

- 10.1 Vocational education has grown significantly in recent years but has also faced major challenges. The development of a range of positive programs has been accompanied by examples of schools struggling to meet the funding, infrastructure and staffing requirements of VET. This report has emphasised the need for consolidation and for ensuring the sustainability of vocational education. Removing the threats to sustainable implementation and improving the quality of teaching and learning in vocational education should be priorities for the next phase of vocational education in schools. The facilitation of effective partnerships and better articulation arrangements are also keys to improved outcomes, as are a diversity of pathways and greater national consistency in a range of areas.

Consolidation and supporting schools

- 10.2 The increasing activity in vocational education in schools from 1996 to 2003 has placed many demands on schools, especially in the senior years. Concentrated effort is required to consolidate good practice and to ensure that all students can benefit from vocational education programs. There is a great deal of enthusiasm in a significant proportion of the community for the aims and potential outcomes of vocational education but that support is not universal. Any lack of support may well be based on a lack of understanding of what vocational education is and what opportunities it offers.
- 10.3 The difficulties of funding and resourcing vocational education programs are creating considerable stress for schools, other VET providers such as TAFE and providers of work placement and transition services. Without additional support the improvements achieved to date will not lead to

significant long term systemic change. For cultural change to occur the benefits of VET need to be promoted and its status raised, to convince the community that it is a viable option for students in developing a career path. Changes do need to occur within schools but many of the issues raised in the report can only be addressed at government, educational sector and industry levels. Schools are often adept at developing 'work arounds' to suit the local situation but longer term strategies are required.

- 10.4 This report includes recommendations mainly aimed at longer term strategies. In summary, there is a need to:
- raise the awareness and status of VET in Schools;
 - review and improve resourcing, operating infrastructure and processes, including across educational sectors;
 - expand partnerships to include a broader base of stakeholders, including links with industry to better target vocational education offerings;
 - provide greater connections between career education, structured workplace learning, VET in Schools, vocational learning and enterprise education;
 - review the requirements of Training Packages to specify work placement requirements;
 - improve access to vocational education for students with specific needs, in particular before the post-compulsory level;
 - provide training and development opportunities for teachers;
 - increase national consistency on a range of vocational education issues; and
 - ensure the collection and compilation of adequate data on which to base policy.
- 10.5 Many of these strategies require successful cooperative arrangements, both within local communities and nationally.

Partnerships for better practice

- 10.6 Partnerships are a key component of successful vocational education programs in schools. As the community, represented by parents, industry and local agencies becomes more involved the opportunities for students to experience a range of work options increases, and changes that schools make to reinvigorate the content and style of senior school may be better received.
- 10.7 Throughout this report reference has been made to a range of partnership arrangements designed to develop collaborative practices. Locally

managed networks across the country are based on former Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP) local community partnerships, school initiated VET clusters or industry-education advisory committees, or are initiated through state or territory arrangements such as the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN) in Victoria and Regional Networks in South Australia.

- 10.8 Part of the role of such partnerships is to consolidate good practice and provide direction for future improvements. Mr David Dahl, the Manager of Cross Sectoral Programs at the Riverina Institute of TAFE in NSW, commented on the need for open debate in the community to articulate the purposes of senior secondary schooling and the place of VET:

Experience drawn from around the Riverina region has shown that there is much to be gained in stimulating a community wide debate by introducing VET courses into the senior secondary curriculum. However, the benefit to be gained appears contingent upon such factors as:

- The involvement of parents and community members at an early stage in a debate about the purposes of the senior years as preparation for transition rather than as a continuation of the style of learning found in the compulsory years of schooling
- The facilitation (or mandating) of collaboration between schools and the VET sector
- The expansion of debate about the nature of and interrelationships among the 3 aspects of VET in schools (namely: accredited vocational courses, preparation for careers, enterprise education).

