



## **Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions**

### **BENDIGO SENIOR SECONDARY COLLEGE**

#### **Background to Bendigo Senior Secondary College:**

*Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) has an annual enrolment of Year 11 and 12 students which varies between 1740 and 1800 from year to year. The entire student cohort falls into the post-compulsory years. Each year, approximately 1000 students undertake Year 11, and 800 students undertake Year 12. During the year, approximately 200 leave to employment, other training or sometimes unemployment prior to completing years 11 or 12.*

*Between 200 and 300 students enrol in the VCAL certificate: Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. This certificate incorporates work, employability skills and accredited industry training. VCAL subjects do not offer scored assessment for the purposes of University entry. BSSC has between 600 and 700 VET program enrolments. School Based Apprenticeships and VET in schools contribute to both the VCAL Certificate and the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE.) The majority of BSSC students, approximately 1500, are enrolled in the VCE certificate. BSSC is the RTO for 11 of the 21 VET programs offered to students.*

*Bendigo is a regional city, with both LaTrobe University and Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT) campuses available to students for post-school training. BRIT is also the provider for several VET in schools programs for BSSC students. AT BSSC, there are opportunities for students to undertake casual work and structured work placements (SWL) as well as work experience whilst at secondary school. BSSC employs a work placement coordinator (0.8 EFT) to facilitate SWL and work experience for its students. The Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) team (1.4EFT) assists students in gaining casual/part-time work, managing the pressures of study and work, and in the transition to work and further training after the student leaves school.*

#### **Response to the Terms of Reference:**

**A. Providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;**

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BSSC annually surveys students about many aspects of their schooling; having a part-time job is one of the items surveyed. Of 1000 of BSSC students who responded to our survey in 2008, 62% are engaged in some form of part-time/casual employment or school based apprenticeships/ part-time traineeships: 7% work 16 or more hours; 18% work 11-15 hours; 25% work 6-10 and 16% less than 5 hours. The majority of employment is in the retail sector and hospitality sectors.

In any one year up to 100 BSSC students are engaged in School-Based or/ part-time Apprenticeships or Traineeships (SBATs), also known as Australian School Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs), mainly in the retail, hospitality, food processing, agriculture, and the traditional trades. However, numbers of students undertaking SBATs in the trades has decreased at BSSC over the last 2 years as the Bendigo Australian Technical College (Bendigo) has used its resources to “tie” employers to ATC SBATs , and in doing so, competing for limited rural /regional trades SBAs with the other Colleges in Bendigo, including BSSC.

In Victoria, completion of accredited training in casual work (part-time) traineeships and SBATs may be formally recognised and accredited to the VCE and VCAL certificates in the following way:

- For each 90-100 nominal hours of completed training at AQF Certificate II level, students receive one unit of credit for VCE and VCAL at Year 11 level (Unit 1 or 2). For example a student successfully completing Certificate II in Retail will gain 4 units of VCE or VCAL credit at Unit 1 & 2 level.
- For each 90-100 nominal hours of AQF Certificate III training , students receive one unit of credit at Year 12 level (Unit 3 & 4)
- Students completing 180 – 200 nominal hours of AQF Certificate III training while at school, will also receive a 10% increment on their Tertiary Entry Score (ENTER) calculated at 10% of the average of their best four scored subjects including English.
- In this way, casual work or SBATs provide the same credit / block credit that a VET in schools Certificate does.
- In Victoria, it is also possible that a student undertaking a SBAT can complete scored assessment, including an end of year exam, in the underpinning theory of their certificate. The score obtained can be one of the scores used to calculate their ENTER score for tertiary selection. This however, **is quite difficult to arrange**, as the student’s training plan must align with the Units of Competence being assessed in the VCAA VET in the VCE program, and the student needs to have a trainer / RTO who is able to administer and assess school assessed course work, and prepare the student for the exam. At BSSC this process has occasionally been achieved in Certificate II/III in Business Administration and Certificate II/ III in Information Technology.
- In the VCAL certificate, a SBAT will also gain formal credit for one or more Units in the subjects of Work Related Skills, and Industry Specific Skills – both compulsory components of the VCAL certificate. The amount of credit provided will depend upon the nominal hours of training completed and the number of hours worked in employment.

