

Chapter 5

Secondary Schools and Transitions to Post-Compulsory Education

INTRODUCTION

A strong secondary school system and transitional arrangements to post compulsory education are an essential combination to build world-class skills and maintain Australia's competitiveness in a global market in the 21st century.

This chapter examines the following components of the school system and the transition from school to work:

- Secondary Schools;
- Schools-industry Policy;
- Australian Technical Colleges; and
- Australian Certificate of Education.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Background

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision and secondary schools provide students with the ability to build on what they know, to assist them to reach their full potential and acknowledge the capacity they have to learn.

Governments set the public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence, enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations. Common and agreed goals for schooling establish a foundation for action among state and territory governments with their constitutional responsibility for schooling. The Australian Government, non-government school authorities and all those who seek the best possible educational outcomes for young Australians, seek to improve the quality of secondary schooling nationally.

Consideration of Issues

Retention to Year 12

According to the Australian Year Book 2007, there were 1,425,400 secondary students in Australia in 2005.¹ Retention rates of secondary school students is a measure of the number of these students who complete Year 12 before entering the world of work, or embarking on further studies. Generally, a high retention rate is considered favourable to an economy.

Retention rates for Year 12 students are generally high in Australia compared to overseas. In 2005 the apparent retention rate of full-time secondary school students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 was 75%. As in previous years, the 2005 apparent retention rate to Year 12 for female students was higher (81%) than the corresponding rate for male students (70%),² (see Figure 5.1).

Retention rates are more complex than is immediately apparent because retention rates measure the quantity, not

Figure 5.1
Apparent Retention Rates
From Year 10 to Year 12

| | 2001 % | 2002 % | 2003 % | 2004 % | 2005 % |
|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Full-Time Students | | | | | |
| Males | 70.8 | 72.4 | 72.3 | 72.4 | 71.5 |
| Females | 80.1 | 81.7 | 81.6 | 82.3 | 81.6 |
| Persons | 75.4 | 77.0 | 76.9 | 77.2 | 76.5 |
| Total Student (a) | | | | | |
| Males | 73.9 | 75.7 | 75.1 | 75.1 | 74.0 |
| Females | 84.9 | 86.9 | 86.4 | 86.9 | 85.7 |
| Persons | 79.4 | 81.3 | 80.7 | 80.9 | 79.8 |

(a) Includes part-time students.

Source: ABS data available on request, National Schools Statistics collection.

quality of the education being received. In general, the more education and training an individual receives, the more likely they are to gain better jobs and incomes and achieve higher standards of living. Retention rates have been considered as a proxy for gaining more skills.

ACCI urges caution about generalising the inference of better education and training and access to better jobs and pay across all sections of the population.

Many currently highly paid executives did not “*fit the mould*” and were not successful at school. Similarly, many tradespersons who left school early are now running highly profitable businesses and contributing to the overall success of the Australian economy.

While everybody will benefit either directly or indirectly by acquiring more skills, there is no formula that says where the starting point should be. Many individuals will start to acquire skills only once they have entered the workforce and may not proceed to gain higher level skills until they are much older. Improving retention rates is an alluring policy direction but differing rates of maturation and motivation need to be considered.

A significant number of young people, particularly young men, may become disaffected and permanently disengaged if compelled to complete Year 12 whereas they may benefit from leaving school early and obtaining more skills at a later point in life.

Naturally, there is also concern about the students who “*slip through the crack*” and the fate that awaits those who never permanently attach to the labour force. Often the reasons for disengagement of this group are a complex mixture of socio-economic background, lack of financial resources, inadequate parenting and other factors.

Compelling this group of students to remain at school and complete Year 12 will not necessarily provide them with the skills and conditions necessary to change the patterns of their life. Flexible entry and exit points are more important to improving the overall quantum of skills than a retention rate measure and individual differences must be considered. This approach is consistent with lifelong learning.

A Good General Education – Quality Issues

Curriculum debate around the way in which subjects should be organized and studied highlights ongoing concern in the community about the quality of education and how it can be improved.

