

## CHAPTER 10

### VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SCHOOLS

10.1 Paragraph (f) of the inquiry's terms of reference direct the Committee to evaluate VET in schools in terms of its overall quality; its implementation of training packages; the effectiveness of teaching and curriculum; accountability provisions; and school-to-work transitional arrangements. The Committee received relatively few submissions on this term of reference, although these were supplemented by descriptions of broad policy implementation by officials at public hearings, and by representatives of some interest groups.

10.2 For the purposes of this chapter, vocational education in schools is taken to include VET courses funded by ANTA, VET subjects taken for the final year certificates like the VCE and the HSC, and any other school-based activity which involves either structured workplace learning (SWL), including New Apprenticeships, part-time traineeships or work experience. It includes courses which are formally part of a school course but which may be taken, in whole or in part, at a post-school institution, usually a TAFE institute.

10.3 The Committee has observed a gap between the policy rhetoric on VET in schools and the reality of its implementation. It acknowledges the sentiments of support given to VET in schools by MINCO and in the Adelaide Declaration. It believes, however, that this support is compromised as a result of insufficient funding and by uncertainty about the quality and value of educational programs and credentials. The increasing popularity of school VET courses, as evidenced by the dramatic increases in enrolments, is creating a funding crisis, with the need to divert a substantial proportion of school running costs to support these new courses. Funding is an issue which has yet to be properly resolved between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

10.4 While it is generally accepted that some form of vocational education should be part of the mainstream school experience, what is less clear is how this can best be achieved within the school program, so that it improves student readiness for the world of work.<sup>1</sup> The Committee appreciates the importance of VET in the school curriculum. It recognises the energy and commitment of its proponents at the school level. It notes the surveys of student and employer satisfaction. It notes also the efforts of systems to keep up with local implementation of programs, the success of which has inspired a much wider interest at system level. Vocational education appears to have the distinction, rare in centrally administered education systems, of being inspired by local initiative and self-confident school leadership. Critical comments by

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1 Josie Misko, *School Students in Workplaces: What are the benefits?* National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 1998, p.2

the Committee relate mainly to the formation of school VET policy in isolation from VET in other institutions.

### **National policy and the role of the Commonwealth**

10.5 Commonwealth and state education ministers agreed in April 1999 that VET in schools programs should be a legitimate expectation of all school students 'who wish to undertake this pathway to future participation in Australian society'<sup>2</sup>. Ministers agreed to improve the range and depth of provision of VET in schools as one of the national goals for schooling included in the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century*. The Commonwealth considers that the states and territories have the responsibility for funding VET in schools, in line with the constitutional responsibilities of state governments, but the Commonwealth has supported the furtherance of this goal with targeted financial assistance and national policy development.<sup>3</sup>

10.6 The ANTA VET in Schools program has the purpose of aligning the content of school-based programs with the National Training Framework and the skill needs of industry as embodied in nationally endorsed Training Packages. Earlier developed models of VET which have operated in schools since the 1980s have been integrated into the Program. The new national VET system is intended to open up pathways between schools, other VET providers, and the workplace; a process intended to expose most school students eventually to experiential learning, the workplace environment and to potential employers.<sup>4</sup>

10.7 The ANTA Ministerial Council (MINCO) agreed in 1996 that \$20 million of VET funds be provided to state and territory schools authorities for each of the four calendar years 1997 to 2000. These amounts would fund both delivery costs for apprenticeships and traineeships and developmental work on teaching materials and professional development.

10.8 In addition to this \$80 million over four years, the Commonwealth has allocated another \$200 million to associated programs: \$27 million for the School-to-Work program 1999-2000; \$45 million for the Jobs Pathway Program up to 2001; and \$88 million for the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, also to June 2001. The ANTA Ministerial Council which met in July 2000 agreed that ANTA prepare, in collaboration with state and territory training agencies, revised Principles and Guidelines for VET in Schools to underpin expenditure of \$20 million in 2001, with a view to the ANTA Board receiving ministerial endorsement by September 2000.

10.9 The result has been a substantial increase in the number of senior secondary students enrolled in VET courses as part of their studies. In 1996 there were

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2 Submission 68, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol.3, p.786

3 *ibid.*

4 The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.12

approximately 60 000 students in VET courses and by 1999 the estimate was 139 000, and an estimated 167 000 in 2000. Approximately 90 per cent of schools offer some VET programs in their curriculum.

10.10 School students can now undertake industry-recognised VET courses while undertaking other courses leading to the final school certificate. These articulate into AQF qualifications under the New Apprenticeship arrangements, and there are opportunities for students to commence part-time New Apprenticeships when they are still at school.

### **The role of states and territories in providing VET in schools**

10.11 The variation in state attitudes to VET is a complication in the formulation of a national VET policy. The ANTA Review noted that, on the whole, school systems seem to lack common standards and mutually agreed expectations. state and regional planning approaches are generally lacking. In New South Wales attempts are being made to coordinate school and industry planning, but other states are opposed to central planning in this area.

10.12 A survey carried out for ANTA by the Allen Consulting Group, as part of its review, found the following divergent views on the vision for VET in Schools:

- NSW takes the view that all students should do some vocational courses in school which are aligned with training packages, irrespective of where students are ultimately heading;
- Victoria sees there is capacity to increase VET in Schools enrolments but as indicated in the current review of post-compulsory pathways, the emphasis will be on opening up training and job pathways for individuals, and that may involve VET in Schools or it may not; and
- in Western Australia the scope for vocational education will not be developed at the expense of the well-established dimensions of schooling that are so highly valued, but will see integration of vocational education into broader courses of study which in turn integrate with the curriculum framework.<sup>5</sup>

10.13 The interest of the Committee in its consideration of state policies is the extent to which state commitment to VET in schools is influenced by the offer of Commonwealth funding. It is also interested in the extent to which the states and territories are prepared to increase their own levels of expenditure to match their stated enthusiasm for an expanded VET program in schools. Another issue in state funding is whether state and territory enthusiasm for school based VET is founded on the basis that it offers a less costly alternative to TAFE for many students, particularly those engaged in lower level courses. The Committee notes the claims from advocates of expanded school programs that they can offer the same courses for less than TAFE

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5 The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.30

can, and would not be surprised if this view was shared by state education managers and auditors.

10.14 Commonwealth leadership in the formation of national policy for VET in schools has been urged by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. In its 1997 report this body was highly critical of the practices of state education authorities establishing workplace models to suit their own circumstances and traditions, rather than the needs of students and employers. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum stated:

Despite present opportunities for reform within individual states, a common vision, an agreed approach to minimum standards and a common commitment to quality are unlikely to emerge if the states are left to their own devices. Both vocational education in schools and school-industry programs are matters in which the Commonwealth has a clear interest and clear responsibilities by virtue of its national role in economic and labour market policy formulation and implementation. It has the opportunity through direct leadership, through policy development, and through direct financial leverage to assist in bringing about a reduction in those forms of diversity that adversely affect quality and outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

10.15 While acknowledging that some of the Dusseldorp comment has been overtaken by events, such as recent MINCO decisions, and by recent and current developments at the state level, the Committee has some regard for these sentiments. The Committee is also aware, however, of state wariness of Commonwealth pressure exerted through financial leverage. No state or territory ever rejects Commonwealth funding, even for projects which a particular state may not see as a priority; the result being that Commonwealth funding may not be used effectively. Agreements between the states and the Commonwealth are essentially political agreements that preserve state administrative practices. Standardisation of procedures, course characteristics and outcomes are issues for collective agreement. The Commonwealth's trump card, as the Dusseldorp report recognises, is the funding purse string. When this is loosened, agreements quickly follow.