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- In Victoria, Skills Victoria has recently made it more difficult for schools to ensure that SBATs gain the credit they are entitled to in their VCE and VCAL. As of Dec 2008, there is no formal process in the “system” for schools to be notified if a young person commences a SBAT IN THEIR CASUAL EMPLOYMENT, and thus to ensure that students are (i) enrolled on VASS (Victoria’s central enrolment data base for school certificates) in the Training plan Units of competence, and (ii) that the RTO provides results to the schools. It appears that employers and RTOs prefer to treat casual employment as a purely private arrangement, and that liaison with the students school is too much trouble! **BSSC recommends that schools be permitted to access the DELTA registration system, in order to ascertain which of our students is involved in part-time traineeships done in out-of-school hours, that are no longer registered as SBATs / ASBAs.**

A regional coordinator of school based apprenticeships (including SBATs in casual employment) used to exist in Victoria, (3 years ago) but the State withdrew the funding for this person once targets were met for SBA numbers. Loss of SBAT/ASBA coordinators has left many students floundering and failing in managing their commitments, or not having their traineeships recognised and accredited to their studies.

School based apprentices with nationally accredited training is a legitimate focus for federal support, as currently the only bodies with sufficient funds to market SBAs to employers and industry are Australian Technical Colleges, and they will not be funded after 2009. The demise of the ATCs leave a large gap in promotion of valuable opportunities to employers for students in the trades.

**BSSC recommends the restoration of ongoing funding for regional coordination, marketing and management of school based apprentices. Coordination funding previously ensured that all young people at school were correctly enrolled to gain VCE/VCAL credit and that support was provided for SBATs and their parents & employers in understanding the complexities of the system, in meeting the requirements of training, and in providing links to relevant post school employment and training pathways.** Currently, state schools do not receive any funding for coordination and marketing of such valuable programs.

- Training Packages which provide the basis of VET in schools programs are progressively embedding employability skill in the outcomes for many of the Units of Competence. At BSSC, training staff have formal processes for linking employability skills to the Unit outcomes.

### **B. Identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;**

- A number of senior students - especially those in the VCAL certificate undertake “work” on flexible timetabled days ie Tuesdays at BSSC. In many cases this work is a structured work placement and forms part of their VET program. Typically, students studying Hairdressing and Community Services (children’s services) at BSSC undertake between 20 – 40 days of work placement per year.

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Assessment of Units of Competence for their VET certificate is done on-the-job in conjunction with the employer. Many of these students gain on-going employment, once they have finished school.

- At BSSC students undertaking Certificate II in Equine Industry are able to complete the entire theory component completely on-line. This has the capacity to free up student's timetables, and provides the opportunity for part-time work during the day. Several students have been employed as stable hands – who usually start work very early in the morning- so limited time during the school day is required.

- BSSC is currently developing on-line learning programs for some VCE subjects so that Senior Maths, Business and Science program can be delivered to small remote rural locations. Once this initiative has been set in place, the project has applicability for students who work and combine study, as they can then complete some of their course work on-line, freeing up time in their daily timetables for part-time work and work placement. In the student survey referred to in #1 above, 38% of students indicated they were very interested in completing some of their study on-line, only 20% indicated that they were not interested at all. **The flexibility of on-line program delivery options can certainly enhance the study options of students who choose to or need to work while they are studying.**

- Although we talk about being life long learners we frequently see young people as having to gain a certain level of education before the work starts. The education system does not value students in the way a workplace frequently values their staff members. The sense of being valued for your skills in the workplace and being paid is a huge incentive for all people, yet the education system largely works towards this being a reward of delayed gratitude; study now and someone will want you later. However, in reality students at a VCE level often have valuable skills which could be put to immediate use for the benefit of both the student and employing organisation. **Encouraging and promoting to students the completion their VCE over three years and working part time or half time during part of their VCE offers one possible option.** BSSC successfully employs one student going into year 12 each year and has the student complete their year 12 over two years. This program has operated for around decade with outstanding results. **This type of program could be extended and is perhaps easier to implement if schools develop flexible methods of curriculum development to minimise requirements for students to attend classes at fixed times.** There would be a need to operate such a program with quality employers.