The quality of teaching is an area where improvements can be made.

Employers strongly support strategies that reward excellence in teaching, including performance-based pay and alternative pathways for teacher registration.

The quality of some educational outcomes has long been of concern to employers. The Australian Government’s stated intention of working more closely with the States and Territories to introduce flexibility and performance pay for teachers and ensure that the community is furnished with better data about school standards, are two important measures that will improve the quality of education outcomes.

As Australia’s population ages, new ways of diversifying the Australian teaching skills base will become increasingly important. Giving school principals the power to hire and fire will help to raise the bar by making sure that teachers who do not perform are not “*carried*” by other staff that have higher standards. Combined with performance-based pay, excellent teachers can be recognised and appropriately rewarded.

An important facet of quality in secondary schooling is to attract good quality teachers, who have mastery over their subject matter content and who can cater for the individual needs of students.

In addition good quality curriculum will provide individuals with access to quality language, literacy and numeracy skills (see Chapter 13) and Maths and Science (see Chapter 11). It is highly desirable that a national curriculum be introduced to gain consistency and, avoid unnecessary duplication and provide standards so that effective comparisons between schools and systems can be made.

Conclusion

ACCI supports the view that Australia’s future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life. In addition, secondary schools provide students with the ability to build on what they know, to assist them to reach their full potential and acknowledge the capacity they have to learn.

ACCI Proposal

ACCI proposes:

- the need for a flexible industrial relations system to underpin the principles of performance pay for teachers;
- that performance pay be seen as part of a total suite of initiatives to improve teacher quality such as improving initial teacher education by providing increased opportunities for practical classroom experience, and recognising and rewarding formal professional development once a teacher commences teaching;
- that all governments need to ensure that the community is furnished with better data about school standards;
- that all school principals be given the power to hire and fire;
- the acknowledgement by all governments that increasing public confidence in secondary school education will come through explicit and defensible standards that guide improvement in students' levels of educational achievement and through which the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schooling can be measured and evaluated;
- that while desirable for all students to complete Year 12, false targets have distorted the debate, especially in terms of young people. This is a matter of lifelong learning and completion should occur at times relevant to individual circumstances;
- therefore, while there should be encouragement of individuals to obtain a good general education and foundational skills, there should be no compulsion of individual students to remain at school to complete Year 12;
- that there be flexible entry and exit points in the education system;
- the implementation of a national curriculum;
- the implementation of programs that take account of individual differences in ability, learning style and level of maturation;
- that there be interesting, broad and rich curriculum with greater choice and wider out of school opportunities but not to the exclusion of foundational skills;
- that policies ensure that students finish their compulsory years of schooling equipped with the knowledge, skills

and personal qualities needed for further education, work and life;

- that there needs to be significantly enhanced professional development for teachers in schools;
- that governments strongly support and encourage the provision of pathway planning for students;
- the development of a much closer relationship between schools, VET providers and Higher Education providers, allowing greater flexibility in the movement between the three sectors; and
- that governments continue to implement plans to improve services and support for students with disabilities.

SCHOOLS-INDUSTRY POLICY

Background

Industry needs a skilled, flexible and motivated workforce that contributes to economic growth and assists in achieving economic goals. A school system that helps meet the particular needs of industry is integral in achieving competitiveness. Cooperative and strategic partnerships between employer and educational stakeholders are necessary to achieve these goals at local, State, Territory and national levels.

An important element of the education system is the transition from secondary school to post secondary school education. This issue is examined in the remainder of the Chapter. Of critical importance to industry is the transition from education and training to the world of work.

Consideration of Issues

Much has been written about the numbers of young people and the extent to which they will be able to provide for Australia's future skills needs. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum has estimated that there will not be a shortage of young people over the next ten years and that "*Australia is not running out of young people.*"³

When considering policy issues around Australia's skill base and future potential, it is therefore important to include consideration of the different pathways available to young persons and how best to manage the transition from school to work and the world beyond. ACCI favours options which offer choice and flexibility to young people and

their parents, the capacity to test options without penalty, including entering employment arrangements while studying or simply using VET as a taster. The full range of models needs to be considered.

