

Submission to the Inquiry into Teacher Education

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From :

Dr. Jackie Watts
Executive Director
VISTA – The Association of VET Professionals

Background :

VISTA is the peak professional association for managers and leaders in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Victoria. VISTA is committed to raising the status of the VET profession within the community and to promoting a deeper understanding of applied learning pedagogy. The VISTA membership base is cross-sectoral and embraces VET professionals, practitioners, managers and leaders, from across the entire VET sector - RTOs (TAFE, private RTOs) industry-based trainers, educators in Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, VET researchers and finally, VET & Career Educators in the secondary sector.

VISTA provides four primary services to over 400 members :

- * Provision of an annual program of targeted professional development events
- * Dissemination of information via the monthly newsletter and the web-site
- * Advocacy, on behalf of the membership
- * Facilitation of collaborative and networking opportunities

VISTA works to enhance VET professional practice in delivery and in management. The personal and professional development needs of members are met through at the provision of a range of timely, innovative and challenging seminars, forums and conferences and through the dissemination of information on policies and practices via an electronic newsletter and web-site. VISTA has forged inter-sectoral collaborative relationships with a range of VET sector organisations, including VET networks, VET research institutions, peak industry bodies and government agencies. Such links support the professional development of VISTA members and thus promote the quality of VET provision.

The VISTA Submission

This submission relates to three specific Points of Reference in the inquiry :

- *Point 7 (ii) Teach vocational education courses*
- *Point 9 Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training.*
- *Point 11. Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce.*

The VISTA Executive Committee seeks to ensure that the inquiry is fully aware of the dire situation in relation to maintaining industry skills currency for practitioners in vocational education and training (VET). VET practitioners must, of necessity, acquire and maintain current industry skills. To achieve this, VET practitioners must be exposed to current industry practises. Yet provision in terms of time and funding to support skills acquisition in the form of on-going professional development, is not factored into current PD equation.

In Victoria, the TAFE Development Centre recently established a program through which TAFE teachers may apply for funding so that they may acquire current industry skills. A good start but what of schools based VET and ACE practitioners ? The way in which skills acquisition needs to be managed should be part of the national training agenda and should be undertaken with the active collaboration with industry peak bodies and/or industry skills councils. The VET sector cannot address national skill shortages without key stakeholders acknowledging joint ownership of the problem.

Initial and on-going teacher training :

It is difficult to initially recruit tradespeople into the VET teacher force given the remuneration levels. Once such people do join the sector, there are no opportunities to maintain skills currency. It may be argued that

embedding VET pedagogy in teacher training would clearly be a valuable step. But, this would not go far enough to deliver longer term benefits to students engaged with VET courses. What is required is a national systemic approach to on-going industry skills acquisition for VET practitioners.

The obvious question arises. How can the national skills shortages be addressed if VET professionals themselves are denied skills development opportunities? Although it is encouraging to find that the Federal government is committed to greater industry in-put into VET, there is irony in the current reality. The inter-dependence between industry demand for skills and VET practitioners skills currency has not been acknowledged. Industry peak bodies need to play a role in ensuring that the VET sector can access – and afford – industry exposure.

At the recent VISTA 2005 Annual Conference, VET practitioner skills currency and the systemic lack of industry exposure emerged as an issue of deep concern.

We urge the inquiry to investigate this crucial issue and to recommend that policy be devised to ameliorate the problem so that industry and the VET practitioners can serve each other to the benefit of the national workforce.

The Hearing :

VISTA Executive Committee Representation
Judy Veal, President of VISTA