



Victorian TAFE  
*Association* Inc  
Reg. No. A37584B

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# Increasing education opportunities for young people in Victoria

*A submission to the Ministerial Review into  
Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways*

If you have any enquiries regarding this submission please contact:

Richard King, Executive Director

or Janelle Thomas, Policy and Project Coordinator

at the Association on (03) 9417 2677

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## *Executive Summary*

The Ministerial Review into Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways has been instigated, in part, to address declining high school retention rates in Victoria. Much of the extensive public debate regarding this issue has assumed that participation in education is a goal itself which, we believe, leads to a misrecognition of the social and economic benefits of education to the individual and the community. Part 1 of this submission explores these benefits and addresses how to achieve higher participation rates in education. It explores the concept of lifelong learning and the role of vocational education and training (VET) in a culture of lifelong learning. In essence, it is argued that a true culture of lifelong learning would value all forms of learning and that, as such, VET would be an integral part of the mainstream curriculum for all secondary students in Australia.

The submission then explores whether or not the current secondary school system in Victoria is promoting the principles identified in Part 1. Following on from the preceding discussion, Part 2 opens with an analysis of the academic bias of the current secondary system despite the rapid growth in VET in recent years. Ironically, even the positive moves toward dual recognition have arguably resulted in a reinforcement of that bias as the VET component of the VCE has had to become more academic in delivery style in order to satisfy university entrance requirements. Hence, university entrance problematically remains the principal focus of the system to the detriment of other forms of education and training.

Part 2 also critically analyses the funding crisis that has characterised VET in Schools delivery. While a call for increased funding is, perhaps, predictable, it makes it no less relevant. The under-funding of VET in Schools and VET generally has a number of serious ramifications which lead to the situation whereby institutional needs and budgets drive the system rather than quality educational outcomes. Under-funding has effectively discouraged collaboration between key education bodies; has seen student support services eroded; has seen VET in Schools outsourced to the lowest bidder rather than the best provider and has seen TAFE Institutes who collaborate with schools to offer VET doing so at a significant financial loss. Thus, while we are encouraged by the Government's public support for VET in Schools since it has come into office, we call upon them to reinforce such support with the significant financial and policy commitment required to improve the system.

The final section of the submission makes some practical suggestions as to where the increased public funds we argue for in Part 2 should be directed. It should be stressed that we see this stage of the Review as the beginning of the process of reforming the Victorian secondary school sector and that we assume that the Review working groups convening in the coming months will deal more closely with the specific outcomes of

the Review. However, we do explore some of the delivery options available and conclude, in essence, that the way forward for VET in Schools is increased collaboration between existing public education bodies.

It has been suggested that VET in Schools could be improved by increased capital funding for schools. Contrary to this, we argue that in most cases students and the system as a whole would be better served by utilising the capital equipment and facilities already available at TAFE Institutes. This does not mean that we are proposing a one-size-fits-all model - quite the opposite. There are some instances in which such collaboration may be impossible or unnecessary such as, for example, in particular rural areas where the distance between the school and TAFE sites is too great. Similarly, in low capital course delivery areas many schools are well-equipped to deliver the VET program themselves. Consequently, we are not arguing for increased collaboration between our members and secondary schools because of sectional interests, rather, we wholeheartedly believe that such collaboration is both sensible and desirable if it is the needs of the students driving the education system of the future.

A collaborative model as outlined above represents a financially responsible model for Government which would allow the direction of funding into crucial areas of VET in Schools delivery. Part 3 provides a summary of where such funds should be directed. Most importantly, recurrent funding for VET in Schools needs to be increased at least to equal course delivery to other students studying the same curriculum - course delivery to secondary students is certainly no less expensive than delivery to anyone else. There are also infrastructure issues which require funding such as student support structures; marketing of VET; staff development (particularly for careers and education counsellors); transportation between sites; capital funding for rural schools as necessary; funding for pilots into innovative on-line delivery methods and administrative support to facilitate collaboration between TAFE Institutes and schools.

It should be stressed that our members are very keen to work with schools, not against them, in order to strive for the best quality educational outcomes for all students in the Victorian secondary system. Sectional interests and territoriality must be put aside if the best possible VET in Schools delivery is to ensue. The Victorian TAFE Association looks forward to being part of the process to reform the secondary system so that it can achieve the principles associated with lifelong learning, and we welcome the opportunity to work with all of the key stakeholders in the coming months to begin this timely process of reform.

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## *Preamble*

This submission is made by the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) to the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria. In particular, consideration will be given to the role of vocational education and training (VET) in addressing the needs of young people in Victoria and the provision of quality educational programs and services for young people in the Victorian secondary school system.

The Association is well placed to comment on these issues from the TAFE perspective. By way of introduction, this Association is the peak employer body for the TAFE industry in Victoria and we have as our members all of Victoria's TAFE Institutes and the four Multi-sector Universities with whom - despite the tight deadline for submissions - we have consulted widely for this Review. Our aim is to support and advocate for Victorian TAFE Institutes in their delivery of world class vocational education and training (VET).

The VTA welcomes this Review and is encouraged by the many positive indications in the Terms of Reference of an educationalist focus which will map the nature, needs and quality of the system. It is our firm belief that these must be the driving force for change, and not arbitrarily decided administrative factors which have been deemed necessary to meet the fiscal demands of government.