### **Schools and industry**

10.16 The Report of the Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program identifies as one of the greatest challenges to VET in schools the sourcing of adequate numbers of quality structured workplace learning placements for students.<sup>7</sup> This will become a problem as the numbers of participating students increase at the anticipated rate. Industry has indicated two components still lacking under current arrangements: the absence of a comprehensive data base of employers and potential employers, resulting in schools having to rely on the same businesses year after year; when these

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6 Dusseldorp Skills Forum, *School-Industry Programs: Some Comparisons Between the states and Territories*, 1997, p.46

7 The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.35

businesses often need a break from the task; and, the absence of detailed information for employers on their obligations as trainers.<sup>8</sup>

10.17 The quality of relationship between schools and industry is claimed to be central to the sustainability of VET in schools, yet there is currently little evidence of the direct involvement of industry in course design and liaison with schools specifically to fit the needs of a local market in skilled employees. Research for ANTA suggests evidence that VET offerings are determined by student choice rather than the needs of local industry, the consequences being that some schools believe they are ‘overtraining’ for the local market, and claim that they find no easy way to seek guidance in this matter.<sup>9</sup> The ANTA Review report points to the possibility that the lack of effective careers counselling may be one reason for students being denied local work placement opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

10.18 The ANTA Review report also makes the point that while there are many local school-industry partnerships, the confidence of employers in school VET courses varies across industries and jurisdictions. The more established trades appear to have a lower level of trust. ANTA gives no explanation for this lack of trust, but the Committee ventures to suggest that the experience of traditional industries with trainees over recent years has not been entirely happy, particularly those which have had no practical workplace experience during their training at TAFE institutes. Many employers appear confused about the purpose of school-based VET and its relationship to work experience conducted lower down the secondary school, even though they are willing to assist schools. The overwhelming problem, however, remains the limited capacity of industry to absorb more workplace learning in the way that it is currently conducted.<sup>11</sup> Many businesses lack the flexibility to offer work placements as a routine commitment, and in all cases, there is a cost to business for which a return is not always apparent.

10.19 Employer’s perceptions and expectations of the role of VET in Schools vary. According to a survey done for ANTA, employers support skills development and also seem to value the programs as ‘tasters’ for young people: as programs that give them a first hand experience of the workplace where they are accountable for their time and performance. Employers do not necessarily expect students to learn specific workplace skills while they are at school but rather to develop an understanding of workplaces in general and have the opportunity to sample what a particular industry has to offer. This view might appear to support the long-standing practice of ‘work experience’, which is now, in the view of some, an obsolete arrangement, having been subsumed into VET in Schools.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, responses of employers represented in a

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8     *ibid.*, p.32

9     The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.68

10    *ibid.*

11    *ibid.*, p.69

12    The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.31

1996-97 survey commissioned by the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, among other organisations, found strong support for work placements on the basis of bringing young future employees face to face with industry. As one manufacturer stated:

Workplace learning provides an opportunity for employers to get an understanding of what they can expect from a young employee, without risk. Given the economic situation of the past few years, a lot of employers have lost track of what is, and what is not, achievable. From the students I've seen, I have been very pleasantly surprised by the extent of their capabilities.<sup>13</sup>

10.20 Nonetheless, industry does have some basic concerns that schools are not preparing students adequately for the workforce. Concerns reflect the knowledge and skills requirements which companies have when recruiting. There is a perception that a significant proportion of young people have particular deficiencies which limit their readiness for employment: inadequate skills in literacy and numeracy; insufficient grounding in generic interpersonal skills; and, poor development of positive attitudes required for work in industry. The Australian Industry Group singled out for special mention the particular unwillingness of young people to work in the manufacturing industry.<sup>14</sup> The AiGroup survey indicated that a significant sector of employers had yet to be convinced of the value of school-based structured learning programs, although an 'important minority' was prepared to give it a try. Nearly half would resist participation.<sup>15</sup> This suggests to the Committee that MINCO and ANTA will need to consider what incentives can be offered to industry if its wider participation is required to meet the training demands of schools.

10.21 The Committee notes that while industry supports enhanced VET in schools, and supports its implementation at a practical level, it has not made known its views on the details of school programs or entered into debate on matters that relate to school organisation and the award of certificates. Industry, no doubt, considers that these are matters best left to schools and education agencies. Yet it is also noteworthy that industry sees VET in schools as having a broader interpretation than simply structured workplace learning and a few technical skills. The view from AiGroup suggests that the work of the Finn and Mayer Reviews of 1991-92 has not been forgotten; in particular the identification of key competencies deemed to be essential for young people engaged in post-compulsory education. These are: language and communication; mathematics; scientific and technological understanding; cultural understanding; problem solving; and, personal and interpersonal competencies. The

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13 Jim Cumming and Bob Carbines, *Reforming schools through workplace learning*, National Schools Network, 1997, p.30

14 The Allen Consulting Group and Australian Industry Group, *Training to Compete: the training needs of industry*, n.d., p.66

15 *ibid.*, p.66

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Committee suggests that any re-thinking about VET in schools should take the Mayer competencies into account.<sup>16</sup>

### **The view from the schools**

10.22 VET programs are now running in most schools, their stage of development dependent on the support of principals (which usually determines internal funding support as well), the quality and enthusiasm of VET staff, and support from local employers. As VET builds community support and contributes to student self-esteem, it is obviously regarded as a worthwhile development. In a study undertaken by Cumming and Carbines in 1996-97, a survey was done which confirmed the value of VET in schools. The Committee notes, however, that the benefits of the program are most evident in the personal development of young people in their introduction to work culture. While there is a degree of skills development, and while students are given worthwhile marketable tasks to perform, the most obvious advantage is in social development and work orientation. Employers also appear to have benefited from the experience. The experience of Junee High School in its implementation of a structured workplace learning program during 1993-96 provides some pointers to issues that will arise once the program is underway across most schools.

10.23 The Junee High School program appears to be rather modest. Its purpose has been to keep students 'at risk' in school, providing them with the incentive and support necessary to gain later employment. The program depends on the cooperation of local business, and the size and nature of the local community has been a factor in the success of the program. The program appears to have been highly successful as a community-building and social development exercise. It also led to students finding jobs more easily upon leaving school.

10.24 This said, many interesting issues have arisen from the Junee experience. These include, from the perspective of teacher and employer participants:

- the lack of a clear focus in VET policy for schools;
- an initial lack of interest shown by departmental officials (presumably this is no longer the case);
- concern that outcome statements and employment related competencies are hindering rather than helping the assessment process because of their complexity;
- lack of sufficient resources to staff the program, and the burdens (and resultant stress) placed on coordinators; and

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16 B Finn, *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training - Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee*, July 1991. E Mayer, *Putting General Education to Work - the Key Competencies Report*, n.d. [1992]

- maintaining the school's capacity to balance the education program between VET and the general curriculum, a particular problem in country schools where traditional academic subjects are under threat in the likely event of a strong swing to a VET oriented subject choice.

10.25 The Committee notes in particular the final point made above from the Cumming and Carbines report, and notes also teacher comment that they felt under constant pressure to 'sugar coat' much of their classroom teaching in order to keep students engaged. Students often complain that their assigned work is 'boring', and the task of teachers to motivate students to take the long view and to persist with a task is difficult. Employers also commented on the unrealistic expectations of students, and the tendency for them to become disillusioned.<sup>17</sup> The Committee regards this as a salutary reminder that vocational education in schools needs to take into account the maturity levels even of late adolescent students.

