are faced with costs for transport, uniform, protective clothing and footwear, tools, training materials and the like.

Cost is undoubtedly the single biggest disincentive to expanding such programs and explains why a great many schools around the nation provide only limited programs with short workplace stays.

The appeal for recognising part-time work lies in the fact that it is comparatively inexpensive – students are responsible for finding work, providing uniforms and tools, getting to and from work. The problem, as pointed out elsewhere, is that it is very difficult to validly, reliably and consistently count learning outcomes, particularly for senior certificate purposes.

By contrast, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships provide a more holistic solution. Paid training meets the appeal of most part time jobs, money and some financial autonomy, while a formal training agreement assures the learning outcomes and schools, other training providers and employers are locked into a mutually supportive arrangement. Some funding of course is assured under both Commonwealth and State training arrangements.

The solution may be to look for ways in which employers of part-time workers can be encouraged to engage their young people in training as part of their work. Training incentives have worked up to a point with part-time traineeships, though these may have been the principal appeal. Providing some employer incentive to provide accredited training even if just at the unit of competence level is worth exploring.

Just as important is a process for alerting young people to the benefits of getting training outcomes from their paid employment. There are many precedents for schools, students and employers to work together demonstrated through the many successful VET in Schools programs around the country. Extending this to paid work could be developed through a publicity campaign focussing on the benefits:

- To employers the advantages to their business of providing formal recognised training and information about how to do it.
- To students the benefits of getting paid work translated into training outcomes and the way in which this contributes to certification and/or qualifications.
- To schools as a complementary, valid form of education and training that supports school learning.
- To parents that paid, part-time work contributes to overall learning and career development.
- To the community that schools and industry can work well together in the best interests of local communities.

4. Potential Impact on Educational Attainment

Figure 2 summarises the range of positive outcomes identified in part-time work.

Young people seem to view part-time work as real work, as distinct from workplace training which is perceived up to a point as being beyond their control. Working is primarily their responsibility, whether it is successful or not is within their locus of control. They are also pretty realistic about it – lousy jobs are identified as such pretty quickly and strategies are developed for working around unrealistic supervisors and exploitative bosses.

Young people value the adult responsibility often given to them in workplaces. You find 16 year old supermarket section managers responsible for maintaining stock, training new casuals and reporting on OH & S matters simultaneously dealing with the often numbing mindlessness of “veggie maths” at school. Some employers look for the unique knowledge and skills their young part-timers have – high-order computing skills, creative flair in design, superior problem solving skills and the like.

A number of reported findings show general employability skills are widely developed through part-time work. This is likely to advantage young people who have been part-time workers in accessing future jobs, and is likely to complement other work-related skills they may develop through formal schooling.

It is also likely that part-time work contributes to the range of experiences that include career education, and more general school studies that may lead to informed and enhanced career planning and career choices. Career education in its traditional sense based in the classroom is considered outmoded. School experience should now be pitched much more at developing appropriate knowledge and skills suitable for pathways into preferred future employment and with that career development skills.

There is no longer a linear progression from school to work – transition is a more complex activity where part-time work and school are part of a wider set of factors which influence future employment. In this respect part-time work can complement school-based activity both in terms of curriculum and other social and cultural learnings. Additionally, it could be actively encouraged for those students groups which require additional support for successful transitions (including those with low literacy and numeracy skills and some students with disabilities).

Part-time work can, however, impact on learning adversely in two significant ways:

1. When hours worked exceed a threshold research suggests is around 12 hours – above this threshold school performance and achievement decreases, reflected in senior certificate performance, attitude to school and motivation to succeed.
2. When part-time work cuts across timetabled classes and home work time – schools generally have not responded with more flexible arrangements and are still inclined to penalise students for missing class time. There is a disjunction between time-based approaches to traditional school course completion and competency based assessment based on skill attainment not time served.

There are instances of schools adjusting to the demands for more flexible arrangements. These have been driven in many instances by the arrangements required for part-time school based traineeships and apprenticeships and VET in schools programs where students need to be free from school for one or two days a week. VETnetwork Australia has gathered extensive information about alternative arrangements over many years through articles published and conference presentations. DEEWR also has considerable material from various reports commissioned on school-based VET.