However, while we are positive about the educationalist focus of the Review, it is our belief that the Terms of Reference are, in some senses, too narrow and the VTA would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the bigger issues at stake. While closely addressing the principal themes of the Review, this submission will go beyond the Terms of Reference in two respects. Firstly, it will look at education and training options for all secondary students rather than confining the discussion to *post-compulsory* education and training. Secondly, it will go beyond the needs of students alone to focus instead on the needs of the community, industry, the nation and other stakeholders albeit with the needs of the students as the principal focus.

This submission does not focus on the failings of the existing system nor does it simply suggest that more money is required from the State and Federal Governments for VET in schools programs. Rather, it aims to improve the current system by providing guidance and advice on how best to utilise the increased public funds we will argue cogently for.

The submission is structured into three parts. Part 1 addresses the principles behind offering VET to school students. It explores the benefits of participation in education generally and the role VET has to play in improving Australia's alarming highschool retention rates. Part 2 explores the current system and essentially argues that, despite the growth in VET in Schools in recent years, the Australian secondary system is still

problematically academically biased. This section of the submission also addresses the current ad-hoc and inadequate funding of VET in Schools. Part 3 draws the first two sections together and makes suggestions as to how the current system can be improved. While most of the specific details of programs to follow will, we assume, be addressed in the Review working groups in coming months, this Part offers some concrete suggestions for improvements of the current system.

We see ourselves not as critics of reform, but as partners in reform and we consider this submission to be part of the *beginning* of the process that builds stronger and workable linkages between TAFE and schools through this opportunity to reform the Victorian secondary education sector. We are optimistic about the further consultation that will ensue in the coming months in order to debate the specific desired outcomes of the Review and we further assume that the Victorian TAFE sector will be firmly included in such a process.

The Victorian TAFE Association welcomes the opportunity to work with governments, both State and Federal, in pursuit of the continuous improvement of the public provision of VET in order to contribute to a culture of lifelong learning in Australia. Such a culture cannot be nurtured without close attention to the needs of our young learners.

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## *List of Recommendations*

*RECOMMENDATION 1: That quality education outcomes form the underlying principle of VET in Schools delivery and that this be facilitated by increased collaboration between existing public education bodies, namely secondary schools and TAFE Institutes*

*RECOMMENDATION 2: That this collaboration involve the utilisation of existing public assets, particularly the equipment and facilities in Victorian TAFE Institutes*

*RECOMMENDATION 3: The form of this collaboration be debated in the Review focus groups due to convene in the coming months*

*RECOMMENDATION 4: That secondary students have the opportunity to become more familiar with TAFE Institutes and what they can offer via Taster Programs and campus tours*

*RECOMMENDATION 5: That a pilot is funded in which Taster programs are offered to year 8 & 9 students*

*RECOMMENDATION 6: That in consultation with the VET sector, a state-wide marketing strategy to promote the general benefits of VET be funded and coordinated by the State Government*

*RECOMMENDATION 7: That further funding be supplied directly to TAFE Institutes for their own specific marketing strategy to promote the benefits of VET to their community*

*RECOMMENDATION 8: That Government provide increased recurrent funding for VET in schools programs as well as increased funding for necessary infrastructure developments to improve VET in schools delivery as outlined in this submission rather than providing increased capital investment for schools.*



**PART 1:**  
*What are the  
principles behind and  
benefits of VET in  
schools?*

*Education will play a central role in both personal and community development [in the twenty-first century]. Its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents and creative potential, including both the responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our goals.<sup>1</sup>*

Jaques Delors, UNESCO

It is necessary, at this point, to clarify the meaning of the often used phrase "VET in Schools" which, we have discovered in our consultations for this submission, means different things to different people. The sense in which we use the phrase in this submission is broad. That is, we take it to mean the provision of VET to school students, as opposed to the delivery of VET on-school-site. This delivery may take a number of forms and the options in regard to this will be explored throughout the submission.

**a) The benefits of encouraging participation in education**

There has been a significant amount of discussion in recent times about the issue of high-school retention rates in Australia due to this country's failure to achieve the 1990s Finn targets which committed the nation to achieving a rate of 95% participation in post compulsory education for 19 year olds.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this rate hovers around the 70% mark with approximately 30% of school students dropping-out of secondary school. Moreover, the attrition figures are much higher for Indigenous Australians and for other cohorts in specific geographical areas.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this debate has often been underpinned by the assumption that participation in education - as opposed to learning - is a goal in itself. Ironically, this has resulted in a lack of understanding of the real benefits of participation in education and thus a simplification of the reasons why such participation should be encouraged.

What is clear is that participation in education and training must not be a strategy to address current political "hot topics" or institutional needs alone. Dorothy Kotz, for example, suggests that "[s]ome training programs have been offered in the past as a means to reduce unemployment statistics."<sup>4</sup> This does virtually nothing for the student or community at large and, as she goes on to say, does little more than make the government look as though they are doing something.

The Shadow Minister for Education, The Hon Phil Honeywood has publicly declared recently, that he believes that low highschool retention rates in Australia are not necessarily problematic as young people often *choose* to exit the secondary system in order to pursue other forms of training and/or employment. While the assumptions that secondary students are leaving school by choice and for greener pastures are highly problematic, what Mr Honeywood's statements do reflect is the need for clarification of the benefits of staying in the education system and the drawbacks of exiting it early.