10.26 It is fair to note, however, that the experience of programs in senior secondary colleges in larger centres like Rosny College in Hobart and Illawarra Senior College in Port Kembla was associated with fewer problems and potential problems than those faced by smaller rural comprehensive secondary schools. Rosny's enrolment is large enough to run both a traditional and a VET program; Illawarra has structured its program to concentrate on VET, including articulation with TAFE institutes and embracing a special training course worked out with BHP.<sup>18</sup> Such specialisation works well in an area with several schools offering a choice of programs to local students.

10.27 The Committee heard from school education representatives in Western Australia and at its final Canberra hearings. There was a great deal of enthusiasm expressed by school authorities about the value of VET in the curriculum. The Committee interprets this enthusiasm as indicating the desire of schools to escape from the restrictive regime of the academic curriculum in the final years of secondary school. Although the problem of catering for a non-academic stream of students in years 11 and 12 has been recognised for many years, as retention rates have increased, education authorities have yet to come forward with credible programs for non-academic students: courses that are recognised as valuable indicators of knowledge and skills, providing for both personal growth and skills applicable in the workforce. It was explained to the Committee thus:

...the post-compulsory was an extremely narrow proviso in the last few years—it was tertiary bound. The number of students, as a result of social changes, were keeping on in schools. The consequence of their enrolment was that in the end they usually failed to attain a tertiary place. Schools provided school based subjects in order to cater for those students and the significant fault of those programs was that they provided little meaning for the kids. They were called mickey mouse courses. The vocational offerings

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17 Jim Cumming and Bob Carbines, *Reforming schools through workplace learning*, National Schools Network, 1997, pp.61-63

18 *ibid.*, p.45



provided direction, they provided open doors for kids where they could succeed and they were, I suppose, the thing that was missing. There was almost an appetite and a starvation for a meaningful alternative to a tertiary-bound education.<sup>19</sup>

10.28 Another element of school culture affected by the challenge of VET is the place of the school in the wider community and in its relations with administrative hierarchies. The Committee gained some sense of the importance of this element of development from evidence that it took in Perth.

We are a very centralised system; we cover a massive area, as you know... I think the reason for the success of the VET program, its implementation, the funding and the decision making has been substantially based around the concept of local clusters. The local clusters are made up of the school principals, the VET coordinators in the school and local industry people and chambers of commerce as well. The decision making has been at that level; the ownership of the program has been at that level. The decisions that are made at that level are not being made from a distance of thousands of kilometres away. Unlike a lot of programs that we have had in the past where the decision making was essentially being made in central office—the actually doing of it has been devolved out—this process has ensured that the programs which have been put in place meet the needs of local industry. ... This aspect provides a very important focus in the tailoring to local needs and also, I have to say, the bringing of local interests and local industry into an understanding of what VET in schools is attempting to do.<sup>20</sup>

10.29 The value of the VET program in Goldfields District schools in Western Australia was also reported to be a greatly increased participation rate among mainly indigenous students in remote areas. More of these students are staying on at school. Large claims were not made about the prospects of these student, for whom there is little or no local employment available, but the new arrangements do increase the possibility that remote area students can move to the city to find jobs. The Committee was told that a whole range of students, previously beyond reach, had, as a result of this program, the newfound ability to make decisions about their lives.<sup>21</sup>

10.30 A number of submissions referred to problems arising from rapid growth in the number of school students undertaking VET courses. Western Sydney region schools have over 15 per cent of New South Wales enrolments in VET which means 5000 students will require the mandatory ten day work placement. The Western Sydney Schools Industry Partnership has written of its concern about the shortage of industry placements.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Mr N Milligan (Education Department of Western Australia), *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.629

20 Mr N Milligan (Education Department of Western Australia), *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.619

21 *ibid.*

22 Submission 39, Western Sydney Schools Partnership, vol.2, p.342

10.31 Strong support for enhanced VET in Schools programs came also from the Australian Secondary Principals' Association. In its evidence to the Committee, the Association noted the disparate and uncoordinated national approach to VET, presumably in its schools element. It urged the need for clearer pathways from school to further education, but also showed how schools could deliver, at less cost, training customarily provided by TAFE institutes.

10.32 The Australian Secondary Principals' Association made reference to one of the foundation planks of VET in schools: the need to cater for non-academic stream students. Schools were still not performing well in this area, according to the Association:

What we do badly is making a tight safety net for students or for those kids who fall through the cracks. We need to have a focus on the prevention of educational disadvantage. We also need to increase our remediation, because unless a kid can read and write then they are not going to get to the starting gate of vocational training. Employers will not have them and employers have every right to expect individuals with those basic skills upon which they can build. Basically, that means that we need to focus more and more on what the students need and to get them into an educational experience which suits their needs.<sup>23</sup>

10.33 The Committee has heard evidence of the importance of adequate career guidance. In its submission the Australian Principals' Association referred to an earlier submissions it had made on this point to the 1998 House of Representatives' inquiry into the role of TAFE. A recent House of Representatives' inquiry has pointed out to the Government the inadequate state of career guidance. Counsellors were said to be badly equipped for the role, lacking up-to-date information needed by students who did not intend to proceed to university.<sup>24</sup> The Committee recommended Commonwealth funding for a 'universal careers guidance service'. The response from the Government was that the Commonwealth provides a comprehensive database of employment information through DETYA, DEWRSB and though Centrelink's Career Information Centres.

10.34 This Committee believes that such information as the Commonwealth provides can be most effectively used only in a school-based service, provided by a trained career adviser on the staff of each secondary school and that this is the responsibility of state education authorities. The Committee believes that the provision of such a service is an essential element in VET in schools and a position in each secondary school should be funded for this purpose.

10.35 Interestingly, the Committee received the most varied snapshots of VET in action in schools in Western Australia. The report of the survey conducted by the

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23 Mr E Brierley (Australian Secondary Principals Association), *Hansard*, Canberra, 4 July 2000, p.761

24 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Today's Training: Tomorrow's Skills*, July 1998, p.58

South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee [Perth] is to be found elsewhere in this chapter. A quite different perspective was offered by the Midland Districts Schools Industry Training Association. It has over 1200 active employers on its database, providing structured workplace learning for students from government and non-government schools. Two points arising from its submission were, first, the information that local businesses were no longer advertising apprenticeship positions but were recruiting from the pool of Structured Workplace Learning students who have been placed in their workplaces. The submission notes this employer recognition of a 'cost effective and efficient way of attracting and maintaining reliable junior employees.'<sup>25</sup>

10.36 The second point of interest was information that not all schools in Western Australia allocate state VET funding for the purpose for which it was intended. The Committee was advised that any EdWest comment on this would be unlikely. The Committee merely notes that audit and accountability procedures in state education departments in other areas of educational activity have been indirectly responsible for much of the activity of this Committee.

### **Award certification**

10.37 The ANTA Review makes it clear that the successful integration of VET into senior secondary school will require adjustment to a number of aspects of award certification.<sup>26</sup> The aim is to ensure that certificates awarded for VET courses opens pathways to higher education as well as ensure the currency of a qualification which will have value in the job market, and be recognised on a school graduation certificate. states and territories are advancing at different stages in their consideration of these matters, which are both complicated and potentially controversial. The first issue is that of having VET course components of a final year certificate or course of study recognised for the purpose of matriculation, known in its latest terminology as University Admissions Index (UAI).

