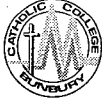




BUNBURY CATHEDRAL
GRAMMAR SCHOOL



BUNBURY
CATHOLIC COLLEGE

SWISlink

South West Independent Schools
Vocational Program



MACKILLOP
CATHOLIC COLLEGE
BUSSELTON



KEARNAN
COLLEGE
MANJIMUP

12 October 2002

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training
R1 Suite 116
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Background

The South West Independent Schools – *SWISlink* represents four schools from the Catholic Education and Independent School sectors in south west region of Western Australia. It covers a geographical region of 25000 square kilometres and comprises the main rural country towns of Busselton, Bunbury and Manjimup, with a collective population of approximately 65,000.

The program provides Year 11 & 12 students the opportunity to examine a range of employment prospects available, and build a focus on career and work avenues they may wish to pursue through involvements in its Structured Workplace Learning and off the job training program.

The structured workplace learning program model promotes and enhances vocational learning, which runs concurrently in each of the schools. Participating students are getting a real taste for work across various industries and gaining employable skills. This year, more than 110 students in Years 11 and 12 are participating in structured work placements with approximately 200 employers across industries including aged care, automotive, building and construction, childcare, hairdressing, horticulture, hospitality & tourism, business services, mining and engineering and information technology.

Partnership development led to the formation of three progressive committees for the program – a principals' committee, a school co-ordinators' committee, and a management committee comprising a healthy mix of industry, school, training and general community representatives. These committee members pooled resources and expertise to get the program off in the right direction through a highly effective strategic plan.

Structure

Students select to study the WA Curriculum Council subject, Structured Workplace Learning during Term 1 in Years 11 or 12. Flexible entry into the program ensures that students are able to take advantage of the opportunity to explore possible career paths. In Term One, students on the program undertake work studies to develop career and industry awareness, and complete work readiness courses including senior first aid and occupational health and safety. The students also come together as a single group at the student induction where a range of industry interactive workshops give them an opportunity to view possible career paths and talk with people involved currently in the industry. In

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Supported by Australian Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and Enterprise & Career Education Foundation Ltd

Term 2, students commence structured work placements – the placement is often identified by the student and most often begins with a formal interview process with their employers. While the work placements start in Term 2, students are not obliged to commence their placements until they feel they are ready. One of the key strengths of the program is flexibility – it aims to acknowledge and meet the needs of the student as an individual. Some students do not go into the workplace until Term 3, because they need more time to become work ready. We aim to cater for every student, from those that are brimming with confidence in the workplace, to those who need a little more time to adjust from school to the work environment.

Throughout the program, workplace assessment and worksite monitoring is carried out by school co-ordinators, students are assessed against a West Australian Curriculum Council set of skills, and keep a log book to track their progress. Evaluation of the program is continuous with input from employers, students, and RTOs. Formal evaluation by the committees is carried out twice a year with the final evaluation being part of a planning session held in Term 4 to create an action plan for the next 12 months.

Resourcing

The cost of running this program is very high by comparison to other schools programs. A benefit to regional schools being in a cluster is that the required critical mass to run courses is possible when students join together from a number of participating schools. However, as the geographic distance is great, transport costs are high to get students to and from work placement and off the job training (up to \$150 per week per student).

Cluster funding is from a variety of sources:

- Enterprise and Career Education Foundation funds the cluster coordinator salary.
- New Apprenticeship Commonwealth funding through the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of WA provide annual VET in Schools funding on a per student basis.
- Schools - the Commonwealth funding falls short of the actual operating cost and each school provides a "top up" amount.
- Excluding salaries, the cost of running this program is approximately \$500 per student. This covers travel (coordinator), transport for students to off the job training, professional development, coordinator and industry meetings, office equipment and consumables. Considerable "in kind" funding is provided by schools for teacher relief, travel, professional development, financial advice and office space.
- Additional funding is sought annually from industry bodies to provide Certificate I level courses to students from all school sectors. 2002 sees the beginning of a 4 year commitment by Automotive Training Australia, to fund 2 groups of 15 south west regional students (Govt, non Govt and Catholic schools) in Certificate I in Automotive. 2001 saw funding from Building Industry Construction Fund for a family of trades program in Certificate I in General Construction. Unfortunately due to political upheaval within this industry, funding of all youth programs has ceased despite there strong representation from local industry to continue the funding to attract youth into an aging workforce.

The WA State Government supports school based traineeships and funds Government schools through West Australia Department of Training. . The WA State Government encourages employers to take on school-based trainees but it

currently will only pay the training subsidy for Government school students and not for students from the Catholic and Independent Education Sectors. Although the training subsidy is currently paid to the **SWISlink** cluster from the Catholic and Independent sectors, it is less than the amount received by the Government schools from WADoT.

