

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Council of Catholic School Parents

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SUBMISSION

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INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NSW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) on behalf of the families of students in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT.

The CCSP has a network of representatives from each diocese in NSW/ACT that is drawn upon for input into submissions such as this.

The CCSP recognises the good work that has been done by governments in assembling VET programs to better situate the workers of tomorrow to fill positions in the ever-changing work environment but has found from parents that the area of study of VET subjects is characterised by a lack of convergence and as such its delivery can be disjointed and piecemeal.

Issues that contribute to this are:

- the disjoint between the leaving age of 17 and attainment of the HSC
- availability of Smart Skilled program only to students that have already left school
- the need for students to complete a HSC even when they are doing school based apprenticeships
- the understanding and appreciation of ROSA by employers and parents
- the dual credentials required of teachers and excessive administrative burden
- lack of clarity around who regulates VET: BoSTES or ASQA and their relationship.

This being said, the benefits for students of being able to follow career paths in industry are manifold and therefore the decision should be made by school systems to embrace this stream of education and support it financially and administratively. If this is not the case then the alternative is to reduce the leaving age and outsource vocational education to the private sectors as in the past, which does not seem to be desired by anyone in this realm.

That VET students complete their education with accreditation in two areas: academic and vocational is a great benefit and as the societal trend of a university careers either being out of reach or not of use to many students grows, the option of vocational education will have a greater role to play in preparing students to be active members of the workforce of the future.

This report is a summary of parents' comments and perceptions about their experiences in undertaking VET studies with their child. Here are the thoughts of one parent:

"From a parent perspective I feel VET is an important aspect to promote as it provides a wealth of opportunities for students seeking important careers outside the traditional academic subject stream. If anything, it needs to be expanded to cover a broader array of skill shortages and emerging careers such as those in health and community services."

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1. This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP) on behalf of the parents of more than 250,000 students in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT.
- 1.2. The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) is an independent association officially recognised as the peak body representing the interests of parents and carers in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT. The work of the Council is guided by the principles of choice, equity and social justice.
- 1.3. As such, the focus of this submission will be on VET in schools and will not attempt to comment on the role of VET in the wider workplace.

2. CATHOLIC SCHOOLING IN NSW

2.1. Catholic schools in NSW:

- have been providing a quality education for Australian children for over 180 years
- educate more than one in five students
- have significant geographical and socio-economic coverage
- reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia
- are a national asset

3. VET EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- 3.1. There are 586 Catholic schools in NSW serving educationally, geographically, culturally and socio-economically diverse communities. This includes:
 - 138 secondary schools
 - 36 Trade Training Centres serving 82 Catholic schools
 - in stage 6, of the 40,626 students enrolled there are 12,496 in 1 or more VET courses
 - this is 30.76% of enrolled students taking 1 or more VET courses which reflects the national trend¹
 - SBAT continues to grow with 894 students in 2014 in Catholic schools

¹ <http://www.jobguide.thegoodguides.com.au/VET-in-Schools>

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. Factors influencing student choice

- 4.1. It is recognised that with the increased leaving age of 17 there is a need to provide instruction that is useful for all students, those aspiring to university degrees as well as those pursuing trades and other career paths after secondary schooling.
- 4.2. Vocational education plays a critical role in providing motivation to students to remain engaged with their course of study in a way that is meaningful and leads to genuine career prospects post-schooling. VET courses give students a 'taste' of their chosen industry and help them to make better-informed decisions.
- 4.3. However, there are a number of factors that impact a student's choice to follow a VET course of study. One major overarching factor, which needs to be addressed, first and foremost is the need for greater clarity around and appreciation of the role of VET subjects in the school curriculum both at the school level as well as in the broader community. This will happen when VET ceases to be regarded as a second rate option by principals, school staff, parents and school authorities. With societal trends of diminishing job opportunities for university graduates, excessive HECS debt and over supply of graduates in many fields, the importance of VET in opening students up to alternative career pathways and experiences cannot be underestimated and indeed should be bolstered.
- 4.4. The status of the ATAR and perception of VET courses as downgrading the ATAR can hold parents back from encouraging their children to take VET courses. There is also confusion around those subjects that are ATAR and those that are non-ATAR subjects and how these can be accommodated in the student's timetable. Students and parents do not fully understand the impact their choices will have.
- 4.5. The reality for many students is that they are not able to avail themselves of all the opportunities that VET courses can offer in relation to preparing them for their chosen line of work for a number of reasons:
 - not all schools offer the variety of courses students may be interested in
 - timetabling in schools does not always allow enough flexibility for students to have their course selections
 - not all schools have careers advisers skilled in opening the minds of students and families to subject selections they may not have previously considered especially when there is no family connection in this area
 - in some areas the course offerings are tied to specific industries prevalent in the geographic location of the school.