#### *Matriculation status for VET courses*

10.38 It is generally recognised that the inclusion of VET course matriculation status is essential if the nation wants to achieve a 70 per cent VET in Schools participation rate. Students will need to be assured that their inclusion of VET courses in their TE package will not jeopardise their chances of attending university. All states, except for Western Australia, provide for varying acceptance of VET courses as part of matriculation requirements.

10.39 ANTA and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training have jointly researched and reported on possibilities for university recognition of VET

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25 Submission 92, Midland Districts Schools Industry Training Association Inc., vol.5, p.1255

26 The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.72

courses.<sup>27</sup> Transition from school to university via the VET pathway varies considerably between states, and the interest shown by universities in recognising these pathways also varies considerably. As universities are autonomous bodies, able to apply their own entrance criteria, the Committee was not surprised to learn that of the fourteen universities which have indicated their willingness to move toward implementing entrance mechanisms for students with achievement in VET courses, none are in the Group of Eight' universities which have higher entry standards resulting from high levels of enrolment applications.

10.40 The joint report acknowledged several potential problems in working toward a more liberal acceptance of VET experience as suitable preparation for university level work. For school authorities these include:

- prescribing minimum hours of study and reviewing current qualification descriptors;
- finding ways of scoring competency-based assessments, possibly through optional testing;
- anticipating and dealing with the problem of unviable traditional subjects in schools should VET courses attract heavy enrolments; and
- ensuring that VET courses do not develop an over-emphasis on the issues of tertiary entry and graded assessment so as to retain the interest and value of these courses for students at risk, and those not bound for further study.

10.41 For universities, the report anticipates other concerns:

- bonus points, which are intended to encourage VET stream students to universities, are likely to jeopardise university entry standards and may result in the entry of students who have unrealistic expectations of success; and
- universities are likely to review entry requirements at any time, making it necessary for students to plan their courses carefully.

#### *Training Packages and matriculation*

10.42 The most difficult issue facing education agencies and universities is how to assess the value of study based on Training Packages so that this may count for matriculation. Training Packages are not based on a curriculum: they comprise a detailed set of competencies to be met. The Committee notes that ANTA Review reports that some in the VET sector and employer groups remain concerned about adapting the assessment of VET in Schools to accommodate matriculation requirements, presumably because this would not be compatible with competency-based skills assessment practices which are contained in Training Packages.

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27 Australian National Training Authority and New South Wales Department of Education and training, *A Report on Establishing New Approaches to Recognising Achievement in VET Courses*, Project 1, June 2000

10.43 The Committee notes that the draft joint ANTA-NSWDET report anticipates some yet-to-be-determined arrangements for aligning competency-based assessment with a matriculation score, and expresses doubts as to how well thought through is the goal of achieving a ‘seamless’ transition from school to university of VET students.<sup>28</sup>

*Final year certificates and the Australian Qualifications Framework*

10.44 The inclusion of VET courses in final year certificates is widely considered desirable and is proving to be increasingly popular. There remains, however, a difficulty in relation to achieving an alignment between an AQF qualification issued by an RTO, and a higher school certificate. The Committee shares the concerns, raised in the ANTA-NSWDET report, of the effect on the broader senior curriculum of any significant move into VET in school courses. The most enthusiastic advocacy of the ‘seamless’ approach to the achievement of VET credentials was presented by the Australian Secondary Teachers’ Association who informed the Committee of the reasons why schools were appropriate agencies for delivering vocational courses, and how schools were able to handle the preliminary coursework for which they could obtain university credits:

Why would schools not take advantage of the Australian qualifications framework in its capacity to focus student learning, to give them meaning and direction and to make them better able to be critical of their life aspirations? Many of the kids who go through the hospitality operations choose to go into management and then move on to Charles Sturt University—where they get credit for their first year, by the way, through having done the certificate IV. Why should I deny kids that opportunity? Why should I deny parents, who find it expensive to send their kids to Charles Sturt, the opportunity to have their first-year costs taken away from them by their children being able to do a certificate IV at Wangaratta High School and then going into the second year at Charles Sturt, either in journalism or in hospitality.<sup>29</sup>

*Schools and TAFE*

10.45 As noted elsewhere, some TAFE institute representatives were mildly disparaging of the attempts by the school sector to poach on their traditional territory. The Committee heard evidence that schools were less suitable for vocational training because the ‘culture’ of the school was too far removed from the workplace. TAFE institutes were described as ‘adult’ places of learning, where many young people, tired of school, find a more congenial learning environment. The Committee put this view to the Australian Principals’ Association, whose view was, predictably, different.

It depends on the student. I have not seen any studies on this, but a lot of claims have been made about an adult environment being much more appropriate, and that may well be true. From my experience as principal of

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28 *ibid.*, pp.15-18

29 Mr E Brierley (Australian Secondary Principals Association), *Hansard*, Canberra, 4 July 2000, p.770

two schools over 15 years, I think that the students are there for the course. They do not seem to have any difficulty with the environment which they are in. They stand aside, anyway, because of the nature of the course that they are in and they tend to operate as a cohesive group, but there does not seem to be any tension and there does not seem to be any great hassle about operating in a school.<sup>30</sup>

10.46 The view from the Association was that school-leavers would not be as comfortable after they settle into a TAFE institution because their peer group has been left behind; they have to form new friendship groups.

10.47 A great deal of what some witnesses have described as flexible and 'seamless' articulation arrangements between school and post-school institutions, each producing graduates with credentials at identical levels across a great range of courses, gives the Committee an impression of free-for-all confusion rather than efficiency driven arrangements aimed at maintaining quality training. This has arisen as a consequence of the promotion of freedom of choice in educational program delivery. The basic aim of this policy was to provide industry with more flexible delivery of training and to provide some healthy competition for the TAFE institutes. The unexpected consequence was the blurring of rational demarcation between school and TAFE sectors as schools gained RTO status.

10.48 Some recognition is made of this in evidence given to a 1998 House of Representatives Committee inquiry into TAFE institutes, by the NSW Director-General of Education and Training, Dr Ken Boston. He advised the Committee that the amalgamation of schools and TAFE in NSW was driven essentially by curriculum: on the need for a new notion of comprehensive secondary education. Dr Boston stated:

We believe that VET in schools to the present stage has failed. Although 38,000 young people have been taking VET in schools, it has not been a curriculum that has been driven essentially by industry or contributed to by industry. The great number of young people taking that course have not counted it towards an HSC. The drop-out rate has been very high. It has been taught in facilities which do not have an industry standard and it has often been taught by teachers from say, an industrial arts area, or some area of over-supply who have been retrained to take VET. It has been unsatisfactory from that point of view.

...We have the capacity, through amalgamating the two departments -and setting aside for the moment the big industrial issues we know we are going to have to face- to have industry trained people from TAFE working in schools, taking VET programs. We have the capacity to have general secondary education-humanities, science teachers and so on-working in TAFE, taking adult education programs. We have the capacity now to use schools and TAFE facilities interchangeably so that the workshops, the

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30 *ibid.*, p.767

kitchens and so on of industrial standard, in a nearby TAFE, often side by side to a high school, can be used by the high school for those programs.

