



TRADES TRAINING CENTRES IN SCHOOLS

The new Australian Government has announced that Trades Training Centres will be created in Australia's secondary schools. ACCI supports this initiative, but believes that the involvement of local businesses should be sought, that the centres must have skilled teachers and modern equipment and that employability skills are a component of skills taught.

The Department of Education, Employment and Work place Relations (DEEWR) issued a discussion paper on Trade Training Centres in Schools in February 2008. The program "provides a unique opportunity for collaboration between State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, the school and training sectors and industry, to achieve the shared goals of improving the quality of schooling and having a highly qualified, well trained work force, particularly those in industries experiencing skills shortages".¹

The objectives of this program are to:

- Improve student access to state-of – the art trade training facilities;
- Improve the quality of schooling offered to secondary students undertaking trade related pathways; and
- Assist young people to make a successful transition to work or further education or training.²

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) supports the objectives of the Government's program as part of a suite of quality elements of a Vocational Learning Pathway and is committed to working closely with education and training authorities and other stakeholders in a collaborative partnership approach.

What will happen under the Program?

The new Australian Government announced the creation of Trades Training Centres to be built in Australia's 2,650 secondary schools. Funds of between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million will be provided through an annual application process to secondary schools or consortiums of schools and RTOs and industry groups to build or upgrade metal, woodwork, automotive, building and construction, electrotechnology and other trade workshops.

Funding will also be available for technical facilities such as commercial cookery and hairdressing facilities. The purchase of new or replacement equipment is also included for items such as safety equipment, soldering and welding equipment, ovens, wood and metal turning lathes, grinders and drills and equipment that will give students experience with new information, Information, Communications and Technology found in trades work places and emerging technologies.

An Industry Perspective

ACCI believes that the aim of establishing Trades Training Centres in schools should be to create a stimulating educational and training environment that prepares young people for further vocational education and training and the rigours of the work place, as well as to encourage them to remain in school by making learning more explicitly relevant.

A successful Trade Schools program is the result of a combination of factors. Engagement with industry is fundamental to establishing relevant learning outcomes and testing the acquired skills and knowledge through on - the job training and work experience. Industry also plays a significant role in ensuring that the skills and knowledge being taught are relevant to the needs of local industry.

It is essential that the some of the most effective elements of the Australian Technical Colleges Model be applied to Trades Training Centres in Schools. The Trade Training Centres will need to be part of a comprehensive quality plan for VETiS.

Some valuable lessons learned from the Australian Technical Colleges Model show that local industry plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of the training through:

1. DEEWR, February 2008, *Trade Training Centres in Schools Programme Discussion Paper for Stake holders*, Canberra, p 18

2. DEEWR, *Ibid*, p 4

- Providing real life validation of acquired skills and knowledge in their workplace;
- Facilities design and sharing of equipment by ensuring awareness of the requirements of industry and applying it to the design of Trades Training Centre facilities and providing advice to schools regarding the type of equipment needed to reflect what apprentices will be required to use in the work place; and
- Curriculum development by providing input to schools curriculum to ensure that what is taught at Trades Training Centres reflects the skills and attributes most needed by local industry.

Quality Issues for Trades Training Centres in Schools

Successful transitions from school to the world of work and beyond are of critical importance for Australia's youth and society in general. National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) research shows that School VET programs have a particularly positive effect on the transition to successful post-school activities for early school leavers.³ An understanding of the rigours of the workplace through access to quality vocationally specific education and training whilst at school will actively contribute towards achieving successful school to work transitions for young people.

They key to the ongoing success of the Trades Centres in Schools will be the availability of suitably qualified and experienced staff for the schools.

The quality of delivery of vocational education and training in schools is affected in part by the teacher's mastery of the subject area. In some instances, teachers delivering vocational education and training courses to students have little experience within the industry that they are meant to be teaching. Teachers in Registered Training Organisations are required under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) 2007 to retain competence in the subject area they are teaching. The same principles need to be applied to teachers in Trades Training Centres in schools. Teachers need to have up-to-date skills on current workplace practices within industry and in using machinery and equipment that is commonly found on the job to ensure that the students acquire relevant work specific skills.

To facilitate this, teachers may need to undertake upskilling through ongoing release to industry programs or further

VET qualifications to ensure that their skills meet the stringent requirements of the workplace.

In addition, ACCI recommends that complementary programs be established for workplace supervisors, in order to increase their understanding of workplace learning and to contribute in a structured and positive way towards a student's learning experience.

Training Packages are a critically important element of vocational education and training in schools. Specific industry knowledge and core competencies that comprise Training Packages ensure a correlation between industry requirements and the education and training received by students. It is imperative that the integrity of units of competence or qualification requirements as outlined in the approved Training Packages is maintained and not "dumbed down" for school-based delivery to ensure that industry maintains a high level of confidence in learning outcomes.

Industry Placement and On-the-Job Training

An essential facet for ensuring that students develop skills relevant to the needs of local industry is on-the-job work experience. Learning within a functioning work place is a key component of preparing students for the world of work and validating the skills and knowledge acquired through structured learning in the school setting. Employers place considerable value on on-the-job work experience because it allows the student to demonstrate the direct relevance of the skills acquired. From an employer's perspective, the quality delivery of vocational education and training in schools is not possible without an on-the-job component.

