

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

Organisation: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South
Wales

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Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales

Prepared by: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of
New South Wales

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Locked Bag 40, GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Telephone: 1300 885 982

Website: www.pandc.org.au

Fax: 1800 655 866

ABN: 37 439 975 796

PREAMBLE¹

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that all students have the capacity to learn and the Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular. Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children. P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students.

RESPONSE

P&C Federation would like to commend the Government for inviting submissions on vocational education and training in New South Wales. This not only allows a broader review, but it also acknowledges the partnerships that are essential between parents, the government and the wider community in order to ensure that every child realises success in their formal education.

P&C Federation makes this response to vocational education and training in New South Wales inquiry with specific reference to;

(a) the factors influencing student choice about entering the vocational education and training system including:

- (i) motivation to study
- (ii) choice of course, course location and method of study
- (iii) barriers to participation, including students in the non-government education and home schooling sectors

(b) the role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry in:

- (i) educational linkages with secondary and higher education
- (ii) the development of skills in the New South Wales economy
- (iii) the development of opportunities for unemployed people, particularly migrants and persons in the mature workers' category, to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects,
- (iv) the delivery of services and programs particularly to regional, rural and remote communities

(c) factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible vocational education and training, including the influence of the co-contribution funding model on student behaviour and completion rates

(d) the effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training, skills and pathways to employment, including opportunities and pathways to further education and employment for the most vulnerable in our community including those suffering a disability or severe disadvantage

¹ Preamble of Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW. *2010 P&C Handbook* (6)

(e) the level of industry participation in the vocational education and training sector, including the provision of sustainable employment opportunities for graduates, including Competency Based Training and the application of training packages to workforce requirements, and

(f) the Smart and Skilled reforms, including:

(i) alternatives to the Smart and Skilled contestable training market and other funding policies

(ii) the effects of the Smart and Skilled roll out on school based apprenticeships

(g) any other related matter.

P&C Federation believes that everyone has a right to education throughout life to maximise their human potential, including the right to return to school or to continue their secondary education later in life. Tertiary, vocational and technical education should be equally available with facilities allocated to make it accessible to all those wishing to further their education.

Education must include Careers Education so that students leave school with dignity to achieve their own vocational choice and their own level of economic independence. Vocational education should enhance self-esteem, confidence in the ability to achieve, and broad competencies, rather than being training to fit into specific jobs, and have sufficient involvement in a range of actual or simulated career experiences to enable students to confidently choose their first career. Careers and vocational education should contribute to giving students an understanding of such matters as the social and political dimensions of the world of work, paid and unpaid, and an appreciation of different views of the relations between work, leisure and life, as well as an understanding of what the different kinds of jobs are like.

As education needs to continue throughout life and benefits both the individual and the community in economic and many other ways, the community, through governments, should make available sufficient resources to see that reasonable personal aspirations and community needs are fully served. To provide equality of opportunity for success in, as well as access to, education for all, it is essential that alternative educational pathways are available for those groups whose capability is not truly reflected in their Higher School Certificate or normal school results.

Vocational courses should not be job specific; they should always include properly thought out broad competencies. Students gain these as a result of the way they are taught the subjects, including supported reflection on the subject material and job experiences. They should be expected to reflect on why the techniques they are taught work, where the industry for which they are learning is going, and what the environmental impact of the industry is, and about the power relations between people in the workplace. The competencies should be assessed as part of the general assessment of the subjects.

Choice of a school must not limit a student's options for employment and further education. Both vocational subjects and subjects providing access to universities must be available to all students, whether in their own schools or through groups of schools working together with TAFE colleges. All students should be able to access the course of study they wish to undertake, in a location close to their residential address as a first priority, or secondarily through assisted travel.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) provides valued steps to further education especially for students that may not respond well to the type of curriculum and subjects offered in schools. It is important that this type of education is available and accessible to all students but more importantly, it is vital for those students that are disengaged or not interested in seeking university qualification, especially now that the school leaving age has been increased.

P&C Federation is concerned that cuts to funding for TAFE and the introduction of new funding arrangements under the Smart and Skilled reform could limit the choice and opportunities available to students who wish to undertake VET courses whilst still attending school. This is also a concern for students attending TAFE or private training organisations after leaving school.

Changes under the Smart and Skilled reform have TAFE competing with other private training organisations for public funding. P&C Federation is concerned that rather than creating a more diverse range of courses, there may well be a reduction in the types of courses being offered with some areas of study not being financially viable for training organisations at all. A reduction in the types of courses being offered would result in the reduction in the number of students able to participate in VET or post secondary school vocational studies. It would also see an increase in the number of disengaged or disenfranchised students. Should local TAFEs discontinue courses previously offered prior to Smart and Skilled, HSC VET students may be left with little or no option to study VET while still at school. This may result in schools having to negotiate with private training organisations to provide these courses.

P&C Federation is concerned about potential financial barriers to learning as the result of increased fees and the removal of subsidies. Increased fees for courses, which depend on whether the course is government subsidised or not, present significant financial barriers to many families despite the provision of fee assistance. Changes in subsidies also impact HSC VET students who may have to pay significantly higher fees compared to post secondary students studying a similar course. P&C Federation believes that in order to minimise barriers to participation in VET studies all HSC VET “access” courses should continue to be funded by the government. If fees are payable, then these fees should be the same as those being paid by post secondary vocational students.

Access to reliable transportation from school to a TAFE campus can be a challenge especially in rural areas where public transport networks may not be as comprehensive or may not be available at all. P&C Federation is concerned that the removal of subsidies for transport for school students attending off-site VET courses may become a barrier to students due to the increased cost. In consideration of the importance of VET to rural communities, subsidised transport should be provided for these students.

Due consideration must be given to those students who are required to travel from school to TAFE and in doing so miss other subjects. Increased travel times to access TAFE has a significant impact on how much work a student is expected to catch up. Policies should be in place to ensure no school student having to travel to TAFE is unfairly disadvantaged or discriminated against.

Also of concern is the impact of staffing formulas as allocations for staff are reduced when students attend VET courses off-site. However, there is still an expectation that staff be responsible for the students even when they are not in attendance. It would be preferable that as many VET courses as possible be delivered on the school site within trade centres, however it is noted that this is not always possible given funding, remoteness of communities, local access to industry and adequate staffing at schools to enable courses to be offered.

P&C Federation are concerned that the Smart and Skilled reform presents a number of uncertainties and challenges that will impact on the provision of educational opportunities for HSC VET students as well as post secondary vocational students. As the primary educational alternative to studying at a university, VET must provide a strong, affordable and effective alternative for further education.

We implore the current government through the Department of Education to continue discussions with all relevant and interested stakeholders. We hope that the government will acknowledge and recognise the very real concerns of students, parents, school communities and other key stakeholders in relation to the issues surrounding this reform.

P&C Federation acknowledges the need for continued involvement in discussion and hopes that the government takes into account many of the key areas of concern. We hope the comments made in this document are of assistance with discussions around this subject.

P&C Federation would like to thank the government for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales. We look forward to seeing the results and welcome any further dialogue this may evoke.