What we are reaching for is that sort of change: essentially a curriculum view where comprehensive secondary education means that you can go into a comprehensive high school and you can take both vocational education programs and general secondary education programs. They will all be accredited towards your HSC. They will all articulate with the Australian qualifications framework. They will not be dead-end programs, they will use industry training packages where they are available and they will articulate with employment and with further and higher education. That is, if you like, the vision.<sup>31</sup>

10.49 The Committee recognises that the two most populous states are enthusiastic about introducing VET into schools at an accelerated pace, and other states are not far behind. It urges, even at this late stage, that state education authorities, and collectively MINCO, consider carefully the consequences to the whole system of vocational training of turning over up to half the senior secondary school curriculum to fit the AQF. The Committee urges caution in allowing workplace specific training to upset the balance provided by comprehensive education. If an incentive to lifelong education is the proper objective of school education, the most important credentials to be gained in school are those upon which further certificates, diplomas and degrees can be attained.

10.50 Evidence from the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group) pointed to the damaging inflexibility of the Australian Qualification Framework, particularly in relation to VET in schools. Students were locked into a competency standards-based approach using training packages. The Committee doubts the suitability of these packages for use in schools because they are aimed specifically at developing skills in the workplace environment. The Ai Group's view of the appropriate vocational training for school students was rather similar to the views expressed by the CFMEU: that is, support for general vocational awareness, described by AiG as the acquisition of 'soft skills'.

Locking kids in schools into those AQF arrangements really limits the capacity to deal with the soft skill areas—and the things that I have written down here in terms of soft skills are love of learning, a sense of curiosity, the inclination to question, having a capable self-concept, information literate and having a range of skills. You can call those other things but essentially they are the skills that people take away, which allow them to function in society, transfer skills to new jobs, develop career opportunities and so on. There are limited ways in which those things can be dealt with once you are locked into an AQF qualification, and I think that the schools really should look closely at different ways of dealing with VET preparation

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31 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Today's Training: Tomorrow's Skills*, July 1998, p.43. Dr K Boston (NSW Dept of Education and Training, *Hansard* (House of Representatives EET Committee), Canberra, 28 May 1998, p.714-15

to allow those soft skill areas to be developed fully before people are locked into whatever occupationally specific training program they are in. I think the current focus on using AQF framework programs, whether they are in or out of an apprenticeship or traineeship in a school, limits those opportunities. I would probably suggest that it would be worth while looking at those areas as well within our current training package arrangements because while they might be implicit they are certainly not explicit.<sup>32</sup>

## **Impediments to school-based VET programs**

### *Funding*

10.51 Chief among the impediments to school-based VET programs is the lack of resources. Funding for VET in schools has been described as ‘insufficient, irregular and unpredictable.’<sup>33</sup>

10.52 States vary in the extent to which they provide funding to VET from within their total school education appropriations. Funding in most states is restricted to grants from the Commonwealth through the agency of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation. These grants cover the cost of coordination of local school-industry work-links, although some schools are able to meet these costs from their own funds. A minority of states provide funding for this purpose. As to the others:

...States have refused to provide such support on the basis that the Commonwealth is responsible – ‘it’s a Commonwealth initiative, let them fund it’ – a position which sidesteps the substantive issue of the value of workplace learning partnerships to mainstream schooling and the coordination input such partnerships require. From the point of view of program quality and sheer continuity the issue of recurrent funding for work placement coordination need to be resolved urgently.<sup>34</sup>

10.53 Noting that states have demonstrated varying degrees of commitment to VET in schools, and noting also the frustration occasionally shown by communities disappointed by lack of departmental officials in some states, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation has recommended that the Commonwealth deal directly with individual states, on a bilateral basis, rather than attempt a national policy initiative arising from the Adelaide agreement.<sup>35</sup> While sympathetic to the sentiments behind this recommendation, the Committee believes this proposal to be fraught with political and administrative difficulties.

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32 Mr S Ghost (Australian Industry Group), *Hansard*, Sydney, 17 April 2000, p.337

33 Mr E Brierley (Australian Secondary Principals Association), *Hansard*, Canberra, 4 July 2000, p.673

34 Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, *Bright Futures for Young Australians*, Canberra 1999, p.59

35 *ibid.*, p.60



10.54 The Committee's attention was drawn to the funding of VET programs in non-government schools. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) pointed to the difficulty of addressing, at the local level, the multiple accountability requirements of the various funding agencies: DETYA, ASTF and ANTA; as well as the specificity of targets and funding protocols. The NCEC has proposed an integrated Commonwealth program for the purposes of broadbanding and global budgeting, all of this to be administered through DETYA.<sup>36</sup>

### *New Apprenticeships*

10.55 Another source of funding is New Apprenticeship grants, but these are criticised on the grounds that they allow only one chance at training. Trainees cannot change courses halfway through an apprenticeship. Participation in school-based programs can disqualify a trainee who wants to undertake another course of training upon leaving school. It also makes trainees who have AQF qualifications unattractive to employers because they no longer attract a wage subsidy. Evidence given by the Chairman of WRAPS Queensland highlighted this strong disincentive to participation in school VET programs.

Those children who in year 10 make a decision about what traineeship they will do in years 11 and 12 have then effectively cut themselves off for future entry into the publicly funded training market. If they come out at the end of year 12 with a certificate 2 in retail, if they then decide, 'School's been wonderful, but now I really want to be a hairdresser,' they are not able to access public funding to get a certificate in hairdressing because they already have a certificate 2. This is going to be an emerging problem. We are really only going to see it in Queensland in this current year because the first real cohort of year 11 and 12 traineeships graduated at the end of last year. That is some of the things we are referring to when we are saying you are actually going to deny access to a whole group of entry level people who perhaps did a Certificate 2 in years 11 and 12 just because they had to stay at school, not because it was a career choice for them in a real sense.<sup>37</sup>

10.56 Interestingly, this is not an issue which has been identified as a problem by school VET proponents, probably because it does not effect the operation of New Apprenticeships in schools. Its effects are felt further up the educational system, and would probably have more effect on TAFE institutes, where most of the re-skilling is done.

10.57 The National Council of Independent Schools' Associations' views New Apprenticeships with favour; their usefulness stimulated by ANTA funding, school-industry partnerships and the energy of VET coordinators in schools. The submission argues that New Apprenticeships in schools will be limited by the inadequate number

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36 Submission 112, National Catholic Education Commission, vol.6, p.1798-99

37 Ms J Himstedt (Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Advisory Board, Queensland Branch) , *Hansard*, Brisbane, 17 March 2000, p.73

of local businesses willing to participate, certain industrial relations issues relating to state awards, and the difficulty of both schools and employers meeting their mutual obligations.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Weaknesses in school-based VET*

10.58 A number of submissions, and a number of witnesses, expressed a degree of scepticism about the value of VET in schools. The ambivalent views of industry have been noted in a previous section. The Committee received little evidence from those who might be opposed to school-based VET programs in principle. The point was more often made that the program rationale was not properly thought through; that programs were too ambitious and did not inspire confidence among employers; that courses were introduced for the wrong reasons and conducted by unqualified teachers.

10.59 The attitude of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) to VET in schools is obviously influenced by the nature of the industries in which it is involved. Construction, mining, forestry and other similar industries that are characterised by manual labour and heavy mechanisation requires an experienced workforce. Age and maturity are matters of real concern. Even so, the union's view was not based on practical considerations alone.

