

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Training**

Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

**Faculty of Education
Deakin University
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Preamble

The Faculty of Education, Deakin University offers professional development courses to secondary teachers in the field of vocational education. The principal course is the Graduate Certificate in Professional Education and Training (Enterprise Education). This course articulates directly into the Master of Professional Education and Training. The specialist units relevant to Vocational Education in Schools are:

- ECN701 Enterprise Education and Youth
- ECN702 Vocational Education in Schools
- ECN703 Enterprise Education Project

The Faculty is now in the process of developing a fourth unit to this specialist suite of units. This new unit will be ECN704 Applied Learning.

In addition, the Faculty is currently undertaking the evaluation of the pilot of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) commissioned by the Victorian Qualifications Authority.

Given the numerous recent reports (Eldridge 2001 and Kirby 200, for example) on the education experiences of young Australians between the ages of 15 to 19 and the social and economic consequences to our society if substantial and sustainable changes are not made to the current forms of educational provision, the Faculty fully supports the expansion of the secondary school curriculum to include vocational education. This is an important development that must be supported by adequate school-based and local regional-based resourcing so that these curriculum initiatives become embedded within the necessary paradigm shifts (Eldridge 2001) in institutional relationships and organisational arrangements at the local school and community levels.

Vocational education is becoming a key component of the curriculum initiatives underway in schools faced with a larger and changed student clientele in the post compulsory years. Vocational education provides the core accredited course content for youth pathways that lead to further education and training in the post-school Vocational Education and Training sector and to employment. There is no doubt that vocational education accredited courses will continue to provide the core curriculum content for students who take up these pathways, and it is expected that this situation will expand over time in terms of the scope of courses available and the numbers of students involved.

Terms of Reference: Comments

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

Vocational education in schools needs to be developed and resourced so that its innovative potential, in the sense of providing new and distinctly different educational experiences for young people at school than was the case under the more conventional academic curriculum, can be fully realised.

Vocational education in schools (VETIS) is an innovation, a departure from long established program delivery, and for this reason, it is difficult to accommodate easily within the existing

institutional culture of secondary schools. For VETIS to be sustained by schools as a significant departure from the dominant forms of teaching and learning since the 1950s, schools will need to undergo significant and substantial change. Without this level of change there is the very real danger that VETIS will undergo dramatic and unintended changes of its own, moulded by prevailing school-based professional educational forms of thinking and associated practices. It is critical that the distinctiveness of vocational education, as developed in the post-school sector, be understood and retained, and that the challenge to current institutional cultures be recognised and embraced.

The challenge for secondary schools is that of maintaining their VETIS learning programs as high quality educational options for a wide range of young people without becoming a remedial alternative to other established programs. Meeting this challenge will require teachers with substantial and broad professional knowledge relevant to the education of youth, creativity and responsiveness as hallmarks of their professional outlook, and capacities to engage youth in learning activities that transcend the conventional classroom environment. These teachers will need to be not only inclusive in their dealings with students, but also inclusive in their professional networks and relationships with other educators and trainers, community service personnel and employers beyond the typical boundaries of the schoolteacher profession. Great encouragement for this prospect has been found in the enthusiasm and commitment of the many VETIS teachers already engaged in this way.

VETIS has the potential to become a powerful influence for change to the form of institutionalised secondary education that became established during the previous century. The institutional boundaries once so rigorously set at the school gate have progressively been moving to embrace a wider and more complex world of community and work. Those schools able to commit themselves to meeting the challenge VETIS poses - in changing themselves rather than diminishing the full potential of VETIS - will become models of a revitalised secondary schooling attuned to the demands of youth education in the twenty first century.

Critical development needs

There are at least five (5) critical development needs which will need to be addressed by schools and State, Territory and Commonwealth Departments of Education and Training in relation to VETIS. These needs are:

- The need for a new conceptualisation of quality curriculum that resists the domination of the generalised/abstracted knowledge-based curriculum experiences of the mainstream secondary school education, and establishes instead applied learning of vocationally-oriented knowledge as a sustainable and valued pathway for students;
- The need for the development of teaching approaches for secondary school students that are informed by the principles of adult education and, as a result, are a clear departure from the teacher-centred, expository, classroom-based pedagogies that are still very much the norm in secondary schools today;
- The need for schools to enter into new partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other schools in their regions and with local community service agencies, employers, and TAFE and ACE providers in order to address more comprehensively the educational, training and employment needs of young people enrolled in vocational education courses;
- The need for an expanded conception of the role of the teacher, as part of a diverse range of efforts necessary to address the above three points;
- The need to develop schools as more broadly based, inclusive, and flexible learning and social environments for young people; and
- The need to overturn negative stakeholder perceptions about vocationally-oriented applied learning in comparison to vocationally-oriented academic learning, and to general and abstracted education.

Teacher Education

There is a clear need, given the above development needs, for Education Faculties of the higher education sector of Australia to reappraise their teacher education courses at both the pre-service and the in-service levels. The models of teacher education for secondary school teachers are, in many cases, based on preparing student teachers for a professional environment that pre-existed the transition now underway in schools as education systems respond to the challenges of the present and the anticipated future. The challenges being experienced by the teaching profession must be addressed through new models of teacher education.

The Faculty of Education at Deakin University has moved in this direction with newly developed (introduced in February 2002) post graduate specialist units in vocational education and enterprise education. This development is to be expanded with a unit in Applied Learning in 2003. These units will also be made available to teachers through short course, modularised approaches to professional development. In addition, the Faculty has begun a process of reviewing its pre-service secondary teacher education degree courses building on existing integration of VETIS components in subject discipline specific curriculum studies units. This work will be further enhanced by the customisation of the post-graduate vocational education in schools, enterprise education and applied learning units into units appropriate for the pre-service secondary teacher education courses of the Faculty.

2. 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 key issue here is the quality of structured workplace experience available to students through VETIS programs. This issue is also central to the organisational changes required by schools as they attempt to adequately integrate accredited courses from the Vocational Education and Training sector into their organisational/institutional structures.

The Faculty is aware of concerns expressed by school and industry representatives in regard to the delivery of units of competence from training packages for particular industries, within VETIS programs. These concerns centre around the amount and quality of the workplace experience available to students. In Victoria, the VET in VCE approach has tended to limit not expand the options for schools to address these concerns. The flexibility available in the newly introduced VCAL for more extended workplace training than is currently the case with VET in VCE has the potential to overcome some of these difficulties.

However, with the wider range of VET accredited course options within VCAL and the potential for greater organisational flexibility there is the ever-present financial resource issue. VET in VCE Units are presently funded by ANTA with work placements funded through the School Industry Program of the ECEF. Funding for additional VET courses to those listed as VET in VCE Units must come from elsewhere, and this will cause considerable problems for schools who enter into partnerships for the external delivery of VET courses (for example, via the local TAFE Institute) within their VCAL and VETIS students' learning programs.

Secondary schools will need additional and substantial financial resources in order to deliver high quality VETIS courses to the satisfaction of industry, employers and public/private RTOs.

Concluding Comment

Vocational education in schools must be integrated into secondary schools and not separated out into alternative 'technically oriented' specialist schools. Vocational education is an important component of

pathways that should be available for all students at periods of their individual study programs as they so choose.

Vocational education in schools is a catalyst for reshaping and modernising the nation's secondary schools. This will result in a closer connectedness between schools and their local communities as schools, as teaching and learning institutions, become more integrated to the post-school VET sector and to the world of work.

References

- (Eldridge) Footprints to the Future, Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce (2001). Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Kirby, P (2000). Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria. Final Report. Melbourne, Department of Education, Employment and Training.