In order to explore the benefits of participation in education, it is appropriate to cite research by the OECD - one of the leading world authorities in this area. The OECD's research indicates that the benefits of such participation are both individual and collective:

There is ample evidence that more secondary and tertiary education for young people improves their individual economic and social opportunities. There is also growing evidence... of a payoff for whole societies from increasing the educational attainment of population.<sup>5</sup>

The findings of the often-cited UNESCO report *Learning: The Treasure*

*Within* support these contentions.<sup>6</sup> It is for these broad reasons that declining highschool retention rates are a critical issue in Australia at the dawn of a new century. A more specific discussion of these benefits follows.

One of the principal benefits of participation in education is derived from the correlation between self-esteem and education, particularly in young people. Respect for, access to and participation in education are extremely important to the general well-being of all young people but especially those from disadvantaged groups. In an Australian context, this includes groups from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural and regional students, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with disabilities and Indigenous Australians.

The chance to increase educational opportunities for young people (taking into account the connection between education and self-esteem) is vital in a country such as Australia which has a significant youth and general suicide problem. Indeed, nationally Australia's suicide toll is one of the highest in the world and exceeds the annual road toll.<sup>7</sup> As Senator Carr recently suggested in Parliament, if international studies are taken into consideration, the evidence does suggest that education has a positive effect on the physical and mental health (in regards to self-esteem) of socio-economically disadvantaged citizens and their children.<sup>8</sup>

Self-esteem, it would seem, is also connected to employment outcomes and, perhaps in this case, the prospect of positive employment outcomes for students. All the research indicates that labour market outcomes are improved the longer one is in the education system. The work of the Dusseldorf Skills Forum suggests that the incidence of unemployment for those students who do not complete year twelve in Australia is twice as high than for those who do and that the completion of year twelve ensures an increase of hourly earnings by an average of 4%.<sup>9</sup> OECD research also indicates that "[r]ising skill demands in OECD countries have made upper secondary qualifications the minimum level credential required for successful labour market entry."<sup>10</sup>

The correlation between employment, education and training is not only - or even primarily - the result of the technical skills and knowledge acquired through education and training. Arguably more important is the proven connection between participation in education and the development of social skills such as cooperation and interaction with others and other skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking.<sup>11</sup> According to NCVER research, these skills are valued extremely highly by employers.<sup>12</sup> When students exit the education system prematurely their ability to develop such skills is severely compromised and they are twice as likely to be involved in marginalised activities.<sup>13</sup> This social and labour-market marginalisation often persists throughout life.<sup>14</sup>

In Australia, as elsewhere, there is another crucial factor which favours moves toward increasing the educational attainment of the population. As is often reported in the media, Australia is currently in the grip of what has been described by Access Economics as a "Skills Crisis" which, Access predicts, will fuel wage inflation and interest rate rises and could potentially cripple industry growth in key areas in future years, thus compromising Australia's international competitiveness.<sup>15</sup> Decreasing retention rates are highly problematic as, in essence, they represent a de-skilling of the Australian population at a time when industry is calling for higher skilled workers.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from the broader social benefits which ensue from a highly accessible quality education and training system and the principles involved in terms of the contribution of education to equality of opportunity, the benefits to the individual and nation of educational attainment are also economic. For example, early school leavers are conservatively estimated to cost the nation \$2.6 billion annually.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, as implied above, Australia's ability to be economically competitive in an increasingly global market is reliant upon a steady stream of educated and skilled workers. To this end, expenditure on education must be viewed by Government at an investment rather than as a cost.

## **b) How to improve participation rates in education**

The question then remains of how Australia can get more people to participate in education. In the context of this Review, the specific question to be addressed is how to get more *young* people to participate in education. While the 15-19 year old cohort is not TAFE Institutes' principal cohort, they are nonetheless extremely important to our Institutes and we believe that our Institutes have a significant role to play in improving the educational outcomes for these students.

The first general principle involved in improving retention rates is the development of a culture of lifelong learning. While this is perhaps an over-used phrase, it is useful to reflect on what it actually means. Underlying the vision of lifelong learning is respect for education. Respect for education is fostered when an individual has access to education which is relevant to them and which leads to positive outcomes. Such a culture would value all types of learning equally and would provide a diversity of education options. This is the only way to impart a desire for and pleasure in learning that will persist throughout life.

Therefore, alongside academic study, quality VET needs to be an option which is available to all secondary students. While there are questions of process to be addressed - and a discussion of this follows in Part 3 - VET needs to be introduced to students at an early age for two reasons. First-

ly, research indicates that early school leavers have become alienated from the school system and/or exit the system well before the post compulsory level.<sup>18</sup> There seems to be consensus among commentators that "many students will be motivated to stay at school if they can study industry-based subjects. Principals are reporting that some students, who would have left after year ten, are staying on."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to note that disadvantaged students, in particular, seem to benefit from and participate in VET. For example, as the table below indicates, such students are often represented in general VET training in excess of their representation in the population at large.

<b>Student Cohort</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Module Completers</b>
Indigenous Students	1.8 %	2.5%
NESB Students	30.9%	24.8%
Students with Disabilities	4.3%	8.1%
Unemployed before, employed after training	47.4%	40.0%

**NCVER Students Outcomes Survey, 1999.<sup>20</sup>**

International comparisons bear out this suggestion. While, for example, participation in VET in public highschools declined in the United States between 1982 and 1994, the exceptions to this rule were participation by black and NESB students whose participation levels increased, and students with disabilities whose participation level remained the same.<sup>21</sup>

Many traditional attritionists are alienated by the secondary system partly as a result of the focus on academic subjects in many schools, to which a number of them do not relate well. This often leads them to view upper-school education as irrelevant and/or beyond their capabilities.<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding this, and in relation to the second reason VET must be introduced early in the education system, there is a danger in the above argument of strengthening the perception of VET as something one does if they *can't* cope with academic studies.