Our general understanding is that VET in schools applies to people in years 11 and 12, but we would have a concern about people extending it into school years below that. I suppose it comes down to the philosophical question of what you believe the education system is there for, and what schools are there for. We have a viewpoint that the school system is there to provide young people with a general education and not necessarily to prepare people for the workplace. In years 11 and 12 there can be a greater focus on the workplace but, in terms of our industry, they can only go up to a certain level because, once you get past a Certificate I, the occupational health and safety considerations come in. And that is where our major concern is.<sup>39</sup>

10.60 The submission from the CFMEU put the issues even more plainly. The union opposed plans by the Victorian Office of Technical and Further Education to push for the introduction of Certificate II level courses into schools on the grounds that Certificate did not meet the points requirements for the VCE. The CFMEU argued that schools should build up the other academic requirements as they could not provide students with on-the-job training and work experience levels required by Certificate II. The submission was critical of a move in Tasmania to give school students a Certificate I at the end of Year 11 and a Certificate II at the end of Year 12, with a statement of attainment for additional Certificate III units. The Committee accepts the implication in this submission that such practices lead to a debasement of post-school vocational training qualifications. It notes also the view of the CFMEU:

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38 Submission 85, National Council of Independent Schools Associations, vol.5, p.1128

39 Mr S Maxwell (CFMEU), *Hansard*, Sydney, 17 April 2000, p.305

...that it appears as though the push for greater vocational training in schools has more to do with empire building in terms of attracting limited government funding, rather than the demands of industry. (It is interesting to note that one of the biggest complaints concerning new entrants by employers is the lack of numeracy and literacy skills, which begs the question of what are the priorities of our secondary school system?)<sup>40</sup>

10.61 Another witness alluded to a policy vacuum in the running of VET courses in schools. This resulted in an *ad hoc* approach to school programs, many of them dependent on the energy and initiative of individual teachers.

It seems to me that strategically is where lots of these issues have to start. If you look carefully at what activity in VET in schools is about, it tends to be pretty much around the flavour of the month industry, it tends to be around what particular relationships exist between school teachers and local industry people, and there appears to be very little strategic analysis of what preparation needs to happen with kids in schools for the future in the world of work that this country will have to face in the next few years. With respect to that strategic approach, it is not a funding issue necessarily but an issue of how we best prepare people for the future. I would have to suggest that there is not much of that happening, certainly in the local schools. There might be a bit of rhetoric around from education departments, but there is a fair old gap between the rhetoric and the reality.<sup>41</sup>

10.62 The Committee suggests that the gap between rhetoric and reality has much to do with the question of resources. Rhetoric requires few resources, but the strategic planning which has not been evident is of little point without a national commitment to VET in schools, with the assurance of significant Commonwealth funding support.

#### *TAFE sector criticisms of VET in schools*

10.63 The Committee noted a distinct lack of enthusiasm in the TAFE sector for school-based VET programs. It gained a strong impression of TAFE resentment of schools entering their traditional territory and competing with TAFE colleges to the detriment of their ability to offer higher level courses. This comes as a result of TAFE's policy of cross-subsidies: of charging fees on scales which keep lower level qualification fees higher than they might be in order to minimise fees for higher level courses which are expensive to run. This practice has already been referred to in relation to the TAFE system's competition with private providers. The problem was explained to the Committee at its Adelaide hearings:

If the VET in schools undertakes the first component of the training, which is all of the introductory modules, the actual cost of the delivery of that ranges from \$3.50 to \$4.50 an hour for the modules. The cost of delivery of

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40 Submission 63, Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, Construction and General Division, vol.3, p.712

41 Mr S Ghost (Australian Industry Group), *Hansard*, Sydney, 17 April 2000, p.331

the certificate level 2 and 3, which TAFE usually completes, then rises from the \$8.60 to between \$10 and \$13 per module. The same thing happens from private providers, so we are limited in terms of being able to take the higher levels to certificate 3 and 4 because the same price is paid by the government whether they do certificate level 1 or a diploma. If the public system is being increasingly required to deliver the higher levels of training from both VET in schools and private providers, which we are, then the cost of delivery to the TAFE institutes increases. This decreases our ability to provide the number of hours that we normally would.<sup>42</sup>

10.64 The funding issue is central to decisions about school-based VET programs. state and territory governments will always look at the lowest cost options, and these are increasingly found in schools which train at Certificate I and II levels. The most desirable option which this Committee recommends for VET in schools, that of having a significant component delivered away from school, would require a more substantial level of funding than is currently acceptable. The attitude of the Western Australian Department of Education, as described below, is typical of policy in all states:

At the moment you have a handful of schools that have recently become registered training organisations. The education department in WA has actively encouraged most schools to actually look at becoming RTOs. The primary reason for that, ...has been as a cost saving measure because they have not got the funds to purchase off-the-job training with a TAFE or another private RTO. One way of schools saving some resources is if they become an RTO and do it themselves. So you had a whole number of schools sitting down spending lord knows how much time, effort, and dollars in-house or be it recruiting consultants to assist them, developing RTO applications so that they can look at saving some moneys. In the main, however, those dollars have actually come out of their VET in schools and have been wasted on submission writing. In fact, you still have the schools around the same table screaming that they cannot afford to go buy some training from the local TAFE college.<sup>43</sup>

### *Teacher qualifications*

10.65 The Report of the ANTA VET in Schools Program Review identified the professional development of teachers as representing a significant cultural challenge for VET in schools. It reported anecdotal evidence as indicating reluctance on the part of many teachers to be 'turned into trainers'.<sup>44</sup> The report suggested that this attitude would disappear once VET courses counted toward university entrance requirements and were placed on the same level as general education courses, but the Committee

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42 Ms S Sachs (Network of TAFE Councils, South Australia), *Hansard*, Adelaide, 16 May 2000, p.517

43 Mr W Hill (North Metropolitan Perth Area Consultative Committee), *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.667

44 The Allen Consulting Group, *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report, June 2000, p.34

has seen no evidence that teachers appear ready to embrace wholeheartedly training packages that have been designed for post-school RTOs.

10.66 The Committee has some difficulty in accepting the full bona fides of school-based VET programs which are conducted by teachers who have no practical experience in the industry whose skills they are trying to teach. It accepts that teachers may have undergone VET orientation courses and, in the case of Western Australia obtained training is awarding competency assessments. The Australian Education Union has stated that the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment, the *de facto* entry-level for VET teachers, is inadequate to meet the needs of the sector.<sup>45</sup> This course provides generic knowledge rather than training in specific skills. Even if it did, teachers would, more likely than not, be without workplace experience in the use of these skills. As one industry representative told the Committee:

The concern was that they were using teachers to do the training and assessment of the youngsters but the teachers had teaching qualifications, not competency based training qualifications. There is a difference, as I am sure you appreciate. Teachers do not always appreciate that. That is one area that I believe could be strengthened and that is that we should be clear about what qualifications the teachers should have. Basically it should be the same as for any RTO delivering under a training package.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Western Australian case study*

10.67 The Committee was presented with some very useful evidence reported in a survey conducted by the South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee in Perth into VET in 24 schools of the area. The South East Metro ACC undertook this task in its capacity as a link between business and the community, and to establish whether the reality of the VET program matched the rhetoric of its proponents. The findings of the report are summarised thus:

- programs tend to be concentrated in clerical and hospitality businesses, while industries with high labour demand, like communications, manufacturing, science and technology are almost totally neglected;
- school organisational priorities are often an impediment to the development of comprehensive VET programs because of their relatively low priority, a factor which also militates against discrete programs for small numbers of students;
- there are few formal links between schools and industry and little evidence in this region that industry influences the shape and structure of VET programs, such influence being less important than student demand, the subjects on offer and the skills of teachers;

