



# SCHOOL TO WORK - MAKING SECONDARY STUDENTS WORK READY

**W**ays to improve our levels of education and training, with a particular focus on young people obtaining industry relevant qualifications during their secondary schooling, is a central focus for both major political parties in this election year. ACCI is examining Government and Opposition vocational learning policies against our own recently released education policy blueprint.

## WHAT INDUSTRY WANTS

First of all, industry wants students to gain a good general education with emphasis on literacy and numeracy and some development of employability skills. A second area of interest is the transition from school to the world of work and beyond, and the sort of industry experience and skills available to students while they complete their studies.

In the first area, agreement around literacy and numeracy stands alongside a national curriculum is seen as important to both major parties, although there are some differences around the edges. In the second area, subtle yet significant differences in policy direction are emerging.

However, there is consensus on the need to raise the esteem of vocational education and training (VET) options being studied in schools compared with more “academic” or university-oriented options.

ACCI fully supports moves for vocational education and training to be seen as an equal first choice option for young people.

Australian industry needs a skilled, flexible and motivated workforce that further contributes to economic growth. A secondary school system that actively contributes to the provision of job-ready school leavers is essential in meeting the workforce requirements of Australian industry today and into the future.

It is timely to compare the Government and Opposition policies and initiatives on vocational pathways options against ACCI’s recent publication *Skills for a Nation: A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007-2017*.

## THE EXISTING GOVERNMENT APPROACH

As in many other policy areas, both the Commonwealth

and the States play a role in providing vocational pathways for secondary students, with the States and Territories responsible for delivery and the Commonwealth providing some targeted funding support.

A student will experience vocational learning at each year level throughout their compulsory schooling and have access to VET in Schools programmes in the post-compulsory years.

Vocational learning is general learning that has a vocational perspective. It includes elements such as generic employability skills, enterprise education, career education, and community and work-based learning.

## VET in Schools

VET in Schools is vocational education and training undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate with completion by the student providing credit towards a recognised VET qualification within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Engagement with industry contributes in a number of ways but most importantly through incorporating quality requirements into teaching and “on-the-job” learning. VET in Schools is an important pathway available to students and does not necessarily need to result in an employment outcome.

## Australian School-Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs)

ASBAs provide an important pathway for those students seeking an employment outcome while they are completing their education.

The purpose of ASBAs is to provide direct links to employment at the end of an individual’s schooling. ASBAs provide part of the suite of options that provide

Australian youth with flexibility in their transition from school to a working environment.

### Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)

Structured Workplace Learning is a VET in Schools program course component situated within a real or simulated workplace, providing supervised learning activities contributing to an assessment of competency and achievement of outcomes relevant to the requirements of a particular Training Package or other AQF VET qualification.

The Commonwealth provides funding for the Local Community Partnerships that organise SWL in conjunction with local schools.

ACCI agrees that improved access to vocational education and training in schools and school-based apprenticeships will make schooling more relevant for the almost two thirds of students who do not go on to University study.

### Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs)

From a Government perspective, the Australian Technical Colleges are the vehicle for providing an employment pathway and secondary school certification for young people.

The principal objective of the Australian Technical Colleges is to address the current and future skills needs of the Australian economy through the achievement of a number of key goals, such as:

- promoting pride and excellence in trade skills training for young people;
- providing skills and education in a flexible learning environment;
- having an industry-led governing body for each Australian Technical College which sets out its strategic directions and performance objectives; and
- providing trade training that is relevant to industry and that leads to nationally recognised qualifications through School-Based Apprenticeships, and providing academic and vocational and technical education which is relevant to trade careers and leads to a year 12 certificate.

Australian Technical Colleges are for students in Year 11 and 12. Students enter into a Australian School-Based Apprenticeship in a trade at the Certificate III level which leads to a nationally recognised qualification, study

academic subjects leading to a Year 12 certificate, and also gain IT, employability and business skills, enabling them to run their own business if they desire. They can also keep the option to go on to further study at university.

The Colleges provide an incentive for more students to stay on at school and encourage more students to pursue a trade qualification. They expand student choice by providing another pathway to a career involving trades. Facilities and educational services offered by the Colleges are high quality, establishing them as centres of excellence in trade training, thereby raising the profile of vocational and technical education in schools and strengthening the training system as a whole.

The Colleges play an important role in expanding School-Based Apprenticeships, particularly in the traditional trades areas.

A range of diverse models has been implemented for the operation of the Colleges including:

- stand-alone Colleges, which are registered schools (government or non-government) and registered training organisations, delivering in-house all educational programs for students;
- Partnership Arrangements, under which a College partners with an RTO to deliver off-the-job trade training while the College delivers schooling, business and entrepreneurship studies, mentoring and other student support services; and
- a Disaggregated Model, under which the College partners with an RTO and a school (or schools), with the delivery of services being shared by all parties.

The most appropriate model for a region is dependent upon a number of factors, including geography, demographics, local infrastructure and industry requirements.

One of the critical factors in the success of the ATC model is the engagement of industry at a local level.