The VTA sees addressing this cultural prejudice against VET as one of the principal aims of the Review. The true potential of VET in Schools will not be realised until cultural shifts in attitudes toward vocational training in general take place. Such attitudes persist despite the research that clearly shows the positive benefits of such training to both the individual and the community.<sup>23</sup> This submission will make some concrete suggestions in Part 3 as to how the necessary cultural shifts can begin to take place.

If VET is to be seen as a real and valued option and as a legitimate way of learning then it should be viewed as a *choice* and not as an alternative to academic study. A "second choice" attitude undermines the principle that people learn differently and equally and that many of the outcomes of different styles of learning are the same. If VET is introduced only at the post compulsory level then it will never be seen as part of the mainstream and will always be seen as an add-on to "real" education. It needs to be integrated into the school system as early as possible if it is to

**PART 2:**  
***Is the Victorian  
education and  
training system achieving  
the  
principles identified in  
Part 1?***

*We recommend an increase in the amount of collaboration between TAFE Institutes and secondary schools, which should be encouraged and facilitated by government at all levels.<sup>24</sup>*

House of Representatives Standing  
Committee on Employment,  
Education and Training

receive the legitimacy it deserves.

**a) The academic bias of the current secondary school system in  
Victoria**

Leading on from the preceding discussion, it is clear that the current Victorian secondary school system is academically focussed. While the number of schools offering VET and the number of students participating in it have increased steadily in recent years, the current Australian school system still displays an academic bias. Ironically, even the attempts to integrate VET into the VCE have reinforced this bias and, from the point of view of many of our members, the move from "VET in schools" to "VET in VCE" represents a symbolic hijacking of the original intentions behind introducing VET in schools.

While the moves toward dual recognition are an important part of seamless education, it must be remembered that VET was originally introduced into schools to cater to the different learning needs of up to 70% of the school population. An unfortunate side effect of the recognition of VET subjects in the VCE has been that VET has had to be delivered and assessed more like academic subjects to satisfy university entry requirements. As one of our members put it, in a general sense, this has meant that VET delivery has had to resemble "book-learning" more and more closely. This undermines the original principle of catering to different learning styles of students and furthermore, it reinforces university study as the principal focus of the system.

Indeed, the research conducted by Teese, Gulen and O'Brien into pathways between middle-level training and higher education cautioned against a similar phenomenon. They suggest that there is a risk that

the need to improve the vocational benefits of middle-level training as such may be overlooked by a concern for building pathways into higher education which are likely to be taken by only a handful of the most mobile students.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, their research shows that approximately one in ten university students were from a TAFE background in 1997.<sup>26</sup> While this research is not related to VET in schools directly, the principle of university entrance being the primary focus of the education system despite the relatively small numbers of students who access it, is the same.

In discussing the general disillusionment noted in young people during the course of their research, the previously cited UNESCO report suggests that young people's "distress is increased by a widespread all-or-nothing obsession with access to higher education."<sup>27</sup> This is a cultural obsession and any attempts to change it will require a multi-faceted and long-term plan. However, this cultural perception is supported by policy efforts which focus on, in Teese's words, the "vertical link" between schools and universities.<sup>28</sup> To this end, VET must be seen as much more than a stepping stone into university.

It should be noted at this point, that we are not suggesting that the pathways between VET and universities should be eroded - quite the contrary. However, this pathway should not be promoted as the best or only one. VET must be viewed as "a positive choice for those who prefer a vocational or practical learning environment"<sup>29</sup> rather than as a failure in the academic stream. Such a shift in perception is crucial if there is to be a change in the fact that, while Australia performs well in terms of the number of tertiary graduates it produces compared to other OECD countries, it lags behind in terms of the overall level of education attainment of its adult population.<sup>30</sup>

**b) Band-aid funding solutions: quality educational outcomes v. lowest cost delivery**

One important and predictable aspect of the overall problem of the perception of the value of VET is that rate at which it is funded. The total expenditure from private and public sources as a percentage of the GDP reveals that non-university education is funded at one fifth the rate of university education.<sup>31</sup> This is relevant in two senses. Firstly, it is indicative of the priorities of the Australian education system and secondly, it reveals how severely under-funded the VET sector is.

This is also true of VET in schools which has been characterised by a "band-aid" funding mentality. This has seen VET in schools funded by the Government at up to *half* the rate at which they are funded for delivery to all other age cohorts! There is clearly no justification for this funding arrangement and we can see no reason why the Government has assumed that VET delivery to school students is less expensive than delivery to other students in the exact same area. If anything, due to the pastoral care requirements of younger learners, such delivery is more expensive.

*Pricing Structures*

During the consultation with our members for this Review submission, we heard time and time again of the frustration associated with the under-funding of VET in schools programs. While calling for increased funding is often overlooked due to its predictability, we would ask the Government to seriously consider the effects of inadequately funding VET in schools.

One of the essential problems which has ensued from the "efficiency" drives in the education sector in recent years has been the pressure that funding constraints have put upon the relationship between key education bodies. When funding is so incredibly tight, key education bodies are, in effect, encouraged to compete with one another rather than collaborate. Therefore, institutional needs and sectoral interests drive the system

rather than the needs of the students in that system.

