

# Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market



This summary brings together the relevant key findings for industry from the research program *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*. The program comprised three different strands:

- pathways from VET in Schools
- pathways within and between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education
- pathways in the labour market.

Current VET qualifications are based on competency-based training, which assumes a direct link between qualifications and jobs. However, past research shows that this is often not the case. This research explores the notion of ‘vocational streams’, which could potentially provide a better frame of reference for shaping the evolution of qualifications and jobs. Education and training in vocational capabilities, rather than in specific occupational tasks, could possibly result in a more sustainable and adaptable workforce.

## What are vocational streams?

Traditionally, the link between qualifications and jobs has developed from the notion that vocations are based on specific skill sets. This tends to prepare students for a narrowly defined occupation or a particular job. A modern concept of vocations, called ‘vocational streams’, provides a framework for creating better connections between qualifications and jobs.

Vocational streams help individuals to be more adaptable by instilling the basic knowledge required for a number of jobs within a broad vocational field of practice rather than for a specific occupation. This research suggests that the implementation of vocational streams would prepare individuals for potentially rewarding working lives, while improving their options for career advancement through specialisation and the flexibility to move sideways into related occupations.

## Why is this research important to industry?

Structures within the labour market shape the educational pathways and outcomes of graduates. However, previous research shows that the links between vocational qualifications and jobs are variable and in many ways weak. This research suggests that the development of vocational streams would provide graduates, especially VET graduates, with more transferable skills, giving them the capacity to better adapt to rapidly changing industry circumstances. In turn, this would ease the difficulties faced by industry when sourcing labour during times of restructure and organisational change. A more effective vocational labour market could also foster employment security and career progression across industry within a range of related occupations and help to overcome skills mismatches.

what the  
research  
says for...  
industry

**‘Vocational streams’ develop work-related capabilities that share common underpinning knowledge, skills and practices, rather than remaining focused on specific workplace tasks and roles that are based on existing or past practices.**

## Key implications for industry

The key implications for industry arising from this work involve:

- better recognition that differing occupations across the labour market share common capabilities, which can foster employment adaptability, mobility and career progression
- developing a coherent industry policy, which more effectively draws together advice that links social partners (employers, unions, professional associations, occupational and accrediting bodies, educational institutions and government) in a broad industry framework
- exploring and developing 'middle-level' occupations when planning workforce development strategies, which link lower- and higher-skilled occupations within vocational streams, drawing on the combined experience of higher education, vocational and industry expertise
- devoting more attention to increasing the role of workplaces in skill development and encouraging skills in individuals that enable them to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances rather than to devising specific qualifications to meet a narrow set of needs.

The conditions effective to nurturing a vocational stream in any sector of industry are:

- the identification of common capabilities (practices, skills, knowledge and personal attributes) across a range of related occupations
- the readiness of employers, unions, professional associations, occupational and accrediting bodies, educational institutions and government to collaborate and cooperate on training reform and workforce-development issues.

Reform is possible where these stakeholders share common objectives. Effective collaboration and the investment of resources across stakeholders will help to sustain deeper changes over time.

## For more information

This work is based on the three-year research program *Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market*. The research was conducted by a consortium led by the LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne. For more information, see the final report, *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*, available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2782.html>, and the research summaries for government and policy-makers; qualification and approval bodies; and tertiary education providers and school educators, available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2793.html>.



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