Industry is engaging in the establishment and operations of the Colleges in a number of ways, including:

- governance - industry plays a major role on the ATC boards;
- providing ASBAs in their workplace;
- facilities design – by contributing knowledge of the requirements of industry and applying it to the design

of College facilities;

- purchasing of equipment – providing advice to Colleges regarding the type of equipment needed to reflect what apprentices will be required to use in the workplace and by assisting the College to secure discounts or sponsorship from equipment providers;
- curriculum development – by providing input to College curriculum to ensure that what is taught at the Colleges reflects what is needed by industry;
- timetabling development – by providing advice to Colleges regarding the type of work placements that best suit; and
- marketing and awareness raising – by utilising industry networks, contacts and events to promote awareness of the Colleges and the benefits which they offer to employers and apprentices.

The College locations have been selected in regions across Australia experiencing gaps in the skills required for local industry. These regions were selected by taking into account a number of factors, including the existence of a strong industry base, identified skills needs and the level of youth population.

The five priority industries targeted by the Colleges are:

- metal and engineering (e.g. machinists, fabricators, toolmakers, welders and sheet metal workers);
- automotive (mechanics, auto electricians, panel beaters and vehicle painters);
- building and construction (bricklayers, plumbers and carpenters);
- electrotechnology (refrigeration, air conditioning and electricians); and
- commercial cookery.

Australian businesses report that their greatest challenge is finding people to take up skilled jobs.

One of the fundamental elements of the Colleges, and a key difference to existing institutions, is the leadership role that local industry and businesses are playing in the operation and governance of the Colleges. This direct involvement of industry will ensure that what is learnt at the College will match what is needed in the local region.

As a result, the skills acquired by students will be directly

relevant to the needs of the local industry. This will enhance the prospect of young people remaining in the region and give them the opportunity for further training and employment. This in turn supports the long-term prosperity of each of the regions in which the Colleges are located and, of course, assists Australian businesses to remain competitive in a global economy.

The ATC experience offers students much more than just a pathway towards nationally recognised trade qualifications. Students study relevant academic subjects - ones that ensure that the link between academia and the real world is recognised, and they gain hands-on skills in a real workplace environment - real working hours and conditions and gaining skills and knowledge that allows them to start a rewarding career in the trades and eventually run their own business.

ACCI supports the establishment of ATCs where:

- there are skills needs;
- there is a high youth population and a strong industry base as part of the longer-term response to skills shortages; and
- they also to raise the status of vocational education and training.

This is based on the principle of improved opportunities for the commencement of industry-valued and recognised school-based vocational education and training. In order to achieve this, the role of the Government is to monitor, evaluate and through targeted funding influence the availability and delivery of qualifications that are recognised by industry, and provide a realistic way for students to gain credit for previous study when progressing to a full time Australian Apprenticeship.

Many states, including Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania, are now in the process of establishing, or have established, their own trade schools, similar in concept to the ATCs.

Also noteworthy is the fact that nearly every single technical school announced by a State Government is either on the site of a TAFE college or in conjunction with one.

In its Blueprint, ACCI does not comment on the Commonwealth, State and Territory division in delivering services so long as the business outcomes are met.

All pathways that encourage young people to undertake vocational learning and training are important, so long as

they follow quality guidelines which are outlined later in this article.

## ALP JOB READINESS POLICIES

In 2002, ACCI and BCA produced an *Employability Skills for the Future* paper for the Department of Education, Science and Training.

The paper 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 eight key employability skills outlined in the paper were:

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

*Employability Skills for the Future* recommended that the framework for assessing and reporting on employability skills be accepted across the Secondary Schools, VET and Higher Education sectors.

In the ACCI Policy Blueprint *Skills for a Nation – A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007 – 2017*, ACCI proposes that all students should have access to a statement of their employability skills on completion of their schooling.

Federal Labor is proposing to introduce a Job Ready Certificate for secondary school students who undertake Vocational Education and Training competencies as part of their schooling. This is part of Labor's proposed \$2.5 billion program to introduce Trades Training Centres in all secondary schools. The aim of establishing Trades Training Centres in Schools is to create a stimulating educational and training environment that prepares young people for vocational education and training and work, and encourages them to remain in school by making

studying in trades areas more attractive to students and relevant to industry.

The Labor policy plans to provide funding for schools to broker on-the-job training for VET in Schools students. Funding of up to \$10 000 will be available to use to secure industry placements so that students gain valuable work-specific skills that cannot be taught in the classroom.

Labor suggests that the funding could be pooled between schools to employ a local community coordinator to broker industry placements for students or to strengthen existing placement programs under the Local Community Partnerships scheme.

## Employability Skills Job Ready Certificate

All nationally recognised Training Packages are required to have embedded Employability Skills by 1 July 2007.

Employability Skills Summaries for all Training Package Qualifications have been developed by Industry Skills Councils in consultation with Industry. The Employability Skills Summaries provide a synopsis of the required employability skills that Industry deems necessary to fulfil the job role of the associated qualification.