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45 Submission 110, Australian Education Union, vol.6, p.1608

46 Mrs L Boschen (Wine Industry National Education and Training Advisory Council), *Hansard*, Adelaide, 16 May 2000, p.533

- government sector schools are not promoting inter-school arrangements to maximise the use of scarce resources or to develop specialist training niches, and nor are students enrolling in a particular school to pursue their career aspirations;
- programs in non-government schools do adopt a cluster approach to promote rational resource use, but their programs are less comprehensive and less directed toward vocational training than government schools;
- it is expected that encouragement of all students to take up a minimum Structured Workplace-based Learning (SWL) program will create competitive pressures which are potentially disadvantageous to non-academic students for whom these courses were originally intended; and
- uncertainty over funding is inhibiting enthusiasm and commitment from schools, as is inadequate support from EdWest management, particularly in regard to SWL placements, and there appears to be a problem of how best schools can take advantage of their cluster system.<sup>47</sup>

10.68 The survey reported success or satisfaction in some areas. Student response has been very favourable, and students notably reluctant to attend mainstream classes have been conscientious about attending their off-the-job training with their providers and going to their work placements. Parental attitudes are also becoming more positive.

10.69 In giving evidence to the Committee, representatives of the South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee expanded on some of the problems identified in making VET programs in schools meet their broad objectives. The Kwinana Industry Council's link with the Midland and Districts Schools Industry Training Association was cited as one of the most successful industry-led models of school-industry partnerships in Australia. The Committee's 1998-9 inquiry into regional unemployment made particular reference to this partnership.<sup>48</sup> The problem it had overcome was the ever-potential demarcation dispute between schools and industry as to which side controls the program. Schools attempting to forge productive relationships with industry cannot afford to see themselves as having the controlling interest, and viewing industry as 'fodder...to place the students in work experience'.<sup>49</sup>

10.70 Opinion was expressed that schools are inward-looking institutions, and that industry was also responsible for some of the failure and policy inertia, being reluctant to take an assertive role in shaping school VET policy.<sup>50</sup> The Committee was told that because industry was very desegregated, it did not know how to develop partnerships

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47 Submission 138, South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee, vol. 8, p.2344-2349

48 Senate EWRSBE References Committee, *Jobs for the Regions-A report on the inquiry into regional employment and unemployment*, September 1999, p. 100

49 Mr W Hill (North Metropolitan Perth Area Consultative Committee), *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.664

50 Mr M Thorne (South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee, *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.664

with schools. While it cried out for people skilled in IT in south east Perth, local students were not encouraged to enter this VET workstream. An example was given of a large company willing to provide IT equipment to schools in the region in order to encourage vocations in this field, but which withdrew its offer when local cluster government schools could not make the appropriate arrangements.<sup>51</sup>

### *An equity issue*

10.71 Another question raised by the South East Metro ACC survey is the issue of which students are the main beneficiaries of VET in school programs. While VET is now 'mainstream' in that courses are taken by students from the whole spectrum of interests and ability, there is a presumption that such courses involving school-to-work transition will have most impact on non-academically inclined students in need of encouragement and skills in preparing to enter the workforce: students of the kind that school systems so often fail to deal with, or have done so in the past. The evidence from this region in Perth does not bear this out:

...It is actually competitive to get on to a VET in schools program, and it is the best and brightest kids that get on to those programs. It is not the kids who are at risk that have not finished year 10, it is not the kids who are educationally at risk in year 11; with most of the kids it is selective, it is competitive, especially in the non-government sector. The schools do not want to sully the relationship and reputation with the private sector by sending kids out who are not good enough, who are not job ready, who are not high achievers-that is, the school's reputation on the line. It is not about which kids we need to help the most, but making sure the disadvantaged and less well-to-do kids get access to a program that might help them get employment at the end of the day.<sup>52</sup>

10.72 The Committee has not established whether this experience is common across all states. If that is the case, the mainstreaming of VET in schools is as likely to result in the same degree of marginalisation as currently exists for non-academic students in schools following a predominantly academic program. As some form of structured workplace learning is required in all states to fulfil VET requirements, the complications would be considerable, with able and socially mature students (many of them with part-time jobs) out-performing less able students in a school program designed to benefit less able and less mature students. The Committee believes that this would represent very poor value for each dollar spent on the program.

10.73 The issue of how to deal with students lacking sufficient maturity for VET programs was raised in the Cumming and Carbines report in its case study on St James Practical Education, a 8-12 Catholic school in inner Brisbane. About 10 per cent of students at the school were considered unready for structured workplace

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51 *ibid.*, p.671

52 Mr W Hill (North Metropolitan Perth Area Consultative Committee), *Hansard*, Perth, 17 May 2000, p.667

learning at any particular time. To exclude these students would effectively segregate them from the rest of the students in the program: to include them might put the program at risk. Some form of safety net was needed for these students. Employer representatives were reported to have regarded workplace readiness in terms of an individual's general disposition or attitude to the work ethic rather than the level of employment-related knowledge or skills.<sup>53</sup>

10.74 The Committee is aware that limited research data on this problem does not allow any firm conclusions to be drawn. There will always be an underachieving minority of students in a school, for a host of reasons, not all of these being easily addressed by schools. What is significant is the size of this group. While acknowledging that evaluations of the effectiveness of VET in schools has yet to be carried out, the Committee believes it to be highly likely that VET programs will assist most students who undertake them, in some way. That is, the proportion of students in a school at risk of dropping out should fall, and any percentage fall is to be welcomed.

10.75 Another equity issue, raised in the submission from the Midlands Districts Schools Industry Training Association, concerned the lesser opportunities for structured workplace learning suffered by students outside metropolitan areas. Industry is limited away from large centres. There is no equity funding to allow students to travel to, or live in, areas close to their chosen work placement. The Midlands submission refers to the alarming social problems in rural towns which VET courses and structured workplace learning experience would be likely to alleviate if access to them was made affordable.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Industrial issues*

10.76 Industrial relations problems have emerged in the area of VET in schools because the need to obtain agreement from industrial parties to vary state and Federal awards and to recognise part-time traineeships is proceeding only slowly. The National Training Award has been varied in some occupations to accommodate school-based part-time traineeships. In some occupations a difficulty arises when a school student is intermittently a student and a worker, which affects workers' compensation and responsibilities relating to duty of care.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Teacher union concerns*

10.77 Finally, the submission from the Australian Education Union is instructive on the issue. While the AEU supports VET in schools, and points to the success of many programs, including those run in the Torres Strait Islands and the Northern Territory

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53 Jim Cumming and Bob Carbines, *Reforming schools through workplace learning*, National Schools Network, 1997, p.83

54 Submission 92, Midland Districts Schools Industry Training Association, vol.5, p.1255

55 Des Fooks, *Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools: Two Perspectives*, Canberra, 1998, p.3



to encourage increased school retention rates, it refers to several issues of concern. These are:

- the *ad hoc* nature of current credit transfer arrangements for VET students wanting to take up university studies, particularly in regard to competency-based assessment and the depth of underpinning knowledge in VET courses;
- the use of skilled workers, having no teacher training, to assist with VET courses in Schools has the potential to undermine the profession of teaching and lower standards of pay and conditions of service;
- the use of teachers without full industry qualifications and experience to translate theory into practice, has the potential to undermine the status of a trade and may affect the level of industry recognition.<sup>56</sup>

10.78 The AEU submission takes a broad view of VET in its impact upon schools, doubtless a reflection of the varying views of its membership which includes teachers from both the school and TAFE sectors. It sees VET as ‘merely one option provided to students in the context of their general education.’ For this reason the AEU opposes students being ‘streamed’ into specific VET programs, while at the same time supporting the introduction in Years 11 and 12 of VET courses linked to accredited Training Packages and leading to an award under the AQF.