Open debate about such issues does not usually occur.¹

- 10.9 Key themes of this report are reflected in this statement, that there is a need to:
- debate and clarify the purposes of vocational education and VET in Schools at national, state and territory, regional and local levels;
 - encourage greater cooperation, consistency and coordination between sectors; and
 - resource systems sufficiently to deliver vocational education effectively in schools.

Cross-sector issues

- 10.10 The interface between schools, VET providers (mainly TAFE) and universities has been growing, with increasing movement of students

¹ Mr David Dahl, *Submission No. 102*, p. 1.

between vocational education and universities in both directions. While there have been improvements in credit transfer arrangements, there are still fundamental differences in learning styles and assessment practices in the different sectors. These have created significant challenges for the school sector in the design of curriculum and VET programs to assist with credit transfer, while still meeting their own mission of providing the broad education outlined fully in the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century.

- 10.11 Collaboration is occurring mainly at a local level, and is being encouraged nationally in improved articulation, joint courses and shared campuses. However, the different funding and reporting requirements of the sectors, combined with few financial incentives for collaboration, are seriously undermining the success and the possible expansion of such seamless approaches to education provision.
- 10.12 Increased recognition of VET in Schools programs for university entrance and enhancement of credit transfer arrangements between the VET and university sectors are essential in improving the pathways from school for VET in Schools students. Adopting a graded assessment approach to VET subjects may have benefits in increasing the flow of students from VET programs or TAFE into universities. However, there is still a need to retain the integrity of the competency-based standards approach of the VET sector and VET in Schools, which is highly valued by industry.

Other government initiatives

- 10.13 The aim of governments and education authorities is to increase the coordination of support for young people, using business, community and government partnerships as outlined in the New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools. The *Australians Working Together* initiative is one example of promoting greater coordination between agencies in providing assistance to young people on income support and also specifically to Indigenous students. This coordination is also demonstrated in the listing on the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) website of information on a range of issues, such as careers and transitions and programs that are available through DEST, the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. However, the coordination is not ideal, as reflected in the following comment, which touches on both funding and coordination issues:

I believe we have the JPP [Jobs Pathway Programme] funding, which is touching the school, and we have the ANTA funding, which comes to Education Queensland and is then distributed to

the school. But those things are a little bit disjointed. They invariably give a good service and the structured workplace programs that we have had with ECEF funding have been good, but they sit outside the school; they are funded outside the school and we send our kids to them. The JPP does good work but, again, it is not direct funding. What we do not have is enough funding.²

- 10.14 The move to absorb ECEF into DEST reduces the number of providers but the effectiveness of these arrangements is yet to be determined. In February 2004 proposals for a new advisory board were in train and contracts for work placement coordination were continuing until the end of 2004. Any change will become apparent in 2005 when contracts will have been reviewed.
- 10.15 Greater continuity in funding allows for staffing stability and more economic resourcing, which in turn allows staff to focus on improving the quality of current programs, thus supporting greater diversity of pathways.
- 10.16 Coordinated approaches can provide a more efficient provision of services and programs for students and schools. An example of such an arrangement is SCISCO, the South Coast Industry Schools Coordinating Organisation on the Gold Coast in Queensland, a school/industry partnership that operates a range of programs including workplace learning programs, JPP, school-based traineeships which are self-funded, fee-for-service programs with schools, and Plan-It Youth, a mentoring program. Alternatively, Group Training Companies can also bring together a range of related services such as those of an RTO, New Apprenticeship Centre, Jobs Network Agency, and JPP provider. In the Northern Territory joint contracts with both the Commonwealth and Territory governments facilitate the provision.
- 10.17 Many of these programs are designed to assist in the transition from school to work. Different pathways are more appropriate for students with different needs in that transition. From a national perspective, the challenge in the next phase of the development of vocational education in schools is to ensure that those diverse pathways are supported consistently across jurisdictions to ensure similar positive outcomes.³

2 Mr John Neville, Executive Member, Queensland Secondary Principals Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, Brisbane, 9 April 2003, p. 371.

3 Recent announcements indicate that a coalition of industry, school organisations, unions and social agencies propose that the Commonwealth Government should support a National Youth Transition Service: *Australian Financial Review*, '\$240m extra aid urged for school leavers', 24 February 2004, p. 3.

