

# Enhancing the standing of vocational education and the occupations it serves

The standing of vocational education is central to how it is perceived in the community, resourced and supported by government, attracts students and is able to realise its important social and economic purposes.

Yet, that standing is often low. This has a consequences for how it is manifested and resourced , its purposes, the kinds of programs it offers, how they are offered, how what is learnt is assessed and how people engage with it

Much of that low standing is a product of societal sentiments about the occupations VET serves. These are often based more on historical and cultural mores, contemporary aspirations and preferences than informed, considered and factual accounts.

Suggests need for a: i) public education process to promote social investment, ii) actions in and by schools and iii) greater attention to the provision of VET by industry groups, and both state and federal governments

Informed by four current research projects

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# Progression

Standing of vocational education

Consequences of that standing

Historical and contemporary factors

Experiences from other countries

Accounts and suggestions from Australia

Ways forward



# Standing and status of vocational education: a global issue

United Kingdom – Wolf reports (2011, 2016)

Germany – ‘war for apprentices’ (Deissinger)

Australia – concerns about preference for higher education leading to skill shortages and ‘un-employable’ graduates (Bradley, 2008; UA 2017)

Switzerland – too many young people engaging in degrees with no specific employment outcomes

South Korea – strong societal disaffection with manufacturing work (Cho & Apple)

Singapore – ITE

Key concerns: i) young people not being attracted and ii) kinds of young people needed for areas of skill shortage.

BiBB/Cedefop conference (2017)

Recent UNESCO-UNEVOC virtual conference on Improving the image of TVET (July-August 2018)  
– 346 participants from 82 countries

## UNESCO virtual conference: some perspectives

“There are very few youth who want to take up Vocational and technical training because they do not want to be viewed as failures (Kenya).”

“... as we all may know TVET is, at best, viewed as a second or non-preferred choice (Ghana)”.

“The overall perception of TVET in Nigeria is generally seen to be poor.” This is characterized by low enrolment of students, apparent lack of interest in the field by students and parents, slim chances of career progression from technical colleges to universities ... “

“Most Nigerian parents view Vocational courses as the last resort for their wards.”

“In Romania, despite the programmatic drive to reshape the image of initial VET, it has a discrediting societal bias.”

“TVET is still mostly seen as being suited for learners who are "academically challenged" and whose only option is to "work with their hands". (Barbados)

“ To many people, the vocational trades are viewed as "hands dirty" types of skills.” (Ethiopia)

“In China, the image of TVET is low or poor, compared with the corresponding levels of education ...”,

Improving the image of TVET: Making TVET attractive to youth (UNESCO-UNEVOC July 2018)

## UNESCO report on work-based learning programs in Arab region (2018)

Societal perspectives of VET and the occupations it serves in Arab region countries

... there is a vicious cycle of negative image, low quality and low self-esteem related to TVET, its students and even its teachers in the Egyptian society and culture. This phenomena, is well documented and acknowledged, however, very little is being done to create awareness to change this. (El-Ashmawi, 2017, p. 5)

Social perspective towards vocational training in general is negative which led to minimal participation in VET in Jordan. (Rawashdeh, 2017, p. 14)

... TVET in Lebanon is socially looked as low image, and the choice of those who have no choice. (Ghneim, 2017, p. 16)

In general, it is socially looked at the TVET sector as low image, and the choice of those who have no choice: it remains a second option for youngsters.... The image of the apprenticeship training and WBL schemes is looked at in a lower social view – Palestine (Jweiles, 2017, p. 6)

Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – mature vocational systems

Very high aspiration of young people and their parents

# Consequences of that standing here

Participation – reluctance to consider and participate (Gore et al 2007), parental support and enterprise sponsorship

Lack of social investment by federal government and community

Narrow and erroneous views about the kind and character of VET provisions:

i) knowledge to be learnt (i.e. measurable and easy);

ii) educational provision (e.g. modularised, pragmatic); and

iii) duration of courses (i.e. shortening of programs).

