INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: NSW Secondary Principals' Council

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Inquiry into vocational education and training in NSW.
General Purpose Standing Committee No6

The Hon Paul Green MLC
Committee Chair

Submission on behalf of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council.

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) represents 500 High School and Central School Principals in NSW Public Education.

Vocational Education is an important part of the curriculum in NSW Public Secondary Schools and is generally delivered to students through TAFE Colleges (TVET) or through schools delivering the course (SVET). A smaller number of students access VET through private providers.

1a Factors influencing student choice about entering the vocational education and training system.
There are many reasons why students pick VET courses. Some of the reasons are very personal, such as pure interest, whilst other students may be more influenced by potential career opportunities. In some cases student choice is driven by the subjects that are available in each school, and what times they are offered.

The range of VET courses offered varies from school to school depending on the location of the school, access to TAFE, availability of trained and accredited staff willing to teach VET, as well as having approval from the Department of Education Registered Training Authority (RTO) to run VET frameworks courses.

Transport and travel costs are a factor for most students doing a VET course outside of their school. Travel to TAFE or a private provider can be significant in both city and country areas as not all courses are available at the nearest TAFE setting. Many courses run into the early evening and this also poses issues for students often travelling alone, or who have after school employment or sporting commitments.

Students who leave their school setting to attend VET courses may also be missing lessons timetabled at the school. This has an impact on the workload for students as they need to catch up on missed lessons to ensure they are meeting Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) course requirements. Some schools and TAFEs have made decisions to run all VET courses on a particular afternoon which allows schools to develop a timetable with minimal impact on student learning. For example, on the Central Coast Tuesday afternoon is when Hunter TAFE runs TVET courses. Schools can timetable to allow senior students to finish early on Tuesday and only the TVET students are then attending classes at TAFE so that they are not missing lessons at school. This is, however, more difficult in some areas where multiple TAFEs are available to students and such coordination is impractical.

Many students pick a VET framework to study with the view of gaining skills that may place them in a favourable position to gain employment when they finish the HSC, or who are hoping to secure an apprenticeship prior to completing their HSC. For example, students may elect to do a construction course if they are planning a career in the building industry, or the entertainment framework to provide them with relevant training and experience in order to get into the entertainment industry.

In rural and remote settings, decisions on VET courses may also be limited by travel and distance, availability of appropriate facilities, the availability of accredited teachers and indeed sufficient numbers needed to make a class viable.

In some settings, students may have started a VET course in Stage 5 and wish to continue it and have early completion. This may allow them to spend more time on other HSC subjects in Year 12 or pursue employment to get into the workforce before the influx of school leavers into the market.

1b The role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry.
In NSW public secondary schools the major providers of VET are the schools themselves and TAFE NSW. There are only small numbers of students accessing private providers. This may change after 2016 when a new model of funding TVET will have evolved following the separation of TAFE from the Department of Education. Principals have concerns that this may lead to increased costs to schools for the provision of TVET, and, as a result, diminish the ability of students to engage in this sector.

The Department of Education has established 4 RTO areas across the state. These RTOs approve what frameworks are able to be run in schools and approve training for staff to run courses. Maintenance and accreditation of teachers to deliver the courses is expensive and the regulation can be both an assistance and an impediment. The RTOs also do internal audits of schools running VET courses to ensure compliance with the ASQA regulations.

In rural and remote areas, the role played by VET is usually conditional upon local TAFE facilities and the availability of trained teachers willing to run the courses and generally does not include the private sector offering VET courses.

1c Factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable VET.
Training and accreditation of teachers; building and maintenance of the facilities needed to run courses; charges set by external providers including TAFE; transport; work placement costs and the cost of compliance through external and internal audits all impact on the affordability of VET delivery.

Students attending TVET courses currently do not get charged for the course. They need to meet any travel costs, but their school is charged for the course through the transfer of teaching time to TAFE. This staffing transfer is passed to TAFE centrally to run the course. Students in Year 11 must do 12 units to satisfy the requirements for a preliminary HSC. In Year 12 they must do a minimum of 10 units. If a student does 2 or 4 units of TVET in Year 11 or 12 then the school loses the staffing for the 2 or 4 units to TAFE. If however the student does the TAFE

units on top of the 12 units in Year 11 or the 10 units in Year 12, the school still loses the staffing even though the student is full time at the school. Should a student enrolled in a TVET course decide after a few weeks that the course is not for them and return full time to the school and cease the TAFE VET course, the school has to accommodate them but does not get back the lost units of staffing reallocated to TAFE.

This situation will change in 2017 with TAFE now outside the Department of Education. Principals are concerned that TVET may become an even more expensive imposition on school staffing. Again, this creates a disincentive for schools to encourage students to undertake vocational education courses.

Many schools, such as The Entrance Senior Campus of Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, actively encourage students to pick SVET rather than TVET courses to minimise the staffing losses should students decide to 'drop' a TVET course. They currently run 40 SVET Classes.

Training and accreditation of teachers is expensive and restricted by the RTO. This creates problems when a staff member moves, becomes sick or retires at short notice once the course is underway. Few schools have trained and accredited backup staff in all frameworks that they run should problems arise with having accredited staff available to teach the class. This creates an ongoing workforce planning problem for the Department of Education.

The cost of having facilities that meet the standards required to deliver some courses can be exorbitant. A commercial kitchen for a high school can cost upwards of $750,000 and there is a requirement that assessment of students in hospitality is conducted in a commercial space. Work placement has an impact on schools as staff are needed to assess the students in the work place. This is often external to the school and involves travel and time which impacts at the school which must provide coverage of timetabled classes by the teacher assessing the student in the work place.

1d Effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training skills and pathways.
The opening up of the market has seen a demise in many TAFE offerings, necessitating additional travel and time if students want to access specific courses. Public schools aim to run as many frameworks as they can, within the constraints of timetables, accredited staff, compliant venues to deliver courses, and approval by the RTO to run the framework, as many students are denied access to private providers because of their economic situation. Some courses can cost upwards of $15,000. Additionally, private providers are not usually willing to vary delivery times to better accommodate the students' school pattern of study for the HSC.

Additional information.
The VET workload for teachers is very demanding. Many schools have indicated that teaching staff are not willing to continue teaching VET subjects because of the demands on them and the impact it has on other classes that they teach.

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The development of 4 RTO's for public schools has created some issues with schools on the edges of the administrative boundaries. These schools sometimes need to seek access to another closer RTO and there are some differences in how the different RTOs operate.

In rural and remote areas, when a trained VET teacher moves on, the issue of replacing them may be more difficult than it is in metropolitan areas due to the limited availability of staff and the cost burden of having to provide ongoing training to cater for the constant 'churn' of staff.

As a result of the improved retention rates for students from Years 10-12, and the subsequent additional demand for VET courses, there is significant pressure on employers in many communities to provide the work placements which BOSTES has determined as mandatory components of all VET courses. Schools are increasingly finding it difficult to source sufficient workplaces for the increasing number of students.

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