There is a range of issues which impact on the effective and successful transition of a student through school and from school to further education, training and employment.

Schools have a vital role in educating young people and assisting them to make a successful transition through school and from school to further education, training and ultimately employment. To achieve this, schools need to ensure there are linkages between career pathways and advice given to students and the realities of the world.

As discussed in Chapter 12, the Employability Skills Framework comprises a set of personal attributes and eight key skill areas required by employers in order to gain employment, establish an enterprise, or to progress within an enterprise or expand employment capability, so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise and strategic directions. Employability skills are acquired from a variety of sources including the home, school, the wider community, sport and through exposure to the workplace. The acquisition of these skills is developmental and the skills can be transferred from one context to another.

There should be no formal teaching, assessment or reporting on the personal attributes but they can be highlighted to students where relevant. The eight key skill areas need to be made explicit to students through pedagogy, assessment, recording and reporting. Students should be encouraged to record their progress in developing employability skills in different contexts. These records would ideally be lodged in an e-portfolio and contain a mixture of formal and informal records. A statement of employability skills should be available on exit from school or where relevant, at the qualification level.

Enterprise Education

Enterprise education covers a range of areas, which are not clearly defined. It involves educating individuals to be more enterprising, via learning about entrepreneurship, simulated business development learning, understanding the world of work and preparation for the possibility of self-employment.

In addition, innovation and enterprise go hand in hand. Unless people have the ability to turn innovative ideas into

marketable and profitable products, ie, have the enterprise skills to make it happen, then there will be little value added or the opportunities will be lost to Australia as the innovators seek support elsewhere. Enterprise education is critical if we are to make the most of the investment being made in innovation skills.

Activities that are suitable enterprise education activities allow students to:

- run their own company through computer simulation of the Australian economy;
- undertake an innovative training strategy for the development of business skills and business thinking;
- establish and run their own business with the help of a real business partner and a network of firms which together generate a simulated market economy;
- undertake a structured one week work placement during which they are confronted with real life challenges, requiring them to use enterprising skills and a total quality management approach;
- undertake five days work experience during which time they receive training in continuous improvement tools and processes, using activities such as data gathering, data analysis, problem solving and planning; and
- be exposed to enterprise days in which businesses, schools and the community are linked.

Simulated Learning

There is a role for simulated learning as a pedagogical approach within the school curriculum. In terms of vocational education and training, there is a place for simulated learning to supplement opportunities where on-the-job learning with employers is not available or only partially available. However, employers prefer student learning in vocational education and training areas to be competed in real workplaces.

VET in Schools

It is of vital importance that industry is put in the driving seat where vocational education and training or other schools-industry initiatives are involved and that there is a move away from the main emphasis being on the provider.

Vocational education and training is vocational education

and training – no matter where it is delivered. Whether it is in schools or in a post-school training environment, the same standard of delivery should be employed. Where schools are unable to meet the same standards as those provided by Technical and Further Education or private providers, alternative arrangements should be made through partnership, auspicing or outsourcing approaches.

On-the-Job Learning

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

Schools as Registered Training Organisations

In terms of the delivery of vocational education and training, ACCI members do not support processes that allow for the automatic and blanket registration of schools as Registered Training Organisations. Arrangements that ensure consistency of standards for Registered Training Organisations, are therefore of great concern to industry.

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 and employers in relation to outcomes.

Australian School-Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs)

The 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. (Also see Chapter 8 on this topic)

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.

Assessment is a critical issue in the delivery of vocational education and training. To satisfy the 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 VTE options.

Teacher Education

It is critical that teachers have adequate literacy and numeracy skills themselves before undertaking teacher education programs.

Traditionally, many teachers have had little or no experience of industry or employment outside the education sector. Therefore, their understanding of the importance of education and training for future employment of the greater population is more academic in nature.