5. Effectiveness of School-based Training Pathways and their Impact on Successful Transitions

VETnetwork Australia, as the peak body representing the interests of those committed to the implementation of VET in Schools program across Australia, has been at the forefront of recognising and reporting on the many success stories. Both its national newsletter *The Vetnetworker* and national journal *VOCAL* have regularly reported on developments, best-practice and success stories around the country. Its biennial national conferences have showcased outstanding examples of VET programs and identified ways in which successful programs can be developed and made to work. It retains an immense amount of social and cultural capital in its established network – outstanding teachers, great innovators, policy leaders, SWL Coordinators working with industry and businesses, expert informed researchers and leading edge school principals.

The message from this vantage point is consistent and clear – vocational programs which are of high quality and are nationally recognised have transformed schools and student learning experiences across Australia. With over 90% of schools across government, Catholic and independent sectors now providing some sort of program and over 50% of students completing a VET in Schools qualification, it is now permanently established and supported by industry and businesses across Australia.

The effectiveness of school-based training in supporting successful transitions is now well recognised and documented. In summary this success is observed in:

- new approaches to teaching and learning focussing on applied learning, new approaches to assessment using competency based approaches and recognising that good learning occurs in places other than schools, like workplaces
- new approaches to school organisation including more flexible timetabling, flexible delivery of courses, adult learning arrangements and new approaches to assessment
- new approaches to career planning where school, work and training experiences are seamlessly integrated into successful post-school transitions to further education and work
- more successful engagement of low-achieving students with better outcomes in terms of employment and training
- a richer curriculum with a greater range of more practical and applied learning opportunities particularly relating to workplace skills

- more effective core skills development in literacy, numeracy and information communication technology and other employability skills
- closer and more productive relationships between education and industry with better understandings about the respective roles of schools and businesses
- better appreciation by communities about the attributes of their young people and what an asset they really are
- the move by all state jurisdictions to recognise workplace and vocational learning in post-compulsory qualifications, with VCAL a shining example of what can be achieved
- significant and extensive reforms of post-compulsory education in a number of states – the move to establish a system of polytechnics and academies in Tasmania as part of its Tasmanian Tomorrow policy framework is a case in point, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) in QLD and South Australia’s School to Work Strategy likewise.

In all of this can be seen the powerful place that vocational education and training has played in stimulating educational reform. That reform is ongoing but there is much more to be done. The Commonwealth has the capacity in policy terms to:

- continue the drive to increase the access of young people to paid training through school-based traineeships and apprenticeships
- increase the overall participation of young people in quality vocational programs to above 75% of those completing year 12 or its equivalent
- make certain that national curriculum developments include school-based vocational education and training
- ensure, in a similar vein, that national senior certification also recognises quality vocational learning including the learning outcomes gained through quality part-time work
- continue to work with peak business bodies (like the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) to ensure much greater awareness of school-based vocational education and training and a greater demand for these skills post-year 12.

The place for paid part-time work, as outlined earlier, is to complement broader efforts to engage young people in work-based training.

In particular, there is a generally agreed need to encourage employers and educators to provide accredited training outcomes through part-time work as a major thrust.

Recommendations

1. Paid part-time work should be considered as an activity that complements other vocational education and training initiatives.

2. Paid part-time work should be recognised as an important part of career development initiatives and included in school-based career planning.
3. Paid part-time work should only contribute to senior certification, including any future national certificate, when it incorporates nationally accredited training.
4. School-based traineeships and apprenticeships should be further promoted as an alternative to part-time work through their capacity to provide income, work based learning and training that leads to formal recognition of competencies
5. Employers should become the focus of a national campaign to build in elements of formal accredited training for their young part-time employees even if it is just at the unit of competence level.
6. Part-time work should be considered as a valid part of any process for recognising informal learning including through RPL processes that contribute to formal certification.
7. Students and schools should be alerted to the threshold at which part-time work is likely to seriously impact on the student's school learning – the upper range is considered to be 10-15 hours.
8. VETnetwork will actively support new national initiatives that are aimed to encourage employers and educators to provide accredited training outcomes, including the employability skills, through part-time work as a major thrust.

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VOCAL: The Australian Journal of Vocational Education Training in Schools

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