

11 October 2002

The Secretary  
Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Sir/Madam

The VET in Schools initiative, which commenced in WA schools in the mid 1990s, has been highly successful in making the experience of schooling in Years 11 and 12 more relevant to the needs of the student population and to that of industry. It has also connected the vocational aspect of the schooling directly to the national training framework so that there is now nationwide accreditation for students who undertake VET in schools programs. However, as the programs have developed, the pressure on young people and their employers to understand and build on literacy and numeracy skills in the context of workplace demands has become more apparent.

In his paper to the Director of Curriculum, Department of Education WA, the Manager Enterprise and Vocational Education, Barrie McMahon, highlights three aspects that need to be considered in addressing this issue:

- Connections need to be made between the literacy and numeracy requirements of each industry - these connections also need to be made locally with specific industries and in conjunction with industry bodies
- Materials need to be developed to support literacy and numeracy programs in a VET context
- The need to professionally develop trainers and teachers in appropriate teaching methodologies within the context of vocational education.

Research has been undertaken into the issue of literacy and numeracy demands of the workplace since as far back as the Mayer Committee deliberations in the early 1990s. More recent research and recommendations from enquiries and reports will need to be considered and analysed to form a solid information base for the development of any new resource.

The State Government in Western Australia identified, as key priorities, the need for significant improvements to retention rates in Year 11 and 12 and to need to ensure that young people entering the workforce are well prepared for the demands of their working life.

The Ministerial Taskforce Review: *Investing in Government Schools: Putting Children First*, also commented on the need to systematically address literacy and numeracy in the delivery of VET and workplace programs.

The review of the post-compulsory curriculum and the interface between schools and higher education and training being undertaken by the Curriculum Council will no doubt form part of the State Government's strategy to achieve its target (a retention rate to Year 12 of 90% has been canvassed).

Just as important, however, is the need for well-designed support mechanisms for those trainers bearing the brunt of instituting changes to make workplace learning more relevant and purposeful. In this context, a support package would help significant stakeholders incorporate appropriate teaching and learning strategies that enable all young people to have access to the increasingly sophisticated literacy and numeracy demands of the twenty first century. A search of existing materials indicates that our *Stepping Out* program is the most appropriate resource to modify for this purpose.

*Stepping Out* is a literacy and learning resource designed for teachers of adolescent students. It provides teachers with the confidence to help students tackle the literacy demands of schooling. It builds on, and extends teachers' skills and understandings about literacy and learning.

*Stepping Out* has been successfully implemented in all Australian states and territories (Queens land, Victoria, Australian, Capital Territory, Northern Territory, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania) as well as in LEAs across the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland. Trials were recently conducted in Toronto, Canada and Michigan and Massachusetts, US.

Four research projects commissioned to document the effectiveness of *Stepping Out*, (Deschamp, 1994-1996) found that:

- 76% of teachers rated the program as outstanding, very valuable or extremely valuable
- *Stepping Out* revitalized teachers' strategies and techniques and raised their awareness of the importance of literacy in all curriculum areas
- More than three quarters of schools implementing the program reported that subject outcomes had improved as a result of teachers implementing *Stepping Out*.

ECURL was recently successful in obtaining funding from the VET in Schools Division of the Western Australian Department of Education to develop a *Stepping Out* literacy resource for teachers of VET in schools and trainers in industry. The program under development consists of a professional development component of up to 4 days that can be accessed flexibly according to the training needs of participants. The professional development program will be underpinned by a support file containing a slim-line text and a series of relevant handout materials.

The resource is conceptualized around the literacy demands of the workplace, rather than the traditional literacy conceptualisation around writing, reading and viewing and speaking and listening. The resource acknowledges both the common and uncommon ground between the delivery sites of schools and workplaces and contextualises its materials to reflect the demands of these sites. It is linked closely to the Training

Packages from the different ITABs and also includes training on how to identify and address the literacy skills required by these industries. The program links to other national training documents, but whereas these documents outline “*What*” teachers and trainers are expected to deliver, the *Stepping Out* resource shows them “*How*” to carry out the ‘*What*’.

Phase One of the project will be completed by the end of December 2002 and will include the development and trialing of the first 2 days of professional development and accompanying materials. As *Stepping Out* is acknowledged as being a resource that addresses the needs of all students, especially those students at education risk, extensive trialing is being carried out with diverse groups of participants, such as those from the Pilbara region in Western Australia and the Swan District Vocational Education Cluster. These groups will give particular feedback on the suitability of the resource for supporting indigenous students.

Phase Two of the project will include the development and trialing of a further 2 days of professional development and accompanying materials, as well as the refinement of Phase One materials. The resource will be ready for publication by the end of March 2003, and implementation of the resource will begin in June 2003.

ECU RL, a company established by Edith Cowan University in 1998, was set up to manage a series of high quality curriculum support initiatives as part of a contract with the Department of Education in Western Australia. The company limited is by guarantee and reports to a Board of Directors comprised of leading educators, senior administrators and business people. ECU RL provides consultancy services to schools and education providers across the world, either directly or in alliance with publishers or other training providers. Its key roles are to develop curriculum support materials and to design and deliver professional development programs. Its main markets are in Australia, North America, the United Kingdom and South East Asia.

We believe we are developing a quality professional development resource that will support the effectiveness of vocation education programs for students around Australia. It is envisaged that, like the *Stepping Out* literacy and learning resource, this program will also be ‘versioned’ to meet the training needs of teachers of vocational programs in contexts outside Australia. In the recent past we have had interest shown in the program from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Committee’s investigation.



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