



**Submission to House of Representatives Education and
Training Committee**

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in Schools

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The Victorian Farmers Federation

The Victorian Farmers Federation is Australia's largest state farmer organisation, and the only recognised, consistent voice on issues affecting rural Victoria.

The VFF represents 21,000 farmer members. The organisation consists of eight commodity groups representing dairy, grains, pastoral, horticulture, chicken meat, pigs, flowers and egg industries.

Farmers are elected by their peer to direct each of the commodity groups and are supported by Melbourne-based staff.

Each VFF member is represented locally by one of the 230 VFF branches across the state and through their commodity representatives at local, district, state and national levels. The VFF also represents farmers' views on hundreds of industry and government forums.

Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools

The Victorian Farmers Federation is heavily committed to vocational education programs in schools.

Two programs support the industry needs of entry-level training. Agriculture and horticulture programs have been developed and implemented to build industry specific vocational skills for secondary school students.

The Victorian Farmers Federation is committed to VET in the VCE programs; school based New Apprenticeship programs; as well as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

The Victorian Farmers Federation believes vocational programs in schools assists the development of entry level skills whilst promoting employment opportunities to young people.

Range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs

The Victorian Farmers Federation believes the current curriculum reflects industry needs. Consultation took place with industry in the development of the curriculum and as such it has strong industry support. Both the agriculture and horticulture programs have strong requirements in terms of work-placements.

Both programs involve 600 hours of study over two years comprising 200 hours of curriculum, 200 hours of work related skills and 200 hours of work placement. These requirements are more onerous than many other vocational programs in schools. This leads to programming problems in schools. Schools seem to have trouble fitting the program into their school timetable because of the time required. Students can be at a disadvantage by missing other classes and being required to complete work placements during school holidays. This is not acceptable for students.

Inadequate funding arrangements means schools offer students cost effective courses with high student interest rather than programs reflecting local industry needs.

There is a lack of qualified staff available to teach agricultural studies in schools. To offer agricultural vocational programs schools are therefore required to buy in programs from TAFE

Colleges and other RTO's. Schools are opting for the lowest cost delivery method rather than the organisation that delivers the best quality program to their students.

As a result of high delivery costs many schools charge students fees to complete vocational programs. They impose these fees to recover cost deficiencies, however, many rural students are not in position to be able to afford these fees.

Rural communities have greater trouble in developing clusters and these clusters require the support of elaborate and costly transport arrangements. There are extra costs incurred in delivering vocational programs to regional and rural communities.

Schools often prefer to deliver VCE Agriculture and Horticulture rather than vocational programs as they are less involved and far less complex to deliver and are more general in their appeal to a wider cross section of students. Often schools do not have available resources or sufficient student demand to offer both VCE and Vocational programs.

Acceptance of School Based Programs

The Victorian Farmers Federation accepts the qualifications awarded to vocational programs in schools and believes they are of equal standing to qualifications granted for other vocational programs providing they have close industry work placement activities throughout the course.

The VFF accepts up to the completion of Certificate Two in Secondary Schools. Certificate Three outcomes are best provided through apprenticeship or traineeship programs, based on workplace training with the supplementary TAFE training where applicable.

Industry Support of Vocational Programs in Schools

The Victorian Farmers Federation is working in partnership with Enterprise and the Career Education Foundation (ECEP) to improve student and parent awareness of agriculture careers. A project officer has been appointed with the role of increasing school and student participation in agricultural vocational program in schools. An important part of the program is to link schools and industry and to work collaboratively on providing quality structured work place learning. The Victorian Farmers Federation has been funded for the project for 18 months. Funding will cease at the end of 2003.

The Victorian Farmers Federation is committed to working with schools and local communities across rural Victoria to provide quality vocational programs in agriculture and horticulture for the future of our industries.