Encouraging further on-the-job placements for students in Trades Training Centres is essential to allow students to contextualise learning when faced with real life scenarios and the challenges of the workplace. On-the-job learning is a key component of preparing students for the world of work both through the acquisition of specific skills and more broadly through general exposure to the expectations of employers.

To develop effective on-the-job work experience, schools will need to work closely with local industry to develop training plans and work placement schedules that take into account the specific needs of individual businesses to ensure that students receive the optimum exposure to the work environment and have the chance to validate the vocationally specific work-skills developed through training at school.

3. Anlezark, A; Karmel, T; Ong, K., 2006, Have school vocational education and training programs been successful?, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide

Employability Skills

The Australian Government, in the lead up to the recent federal election, proposed to introduce a Job Ready Certificate recording and reporting on the Employability Skills gained through training for secondary schools students who undertake Vocational Education and Training competencies as part of their schooling.

In 2002, ACCI and BCA produced the *Employability Skills for the Future* paper for the Department of Education, Science and Training. The papers outlined the required skills and knowledge that Australian industry regarded as an essential foundation for all employees. The skills represent the transportable “soft skills” that underpin the technical skills that enable an employee to perform effectively in the workplace. The paper outlined eight key employability skills:

- Communication;
- Teamwork;
- Problem Solving;
- Initiative and Enterprise;
- Problem Solving;
- Self Management;
- Learning; and
- Technology.

All learners, upon completion of a VET qualification, will receive an Employability Skills Summary that details the keys facets of the eight employability skills learnt whilst undergoing training. The Employability Skills Summaries provide a synopsis of the required employability skills that are deemed by industry as necessary to fulfil the job role of the associated qualification.

It is essential that students in Trades Training Centres in Schools also develop employability skills as part of their vocational training. The delivery of targeted vocationally specific literacy and numeracy development as well as a concentration on generic employability skills will ensure that students leave school with the essential skills and knowledge that will enable them to function effectively and prosper in the work place.

Equipping Trades Centres in Schools

The Australian government has committed to significant expenditure to embed the Trades Training Centres in the 2650 public and private secondary schools around the country.

In many cases, the required equipment and facilities will be already in place in existing schools ‘trades’ skills departments, ATCs, TAFES, private RTOs and local industry.

To eliminate duplication of resources and prevent the concentration of Trades Training Centres concentrating on the same industry field, the Australian Government will need to conduct a full audit of existing facilities and equipment that are available for use by schools within their local area. The audit can be used to indicate gaps in equipment requirements and identify priority needs in the local area. The audit can also be used to facilitate links with local industry and training providers and contribute towards strategic planning.

ACCI is committed to assisting the new government achieve this outcome by offering to provide access to individual employers, who can work in collaboration with schools at the local level to determine local and regional needs.

At the State and Territory level, ACCI member organisations enjoy positive professional relationships with governments, and at the industry level, associations also have a role to play in offering to be part of the application evaluation process. They would bring the benefit of business and industry trends as well as expert knowledge about regional skills needs.

At the national level, ACCI can promote the benefits of employer engagement to its constituents and enter into dialogue with government to make effective use of ACCI’s Australia-wide network of employers. ACCI will also support the government in sourcing retired trades persons to become part of the *Mentors of Our Students* program.

Other ways Industry can be Involved

Industry can also contribute positively through an initiative recently trialled by some jurisdictions and some ACCI member organisations. The initiative involves providing supervisors, trades persons and other relevant people with industry expertise, training in assessment competencies from the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package to become involved in the assessment process.

This initiative is proving popular amongst employers as not only does it assure the assessment process reflects industry standards, but it also provides a way for employers to contribute towards the learning of their employees or of students undertaking workplace learning. Previous research by ACCI indicates that a part of the motivation for employers to become directly involved in training is their desire to “give back” to the community.

The possibility of expanding these initiatives to become integrated into a holistic quality VETiS program is an option certainly worth pursuing.

Conclusion

To further foster productivity and economic growth, Australian industry needs a skilled, flexible and motivated workforce. A secondary school system that actively contributes to the provision of job ready school leavers through vocationally specific technical skills and underpinning employability skills, is essential in meeting the workforce requirements of Australian industry. The development of skills within an industry context provides valuable experience for students as they transition from education into the work force.

ACCI Recommends

To ensure that Trade Training Centres in Schools work as envisaged, ACCI recommend that:

- The new Trade Training Centres work with existing Registered Training Organisations and Australia Technical Colleges;
- Students gain credits in programs that develop skills that are placed on the skills shortage list;
- Students gain employability skills;
- Teachers using the equipment have up-to-date industry skills and are competent in modern industry practices and techniques;
- Personal Development and industry renewal programs are provided for staff;
- Programs are developed and provided for workplace supervisors and mentors;
- Duplication with existing training facilities and programs is minimised;
- A strategic plan is developed for use of the equipment and ongoing maintenance and updating of the equipment features are part of this plan;
- Local employers, industry groups, employer organisations and national peak bodies are active partners in rolling out the initiative; and
- Further consideration is given to developing programs that provide industry experts with assessment competencies in the TAA Training Package.