It is therefore essential that teacher education programs include information about enterprise education,

employability skills and careers systems. Compulsory units should be developed and incorporated into all teacher training courses so that teachers gain a better understanding of the importance of these aspects of education and training for their students.

ACCI believes that there is considerable need for trainee teachers to gain extensive practical skills in teaching methodologies and behavioural management before entering the classroom as a graduate teacher. Most education programs stipulate blocks of practicum for trainee teachers, usually for 80 days in the fourth year of study. ACCI believes that this is not sufficient practical experience to prepare trainee teachers for the rigours of teaching. Increased exposure to the classroom environment at an earlier stage in the program of study would give trainee teachers realistic expectations of a career in teaching and decrease early exits from the profession due to unrealistic expectations.

Federal Arrangements

Education is primarily a state and territory responsibility but there is a role for the Federal government to take in ensuring a degree of national consistency, sufficient resourcing to allow the offering of vocational education and training choices, the collection of data and research and analysis.

Consultation with industry through formal and informal structures that provide advice to Ministers will assist the education sector in setting priorities and ensuring demand responsiveness in respect to federal arrangements.

Student Records of Achievement

Clear and consistent reporting on schools and students across Australia, incorporating objective performance measures is a vital ingredient of effective parental involvement.

National consistency and reporting in plain English would assist students, parents and employers during schooling, but especially in the transition to work.

Transition Plans

It is desirable that students are given the opportunity to develop career options and to plan their transition from school to further education, training or employment and active participation in the community.

VET in Schools Quality Issues

Successful transitions from school to the world of work and beyond are of critical importance for Australia's youth and society in general. NCVET 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 at work and access to quality VET in Schools programs contribute towards achieving successful transitions.

Industry is concerned that students 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.

ACCI recommends the following ingredients as 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

A successful VET in schools program is the result of a combination of factors. Engagement with industry contributes in a number of ways but most importantly

though 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.

ACCI Proposals

ACCI proposes that:

- students should have access to a statement of their employability skills on exit from school;
- the early intervention of enterprise education in schools is important in educating individuals to be more enterprising, understand entrepreneurship and the world of work, and prepare for the possibility of self employment;
- that units be developed for teacher education courses to include the areas of employability skills, enterprise education and careers systems;
- that study of such units be compulsory for all teachers;
- that a prerequisite for entry into teacher education be adequate levels of literacy and numeracy for themselves;
- there is a role for simulated learning as a pedagogical approach within the school curriculum but only where on the job experience is not available;
- the automatic and blanket registration of schools as Registered Training Organisations is not supported;
- Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASBAs) provide an important pathway for those students seeking an employment outcome while they are completing their education. VET in schools provides an alternative pathway but does not involve an employment arrangement;
- a compulsory unit of study should be introduced into teacher training programs in relation to vocational education and training;
- training for teachers should include more exposure to the classroom at an earlier time in their course;
- a system should be established where teachers can be released to industry to gain industry relevant experience. Careers advisers should also be given “*release to industry*”

opportunities;

- alternative models of fast-tracking entry into teaching and contract delivery where specialist industry knowledge is involved should be explored; and
- reporting against the eight key employability skills should be adopted and delivered to Australian parents. National consistency and reporting in plain English on these skills would assist students, parents and employers during schooling, but especially in the transition to work.

AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL COLLEGES

Background

Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) contribute, in part, to the solution to Australia’s skill shortages by targeting identified skills needs. They are one model amongst a number that provide an alternative pathway for young people who combine industry experience with secondary education.

The Federal Government is spending \$289 million over four years to establish 25 Australian Technical Colleges across the nation to help combat the skills crisis. About 7200 Year 11 and 12 students are expected to attend the colleges by 2009.⁴

Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) play a role in providing prestige opportunities for quality students to undertake an employment pathway in Years 11 and 12.

ATCs are for students in Year 11 and 12. Students enter into a Australian School based Apprenticeship (ASBAs) 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. Each college will provide places for 300 students, a total of 7,200 places.