We believe that the VET in schools programs require increased funding because, currently, practically all of the Institutes that collaborate with schools to offer VET do so at a significant financial loss. They continue to participate in such programs due to their commitment to maintain community service obligations but this, in effect, sees them differentially funding a Government obligation and this cannot continue. Combined with the funding constraints they are already suffering, this represents an over-bearing burden on Victorian TAFE Institutes.

As we have consistently argued in previous submissions to Government, one of the principal problems with the under-funding of all types of education is that student support services are effected drastically. Of particular concern in this sense, is under-funding in the area of student careers and education advice. The undermining of the quality of such advice to students represents a misguided financial decision in the sense that high quality careers & education advice and support reduces the risk of attrition and therefore acts as investment protection.

#### *Staff Expertise*

The under-funding of VET in schools places Institutes under further financial pressure in relation to staff costs in the delivery of VET to school students. Due to the fact that sessional teachers have often had very little involvement with the Institute, many Institutes we spoke to were reluctant to place such teachers with secondary students.

Of course, we do not mean to imply that sessional staff are sub-standard or untrustworthy. However, what we did hear from our members is that most of them prefer to use longer-term employees as a result of the vulnerability of many of these students. Sessional staff, due to the nature of their employment, are most often not involved in structured staff development activities and it is difficult to assess whether they are suitable for delivery to younger students.

#### *Outsourcing VET*

A further flow-on effect of the under-funding of VET in schools programs is that educational outcomes have been subsumed under the drive for lowest cost delivery. This has encouraged schools to deliver VET programs themselves which, due to lack of equipment or expertise, really should have been out-sourced. As schools have been funded at lower and lower rates, the amount they can and/or will pay for the VET they do out-source has been driven down through competitive tendering. In many cases, schools have opted for the lowest cost delivery rather than the best quality delivery in order to accommodate their budgets. It's legitimate to ask where the needs of the students - for whom the education system ultimately exists - are in such an arrangement?

This Association has previously expressed serious concern about the quality control measures for private providers which have been echoed by many of the submissions to the recent federal inquiry into the quality of education and training by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee. While we acknowledge that our Institutes are extremely competitive in the User Choice system, we are also concerned that the competition between public and private providers is not equal. Private providers are not subjected to the same accountability requirements as our Institutes and arguably, in many cases, have a business culture which is more concerned with profit than educational accountability. We heard many instances of schools tendering out to private providers due to the low cost of delivery they promised, only to discover that that delivery was inadequate or, that the provider couldn't actually deliver what they had promised at the rate quoted. This is a costly mistake for both the students involved and the school.

#### **c) On-the-job delivery v. Off-the-job delivery**

This Association wholeheartedly supports the concept of the VET Triangle - that is, the link between education, training and employment - and we see on-the-job training as a vital component of that triangle. However, while we appreciate the benefits of on-the-job training and heed Industry's call for it, we firmly feel that there must be an acknowledgement that none of us "can do it all".

While on-the-job and off-the-job training both have their place in the VET sector, we are concerned with the growing number of reports which suggest that training is often secondary to the operational needs of business in on-the-job arrangements. The conflicting interests between the needs of an individual employer for whom "just in time" training may be adequate and their duty as a trainer to provide for the learning needs of the student, is clearly apparent.

There is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest that the RTO registration process is seriously flawed and we have heard of many instances in which RTOs are ill-equipped and have insufficiently qualified trainers. The audit procedures in relation to this are inadequate and the conclusion that employers can and will provide adequate training to students must be made extremely carefully. We believe that, along with an improved auditing system, a combination of on and off-the-job training and education is preferable to either standing alone as it broadens the learning outcomes for the student and, just as importantly in relation to the preceding discussion, results in reciprocal monitoring.



**PART 3:**  
*In what ways could the  
Victorian post-compulsory  
education and  
training pathways  
be improved?*

As has been argued, high quality VET should be available to all secondary school students so that seventy per cent of the school population is not placed at an educational disadvantage. Furthermore, in order to provide further options for those students at-risk of leaving the education system, this option should be introduced at the lower-school level to minimise this cohort's alienation from school before it is irreparable. The remainder of the submission will provide some recommendations as to how the principles that have been discussed in Parts 1 & 2 can be applied.

**a) Program Delivery: putting students first**

There are a number options available for the delivery of VET in schools. They include:

- Schools deliver the full program on-school-site with their staff
- Schools collaborate with TAFE to deliver the program
- Schools tender out to private providers to deliver the program

There is no one model of delivery that is suitable in all cases all of the time and we are not proposing an inflexible "one size fits all" agenda with TAFE Institutes at the centre. While we believe our members have a crucial role to play in VET in Schools, our principal concern is quality educational outcomes and not sectional institutional interests.

As a general principle, we believe that the VET in Schools system in Victoria can be vastly improved in two ways: increased collaboration between TAFE Institutes and schools and, increased funding to enable that collaboration to be effective. In essence, this excludes the third option outline above. This is quite deliberate because, as discussed previously, the VTA has serious concerns about the highly inadequate quality control measures currently in place. Furthermore, given the public education infrastructure that is already available, we see the third option as superfluous.

Our reasons for advocating increased collaboration between TAFE Institutes and schools rather than the delivery of VET exclusively by the schools themselves are simple and essentially two-fold. Currently, many VET courses available in secondary schools are taught on-school-site by secondary teachers who, through no fault of their own, are insufficiently qualified to teach vocational subjects and who have out-dated and limited teaching resources.

Too often, schools adopt VET programs to address staffing problems as students turn their backs on particular academic subjects. The quality of VET offered is severely compromised in such a situation in which institutional needs are driving the system rather than educational outcomes.