Diversity and consistency

- 10.18 There is still a need for focused debate on the purposes of vocational education in schools, and specifically VET in Schools, to guide effective development of a diversity of pathways. ANTA has reported on the need for flexibility and for multiple ways to address different student and industry requirements. Without additional guidance for educational providers on the development of appropriate and effective pathways, efforts to support those who are most at risk of not successfully completing their schooling and the transition to post-school education or employment may not be well served. The needs of more academically able students appear to be more adequately met by the direction of current improvements, for example with VET recognition in university entrance requirements.
- 10.19 Diversity in pathways needs to be based on real choices, reflecting variation in learning styles, assessment methods and differing outcomes that best meet the needs of the students. Maintaining the vocational emphasis and applied learning strategies of courses is essential to ensure that there is true diversity in pathways for a broader range of students. Associate Professor John Henry of Deakin University commented critically on VET programs in Victoria prior to the introduction of the more applied Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning:
- In Victoria, VET in VCE actually changed the vocational learning experience from what seemed to be the original intent, so that the programs themselves became much more academically oriented and less about preparing young people for employment or for a pathway into the tertiary TAFE vocational education and training sector. They became more bookish in the form of experience that students had, and there was a diminishing of the work placement experiences and the sorts of activities that would prepare young people for the world of work. That is an example of how, over the past five years or so, not only in Victoria but elsewhere, VET in Schools programs have become shaped to fit the school culture and not the reverse: the vocational education and training programs, in other words, acting as a catalyst for substantial transformation.⁴
- 10.20 Real choices allow programs to engage students across the full spectrum of needs. Stand-alone courses carry considerable benefits for many students

4 Associate Professor John Henry, Director, Research Institute for Professional and Vocational Education and Training, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 September 2003, Melbourne, p. 1162.

and are generally preferred by industry. However, they do have implications for student workload and university entrance, as well as requiring greater financial and human resources. It is the Committee's view that greater analysis is needed of the relative costs and benefits of each approach, and that authorities move towards a more consistent national approach bearing in mind that different subjects may be better suited to either embedded or stand-alone courses.

- 10.21 Providing additional support to meet the special needs of students with disabilities or others requiring more individual assistance similarly has additional costs. The benefits of implementing generic workplace vocational education programs for the diverse range of students needs to be considered and resourced in addition to industry-specific programs.
- 10.22 However, with the greater provision of choice, greater assistance to students is needed to help them understand the differences between the increasingly diverse range of options made available to them. The importance of effective career guidance is fundamental to this process. In some states and territories this requires policy change and extra resourcing. Developing and mapping of learning pathways between schools, vocational education and training and university would assist students understand current arrangements and possibilities for their future careers. Opportunities in later life to complement decisions made at school leaving age also need to be encouraged.
- 10.23 In addition to the range of pathways there is also a need for a range of structures and providers to support the delivery of vocational education in schools. Some regions and students have access to multiple providers who can complement each other's services, but other schools are more remotely located and may be the primary source of expertise. Funding and guidelines need to be sufficiently flexible to suit such local arrangements. The model of senior colleges appeared to be one of the most successful approaches, with sufficient numbers of students to enable the resourcing of a range of programs and flexibility in timetabling. It is acknowledged, however, that this model is most suitable for urban areas or regional centres.
- 10.24 In providing future direction for the development of pathways, the OECD review of transitions from initial education to working life in 2000 found key features of effective transition systems include well organised pathways that:
- avoid making vocational education a residual and dead-end pathway linked to poor quality jobs and directed at the lowest achievers;

- provide institutionalised bridges between vocation education and apprenticeships and tertiary education and ensure that significant proportions of students and apprentices do take this pathway;
 - provide vocational educational and training programs for less successful young people as part of safety nets rather than as ordinary vocational programmes; and
 - pay attention to the financial costs and benefits for individuals and firms.⁵
- 10.25 Many programs within states and territories are addressing these key features but some require a national approach to assist in removing barriers in order to better meet the needs of students and ensure industry confidence in the quality of vocational education in schools.