Each College is linked with, and endorsed by, industry. It has a governing body chaired by a local business or industry representative and should draw its members from the regional community including industry, parents and education and training providers. Input from industry representatives ensures that what is being taught in the Colleges is directly relevant to the needs of industry and thus enhances young people’s prospects for further training

and employment.

Colleges will be expected to demonstrate a level of commitment and engagement from local industry, especially in relation to the placements of an ASBA, which assures the ongoing value and sustainability of the College.

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;
- providing trade training that is relevant to industry and that leads to nationally recognised qualifications through Australian School-based Apprenticeships; and
- providing academic and vocational and technical education, which is relevant to trade careers and leads to a year 12 certificate.

ACCI supports the establishment of ATCs where:

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

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.

An evaluation of the model needs to be undertaken once

the ATCs are fully operational and if industry validates it as providing successful transition outcomes it should be promoted and adopted more widely. A key criterion for measuring the relevance of the model will be the degree to which students' learning is acquired in the workplace and not from institutional learning. It should be recognised that all the existing ATCs models are very different and the evaluation would need to take account of that.

ACCI Proposal

ACCI proposes that:

- there be a focus on improved opportunities for the commencement of industry valued and recognised school based vocational education and training;
- an evaluation of ATCs be undertaken and where relevant, the model promoted and extended; and
- the extent of industry based learning should be a key criterion in validating the model.

AN AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

Background

In May 2005 the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to investigate and report on models and implementation arrangements for an Australian Certificate of Education (ACE) for the final years of secondary school.

Consideration of Issues

A key question in this investigation was whether an Australian Certificate of Education would best be introduced as a new certificate that would sit alongside existing state and territory senior secondary certificates, or whether to establish a single ACE for the final years of secondary school.

Four options were investigated and a conclusion reached. The most desirable long-term outcome would be the emergence of a single ACE awarded by each of the Australian states and territories in place of the existing nine certificates.

The framework of a single senior certificate is more likely to promote consistency in senior secondary arrangements, to provide comparability of student results across Australia,

and to ensure nationally consistent high standards of curriculum provision.

Achieving a single ACE may be more difficult than introducing a tenth certificate to sit alongside existing state and territory certificates. A single national certificate inevitably will require time to implement, and may have to be achieved in stages.

The vision is for a single ACE, undertaken by senior secondary students throughout Australia and within which students are able to pursue a range of pathways, including academic and vocational studies in schools, workplaces and other community settings. It is envisaged that the national certificate will be awarded by all state and territory authorities, through the Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certificate Authorities (ACACA agencies).

Under the ACE, schools and awarding bodies would be encouraged to develop, assess and report on general skills required for life and work beyond school. The employability skills framework of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) identifies eight such skills.

Conclusion

The introduction of an ACE has the potential to provide greater national consistency in senior secondary arrangements; to set nationally consistent high standards; to improve the comparability of student results across Australia; to advance efforts to ensure that all young Australians develop the knowledge and skills required for life and work beyond school; and to establish a national qualification with international standing. If Australia is to maintain a world-class educational system changes the introduction of an ACE is necessary.

ACCI Proposals

ACCI proposes that:

- a national standards body should set minimum requirements for the award of the ACE;
- curriculum essentials would spell out a core of curriculum content (fundamental knowledge, principles and skills) to be taught in an ACE subject across all awarding bodies offering that subject. Achievement standards would be set in these nominated subjects;
- achievement standards should provide a nationally

consistent framework of levels;

- under ACE, schools and awarding bodies would be encouraged to develop, assess and report on employability skills required for life and work beyond school; and
- there should be an ACE Award of Excellence: a certificate awarded to students throughout Australia who meet high standards of achievement in their studies.

¹ ABS, 1301.0, *Year Book Australia*, 2007.

² Ibid.

³ Dusseldorp Skills Forum, "How Young People are Faring 2006", *At A Glance*, p 8.

⁴ Courtney Trenwith, 6 February 2007, "Multi-Million Dollar Federal Initiative", *Illawarra Mercury*.

