



2 October 2003

Mr Kerry Bartlett MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee into Vocational Education in Schools  
House of Representatives  
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Dear Mr Bartlett

Following the appearance before your Committee by representatives of the Australian College of Educators on 14 August 2003, I thought it might be useful to provide a brief follow up statement with some specific recommendations relevant to your final report.

The growth of vocational education in schools has meant that many teachers have moved from teaching conventional discipline-based subjects to vocational studies. A common view among education systems is that trained teachers can readily adapt to teaching in these new areas. Typically, this has meant a short preparation and orientation program, with a few days spent in an appropriate workplace. A growing body of evidence suggests, however, that the quality of the teaching in these vocational areas could be improved significantly.

A key issue is an inadequate understanding of the primary purpose of vocational learning in schools. Many teachers, principals and teacher educators appear to view vocational studies as an alternative to, rather than an integral part of general education. This can result in unimaginative teaching practices and the implementation of mundane exercises and repetitive tasks. Vocational education should be seen as an effective mechanism for developing and extending a broad range of competencies that will enable young people to participate in and contribute to, emerging knowledge economies and societies. Also, there appears to be limited understanding of the potential of the workplace as a site for learning, and a lack of clarity regarding the most effective means of assessing competencies – both general and specific.

Quality teaching to meet the growing demand for vocational learning can only be ensured by a new emphasis on the development of appropriate pre-service courses and major professional learning opportunities for existing teachers of VET in schools.

### **Recommendations**

1. That teacher preparation faculties with expertise in vocational education and workplace learning and which have established relationships with TAFE colleges, develop pre-service courses that reflect a genuine integration of general and

vocational methodologies (e.g. Information and Communication Technologies with Mathematics).

2. That professional learning opportunities be increased

- to enable VET teachers to undertake regular work placement at no cost to individual schools
- to ensure ongoing currency of VET in schools teachers' workplace knowledge and skills (e.g. a Post Graduate Certificate in VET)
- to enhance TAFE teachers' understanding of the learning needs of school students
- to ensure consistency in curriculum, assessment and reporting between VET in schools and TAFE
- to embed vocational learning into the learning culture and practice of all education institutions and communities.

Much of this professional development needs to be developed through cooperative approaches involving education systems/sectors, universities and professional organisations with expertise in VET in each State/Territory.

3. That a standards-based national award scheme be implemented that recognises outstanding VET practitioners and VET programs.

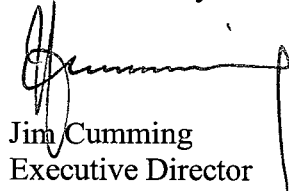
4. That quality control mechanisms for VET in schools be rationalised.

5. That the management of VET in schools be simplified.

Thank you again for the opportunity for ACE to have input into this highly important area of education and training.

I am looking forward to your presentation at the National Education Forum meeting on 25 October 2003 in Sydney.

Yours sincerely



Jim Cumming  
Executive Director