10.79 A similar view is taken by the National Council of Independent Schools Association (NCISA) which argues that VET should not be promoted as a panacea for all the difficulties faced by young people; that they are only one type of program in which basic educational and general living skills are integral.<sup>57</sup>

10.80 The Committee regards the Australian Education Union position as an endorsement of current practice, with the expected reservations noted above. It also notes the importance attached to vocational education in schools by those who see it as a catalyst for broader educational change. The Committee has received the distinct impression that some education policy makers in the states and territories view VET in schools as much more than a curriculum element required to satisfy the needs of students in the non-academic stream, although that may have been the first response to the higher school retention rates and to the consequences of economic restructuring.

10.81 The most radical advocacy of vocational education in schools presented to the Committee came from Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, a Commonwealth-funded body established in 1994 to bring about far-reaching changes to schooling in Australia, notably bridging the gap between school and work. The Committee notes the success with which the Foundation is promoting school-industry partnerships, benefiting around 60 000 students and involving around 30 000 businesses.

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56 Submission 110, Australian Education Union, vol.6, p.1601-07

57 Submission 85, National Council of Independent Schools Association, vol.5, p.1127

10.82 The Foundation's conclusions in its report, *Bright futures for young Australians*, owes something to the Cumming and Carbines report, referred to earlier in this chapter, in its emphasis on VET as a catalyst for building links with communities in a way which has not hitherto been part of the Australian education tradition. The community has looked to central authority for leadership and for decisions on education. School principals have been traditionally regarded as agents of a state bureaucracy rather than as local community leaders. While the Committee has reservations about the radical scope of the Foundation's ideas for change, it accepts that one of the Foundation's planks: the need for a reorganisation of institutional arrangements and resourcing, is an issue which needs to be addressed. The Committee is more doubtful about the Foundation's ambitions for a cultural evolution toward community partnerships because it does not see this as compatible with the way social and educational cultures and administrative practices have developed in Australia. However desirable these changes may be in theory (though some members doubt even this), the proposals require a degree of political and administrative abnegation on the part of state governments, government departmental officials, and probably also teacher unions, that they would be highly unlikely to accept. The Commonwealth would have very little influence in pursuing such a policy so closely affecting the operations of the states.

### **The need for fundamental policy review**

10.83 The Committee sees evidence of policy confusion in the approach currently taken to VET in schools: a confusion stemming mainly from moves to broaden the role of school education. This comes in response to a particular interpretation of the requirements of the job market by both employers and job-seekers. Employers are believed to require a highly flexible workforce, and the appropriate response from educationists has been a call for the widest possible articulation between the various levels of education. It is by no means clear to the Committee that these responses address the real concerns of employers, or meet the labour requirements of industry which is experiencing continued technological change. School students may be enthusiastic about VET in schools, but this enthusiasm alone cannot provide the basis for VET policy. Witnesses to this inquiry, as well as commentators on broader issues, have referred to the desirability of 'seamless links' between universities and TAFE institutes; between schools and TAFE and between schools and universities, but few of these witnesses have represented industry or employers. Industry, on the whole, has stood aside from the debate about how school-based VET should be incorporated in the overall training arrangements for the nation. The Committee, in reading between the lines of industry submissions, suggests that the Mayer key competencies have not lost their appeal for employers, whose 'bottom line' remains unchanged, even while educationists, as is their tendency, pass on to fresh emphases and new schemes, together with a whole set of new acronyms.

10.84 The Committee is sceptical about the value of time and resources devoted to the reconstruction of secondary education to meet the perceived needs of industry and its future workforce. It raises the question of how important specialisation is in education; whether some institutions of learning are more appropriate for some

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courses than are others; and the costs of duplicating educational capacity in competing sectors.

10.85 The Committee understands the concern of education authorities and schools to provide satisfying and credible courses for students who are not interested in proceeding to university. It also recognises the importance of preparing students for the world of work, but believes this need not necessarily require training in the specific technical skills that relate to a particular industry. In this it has the support of most employers who gave evidence to this inquiry. Apart from literacy and numeracy skills, VET could be so defined as to embrace – in the school curriculum – enhanced careers advice, career motivation, personal development skills and civic knowledge and responsibility enhancement. These aspects of VET can be handled very well in schools and would complement more practical workplace instruction and skills development that was placed in the hands of RTOs from outside the school.

10.86 The first concern is the awarding of AQF Certificates for completion of VET courses in schools, and indeed the very notion of a school gaining RTO status. On the information available to the Committee it appears doubtful that the quality of the training and experience gained by students in school-based courses is equal to that gained by trainees in full workplace training or a combination of TAFE and workplace training. If senior secondary school students are attempting to gain qualifications equal to TAFE-based trainees and apprentices they would be better off enrolling in a (TAFE or TAFE equivalent) post-school institution course linked to on-the-job training.

10.87 The Committee takes note of evidence received of the ineligibility of students for Certificate I and II training funding upon their leaving school if these qualifications have been gained as part of a school-based VET program. It considers this to be arbitrary discrimination, disadvantaging those who want to change career paths on leaving school, which may be regarded as a normal expectation. Nonetheless, this restriction emphasises the need to consider whether certification of school-based qualifications is desirable when identical qualifications can be gained at TAFE institutes, arguably in a more appropriate learning environment, and undertaken at a time when a young person has had more time to reflect on one of life's big decisions.

10.88 The Committee sees no particular advantage in provoking a demarcation dispute between schools and TAFE institutes when an alternative model of cooperation between schools and TAFE institutes is a proven possibility. If schools are serious about facilitating VET programs, the establishment of a link with TAFE is essential. This would entail subordinating the school's timetabling arrangements (so far as its VET stream is concerned) to the TAFE institute timetable. It would allow school teachers to concentrate on the important generic components of a VET program for which they can be trained. As it is, school teachers, even with training in the generic subject of vocational education are rarely qualified in trades and skills related to VET courses, and few have any direct industry experience.

10.89 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, in looking at the links between school and TAFE in its 1998 inquiry into the role of TAFE, cited a number of successful working arrangements whereby TAFE institutes provided courses for schools. The House Committee commended these collaborative arrangements, considering them to be preferable to having inadequately qualified school teachers taking VET courses in schools.<sup>58</sup> This Committee supports that view.

10.90 From a view of school-based VET as a worthwhile expedient that has evolved into a socially and educationally valuable mainstream component of the school curriculum, there has developed a philosophy of education that blurs the distinct and differing needs which education must serve. This has arisen from economic and technological changes which have revolutionised the workplace, rendering many jobs obsolete and creating many new jobs. Employment in the 'new economy' requires either new higher order technical skills, or higher order interpersonal and communications skills. The Committee sees value in the emphasis given in school-based VET on the latter area of skills development. It remains sceptical of the appropriateness of schools undertaking training in vocational skills unsupported by post-school training institutions.

10.91 The Committee therefore believes that MINCO should look more closely at the fundamentals of this issue: that it looks beyond the well-expressed enthusiasm of sectional players, and considers how each sector can be funded to deliver the most appropriate level of training and obtain the best value for the training dollar.

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58 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Today's Training: Tomorrow's Skills*, July 1998, p. 47-58