- Fundamental problems exist with aspects of the content and assessment within much of the VCE. Core skills which are frequently identified as being required by a future workforce such as verbal communications and capacity to work with others in teams are not a formal part of many subject assessments. In other subjects the theoretical nature of the content may make it difficult for students to understand where and how the knowledge and skills can be applied. **Subjects which can be flexibly arranged to recognise the eclectic skills and knowledge students have developed or may develop via their hobbies, interests, or work could substantially**

**improve the relevance of formal certification and education. Such subjects should have a minimalistic assessment framework, be flexible and allow for recognition of what is being done in the workplace or other areas in which students are excelling or developing useful skills.**

**C. Support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;**

- Current modes of student support often miss the mark. The most notable of these is the Youth Allowance, which is designed to support needy students in continuing their education. Introduced in 1998, Youth Allowance seems to contradict a commitment to the completion of study, in the sense that the greater the earnings of the young person, the less income support. It is clear that in many cases the funds provided are not used for this purpose at all. Some students do not see the money where it is paid to and used by parents, and in many cases, students who are in receipt of this support do not use it on basic items such as purchasing text books, paying for class materials or school activities. **Some portion of this payment should be provided directly to schools with clear guidelines about how it can be used.**
- **Additional support is needed to support school and industry linkages in terms of SBATs (see earlier suggestion). Our College suggests funding of a regional coordinator shared by a number of schools.**
- **Our college also suggests that an investment at government level in online delivery would provide more flexibility in delivery and allow students to better meet the demands of both training and work.**

The MIPs staff at BSSC work with many students trying to grapple with the challenges of combining work and study. They have found:

- Students struggle to remaining 'interested' in their studies as the money is an 'instant gratification' prospect, whereas for some they begin to lose the energy or the excitement of the long term outcome of study. It is also, in some cases, easier for struggling students to accept a minimum skilled job over the increasingly challenging school work. Students often lack the significant 'driving' adult to provide them the motivation and encouragement to keep up with their school work.
- Breaking the cycle of education by adding in employment, reduces the students' time available to take part in extra curricular student activities and limits relaxed social time with friends. Both of which are important educational bonds to peers as they enhance opportunities to study with a friend/friends.
- Perhaps the greatest barrier faced by many students who have chosen to combine school and work is that they are 'repelled by school rather than attracted by the workplace' and that 'if the

first major motive for early leaving is the desire to work, then the second is the desire to get away from school.

- **With targeted funding for school welfare support for working students**, those who are working in addition to studying could attend some education sessions through welfare/MIPs dedicated to 'balancing' school & work commitments – making a plan at the beginning of the year etc so as they remain focussed and aware of their needs before it becomes an engagement/stress issue.
- Students can see part time work or a school based work option as an escape from their full time schooling commitments/issues. A more intense or thorough marketing campaign with regard to school based work options would make a significant improve in the transition to work, in the sense of choosing this option for the 'right' reasons – ie. certification, work/career experience, early entry, pathway commencement, educational benefits.
- The current economic down turn has impacted on BSSC's capacity to find structured work placements and SBATs for its students, as employers operate with reduced staff numbers and don't have supervisors available for students. While VET programs which incorporate on-the-job training and assessment provide excellent opportunities for students to secure pathways into employment, and to obtain employability skills whilst at school, these on-going placements do place restrictions on schools obtaining shorter-term work experience spots for students.