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TAFE Institutes are public assets which are equipped with world-class equipment. Institutes have capital equipment valued at millions of dollars. This money has already been spent by government and need not be spent again in order to equip schools with the necessary equipment to make them industry-relevant. The investment required to equip schools with the necessary capital to deliver VET is far greater than the investment required to improve the infrastructure of our Institutes to deliver VET to school age students (a discussion of this follows).

The collaboration between schools and TAFE Institutes could take a number of forms and we encourage Government to look more fully at the options in the Review focus groups in coming months. Some of the options proposed here and elsewhere include:

- Pathways Programs
- Taster Programs
- Vocational Colleges<sup>32</sup>
- Regional Boards
- Cluster Programs

However, it is worth noting that one of the highly successful forms of collaboration between Institutes and schools is the *Pathways* program, which sees mid-to-upper high-school students attend an Institute for VET training one day per week where they receive training by experienced TAFE teachers on contemporary equipment. Feedback given to our teachers suggests that, for many of these students, this is the one day a week that they feel competent and comfortable in a learning environment. This program has a very high follow through rate (in Victoria 75% compared with 19% for VET in schools) which, given the fact that many of the students involved are traditionally attritionists, is testament to the success of the program.

Upon completion of these *Pathways* programs, students are well-equipped to enter pre-apprenticeships and, in some cases, apprenticeships. This is relevant in two senses. Many students who enter apprenticeships and traineeships are deemed under-qualified by competent TAFE assessors in basic areas when they begin their training. While pre-apprenticeship programs address this to some extent, there is often a need for assistance even at this initial stage of entry into the pre-apprenticeship program. The pre-apprentice does require basic skills that many educationally disadvantaged people don't have - particularly numeracy and literacy skills - and *Pathways* programs offer them this.

*Pathways* programs are valuable in terms of providing the opportunity for many educationally disadvantaged students to develop the belief that they are competent enough to consider further training and education.

Self-respect and respect for education are alien concepts to many of these students. The benefits of the trickle-down cultural shifts that this engenders cannot be over-estimated. The social and economic benefits have been discussed previously.

A further instance in which off-school-site training is conducive to positive educational outcomes is when it is the learning environment rather than the curriculum which is problematic for the student. Many students, who are considered “problem” students at school, make the successful transition from school to TAFE Institutes where they are often treated in a more adult manner. Providing an alternative learning environment allows the student to leave behind the scene of past failures or leave an oppressive environment in which, as but one example, they may have been bullied.

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule that off-school-site VET is preferable. In some courses - such as Business Studies for example - where capital investment is low, it is often feasible for schools to deliver the VET themselves. Depending on their resources, they may be able to deliver this aspect of VET on their own, or they may utilise our teaching expertise and other other resources.

We further acknowledge that a program such as *Pathways* may not be appropriate in some rural areas where the distance between the Institute and the school/s may be too great to make it feasible. It is not reasonable to expect rural students to travel large distances to receive their education. To this end, additional funding is required for VET to be delivered in schools in rural areas to address the issues of capital funding for schools and for travel costs for Institute teachers to travel to the school-site where appropriate.

It should now be clear, by arguing for increased collaboration between schools and TAFE we are not arguing that our Institutes are better than schools, nor do we wish to compete with schools or squabble about institutional territoriality. We simply believe that the focus of the system must be what is best for the student; that collaboration between schools and TAFE Institutes is possible and preferable; and, that it is common-sensical to utilise existing public assets wherever possible rather than unnecessarily duplicating resources. The money could surely be better spent elsewhere.

*RECOMMENDATION 1: That quality education outcomes form the underlying principle of VET in Schools delivery and that this be facilitated by increased collaboration between existing public education bodies, namely secondary schools and TAFE Institutes*

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*RECOMMENDATION 2: That this collaboration involve the utilisation of existing public assets, particularly the equipment and facilities in Victorian TAFE Institutes*

*RECOMMENDATION 3: That the form of this collaboration be debated in the Review focus groups due to convene in the coming months*

#### **b) What to offer and when: resisting the one-size fits all approach**

As mentioned above, the "one size fits all" approach to education is inadequate and hence, we are certainly not suggesting that *Pathways* is the only way forward for VET in schools. At present it is generally offered only to post-compulsory students and, in some cases, to students in year ten. This is an appropriate age cohort.

However, as mentioned, younger students also require the option of VET - particularly if we are serious about addressing retention rates. Another program which is currently successful is the *Taster* program which sees students offered a hands-on taster of VET at a TAFE Institute for a day or so. At present, this program is generally only offered to the same age cohort as the *Pathways* program. We see little reason why *Tasters* could not be offered at least at the year nine level. For example, this might involve a secondary teacher taking his/her class to an Institute to work with a TAFE instructor for a day.

In conjunction with an increase in *Taster* programs, we would also encourage an increase in school tours of TAFE. In this case, students and teachers should have the opportunity to tour an Institute or Institutes and observe people learning in different industry sectors. Ideally, they would also have the opportunity to talk with some of the TAFE students who would act as exemplars of the possibilities of VET. Our VET success stories are insufficiently championed and as such, are an under-utilised asset to breakdown ill-founded stereotypes and prejudices.

*RECOMMENDATION 4: That secondary students have the opportunity to become more familiar with TAFE Institutes and what they can offer via Taster programs and campus tours*

*RECOMMENDATION 5: That a pilot is funded in which Taster programs are offered to year 8 & 9 students*

#### **c) Improving the status of VET**

The concept of increasing student's awareness of the benefits of VET obviously needs to be broader than simply getting more students to see

what TAFE Institutes have to offer. In order to address the widespread perception of VET as something you do if you can't get into university - a perception which undermines the very real benefits of VET - a structured marketing campaign is required.