*But how informed is all of this?*

Situational requirements (non-endorsed elements of TPs)

Denies the nature of much occupational performance - novel activities (PIAAC 2013)

Non-routine problem-solving required by all kinds of Australian workers



## Australian PIAAC data - Problem solving by occupations

Problem solving	Occupation	n	Never (%)	Less than once a month (%)	Less than once a week (%)	At least once a week (%)	Everyday (%)
<b>Routine problem solving</b> How often work involves confronting simple problems (under 5 minutes to identify a solution)	Skilled workers	1047	6.1	8.4	7.4	25.4	52.7
	Professional	2545	1.8	4.6	5.1	23.9	64.7
	Technical	40	2.5	2.5	5	15	75
	Service workers	1502	6.2	10.3	9.1	23.1	51.4
	Operatives	427	8.7	10.3	10.5	22.7	47.8
<b>Non-routine problem-solving</b> How often work involves confronting demanding problems (5-30 minutes to identify a solution)	Skilled workers	1047	18.5	18.6	20.2	30.1	12.5
	Professional	2541	4.6	13.3	20.4	41.6	20.2
	Technical	40	-	15	12.5	37.5	35
	Service workers	1499	25.3	22.8	17.7	24.9	9.2
	Operatives	426	32.2	25.8	13.4	18.8	9.9

43% of Skilled workers, 73% of Technical workers, 34% of service workers and 29% of operatives engage in non-routine problem-solving of the kind that requires higher cognitive capacities and contributions, at least weekly. Often, higher levels than those reporting as Professional

So, from where do societal views about the standing of occupations and VET arise?

The standing of occupations and their preparation is deeply rooted in societal values:

Across human history, 'privileged others' have decided the worth of occupations and their preparation (Billett 2011):-

Aristocrats

Theocrats

Plutocrats

Bureaucrats and academics (e.g. Stenhouse, Oakshott)

Nearly all of these views advanced in the absence of voices of those who practice, learn and assist others learn those occupations

Extends to curriculum development (e.g. DACUM)

Also, in the absence of evidence, based on unsubstantiated sentiments

Need to engage more with: i) practitioners and ii) learners



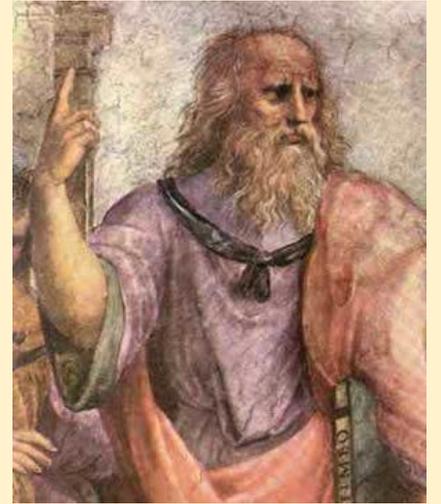
# Hellenic Greece

Plato distinguished among:

*Artisans* - engaged in activities such as building, carpentry, pottery, weaving; - leading to tangible product or services;

*Artists* - musicians, painters, poetry who produce something concrete, beautiful and useful; and

*Professions* – medical, legal, professor, theological, military



Artisans and artists' work belonged to that side of life which the average free born Greek citizen regarded as “banausic” and unworthy of his serious attention ..." (Lodge 1947)

The citizens must not lead the life of mechanics or tradesmen, which is ignoble and far from conducive of virtue. (Aristotle, 1964 p. 60, cited in Elias 1995)

Plato viewed artisans as being incapable of generating new ideas and "had to wait for God to invent a solution“ to their problems (Farrington 1966: 105).

... human capacities had little to do with the effectiveness of their enactment ... nature gives the increase. Human reason does little compared with nature.” (Lodge 1947:16)

The nurse and 'tutor' were domestic servants, who were of no particular use in other respects (Lodge 1947 p.35)

... the lowest form of education to be for those who worked with their hands and not with their minds" – this was to be referred to as technical from the Greek *techne* – to make (Elias 1995)

## Enduring legacies

### 1. Low standing and limited requirements of many occupations

- simple, easy to learn (short-term training, low level certification), justifies reducing duration of trade training
- measurable outcomes (e.g. competency-based assessment)
- hierarchical qualification frameworks (e.g. AQF)

### 2. Limited capacities of many workers

- beliefs about these workers, their work and learning (AQF, spokespersons)
- VET teachers are often positioned as mere implementers of what others decide is important for their students



That legacy persists up to contemporary times

Class	Occupations
Class I	High-grade professionals, managers, administrators and large proprietors
Class II	Lower grade professionals and managers, and higher grade technicians
Class III	Routine non-manual workers
Class IV	Small proprietors and the self-employed
Class V	Lower-grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers
Class VI	Skilled manual workers
Class VII	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers

Occupational desirability scales (Hope-Goldthorpe Scale 1974)

## Sources of that standing: Contemporary

Aspirational generations: wanting clean, high status work

### Young people

Key influences on young people's decision-making

i) parents, ii) school teachers, iii) work experience; iv) school guidance officers (Clements 2014)

i) parents, ii) school/school teachers, iii) friends, iv) school guidance officers (current study)

### Societal sentiments

Berufskonzept – valuing of skilled work empowers societal investment

Pride of trade – importance of skilfulness

Yet, these sentiments differ across countries and times

Importance of vocations – what these occupations mean to those who practice them

Dewey's two goals: i) identifying individuals fit with occupations and ii) developing occupational capacities

## Ways forward: International perspectives

Denmark - The raising of the entry requirements and improved educational facilities and institutions that are modern and attractive to young people (Aarkrog).