#### **D. The potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post- compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity)**

- A number of students are paid "cash" by various employers and this income is necessary to supplement Youth Allowance, or limited family income, esp. if students are not entitled to Youth Allowance. However, understandably, employers are reluctant to provide formal evidence that they are employing students under these "black market" arrangements. This may impact on students trying to count their hours of work in their VCAL "work related skills" subject, and upon students gaining a reference from the employer which could assist in them gaining future employment and further study opportunities. The employers using cash employment opportunities are also likely to refuse trainers the opportunity to assess students for their VET in Schools certificates "on-the-job" Thus students can't gain formal accreditation for their part-time / casual work.
- Another impact on educational attainment is the time that some students must devote to their work – especially if they are independent students, or from low socioeconomic families – in order to meet basic food, clothing and housing needs. It is not uncommon for students to work 20 + hours per week in their part-time employment.
- With poverty, transience and ill health apparent in many of the students the College MIPs staff deal with, **student welfare support is undeniably essential**. These three factors are known to 'subvert scholarly goals..and have negative effects on academic achievement and..completion.' Schools have to ensure that those students endeavouring to meet their personal demands can manage them with their study and work commitments, and often this is far too difficult. It leads to absenteeism from school, preference to gain full time work because of school expectations,

and definitely the lure of financial independence by the possibility of increasing hours. Unbeknown to the young person, their hours may NOT increase, certifications/traineeships may not extend beyond a PART TIME capacity, and the sacrificing of higher education may be an ill informed decision.

- It is also difficult to encourage certified traineeships for students looking to combine school and work, when the remuneration is so low in comparison with permanent part time work. It is also again difficult to encourage this pathway when employers are not committed to their staff and young people often do not understand that they are employed as trainees. Part-time trainees often have little contact with training staff, there is little or no communication from the RTO with the College regarding credit, and certainly a lack of understanding on behalf of students and their families of the work and study possibilities. MIPs has certainly met with many students who are struggling to remain at school and who are extremely dissatisfied. Many employers are also ignorant to the opportunities that can be afforded to their young employees. The majority of casual/part time employment seems to carry weight with regard to training standards – why is it not accessible to all?
- On the other hand, some students have commented that managing the commitment to both work and study has helped them become better organised for both. Further, it has developed their employability skills, and linked them into possible employment opportunities after school. In the case of students planning on attending University, many will need to work as well as study to survive economically, and the training of combining school study and work, while at school provides them with future casual job opportunities, and organisational skills which will enhance their chances of success at the tertiary level.

### **E. The effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).**

- Pre-apprenticeship training through VET in Schools Programs together with availability of SBATs can ensure that employability skills, credentials, educational outcomes as well as future workplace productivity is achieved. Skills training will also be delivered by Trade Training Centres attached to schools through recent Federal funding initiatives, and TAFE courses. It is expected that similar benefits will eventuate from this initiative.
- BSSC is represented on the Management Committee of the Bendigo LCP which supports Programs such as Structured Work Placement, Adopt A School and Career and Transition Services are responsive to changes in local communities, as well as the national labour market. The LCP assists in providing SWL opportunities for students in VET programs, and thus links to future employment.
- SWL, Part-time and casual work & SBATs all provide the opportunity for students to impress employers who may be looking for future employees and apprentices. There is always an opportunity to convert SBATs to full time apprenticeships upon students completing school.
- All students who combine part-time work and study at BSSC have been encouraged to complete the on-line survey for the Committee.

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At BSSC a focus group of students reported -

- working hours of 7 – 25 per week – sometimes leads to tiredness and limits capacity to study effectively.
- working late nights at Night Clubs / hotels over the weekend – finishing as late as 5:00am, causes tiredness the following week at school, and having little time for homework at weekends.
- having increased levels of stress in trying to meet employer expectations, and fit in work shifts with classes and other sporting commitments. Can also lead to absenteeism from school as students take time to catch up on homework and reduce the stress of keeping up with study.
- that the funds earned supported their education eg purchase of a computer.
- that the experience of combining work and study promoted good organisational skills and thus helped with time management – a skill vital to being a successful student and a good employee.

**A formal audit of students/youth – those combining school and work – should be undertaken.**

Until this is achieved, data and evidence collected remains anecdotal and speculative. Programs to support students' learning and outcomes in the senior years of school will continue to be piecemeal.

*Submission prepared by Mrs Rosalie Lake (Vocational Learning Manager /Assistant Principal) with the authority of the Principal, Mr Dale Pearce.*

*On behalf of Bendigo Senior Secondary College:*