We propose that such a campaign would work on two levels - the state level and the local level. On a state level, an extensive media campaign is required to address the perception of VET in the community. There is little point in encouraging students to see the benefits of VET if their parents, and in some cases their teachers and careers counsellors, do not concur. A structured and broad campaign championing VET success stories and clearly articulating the benefits of VET to the state and nation would not only encourage more people to participate in VET, it would also increase the pride of those who currently do. The specific details of such a campaign should, of course, be developed via extensive consultation with key stakeholders in the VET sector.

However, a state campaign would not be sufficient in itself. Further marketing funding would need to be provided to individual TAFE Institutes so that they can tailor their own marketing strategy to their local community. This is particularly relevant to regional communities who often respond better to a familiar face extolling the benefits of their TAFE Institute than a complete stranger. Similarly, metropolitan Institutes could advertise in their local press promoting the industry areas they offer and the specific benefits of attending their Institute. Moreover, this is especially important to the "less glamorous" industry sectors such as engineering which suffer due to ignorance of the benefits of a career in their area and in which there is a dearth of qualified people.<sup>33</sup>

*RECOMMENDATION 6: That in consultation with the VET sector, a state-wide marketing campaign to promote the general benefits of VET be funded and coordinated by the State Government*

*RECOMMENDATION 7: That further funding be supplied directly to TAFE Institutes for their own specific marketing campaign to promote the benefits of VET to their community*

#### **d) Improving careers and education advice: protecting our investment in education**

Arguably, the academic bias of the secondary system is perpetuated by teachers and, perhaps more importantly, careers counsellors, who come almost exclusively from academic backgrounds who often have no experience of contemporary TAFE. This results in a bias in favour of academic pathways. We heard of many instances where our Institutes have arranged for careers counsellors to tour the campus and discuss some of the VET options available to their students only to discover that

they knew very little about the quality and range of options available to the students they advise.

At the moment, there is no clear system in place to encourage and/or require the participation of careers counsellors in industry exchange programs or tours such as the one mentioned above. We would suggest that a program specifically designed to enhance careers counsellors' understanding of vocational pathways and career opportunities be piloted. We believe that this is an absolutely critical issue for the Review to address.

#### **e) A Summary of where to target increased funds**

Utilising TAFE Institutes rather than spending millions of dollars equipping schools with comparable equipment represents a significant cost-saving for Government.

We believe that the increased funding we have argued for should be targeted specifically at:

- a) Funding VET in schools programs at a rate comparable with other recurrent VET delivery.
- b) Improving student support structures, particularly for "at risk" students.
- c) Providing staff development for TAFE Institute staff in areas such as education delivery to younger students and "at risk" students.
- d) A funding model which reduces the need for Institutes to rely on sessional teaching.
- e) Transportation between school-site and TAFE Institute site - particularly in rural areas where relevant.
- f) Capital funding for rural areas as necessary (that is, where the utilisation of a TAFE Institute is not possible due to distance).
- g) Improving the quality of careers advice to secondary students.
- h) Administrative support to facilitate collaboration between TAFE Institutes and schools.
- i) Pilots of innovative on-line delivery methods.
- j) State and regional VET marketing campaigns.

*RECOMMENDATION 8: That Government provide increased recurrent funding for VET in schools programs as well as increased funding for the necessary infrastructure developments to improve VET in Schools delivery as outlined above rather than providing increased capital investment for schools.*

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## Conclusion

The Victorian TAFE Association welcomes the Ministerial Review into Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways. We are heartened to see that the focus of the Terms of Reference for the Review are primarily educationalist in nature and therefore, that the driving force of the Review is the best outcomes for students - for whom the education sector ultimately exists.

We are pleased to be able to offer this submission as our contribution to the first stage of the Review and we would welcome the opportunity to continue to be involved in the coming stages. Indeed, it is crucial that Victorian TAFE Institutes and multi-sector universities be represented and consulted with in the next phase of the Review which, we assume, will involve fine tuning the recommendations which come out of the first stage.

In essence, our recommendations are two-fold. Firstly, we firmly believe that the best educational outcomes for students in the secondary system will be achieved by increased collaboration between TAFE Institutes and secondary schools. Such collaboration, if further encouraged and facilitated effectively is the key to a flexible and responsive education system.

Secondly, we have argued clearly and concisely for a much-needed increase in funding for VET in Schools programs. Since its appointment, the Government has indicated a firm commitment in the press to many of the principles outlined in this paper. While we are very much encouraged by this, the reality of the current system is that it requires a significant funding commitment.

As we have also argued, increased funding need not be targeted at improving the capacity of schools to offer quality VET as has been suggested elsewhere. Our suggestion that existing public assets - that is, TAFE Institutes - be utilised rather than duplicating resources by equipping schools with specialist equipment, is motivated by common sense and a responsible appraisal of Government's fiscal responsibilities, and not sectional interests. Again, it should be stressed that our Institutes are keen to work *with* schools in Victoria in order to provide the best possible range and quality of educational options for secondary students. Institutional territoriality and bureaucratic imperatives must not be the driving force of the reforms this Review is sure to prompt.