UK - use of ambassadors – young people who have engaged in trade related occupations and speak at local schools, to create, also, having pathways to higher education (Unwin).

The Netherlands - Some elements of vocational education are high status, but lower qualification levels are low status. Fourth level MBOs can lead to either good jobs or to universities of applied sciences (de Bruijn).

Germany - vocational technical courses now offered through universities of applied sciences - seen as being more attractive than the dual system approach. Chambers of commerce and large employers are advertising to make occupations more attractive to young people (Deissinger).

Switzerland - standing of VET is improving because of societal concerns (expressed in newspapers and television) about the number of young people enrolling in university courses with no link to the labour market (Stadler).

Finland - the rise of applied universities helped elevate the standing VET and the occupation (Nokelainen).

Norway – Preparing VET teachers in specialised institutions that offer Masters programs and pathways through to PhD has supported its standing (Hiim).

## Ways forward: Processes and outcomes of VET

Parity of esteem argument with higher education is lost/not worth pursuing

Upper secondary - VET in schools is compared with studies leading to university entrance

Post-school – VET is compared to higher education

Not helpful to compare with higher education – view it in its own terms

Graduate Destination Survey – highly support of the TAFE provision, particularly, the identifiable contributions of VET teachers

Evaluations of TAFE emphasise the important contributions by TAFE teachers (U of Melbourne)

High demand for many of the occupations, particularly those that are trade-related

Lots of evidence of impact....

# Ways forward: what Australian TAFE teachers propose (n=281)

An education leading to stable, employable and interesting work, Promote how those occupations can be made realistic and demanding work

<p>Provisions of VET – making them more attractive</p>	<p>“relevant, engaging, modern teaching and learning methodologies.” “Learning for the future; keep it modern and relevant to the jobs most likely to have a future (technology). Make students excited to specialise in something that universities can't offer - for example most people have an idea that universities specialise in the book learning whereas TAFE is hands-on. Make the hands-on exciting.”</p>
<p>Qualities of VET course – what messages might go out</p>	<p>“Students who have undertaken VET/TAFE and gone on to have successful careers, positive stories about what VET/TAFE has helped them achieve.” “Paving your way towards your career whilst you are still in high school. Starting your career early.” “High quality courses and teachers, Practical and applied education with direct links to employers” Practical hands on gaining work ready individuals that can commence in the workplace with skills designed for the practical application.</p>
<p>Action by government – what government might do</p>	<p>“Would increase the funding from Governments to encourage students to undertake VET qualifications as valued careers pathways and provide equal assistance to TAFEs as provided to Universities - thereby placing the same value on trades as academic qualifications.</p>

# So what? how do we redress this situation?

Necessary to engage with young people, parents, school teachers, employers

Giving VET a 'fair go' - Informing about and redressing unhelpful societal sentiments about vocational education and the occupations it serves

Seems that five things need to happen:

- i) enhancing the societal status of occupations;
- ii) informing young people's decision-making about post-school pathways, not just university entrance, incl re-shaping school PIs;
- iii) engaging parent and teachers;
- iv) have VET provisions that are rich, focused yet articulate to higher education; and
- iv) skills sector councils promoting the occupations served by VET

Three areas for action:

- i) Public education/social marketing
- ii) Actions in and by schools
- iii) Government and industry support for and profile of VET provisions, especially TAFE

So what?

Improving the standing of vocational education needs to co-occur with that of promoting the status of occupations.

VET's appeal to the Australian community and government, its attractiveness to young people, their parents and employers is central to its ability to survive and thrive and, importantly, make its essential contributions to the Australian community, its enterprises and young people, and those who work within the VET system.

Not possible to address that standing without considering the occupations it serves.

Suggested a need for:

- i) a public education process – give VET a 'fair go';
- ii) actions by schools to promote, inform and advise; and
- iii) concerted attention and leadership by government and skills sector councils.