National consistency

There is no one-size-fits-all template for best practice organisational arrangements for VET in Schools. Jurisdictional variation in roles and responsibilities and local area attributes create significant difference in the patterns of implementation and many interrelated elements impact on the quality of delivery of VET in Schools. However, some common organisational characteristics will ensure a strong and sustainable framework for the continued development of VET in Schools across Australia.⁶

- 10.26 A case is made throughout this report that echoes this finding from *Organisational Best Practice Delivery of VET in Schools*. Meeting local needs is a key feature of the success of vocational education in schools, including VET in Schools. However, system, school and community and business factors all interact to influence the quality outcomes, effectiveness and administrative efficiency of VET in Schools.
- 10.27 Innovative and cooperative programs have developed in partnership with all stakeholders to suit students' and the community's needs. However, the Committee was told repeatedly of structural and system inefficiencies and deficiencies that were preventing schools from most effectively catering for their students. For this reason the Commonwealth, states and territories are encouraged to work together to resolve matters of difference that have been identified throughout this report. These include:

5 OECD, 2000, *From Initial Education to Working Life. Making Transitions Work*, Chapter 4, Key Features of Effective Transition Systems, OECD, Paris, pp. 90-91.

6 Allen Consulting Group, 2003, *Organisational Best Practice Delivery of VET in Schools*, Report to MCEETYA on Transition from School, p. 1.

- the adoption of common terminology;
 - the recognition of VET for tertiary entrance;
 - the role of and requirements for structured workplace learning;
 - issues regarding nominal hours and units of competency;
 - approaches to stand alone course versus embedding of VET components;
 - teacher training;
 - policies for the use of TAFE and private RTOs;
 - data collection standards; and
 - reporting of participation and outcomes.
- 10.28 An ANTA action plan for quality of VET in Schools has been developed for 2004, and addresses a number of these issues, including ways of improving structured workplace learning.⁷ The ANTA Ministerial Council has agreed to continue to provide \$20 million a year for VET in Schools until the end of 2006, and guidelines for funding will be reviewed in mid 2004 for 2005-06.
- 10.29 Indication of DEST funding for careers, transitions and partnerships also looks as if it will be maintained at the same 2003–2004 rate for the next four years, \$205 million.⁸ This is about four times the current budget estimate of \$51 million for 2003-04. Savings of about \$4 million over four years are expected from the administrative savings from the termination of ECEF.
- 10.30 Given the increase in participation and the range of issues that still need to be improved the Committee questions the adequacy of the funding available. The Committee urges that with the release of this report and its findings, there is a reconsideration of funding needs.
- 10.31 Both industry and government need to increase their commitment to vocational education in schools. The Committee urges all funding bodies, Commonwealth, state and territory to raise their commitment through recurrent and special purpose funding in the short and longer term to support students, teachers, schools, communities and finally industry in this essential component of education:
- If all students are to be suitably equipped with a broad range of skills and knowledge, a renewed emphasis is needed to allow vocational learning to be universally desirable, achievable and

7 ANTA, 2003, *Quality plan targets VET in schools*, <<http://www.anta.gov.au/download/VETIS.rtf>>.

8 Dr Brendan Nelson, 2004, *Careers Guidance for Young Australians*, media release, 16 February 2004 MIN 628/04, <www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Nelson/2004/02/n628160202.asp>.

sustainable ... What is needed is a culture that values vocational learning as integral to all learning to enhance young peoples' pathways to work and lifelong learning. Teachers, recognised as key factors in student learning, have to be professionally prepared and then professionally supported in an ongoing way to maintain the importance of vocational learning.⁹

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9 Australian College of Educators, 2002, Building the profession to support vocational learning, Position Paper, *Learning in a Knowledge Society: The vocational dimension*, Unicorn, Vol 28, No. 3, December 2002, p. 74.