

16 September 2002

Secretary of the Committee
Standing Committee on Education and Training

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

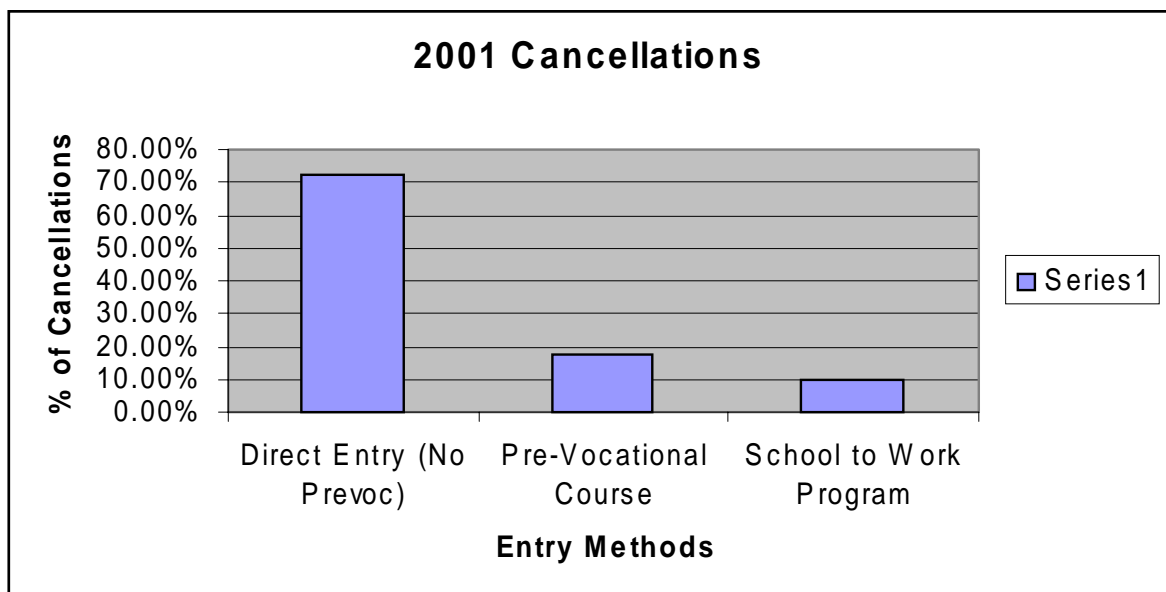
I am writing on behalf of BIGA Training Ltd. BIGA Training Ltd is a Group Training company that employs some 600 apprentices and trainees in the building and construction industry.

We have many years of experience in the provision of education programs, including the School to Work Program, and would like to make comments to assist you in your review of Vocational Education in Schools.

Since 1999 BIGA has piloted and has achieved great success in state government-funded school to work programs. These programs have seen the employment, and transition from school to work, of over 300 young people. Last year BIGA trained 250 year 11 students from Bundaberg to the Gold Coast in this program, which resulted in well over 50% of participants gaining either school-based or full-time construction apprenticeships. Unfortunately, due to a change of state funding priorities that focuses more on year 9 and 10 "at-risk" students, BIGA can only train 148 students in 2002. In BIGA's opinion, this shift in funding priorities will result in reduced access to entry into a trade and increased high school drop out rates for students who would have benefited from our program.

The Queensland Government has made it clear this year through its Green Paper that it is concerned with the retention of pupils in the latter years of high school or their progression to further training and/or employment. It is of concern therefore that a program, which has enjoyed years of success and seemingly more than satisfies the governments concerns, has suffered due to funding issues. BIGA's school to work program trains the students in year 11 in construction skills; employs them as school-based apprentices in year 12 and; maintains their employment in a full-time capacity for up to three and a half years after high school graduation, culminating in the achievement of a trade qualification.

The Board of BIGA Training, which is comprised of representatives from industry groups; employer associations and; employee associations, believes there is no better method of entry into our industry than the school to work program. An analysis of BIGA apprentice cancellation rates for the 2001 calendar year clearly indicates that the STW program is the most successful method of entry into the construction trades:



These figures support research carried out by NCVET, which proves that pre-employment training is influential in determining the success of an apprenticeship. Further, BIGA's CEO and Chairman have studied similar models in the United States over a number of years that also confirm the positive impacts of a program that supports the transition from school to work.

BIGA Training is Australia's largest employer of school-based apprentices in the construction industry and as such, has invested considerable resources into the School-to-Work Program. We believe our funding need is for 250 high school students per year in the following regions:

- Wide Bay
- North Brisbane
- South Brisbane
- Gold Coast

BIGA is aware, through first hand experience, of the outstanding outcomes achieved through the Federal Government's New Apprenticeship Access Program (NAAP). We have demonstrated that the same successes achieved with school leavers under this program, could be mirrored in a similar program for secondary students in their latter years of high school.

The following comments are provided in relation to your terms of reference for this inquiry:

Reference 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.

Response to Reference 1:

In BIGA's experience with Construction training programs, high school human and/or physical resources have not been of a standard that would ensure satisfactory delivery of trade skills. BIGA has delivered practical professional development to high school teachers in the past but it is only a minor percentage of the industry teachers who have this training made available to them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the reason for the limited take-up of this professional development is cost related. Further government funding in this area would be beneficial to an improved take up from teachers.

Reference 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.

Response to Reference 2:

BIGA has identified unique issues, which affect the operation of a school-based apprenticeship program, as opposed to a full-time apprenticeship in the construction industry. By operating a *one day per week* work program for school-based apprentices, an employer in the construction industry can be limited by weather, site locations and availability of building materials. Thus, it has proven beneficial to incorporate block work arrangements for school-based apprentices. A block work arrangement of one week or more also proves a more effective method of acquiring on-the-job skills for the school-based apprentice, which in turn contributes to an increased apprentice completion rate.

Unlike some traineeships, a school-based apprentice must continue their apprenticeship well past high school graduation (often three years or more full-time) in order to achieve their trade qualification.

Reference 3:

Vocational education in new and emerging industries.

Response to Reference 3:

BIGA Training is not in a position to comment on this item as it is solely focused on VET in School arrangements in the Construction Industry.

Reference 4:

The accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.

Response to Reference 4:

Accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students is definitely an issue. BIGA Training would welcome any support that would result in increased participation of indigenous students in BIGA's programs.

I thank you for your consideration of this submission. Due to the amount of submissions the committee will undoubtedly receive on this issue, we have attempted to keep this document brief. We believe the School-to-Work model that we have developed over the past several years is resulting in positive outcomes for young people, employers and industry. A report by Dr Larry Smith of Queensland's Department of Employment and Training into BIGA's pilot School-to-Work program greatly supports this assertion. Please feel free to contact me on 07 3205 1855 or at email rrow@biga.com.au if you require any further information.

Kind regards

Robert Row
Chief Executive Officer
BIGA Training Ltd

Contact Details:

Telephone: 07 3205 1855
Facsimile: 07 3205 3077
Email: rrow@biga.com.au
Postal: PO Box 5360, BRENDALÉ QLD 4500