Under the current arrangements to embed Employability Skills into Training Packages, students, whether undertaking a VET in Schools qualification, an Australian School-Based Apprenticeship or a VET qualification through TAFE or a private RTO, would be issued with an Employability Skills Statement upon completion of the qualification.

*Skills for a Nation – A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007 – 2017* proposes that all students should have access to a statement of their employability skills on completion of their schooling. The Blueprint states that the eight key employability skills areas need to be made explicit to students through pedagogy, assessment, recording and reporting, and students should be encouraged to record their progress in developing employability skills in different contexts.

The Labor proposal states that only students undertaking VET in Schools qualifications and Australian School-Based Apprenticeships will receive a Job Ready Certificate.

## On-the-Job Training

Encouraging further on-the-job placements for VET in Schools students 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.

Employers highly value on-the-job learning because of the learning styles available, the direct relevance of the skills acquired and the assurance of the skills imparted.

From an employer's perspective, the quality delivery of vocational education and training in schools is not possible without an on-the-job component.

The provision of additional funding to bolster industry placements for VET in Schools students under the Labor policy would need to ensure that all students undertaking VET in Schools competencies have the opportunity to participate in on-the-job training.

### **Enterprise and Career Education Foundation**

If elected, Labor would focus on providing students with relevant work placements and industry experience by renewing funding to the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) by \$8 million over five years to improve links between schools and industry, and develop innovative, high quality, relevant work and training programs for vocational education and training in schools.

It is essential that existing successful programs are not duplicated or replaced by untested structures and that failed models such as the ECEF are not resurrected without analytical consideration and adjustment to better reflect the needs of industry.

Another ECEF is not needed. What is needed is incorporation of the business and industry principles outlined above.

Exactly how payments of up to \$10,000 to be made directly to individual schools to broker on-the-job training or work experience is highly questionable without more detail and without knowing what would happen to existing structures that already deliver these services, such as the Local Community Partnership model.

### **ESSENTIAL QUALITY COMPONENTS OF A VOCATIONAL OFFERING IN SECONDARY 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 and 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. There are very few people in Australia who will not participate in paid or unpaid work at some point in their lives. An understanding of the world of work and access to quality VET in Schools programs contribute towards achieving successful transitions.

Industry wants students to have access to quality VET in Schools offerings during their secondary school years but particularly in Years 11 and 12. Many schools now also offer VET in Schools in Year 10 and there may be benefit in extending VET in Schools to Years 8 and 9 students where local needs and conditions permit and the ingredients essential to quality VET in Schools are met.

### **Training Packages**

Training Packages are a critically important element of vocational education and training in schools.

Industry knowledge and competencies that characterise Training Packages ensure a synergy between industry requirements and the education and training received by students.

It is imperative that Boards of Studies do not alter units of competence or qualification requirements as outlined in the approved Training Packages. This will lead to dissatisfaction by students, parents and employers in relation to outcomes.

It is essential that the integrity of a qualification be sustained to ensure that industry maintains a high level of confidence in VET in Schools outcomes.

### **Teacher Release to Industry**

The quality of delivery of vocational education and training in schools and enterprise education to school students is affected in part by the teacher's mastery of content. In some instances, teachers delivering vocational education and training courses to students have little, outdated or no experience within an industry, let alone the industry area that they are meant to be teaching. This is further exacerbated by the ageing profile of the teaching workforce.

In delivering training programs based on national industry standards, vocational education teachers move beyond classroom and school settings to facilitate learning in the workplace.

This means that vocational education teachers play a

pivotal role in developing alternative school structures to accommodate the implementation of vocational courses.

It also requires working closely with local employers and possibly industry bodies or other training providers. ACCI favours a system where teachers can be released to industry to gain industry relevant experience. Careers advisers should also be given release to industry opportunities.

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Assessment is a critical issue in the delivery of vocational education and training. To satisfy quality assurance requirements, teachers need to complete all components of an approved training program or gain formal recognition of individual qualifications, relevant recent industry experience or other training. Teachers not qualified in the areas or without knowledge of current industry standards and practices should not undertake assessment on students taking VET options.

ACCI recommends the following ingredients are essential to quality VET in Schools programs:

- appropriate levels of resourcing from State and Territory governments to fund teaching, commercial standard equipment and placement requirements;
- appropriate matching between students and employers, with industry involvement in the selection of students;
- school teachers with the right level of skills and industry experience to deliver courses to industry standards;
- on-the-job learning as a critical component of courses undertaken including flexible school timetabling arrangements to support student access to such;
- the use of relevant Training Packages to ensure industry standards are met;

- access to flexible pathways across the full range of industries; and

- connections to local and regional economic development needs.

### CONCLUSION

Schools have a vital role in educating young people and assisting them to make a successful transition from school to further education and training and ultimately to employment.

A focus on the development of skills that are readily transferable to the work environment is essential in allowing the smooth transition of students from school to the workplace.

VET in Schools is an important facet of secondary education for all students, even those aiming at further studies in higher education. The development of skills within an industry context provides valuable experience for students as they move from education into the work environment.