Furthermore, we are keen to warn against any major changes to the VET in Schools sector for the purpose of political expediency alone. Such responses will only harm the system at this point. All solutions sought to improve the current system must be long-term in nature with the needs of the principal stakeholder - that is, the student - firmly driving the agenda.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Jacques Delors. *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report of the International Commission in Education for the Twenty First Century*. UNESCO (Paris 1996) p.6.
- <sup>2</sup> Dusseldorp Skills Forum. *How young people are faring: A national perspective on developments that have affected young people during the 1990s*. Sydney (1999).
- <sup>3</sup> The Hon. David Kemp. "An Australian Perspective." *OECD Conference, Preparing Youth for the 21st Century: The Policy Lessons from the Past Two Decades*. Washington D.C. (23-24 February 1999) p.3.
- <sup>4</sup> The Hon. Dorothy Kotz. "Students and trainees in VET." *Market for Vocational Education and Training: who pays and who profits*. Adelaide: NCVER, p.302.
- <sup>5</sup> OECD. *Education at a Glance - OECD Indicators*. OECD: Centre for Education Research and Innovation (1998) p.148.
- <sup>6</sup> Op.cit., Delors.
- <sup>7</sup> See, Table 9.3. *International Comparison of Selected Causes of Death*, on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Web Page: [www.statistics.gov.au/](http://www.statistics.gov.au/).
- <sup>8</sup> Dr Bob Boughton, Co-operative Research Centre for Indigenous and Tropical Health at the Menzies School of Health and Research. Cited in, The Hon. Senator Kim Carr. *Federal Parliament of Australia - Hansard*. (22 November 1999) p.10257.
- <sup>9</sup> Op.cit., Dusseldorp Skills Forum, p.2.
- <sup>10</sup> Op.cit., OECD, p.163.
- <sup>11</sup> See, Op.cit., Kemp, p.2.
- <sup>12</sup> See, NCVER. *Survey of Employer Views on Vocational Education and Training*. (1999). Also see, Australian Industry Group. *Training to Compete: The Training Needs of Industry*. By the Allen Consulting Group (1999).
- <sup>13</sup> Dusseldorp Skills Forum. "Australia's Youth: reality and risk: A national perspective on developments that have affected 15-19year olds during the 1990s." Sydney (March 1998) p.8.
- <sup>14</sup> Op.cit., OECD, p.348. Also see, Peter Dwyer, the Youth Research Centre. *Opting Out: Early School Leavers to the degeneration of Youth Policy*. National Clearing House for Youth Studies: Tasmania, 1996.
- <sup>15</sup> Sue Lewis. "Access warns of growing skills shortage." *The Australian Financial Review*. (24 January 2000).
- <sup>16</sup> See, Op.cit., AiG report.
- <sup>17</sup> Anthony King. *The Cost to Australia of Early School-Leaving*. Dusseldorp Skills Forum, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling: Canberra (October 1999), p.1.
- <sup>18</sup> See, Bill Sheridan with Margot Eaton & Laurie Bird. *Students at Risk: An Investigative Report*. Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (April 1999).
- <sup>19</sup> Guy Healy, Dorothy Illing & Colleen Egan. "Enrolments favour vocation." *Higher Education Supplement, The Australian Newspaper*. (19 January 2000).
- <sup>20</sup> NCVER. *Student Outcomes Survey 1999 - National Report*. p.7.
- <sup>21</sup> National Centre for Education Statistics. *Vocational Education in the United States: Toward the Year 2000*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (February 2000) p.vii.
- <sup>22</sup> See, Professor John W. Chudleigh. "Education and Training in Regional Australia." *Regional Australia Summit Unit*. Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania (27-29 October 1999) p.1.
- <sup>23</sup> See, Department of Education, Victoria. *A Study of Post-Schooling Destinations: Destinations of students enrolled in VET in schools programs in 1997*. Education Outcomes Research Unit, The University of Melbourne (November 1998).
- <sup>24</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. *Today's Training. Tomorrow's Skills*. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (July 1998) p.48.
- <sup>25</sup> Richard Teese with Sonia Gulec & Kate O'Brien. "Middle Level Training to Higher Education - Pathways and Issues." *Learning for Life: Seamless Education and Training in Victoria*. p. 2. Available from the OPCETE web site: <http://www.otfe.vic.gov.au/>
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.1.
- <sup>27</sup> Op.cit., Delors, p.11.
- <sup>28</sup> Richard Teese. "In education, it's the quality that counts." *The Age Newspaper*. (24 January 2000).
- <sup>29</sup> Op.cit., Kotz.
- <sup>30</sup> Op.cit., Dusseldorp - *Young People, Faring*, p.8.
- <sup>31</sup> Op.cit., OECD, p.84.
- <sup>32</sup> See, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. *A proposal for a Vocational Collage for the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP*. (1 April, 1999). For an evaluation of a similar model to the one being proposed, see, Queensland Department of Education. *Evaluation Report: A Review of Hervey Bay College at the End of the Second Year*.
- <sup>33</sup> On this topic see, Alex Bernhardt. *To Train or Not to train*. Master of Education Dissertation, RMIT University (1998).



## Appendix 1



Hi-tech timber finishing machines  
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE



Industry TAFE linkages provide TAFE students with the opportunity to  
work on latest model vehicles  
Gordon Institute of TAFE

Opportunities for a variety of live work at our Institutes



Victoria University of Technology



Holmesglen Institute of TAFE



All of our Institutes are equipped with contemporary  
computer equipment and software  
Gordon Institute of TAFE



Graphic Design students get hands on experience at TAFE  
Victoria University of Technology

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