Points for Consideration

- Travel assistance be provided for Vet students who are required to travel to regional centres for on and off the job training.
- New apprenticeship funding be for a period longer than one year.
- Commonwealth funding provided to sectors earlier in the year so that programs do not have to seek temporary funds through the year, which are repaid when Vet in schools funding comes in.
- School based traineeship training subsidy equity to all school sectors.

Teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs.

Principals select teachers who are appointed as school coordinators in this program. Emphasis on selection has seen teachers with a strong industry background themselves and career focus being appointed. There is some resistance from teachers in other curriculum areas to acknowledge that VET plays an important part of the school curriculum. Students who are released on a one-day per week basis, at times face difficulties arising from their subject teachers who are less helpful to enable the student to be away on a particular day, each week.

The current **SWISlink** model does not support embedding numerous units of competence from different training packages into school Courses of Study - it does not advantage students and would require huge professional development for the teacher delivering the course.

The current VET program offers continuity and a supportive learning environment that risks being lost with embedding of units of competence in existing subjects and future Courses of Study. If students' learning preferences and access to success are not accommodated they will look elsewhere for opportunities or give up in frustration. This will alienate students from the education system and result in a lowering of student retention.

Points for Consideration

- Industry level training should take place out of the school sector, not embedded in current curriculum.
- Teacher training should include career guidance and counselling
- VET funding should be a greater length than 1 year to enable strategic planning for programs

VET and the resulting qualification

No cluster school embeds national units of competency within the school curriculum framework. Cluster schools view their core business as educators, not industry trainers. Although there are often staff who have the ability and qualification level recognised by the AQTF to deliver units of competency, this is outsourced to regional registered training organisations. The program offers one-week blocks of training in a package of units of competency. Over a two-year period students are able to participate in up to 4 industry areas of national units of competency training at Certificate I, II and III level. Although students may select units of competency from the same industry area, the flexibility of the program, enables the student to cross to another industry area. Students are not

locked into one industry area of study for an entire year but are able to explore and change direction as their skill and knowledge level expand. The primary purpose of this program is to enable students to have the chance to try industry areas of their interest and then change into another one if the first proves not to be suitable.

Key partnerships have been formed with local registered training organisations (RTOs), which are heavily involved with students to deliver formal practical training (national units of competency) as part of the program. Through developing strong relationships, the RTOs provide a suitable duty of care and provide excellent services in different industry areas. They tailor their training to individual students' capabilities, and the students get a good window into the industry in which they are interested.

Points for consideration:

- Keep student study options open in Year 11 and 12 to prevent students being locked into a one-year course of study in an industry area they find they do not enjoy after only a few months exploration of it.

Industry acceptance of SWISlink program

SWISlink has focussed on really strong partnership development with all stakeholders involved – principals, coordinators, students, parents, community groups, peak industry bodies and employers. The program seeks to form fruitful relationships, where everybody understands the importance of the role they play and what is going on across the program. Developing these community and industry links has opened up the communication lines and created a feeling of ownership for everyone involved.

SWISlink has a database of more than 250 active employers who are willing to take on students through the program, and this far exceeds the current demand of around 110 students. Most host employers understand the benefits of being involved in the program – many no longer advertise for employees, trainees and apprentices, as they feel they have already got a great skills base from the program. Most importantly, they can see that they really are investing into the future of our youths.

Industry acceptance of the program model is clearly shown in the offer of additional funding for 2003 & 2004 for the Certificate I in Automotive scholarship program. Funding is provided for promotion, on and off the job training and student travel.

New and Emerging Industries

The south west region of Western Australia has a range of new and emerging industries, which studies can explore for employment potential. Contact with WA Department of Training, Peak industry bodies and local industry bodies is crucial to be able to support emerging industries. The Manjimup/Pemberton region is a prime example of State Government changes to logging necessitating a large number of people to retrain, and businesses to look at changing their focus. In addition this area has seen a growth of eco-tourism. Hospitality and tourism is a growth industry in this region and the WA Tourism Commission has been heavily promoting travel within WA to both the domestic and Asian market with reasonable success.

A 14% skill shortage of heavy-duty automotive technicians was identified by local industry. An alliance between south west high schools and the automotive industry to provide funding for industry level training (on and off the job) has

begun to raise the profile of the industry and create career path awareness to students.

Points for Consideration


- Financial assistance to peak industry bodies would greatly improve the chance to support student exploration of new and emerging industries.
- On the ground assistance to emerging industries, which replace terminated industries in the manner of training people to manage change, upskilling and relocation.

Summary

The collaborative manner in which Vocational Education and Training is offered through the SWISlink program is proving successful for all stakeholders. Students explore a range of industry career opportunities through both on and off the job training. This exploration also enables them to develop their own important networks within industry areas, which can create further opportunities after the student leaves school. Students are also introduced to a range of employment and support agencies in the region through this program, to enhance and continue their job seeking skills both whilst at school and after leaving school.

Further information on the SWISlink cluster vocational educational program may be obtained by contacting Jocelyn Hope, Cluster Coordinator telephone numbers or email listed below.

Yours sincerely



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