"The current obvious challenge is keeping kids engaged in education. But for many skills shortage areas, schools are not currently offering related VET subject choices and this hurts the career and national prospects."

5. The role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry

- 5.1. Many schools do not see it as their primary role to be providers of VET courses and thus do not go out of their way to assist families in maximising student choices to best suit the needs of the student. They are not always forthcoming in showing the way for students to undertake VET courses in other settings and the various pathways on offer as this can sometimes lead to a loss of funding for teachers when students go elsewhere.
- 5.2. Therefore, there is a greater role for public and private providers to fill the gaps that schools cannot, due to factors such as the size of the school; if it is in a regional, rural or remote area; and the capability and qualifications of teaching staff. Strengthened partnerships with providers would benefit students in being able to access higher quality workplace opportunities and experiences and can also assist in up skilling teachers to deliver the relevant courses.
- 5.3. Some sort of government incentives for industry providers to participate in work placement programs may induce more host employers.

“Industry participation is the largest missed opportunity. Training packages are adjusted to meet industry demands only to be left without adequate support and business connections to bring the training package to life. Financial services is one classic example of this.”

6. Factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible vocational education

- 6.1. VET courses can be considerably more expensive than the academic line of study which raises issues of equity in that the students who may well be more inclined or more suited to VET subjects could be the least able to afford them.
- 6.2. This is where schools need to be more supportive of this line of study or alternatively, partnerships with industry could absorb some of the burden of its delivery.
- 6.3. There may also be a role here for diocesan education authorities to regard its overall commitment as a provider of VET courses and defray the costs through more equitable fee structures.

7. The effects of a competitive training market on student access to education training, skills and pathways

- 7.1. This is perhaps one of the areas of greatest discrimination for students with a disability. While many students with disabilities are ‘pushed’ into this course of study, this can result in disrupted learning for the other students and a less than satisfactory experience for the student with disabilities. Life Skills students often find it challenging to fit in all their desired subjects as there are so few non-ATAR subjects offered, making it difficult to fulfil their requirements for the HSC. VET courses can provide stronger pathways into meaningful careers especially for students with disabilities because of the diverse range of employment opportunities it creates.

8. Level of industry participation in the vocational education and training sector

- 8.1. There is an increasing role and indeed responsibility for industry in education today due to many factors such as diminishing government support for education and the rapidly changing nature of the workplace.
- 8.2. There is a greater need for industry to partner with education to better anticipate the future needs of the workplace and to prepare the future workers for that world.
- 8.3. Retired Deloitte CEO, Barry Salzberg produces a blog series in which he shares his insights and experience of 38 years in corporate work and stresses that it is not a problem for education alone to solve, but along with the non-profits and businesses needs to work together to develop the next generation of talent.

He referred to a report from College Summit in the United States which outlines many diverse ways businesses can contribute, such as:

- provide work-based learning experiences and strengthen career awareness
- help schools build success-oriented college and career cultures that empower students
- help educators align curriculum and readiness standards with business needs
- help youth build meaningful relationships with strong role models and mentors
- provide financial guidance and advice that lessens affordability as a barrier to college.²

- 8.4. Some workplaces do not see themselves as responsible partners in the role of forming future workers and work placement experiences do not always stand up to the expectations of students and parents and can sometimes end up being unpaid labour with students executing menial tasks unrelated to their chosen course of study.

9. Smart Skilled reforms

- 9.1. As the 'study scape' is currently laid out for the 15 to 18 year olds, the pathways and best options for individual students can be unclear and confusing. There seems to be a lack of cohesion and disjoint in the various programs that are on offer whether it is HSC, SBAT, or a combination.
- 9.2. Students are required to remain at school until they are 17 unless they leave for an apprenticeship, a training course at TAFE or private provider, or full-time employment.
- 9.3. Yet programs like the Smart and Skilled are available to students from the age of 15 but only if they have already left school.

² <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20131009151728-27058877-how-i-learned-to-dream-big-and-why-we-must-help-young-people-do-the-same?trk=mp-reader-card>

10. Other Matters

There needs to be special consideration for Aboriginal students as they are significantly impacted by the leaving age of 17 now. TVET and SBAT are very important pathways for Aboriginal students as they can be inclined to disengage from school at this time. There is also a need for school Careers Advisers to be in-serviced in the particular needs and circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to assist those students find the best path forward.

Conclusion

Reform in VET needs to start from the top down and establish first and foremost a clear vision and understanding of the role that VET plays in the education of our young people.

Having done this, the decision then needs to be made, under which authority it will function and once that is decided it needs to be wholly embraced by the sectors.

This will then lead to better qualified teachers who are able to guide and direct families and students into the optimal course of study for their child that opens them up to a wider range of experience by the time they leave school.

As students now remain in school until they are 17 years of age it is critical that once they leave school and enter the work force they are ready to engage fully.